

Proclaiming Biblically

Scripture Focus

Zephaniah 1:1 – 2:3

Key Verse

“Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger.”
Zephaniah 2:3

Overview

The right understanding of God's judgment is essential to a right proclamation of the gospel. In this lesson, students will consider Zephaniah's perspective on judgment and grace.

Theme

Though we often major on grace in our thoughts about God and the gospel, we must be careful not to neglect the equally important understanding of judgment, especially as we are seeking to biblically proclaim the gospel among those who are still in danger of God's wrath.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will grow in his understanding of judgment, grace, the gospel, and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

Outline

- I. **God's Judgment Will Consume Those Who Are Disloyal 1:1-9**
- II. **God's Judgment Will Conquer Atheists 1:10-13**
- III. **God's Judgment Will Cover His Adversaries 1: 14-18**
- IV. **God's Judgment Will Compel Those Who Struggle 2:1-3**

Getting Started

Little Boy in England going to see play Snow White - excited - play began - she ate apple - died - Little Boy jumps up out of his seat shouts no, no and runs out of the theater; Father - next night - little Boy does same thing - for 4 nights - last night - he promised he would stay – runs out shouting--no, no. He keeps running away when he was confronted with death as a result he never saw the prince come and give life. Many have been confronted with their own eternal death and they run away saying no, no. One day the last show is going to be presented and they are going to say no for the last time. When they do, they will miss the prince coming and giving life - the only part of the story they will know is death. That one more minute can determine whether the prince comes to you with life or judgment.

Searching the Scriptures

“How can evangelistic challenges be overcome by the proclamation of judgment?”

Note that most people today do not like talking about judgment for they believe it is too negative. Encourage your class to understand that although God loves, His perfect nature requires a punishment for sin and a day of accountability for all sinners. This message of judgment will shake the weak foundation of faithless sinners so that they may be saved. This is a movement we are seeing all over the world. People cannot be saved without an understanding that they have sinned against God.

I. God's Judgment Will Consume Those Who Are Disloyal (vv. 1-9)

Explanation: Zephaniah was of a royal bloodline and was actually Joshua's 2nd cousin. Literally his name means “The Lord Protects.” He was the first Biblical prophet since Isaiah after 70 years of silence, and oh, did, he have a message. This has been called the *hottest book in the Bible* because of its description of the consuming part of God's judgment. In vv. 2-3 Zephaniah announces the theme for the entire book: God's judgment on a worldwide scale. The language of the prophet would have sent shock waves throughout the land. This is the first word of the Lord in 70 years, and it is about judgment and death. v. 3 - Why animals? When man fell in sin all the earth was tainted by sin. This is not saying animals will go to hell or heaven. Animals have no souls.

Stumbling – refers first to those people who have spread their allegiance to something other than God. These idols, which were used to promote false religions, would utterly be destroyed. Pagan Practices (vv.4-5): He now narrows down the scope – he brings the judgment home to the hometown crowd that had immersed themselves in ungodly acts.

Baal – This was a Canaanite fertility god, which had been a constant source of stumbling for the nation of Israel - sacred post, sexual orgies, had constantly tempted the people of Israel. God, in His judgment, will destroy all remnants of those who have perverted His plan of two becoming one.

Priests – These were priests who paraded around as true priests (priests not priest) of God. They polluted the worship of God by combining it with the worship of false gods. The people of Judah were trying to play it safe by staying on the good side of all the gods. They failed to realize God demands individual and absolute loyalty. Those who had spread their allegiance to other gods would be consumed in God's judgment. Many were worshippers of astrological bodies and would bow down on their flat rooftops in reverence to stars. Judgment consumed, Mikam, literally King of Shame – those who worship him also worshipped many other gods. Many people, who at first thought of following God turned from God – they maybe even participated in certain acts of worship but without cause turned away. They demonstrated their true allegiance to self not God. The main problem of the people of Judah is that they had not sought God. They were so caught up within themselves and all the other exciting avenues that would build their self esteem that they did not call upon the Lord – they would be consumed in judgment.

Silent (v. 7) - used by prophets when the people should show respect. Silence comes before the revelation of the power of God.

Day – God will come to judge the world – a day of unprecedented battle when the Lord Himself enters as a Warrior. It will be a day when the Lord will judge and destroy all the nations who have resisted Him. Man’s pride will be judged and idolatry will be done away with. The Lord will be King over the whole earth and His name will be exalted. This day is near – it could begin anytime. Sacrifice has already been prepared. The enemies of God are the invited guests who will sacrifice their life for their rebellion against God and rejection of His grace.

Zephaniah continues to show others who will be judged. Apparel – they are evidence of adopting a new life style, customs, moral behavior by the way they dressed. They were physically demonstrating their allegiance had shifted away from God (vv. 8-9).

Leap – many were demonstrating respect for ancient and religious superstitions. The symbols of false gods were often carved in the threshold and by leaping over it they were showing respect. The people of God brought all sorts of symbols from pagan religions, which were perversions of all that is true and holy.

Illustration: Kirby Godsey wrote *When We Talk about God... Let's Be Honest*. He made statements like “Jesus is not the ultimate defining revelation of God.” “The authority of our faith should not rest upon the Bible alone or even primarily.” “Each of us is God incarnate.” His allegiance has moved from being surrendered to the authority of scripture to the authority of man; from Jesus as the only way to God as a way to God among many other ways; from God being all powerful to man being God and for that shift of allegiance God will judge men and women.

Application:

Ask: Are you fully surrendered to Christ? Do you realize the difference between surrender and commitment? The difference is that we commit to many things, but surrender to only one. No one says, “I cannot make the party I have many surrenders.” But we do miss out sometimes because of many commitments. When we surrender to Jesus, it is a transfer of ownership of our life into the hands of Jesus.

Where is your allegiance today? Are you fully surrendered? Have you come to the place in your life where you have settled the issue that Christ is Lord of all you do? Is your attitude in His will? Are your actions at work in His will? Is the way you treat your spouse obedient to His Word? God demands sole and soul surrender.

Ask class members to write their commitments to the Lord on a piece of paper (allow about 3-5 minutes). Now have them turn that paper over and ask them to simply sign their name at the bottom. Lead them to see that true surrender to the Lord is not about setting our own commitments, but it is about signing our name to the contract and saying, “Now, Lord, You fill in the details of what You want me to be surrendered to.”

II. God's Judgment Will Conquer Atheists (vv. 10-13)

Explanation: Fish gate – the place of common man; the blue-collar workers of the day. (vv. 10-11) Second Quarter – A suburb added to the city where the fashionable homes of the day were built.

Maktesh – business district “Wall Street” of the day. A place where money changed hands frequently.

Point of each: The judgment of God is not limited to only those who are poor, or only the rich. It encompasses all people of every economic class. Social, racial, ethnic groups. This Day of Judgment will cause rich and poor to wail in agony realizing their last minute has passed – the Prince of Peace has now become Jury and Judge.

Notice the apathy among the people. (v. 12) Lamps – symbolic for searching for the truth – God will go to every part of the earth until every individual who does not believe and trust in Him is rooted out. The comfortable well-to-do, the Satan worshipper, and the good workers will all be punished. Why?

They have a total indifference toward God's Son – not only in who He is and what He did on the cross, but what He's doing in the world today. Many of those in Zephaniah's day doubted that God would do good or bad – they thought He was all talk – He only threatened, He never did anything. They were practicing atheists in that they may have believed God existed, but in practice they lived like He did not. Eight-two percent of Americans say they believe in God – how many live like He does not exist by setting their own standard of morality – determine what is the truth by the circumstances they face? This lifestyle is evidence of a practical atheist – someone who has not turned to God and lives as though He does not exist. The judgment would come in the form of invasion where their houses would be destroyed and their land would be ravaged. These are curses described in Deut. 28:30. Curses that would come upon people who turned their back on the one true God (v. 13). Believers who claim to believe the gospel but never do anything to spread its message to their neighbors or the nations are in their practice atheists. What we do matters as much as what we say.

Illustration: One of the favorite games of children is “flashlight spotlight.” One kid takes a flashlight and everyone else hides. If the child with the light can catch the others in the light long enough to yell out the color of their shirt he wins. Sometimes guys will take off their shirts so that when the light is shined on them there is no shirt color to yell out. They are in the game but they are not playing by the rules. Many Christians today in a sense are running around with their shirt off. They think they are running hard and everybody sees them as workers, but one day the light of Christ will shine on them and it will be revealed that they were not playing by the rules. They confessed with their mouth, but did not trust with their heart. It was obvious by their lifestyle and the things they were truly surrendered to.

Application: Ask: By whose rules are you playing today? Are you following God's Word? Does He manage your calendar? Does His Word determine your checkbook

ledger? If not, you're a practical atheist – confessing Him with your mouth, but not demonstrating a transformed life before the world. A young Muslim boy in Egypt recently heard the gospel from one of our missionaries. The boy gave his heart to Christ and upon being baptized was kicked out of his home. What price are you willing to pay to live like a believer and renounce Atheism with your lifestyle?

III. God's Judgment Will Cover His Adversaries (vv. 14-18)

Explanation: God promised a punishment of the powerful (vv. 14-16)

This rapidly approaching day of the Lord would mean the end of human history and the destruction of the earth. In this section Zephaniah describes several who will be covered in the judgment of God. Each of these people groups and places has developed a lifestyle of self-sufficiency – they have rejected their need of God and have become His enemies. V. 14 -mighty men who have placed themselves on an island and said "I cannot be defeated" will cry like babies on the day of judgment. V. 16 – describes fortified cities and high towers – all symbols of power and man's desire to close himself off from the outside world and be king of his own life; ruler of his own world, but will be covered up in God's judgment.

v. 15 describes how every aspect of life will be covered by judgment and emotionally, physically, psychologically, cosmically, militarily it will be worse than anything the world could ever imagine. His judgment will be like an enemy storming a city without warning; it will be a time of greater fear than anytime in history. What is the cause of this awful day of God's wrath being poured out? Zephaniah tells us in v. 1 the answer is SIN – just like they did not seek God – they sinned against Him and because that sin remained in their hearts one minute too long, judgment came. When this judgment comes they will be blind – helplessness – those mighty men who could do it all would have no power – lack of direction – those people behind the walls of the mighty city who thought nothing could harm them – nothing could penetrate the walls. They will be wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. V. 18, they will have no resources to escape the judgment. The money they had so long used to bring them peace and happiness now is totally worthless.

Illustration: (Use the following illustration or one similar from your own life.)

I played football in the 3-4 grades. I remember going to the gym to sign up. The coach was there and he met mom, and dad – nicest guy I had ever met – so I thought. The first day of practice came; I dressed out and went to the field. There was coach; I said, "Hey, coach, how's it going?" He looked at me and that nice man turned into a screaming machine. He said, "None of your business how I'm doing. This isn't a beauty parlor – chit-chat time is over." He was playing the role of coach.

Application: Many people talk and hear so much about the loving God we serve; and when it comes time for them to trust they say oh, that loving God won't send me to hell, I'm a good person. But the Bible says there will come a day when chit-chat time will be over. Exodus 34:7 says God is going to punish sin, and the punishment for sin is separation from God; therefore, it is perfect punishment. James 4:4 says that we make ourselves an enemy of God. God will judge His enemies. Biblical Proclaiming is a

message of a righteous God judging those who refuse Him and that message often causes the masses to turn from their idols and follow Christ.

IV. God's Judgment Will Compel Those Who Struggle (vv. 2:1-3)

Explanation: The awful dread of God's judgment has caused many to weep and tremble in fear. During the first great awakening in America a young girl confined herself to her bedroom, on her face she stayed before God, repenting until the fear of His wrath was gone and the certainty of His grace were present. Oh that we would see brokenness in our families and on the mission fields around the world like that little girl. Gather. Why? To repent – it was the only way to escape the coming day of the Lord. Nation – only used to describe Gentiles or Pagan people – it was a deliberate insult to demonstrate how the children of Israel were behaving like pagans. Zephaniah is putting before their eyes that they have become as rebellious against God as those they used to point to and say look at those sinners.

Repent rapidly (v.2) He is showing urgency for them to repent – waiting one minute longer could be too late. Once judgment begins there is no longer time to seek forgiveness (v. 3). 2 Chronicles 7:14 - to seek Him is to turn to Him with all your heart; with everything you are to depend on Him rather than self. Seek God's righteousness – seek God's standard for our behavior – no longer having our own moral standard, our own set of rules we live by, but following the standard of God. This does not come by obeying the law or a set of rules, but by having faith in God, which results in a lifestyle change of obedience and must start with faith. Seek humility – is to accept God's standard of living and submit to it by a lifestyle change. It is the opposite of making sure our will is done and protecting our pride. Repentance and accepting Christ is the only way to escape the coming judgment of God. Have you accepted Christ or are you still waiting one more minute?

Illustration: Many people when offered to accept Jesus as Savior will respond with statements like: "I'm not ready" "I have too much going on." "I will wait till I'm ready." Ask: What's holding you back? Is it what people think, or something you haven't done, or something you have not cleaned up? Is it worth risking going through the judgment and being in Hell forever?

Application: Those who say that God's a loving God, He won't send me to hell are half right. He is a loving God, but He will judge people to Hell. In His love, He is saying there is still time, but in one more minute time may be gone. All around the world Christians are proclaiming the love of God in Christ Jesus and seeing many come to Christ as Savior. But the message of grace must include a message of God's judgment. It may just be the message that will shake the people you share with this week. Remember, sharing the judgment of God must be done with tears in our eyes and brokenness in our hearts for those who even upon hearing the message choose to remain dead. The grace of Jesus Christ is the only answer to one's quest to escape the judgment of God.

Making It Personal

Today's text offers you a wonderful opportunity to open some discussion with your class about God's judgment. Today, the wrath and judgment of God is a topic highly avoided by believers. However, as with any biblical doctrine, there is great danger in avoiding the uncomfortable aspects of God's work, character, and nature. Encourage your class to discuss together (as a large group or in small groups) how they struggle with rightly understanding the judgment of God. Following this, instruct the class members to use part of their personal devotion time this week to search the Scriptures for other examples of God's judgment so that they might become more familiar with what judgment actually is and why God exercises it.

Review

Remind your class of the reality of God's jealous and wrathful judgment. In addition, remind them of the great joy we gain by knowing that we are no longer under law, but under grace and, as a result, no longer have a fearful expectation of judgment, but a sober expectation of grace as we follow God's way.

Memory Verse

Encourage your class to memorize Zephaniah 1:1 – 2:3.