
Zephaniah: The Dark Side of Love

Context

Zep 1:1 The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

Author

God speaks through his prophet Zephaniah. Zephaniah's name means, "Yahweh has hidden." Unlike most of the other prophets we are given 4 generations of his lineage as well as the time frame of his prophecy. There is debate amongst scholars, but most believe that this lineage is given because he descended from Hizkiah, that is King Hezekiah.

Time

"In the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah." Josiah reigned in the southern kingdom of Judah from 640-609 B.C. His prophetic ministry overlapped with that of Jeremiah and Habakkuk, and possibly Nahum.

Historical (2 Kings 17-25, 2 Chron 28-36)

Assyrian dominance and the fall of Israel

The Assyrian empire was the world super power for hundreds of years until the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. During the 4th year of King Hezekiah's (Josiah's great grandfather) reign in Judah the Assyrian king Shalmaneser besieged Samaria, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. Three years after the siege, Samaria fell and the northern kingdom with it (2 Kings 18:9-10). 8 years later, Assyria marched on Judah and conquered many of its cities. God spared Jerusalem and Judah at this time, under the flawed but overall righteous reign of Hezekiah.

The Evil Reign of King Manasseh & Amon

At the death of Hezekiah, his son Manasseh began to reign. He reigned for 55 years in what marked a time of deep and dark rebellion and sin against the Lord and the covenant promises they had made to Him. We are told that during the time of Manasseh's reign he burned his own children as an offering to pagan gods. He built altars to pagan gods and placed them inside the temple of the Lord. He used fortune-tellers, mediums, and witchcraft. He shed innocent blood, "till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." He led God's people, His nation, astray, the

Bible saying they sinned more than the surrounding pagan nations that God had delivered them from. Manasseh's son Amon reigned for only 2 years at the death of his father and continued down the same path of idolatry and wickedness before his assassination at the hands of his own servants.

Josiah's Godly Reign

Josiah became king at the age of 8 following the death of his father Amon. He stepped onto a scene of unfathomable darkness and sin. Yet, Josiah's reign would not continue in the ways of his father and grandfather. In the 8th year of his reign he began to seek God and 4 years later he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places of pagan idol worship, the carved images, and the altars, destroying them down to dust. In the 18th year of his reign, Josiah brought money, collected from the people, to Hilkiah the high priest to begin repairing and restoring the temple of the Lord. As the men faithfully worked on the temple, Hilkiah "found the Book of the Law of the LORD given through Moses." The word's of God in the book of the law had been lost and neglected through the many years of sinful debauchery. When Josiah heard the word of God as it was read to him he tore his clothes, an external sign of the inward repentance and hurt he felt seeing that God's people had so neglected the commandments of the Lord and brought shame to the name of God. He also began to understand the consequences of the sinful rejection and abandonment of God, and the disobedience to the covenant, that had marked the years leading up to his reign. *"For great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD" (2 Chron 34:21).* God told Josiah through the prophetess Huldah that due to his tender heart that responded to the word of the Lord with humility and repentance, God had heard his cries. Josiah would not see the day of the wrath of the LORD, but would "be gathered to [his] grave in peace" before that day would come. Josiah's life, as given by the record of scripture, was marked by a deep and genuine love for God, a heart that was tender and moved to action by the Word of God, and a courageous faithfulness in restoring and pointing Judah back to obedience to the LORD. Josiah died in battle against Egypt and was buried. There is scholarly debate over when during Josiah's reign Zephaniah gave his prophecy. Many suggest it was very early on, before the discovery of the book of the law and the religious reforms of Josiah, since it describes the idolatry of the priests and people. Others suggest that the prophecy came shortly after the discovery of the book of the law and in response to its teachings. There are certainly arguments to be made that there are parallels between his prophecy and passages in Deuteronomy.

Assyria's Fall and the Rise of Babylon

Towards the end of Josiah's reign over Judah, the Assyrian capital of Nineveh is destroyed by Babylon just as God had prophesied through his prophet Nahum, *"Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains,*

and no man gathereth them. There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually" (Nah 3:18,19). This marked the end of Assyrian dominance and ushered in Babylon as the world's new superpower in 612 B.C.

Babylon's Invasions of Judah and Ultimate Destruction of Jerusalem

After the fall of Nineveh (612 B.C.), the death Josiah (609 B.C.), and Babylon dealing a decisive blow to the Egyptians and remaining Assyrians at Carchemish (605) (Jer 46:2), the powerful Babylonians now led by King Nebuchadnezzar were dominant and would almost immediately begin their invasions of Judah.

- The First Invasion of Judah (605 B.C.)

The first invasion happened during the reign of Jehoiakim (609-597 B.C.), who had been a vassal king, first under Pharaoh Neco of Egypt, and then under the command of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Jehoiakim rebelled against the powerful king of Babylon and great bands of armies, made of nations loyal to Babylon, swept in on Judah. The Bible record is clear that this happened at the command of the LORD, due to the sins of Manasseh. *"Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon (2Ki 24:3-4).* It was during this initial siege that Daniel and his friends were taken captive (Dan 1:1).

- The Second Invasion of Judah (597 B.C.)

The second invasion occurred during the reign of Jehoiachin the son of Jehoiakim. He only reigned for 3 months and did evil as his father had. During this time *"Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged."* Jehoiachin came with his family and officials and surrendered themselves to the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar carried out all of the treasures of Jerusalem, and took thousands of captives. He took the skilled and strong, and left only *"the poorest sort of the people" (2 Kings 24:14b).*

- The Third Invasion and Destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.)

The third and final invasion came during the reign of Mattaniah, renamed Zedekiah, who was Jehoiakim's uncle and another of Josiah's sons. He had been made a vassal king by Nebuchadnezzar when Jehoiachin surrendered and became a prisoner in Babylon. Zedekiah too, continued to walk down the paths of evil. Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon and they once again besieged the city of Jerusalem. This time destroying the

temple, tearing down the walls, burning everything to the ground, killing Zedekiah's sons, and taking more exiles. This final invasion left Judah and Jerusalem in total ruin.

Introduction

Understanding what happened before, during, and after the reign of Josiah is essential to trying to wrap our hearts and minds around what Zephaniah's prophecy was all about. It will help us to make sense of this snap shot of history in these 53 verses, within the wider context of what God is doing in redemptive history. God made crystal clear through his prophets that He was in control. That Babylon was His instrument of judgment, and that *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will"* (Prov 21:1). That while those who lived in that time had such a limited scope of what was happening in the moment, they were called to *"seek the Lord," "seek righteousness," and "seek humility"* (Zeph 2:3). Called to trust in Him who is both Sovereign Lord that *"will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him,"* and a gentle shepherd who *"shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom..."* (Is 40:10a,11a). The prophets spoke what *"Thus says the Lord,"* and what we are blessed to be able to see in our age, that was even clouded to the prophets themselves, was that in all of this unfolding history, the rising and falling of nations, the victory and defeat in battles, the judgements and mercies of God, "The Old Testament tells a single, coherent story.... It is a progressive revelation of God and of his purposes for the salvation of his people" (Goldsworthy). It is a story ultimately about Jesus. Jesus himself helped the downtrodden and confused men on the road to Emmaus after his crucifixion to understand this reality, *"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."* (Luk 24:27). Jesus also taught his disciples saying, *"...These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures"* (Luk 24:44-45). My prayer for this study of the prophecy of Zephaniah, is that Christ would do for us what he did for His disciples, open our minds to understand the scriptures, open our minds to see Him as Lord and Savior, open our minds to see that *"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save"* (Zep 3:17 ESV).

Summary

What you find when you read Zephaniah are elements that are common amongst nearly all the prophetic books.

1. The prophecy identifies specific ways in which God's people have broken the covenant with God.
 - a. Worship of false gods. (Zeph 1:4-5)
 - b. Mixing of pagan religion with true religion (1:5b)
 - c. Openly abandoning God (1:6a)
 - d. Rendering God insincere, heartless allegiance (1:6b)
 - e. Disobedient in those things which were external identifiers of God's people (1:8)
 - f. Violent in pursuit of self gain(1:9b)
 - g. Fraudulent in business (1:9)
 - h. Complacent, unconcerned (1:12)
 - i. Listens to no voice, accepts no correction, does not trust the Lord, and does not draw near to God. (3:2)
 - j. Political Leaders and Judges that are like blood thirsty predators. (3:3)
 - k. Religious leaders who were unstable, deceptive, and polluted that which was sacred and set apart for the Lord. (3:4)
2. The prophecy pronounces the judgment of God upon sin.
 - a. Against Judah and Jerusalem. (Zeph 1:4-13, 3:1-7)
 - b. Against Judah's pagan neighbors (Zeph 2:4-15)
 - i. Specifically; Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Cush, and Assyria
 - c. Universal judgment on all mankind (Zeph 1:2,3, 1:17,18, 3:8)
3. The prophecy calls on its listeners to seek the LORD, before judgment comes.
 - a. Zeph 2:1-3
4. The prophecy speaks a message of comfort to the faithful. God will yet save them completely, finally, and gloriously.
 - a. Zeph 3:9-20

Major Points

God's creative purpose and the fall of man

We learn in the Genesis account of creation about the beginning of all things and about the relationships between those things as God designed them to be. Relationships that God said were "very good." God established a perfect creation that He loves and over which he rules. When man fell and sin entered, those relationships between God and man, God and the rest of creation, man and man, and man and creation were thrown into chaos and confusion. At the heart of the message of the gospel and the purpose of God that unfolds throughout the pages of scripture, and the centuries of unfolding history, is God's plan to restore all things to their proper relationships (Goldsworthy).

Mankind was created in a unique relationship to God. We were made in God's own image, the special focus of his care and love, given dominion over the rest of the created world and made the representatives of the whole of creation. God's description of the heart of the Assyrians in Zeph 2:15 (ESV) "*I am, and there is no one else,*" is a microcosm of the heart of all of mankind. It is the rallying cry of Babel when men attempted to build a monument as a symbol of their power and independence from God. We think of ourselves as being in charge. We set our own rules and all that we have, and all that we have accomplished, is a result only of our own doing. The result of Babel was a confusion of languages and a dividing of the people into smaller units all seeking their own advantage. Man has continually rejected the biblical doctrine of creation because it flies directly in the face of the heart that says, "*I am, and there is no one else.*" The biblical doctrine of creation says God is, and everything we are and have is a gift from God. It means we are totally dependent upon Him for everything. That every moment of our existence, every breath we take is only on the account of God that allows and sustains it. It means we are uniquely responsible to God, and must answer to him for what we do. Whether man comes to that reality now in time and humbles himself to find mercy, or waits till the coming day of the LORD, all will bow before him as Lord. "*The LORD will be awesome against them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth, and to him shall bow down, each in its place, all the lands of the nations.*" (Zeph 2:11 ESV).

The cry of the prophet to the people is straightforward.

1. Judah "cannot as a nation go on enjoying the blessings of the covenant while it refuses the responsibilities of covenant life" (Goldsworthy).
 - a. There are both unconditional and conditional promises found in God's covenant to Israel. The unconditional portion of his promises he made to Israel will come to pass regardless of what man does. He won't allow his people's unfaithfulness to stand in the way or prevent his purposes from being fulfilled. We will think about this more later on, but first we want to consider the conditional portion of his promises. In Moses' law in Deuteronomy, God summarizes the blessings that will accompany obedience to the Covenant, and cursings that will accompany disobedience. You can only imagine what Josiah must have felt when hearing the book of the law read to him after its discovery. He tore his clothing and cried out to God. He must have vividly seen the condition of his people, the consequences of walking contrary to God's commandments, and the blessings of God that were being so carelessly forfeited. It is sadly often the nature of God's children to presume on the blessings of God while refusing the responsibilities of being his representative people. We fall in line with a world that wants the benefits of the marriage relationship (i.e. intimacy, companionship, children) without the

commitment and responsibility of marriage. We want the benefits of being a member of the Lord's church without the commitment and responsibility of membership, and sadly we demand the blessings of God on our lives and families and yet continue to live in disobedience and refuse the responsibilities that come with being God's "chosen generation," His "royal priesthood," His "holy nation," His "peculiar people."

2. God is long suffering and slow to anger, but his forbearance is limited.

- a. *"Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; 2 Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon you. 3 Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger" (Zep 2:1-3).*
- b. *"I said, 'Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.' But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt. 8 "Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed (Zep 3:7-8 ESV).*
- c. Peter summarizes God's heart so beautifully when he reminds his readers, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2Pe 3:9).* He goes on to say later, *"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (2Pe 3:15a).*
- d. As years rolled on and God sent prophet after prophet to Israel and Judah to shake them from their sleep, gave them his law, and patiently and lovingly called them to return unto him, the people continued to slide deeper into perverse sin and abandonment of God. Certainly the question God asked his people Israel in years prior through the prophet Isaiah continues to echo, *"What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? 5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down" (Isa 5:4,5)*
- e. He asks Israel, *"What could have been done more... that I have not done...?"* God is *"...merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Psa 103:8).* He

had been so gracious to His people and provided them with everything they could need. As he certainly has for us, but *"...despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? 5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; 6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds"* (Rom 2:4-6). God's wrath is arisen by one thing only and that is evil. His judgments on the day of the LORD will be altogether righteous and just.

The day of the Lord

The prophecy of Zephaniah paints vivid word pictures of the wrath of God that will bring unfathomable devastation and destruction on the Day of the Lord, but also speaks to the gathering, restoration, and ultimate salvation of a remnant of God's faithful people. The phrase *"The day of the Lord"* is used more in this prophecy than any other book of the Bible. *"The day of the Lord"* most simply put means the coming of God. It speaks of an event in time rather than an extent of time, and what we find out in the study of Zephaniah in the context of the whole of scripture, is that this "day" is multi-layered. Some have referred to this as a multi-fulfillment or telescoping prophecy. A common analogy that I find helpful is that of climbing a mountain. You see a peak in the distance and nothing behind it, but as you summit the peak you realize there is a larger and higher peak still further on. This idea can help us in our understanding of the prophetic writings of the old testament. Your vantage point in history determines the scope of your understanding. Peter spoke of the vantage point of the prophets themselves compared to the vantage point of christians after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. *"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. 12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into"* (1Pe 1:10-12). The prophets themselves sought out with care the full meaning of the revelations made to them. The predictions which they spoke were obscured to some degree to the people of their day and to themselves, yet they knew the full understanding and benefit of them would only be fully known in a distant age.

The first peak of Zephaniah's prophecy of the day of the LORD is made clear to us in biblical history. Zephaniah speaks of judgment that would come to the whole world, to Judah's neighbors, but most of its warning is spent specifically on Judah and Jerusalem, God's covenant

people. As you read Jeremiah and Habakkuk, contemporary prophets to Zephaniah, you see that God was at work in the world, and was raising up a nation that would be an instrument of judgment in the hands of the Lord. The history recorded in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles lays out the utter devastation that would come upon Judah and Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Throughout the biblical timeline we see various instances where “Yahweh intrudes into space and time to reconstitute right order through punishing wickedness” (DeRouchie). These days of the Lord’s anger were only a foreshadowing of the ultimate day of the Lord’s punishment and salvation to come.

A Universal and Complete Destruction

As we read Zephaniah’s prophecy and see the warning to the people and the historical intrusion of the Lord’s wrath that would come in the Babylonian destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, we also see elements within the prophecy that are clearly speaking of a taller peak yet to come. A day of the Lord that was further out in time. Zephaniah, at times, speaks not just of the judgment to come on Judah or its pagan neighbors, but speaks of a universal judgment on the whole of the world. Zephaniah’s prophecy both starts and ends the judgment portion with a promise of universal judgment that was on a much grander scale than that of what would happen specifically to the nations in the near future. *“I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD. 3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD” (Zep 1:2-3). “Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy” (Zep 3:8).* Upon first reading it, I said to myself, “This hasn’t happened yet. What’s going on here?” He speaks of a universal destruction of all the earth, almost a reversing of the Genesis account of creation as he lists all that will be consumed in the Lord’s wrath in reverse order of their creation; man, beast, fowls, fish. Certainly, the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem was not the highest peak.

A purified remnant in the presence of the LORD

As you get to the end of the prophecy you read one of the most glorious and beautiful descriptions of a great restoration that will take place on the day of the Lord, a reversal of Babel where his remnant would be gathered from the nations and given a *“pure language.”* The LORD would be in their midst, and evil would be seen no more. *“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent. 10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. 11 In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice*

in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. 12 I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. 13 The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid. 14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. 15 The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. 16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. 17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. 18 I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. 19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. 20 At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD" (Zep 3:9-20). What's going on here?! Zephaniah speaks of a multi-ethnic community of worshipers, no longer divided by nation or language, but that have been set apart from the proud and sinful and will call upon the name of the Lord. Rejoicing in him that he has taken away His judgments from them, eradicated sin from their presence, overcome their enemies, and the king of Israel, even the LORD will be in their midst! He says in that day His people would not need to fear for "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (3:17). Surely, Zephaniah must have inquired diligently as Peter said, into what the full extent of these truths meant.

The Return from Babylon

We know from biblical history in Ezra and Nehemiah that the captivity that followed the Babylonian destruction of Israel lasted 70 years, and then God stirred in the heart of a pagan Persian king named Cyrus to let a remnant of God's people return to Jerusalem. They would rebuild the temple of the Lord, they would rebuild the walls, and once again God's people could dwell in the land of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. This return was most certainly a peak in the prophecy of Zephaniah of the gathering again of His exiled people. It must have certainly been a great comfort to the faithful in Jerusalem that despite the reality and immanence of the judgment that would come, God was not forsaking his people and was speaking of a plan of future restoration before the judgment even came. With that understanding, the reader of the prophecy is still left saying certainly that can't be the full fulfillment.

The Coming of the King of Israel

Zephaniah says In chapter 3 verse 14, "*shout O Israel*" and in verse 15 speaks of the "*King of Israel*" that would be in their midst. This is the first time Israel is spoken of in the prophecy. Israel which was the name of the united kingdom under David and Solomon had divided under Solomon's son Rehoboam. The 10 tribes to the north went by Israel and the 2 tribes to the south by Judah. At the time of Zephaniah's prophecy the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians as mentioned previously, and only Judah remained. The King that was on the throne at the time of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem was Zedekiah the son of Josiah. In one of the darkest scenes in scripture 2 Kings 25:6-7 we are told, "*So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. 7 And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.*" It had been over 400 years since David had taken the throne till Zedekiah. Now Zedekiah was blinded and all of his son's killed. This created a problem in the Jewish mind. God had made a covenant with David that his family dynasty would never end, and his kingdom would be established forever (2 Sam 7). Have God's promises failed? This brings us to the unconditional portion of God's covenant with Abraham and with David. God promised Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed and to David that his kingdom would be established forever, and for hundreds of years people must have wondered what was happening? Yet the prophets continued to cry out to the people that God's word had not failed and pointed forward to a day the King would come! And as we open our New Testaments to Matthew 1:1 we read, "*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" Then we fast forward to triumphal entry as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem riding on a donkey just as Zechariah the prophet had spoken. "*On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13 Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord 14 And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, 15 Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt*" (John 12:13-15). Our minds should immediately remember Zephaniah's prophecy as he said, "*14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. 15 The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. 16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack*" (Zeph 3:14-16). What we have in the coming of the King of Israel, Jesus Christ, was another peak in the prophecy of the Day of the Lord. A day of great and unfathomable judgment as well as a day of indescribable salvation. As they nailed the "*King of the Jews*" to cross, what would come thereafter was the judgment of God's wrath, far more severe than anything described in the prophecy of Zephaniah. God would pour out his indignation and all of his burning anger on sin,

but it would be "once for all", it would not be on Babylon, Assyria, or Judah, it would be on His sinless Son, who would substitute Himself in our place. He would win a great victory over sin on the cross and he would soon win victory over death and the grave. He fulfilled the promises of the old covenant and established a new covenant, a better covenant. "In the old covenant Israel was separated from the nations, a distinct national and theocratic entity. But in the new covenant the people of God, the restored Israel, is made up of both Jews and Gentiles" (Schreiner). By Christ's atoning death and resurrection, complete forgiveness is achieved and a new and bold access to God is obtained. We begin to see the fuller picture of what we spoke of earlier on, God's plan to restore all things to their proper relationships. Through faith in Jesus Christ all mankind, whether Jew or Gentile, can be justified, reconciled to God, welcomed into His kingdom, and adopted as His child.

The Consummation of the Day of the Lord

And yet, our regenerated spirits still war with our flesh. Men fight with men, nations rise up against nations, persecution of God's faithful continues on, and we still disappoint our heavenly Father. We realize that there is a consummation of the day of the Lord still to come. Where all of the promises of Zephaniah and the prophets are fully realized. Peter speaks of that day, and the ultimate destruction of the heavens and earth, *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up"* (2Pe 3:10). John the revelator saw a vision of the restoration work of the Lord in the new creation on the day of the Lord, *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death"* (Rev 21:1-8). Oh that man would heed the call of God through Zephaniah the prophet, *"before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon you. Seek ye the LORD..."* (Zeph 2b-3a). And believer, child of God, do not presume on the blessings of God, but serve Him in faithfulness until He comes, and no matter how dark these

days may get, remember *"...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom 8:18b)*. On that day, that terrible and glorious day, *"he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (Zep 3:17b)*.