

Zephaniah-by Rick Stark

Chapter 1

That God is not silent (1) is always an act of His grace; evermore so in view of Zephaniah's message: *"Seek the Lord, His righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger."* (Boice) Note the dramatic opening announcement of the wrath of God's judgment (2-6), reminiscent of God's warnings to Noah (Gen.6:7), and pointing beyond the coming Babylonian invasion to THE *"day of the Lord."* In view of the drumbeat of history (ancient and contemporary), English historian Herbert Butterfield notes *"there is a judgment embedded in the fabric of history."* Despite people (then and now) are so ready to protest their innocence (12), God is still the righteous judge of the universe who does not tolerate sin. Note the categories of unrighteousness: idolatrous worship (1-4), covenantal cowardice (4-13), economic injustice (10-11), and spiritual presumption (12, *"live for today, for there is no day of reckoning"* - Boice). God's righteousness justified, the prophet describes the day of the outpouring, the horrors of His wrath (14-18). The only appropriate response? *"Shut your mouth!"* (7) AND *"Seek the Lord!"* (2:3)

Chapter 2

Zephaniah concludes pt. 1 (to God's people, 1:2-2:3) saying, *"Seek the Lord... righteousness... humility...; perhaps you will be [sheltered] on the day..."* Compare and contrast this with a century earlier, Amos 5:6 (*"lest"* vs. *"perhaps"*). In the case of God's destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by means of the Babylonians, there was no guarantee that the righteous would escape all calamity. We, too, may have difficulties in life, but we are assured of God's favor in the day of wrath *IF* we belong to him, have sought Him in faith confirmed in our obedience. Have we? What does it mean to *"seek the Lord?"* Where or who is our ultimate *"shelter on the day?"* Zephaniah pt. 2 deals with "God rules the entire world; all nations are answerable to Him," (4-15, Boice). No compartmentalization allowed; God is not parked on the reservation. The prophet now sweeps the globe: first Philistia to the west (4-7), then Moab and Ammon to the east (8-11), then southward to include Ethiopia (12), and finally northeast to Assyria (13-15). No place for arrogance, though, because He's coming back 'round to you! (3:1-5)

Chapter 3

Birds of a feather fly together. God's people forgot. Note the indictments (2): did not listen, especially to God, did not accept correction, did not trust God, and did not draw near to God. The truism? It all starts at the top (3). But the Lord is the righteous judge (5); what more could He do (6-8, compare with Matt.21:33-41)? Depressed, nothing in life leads us to think otherwise. But God is patient and gracious (Rom.2:4; 2 Pet.3:9). Good news! Zephaniah pt. 3 (9-20) says sin will not have the final word; evil will not triumph. A new day is coming for the remnant of God (9-13), both in the contemporary context as well as the heavenly Jerusalem to come. The question is, *"Are you a part of that remnant? Will you rejoice at the dawning of this new day?"* (14) Zephaniah gives three ways by which you may know (9, 11-12, 13). As God's people, you are invited to sing and shout (14), and for double cause (15): your sins forgiven and God has turned back your great enemy (Lk.10:20); and the Lord is with you, never again reason to fear (Ps.23:6; Matt.28:20). Nothing greater to sing about than the great reversal of the fall, all based upon God's ability not your own (18-20).

-Reflecting on Zephaniah-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Zephaniah. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Zephaniah before we move forward?

"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" John 8.31-32