

A Day of Wrath
And A Day of Joy

Zephaniah

MEMORY VERSE

ZEPHANIAH 2:3

“Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD’S anger.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Bibles, children’s music cassette/CD and player, a chalk/dry erase board, chalk/dry erase marker and an eraser.

Grapefruit juice, apple juice and enough small cups for every child in your class.

White and black construction paper, glue sticks, scissors, large tongue depressors and markers.

ATTENTION GETTER!

Hot Potato Prophets

Use this game to review with the children the books of the Major and Minor Prophets found in the Old Testament (Isaiah through Malachi). You will need Bibles, children’s music cassette/CD and player, a chalk/dry erase board, chalk/dry erase markers and an eraser. Begin by printing the names of the Major and Minor Prophets in order on the chalkboard.

Have the students sit on the floor in a circle. Choose a volunteer (or if everyone wants to play you can do this) to read the book names aloud from the board. Explain that the first 5 books are the Major Prophets because they are longer than the last 12 books of the Old Testament, which are the Minor Prophets. The students will then play a game of Hot Potato, passing the eraser while the music plays. When the music stops, say either “Major Prophets” or “Minor Prophets.” The student with the eraser should then go to

the board and erase a book from either of those divisions. After that have all of the children together read the names of all of the books, remembering the erased name. This will help them to commit to memory the order of these books. Continue playing until all books are erased and students can repeat all of the books from memory.

LESSON TIME!

About 100 years before Zephaniah became a prophet, another prophet by the name of Isaiah spoke out against the people of Israel because of their disobedience to God. Because of God's coming judgment on His people, Isaiah pleaded with them to turn away from their wicked ways and return to the Lord. Simply said, Isaiah told them to, "Seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

One hundred years later, Israel experienced God's judgment because they refused to repent of their sins, and turn to God. As we read through the book of Zephaniah, we see the same situation with the Southern Kingdom, Judah. Several years earlier the nation of Israel had split into two nations - the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. God judged Israel (the Northern Kingdom) through the nation of Assyria and God was now about to judge Judah (the Southern Kingdom) for their disobedience.

You would think that God's people in Judah would have learned from Israel's mistake, as they were taken captive and made servants under the control of Assyria. Zephaniah would proclaim the same message as many prophets before him, "Seek the Lord, seek righteousness and seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of His anger" (Zephaniah 2:3). God only wanted His people to turn back to Him and He would bless them. The result of their sin would be captivity and bondage, but they loved their sin more than they loved God.

In our lesson today, we will see that God will punish the wicked, but He is also patient and longsuffering with those who sin against Him. He will always provide everyone with the opportunity to repent and turn from his or her sins. **God is faithful to forgive when we turn to Him.** It's never too late to make a fresh start with God. Though the judgment of God was certain, He promised to preserve a remnant of His people in Judah who would continue to serve Him faithfully.

ZEPHANIAH 1:2-5, 17-18; 3:1-7

"I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land," Says the LORD;

"I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land," Says the LORD.

"I will stretch out my hand against Judah, And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests;

Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops; those who worship and swear oaths by the LORD, but who also swear by Milcom;

1:17-18

"I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse."

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His

jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.

3:1-7

Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city!

She has not obeyed His voice, she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the LORD, she has not drawn near to her God.

Her princes in her midst are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave not a bone till morning.

Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.

The LORD is righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, but the unjust knows no shame.

"I have cut off nations, their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, with none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; There is no one, no inhabitant.

I said, 'Surely you will fear Me, you will receive instruction'; So that her dwelling would not be cut off, despite everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.

Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah, king of Judah. Josiah was a godly king who sought after God to lead the people in a great revival (2 Kings 22:1-23:25). Zephaniah helped the revival by warning the people that judgment would come if they did not turn from their sins. Although this great revival brought the nation toward God, it would only last a short time. Twelve years later Judah was conquered by Babylon and sent into exile.

What happened to the people of Judah? Why did they ignore God's warning? They refused to listen either because they doubted God's prophet, thinking he was not from God, or because they doubted God Himself and thus did not believe He would do what He said. Do we listen to God's Word and then think He is not really serious about how He wants us to live our lives? Possibly the people of Judah did not think that God would really judge them for their sin.

God sent Zephaniah to warn His people and encourage them to turn from their own ways and turn to God. **God is faithful to forgive when we turn to Him.** Zephaniah spoke God's Word and proclaimed certain judgment and horrible punishment for all that would defy the Lord (Zephaniah 1:2-28).

The people of God had become loyal to many different gods, worshipping the Lord as well as all the pagan gods of the land. They added the best of pagan worship to true faith in God. They allowed the influence of the surrounding nations to make them stray in their devotion from the true God, thus making them corrupted. Their worship of other gods got so bad that they were doing horrible and evil things to one another and their own children all in the name of worship. Serving idols is a cruel and a sad life, but Judah would not turn from them.

Zephaniah's prophecy of judgment would be twofold, one for the near future (verses 7 and 14) and another for the distant future (verse 18). The surrounding nations of Judah were warned of the judgment of God (2:4-5), but Jerusalem, a rebellious and polluted

people, was singled out for God's punishment (3:1-7). God would prepare Judah like a sacrifice, making her ready for the slaughter, much like the sacrificial animals were when they were prepared (verse 7).

Sin Vs. Obedience

You will need grapefruit juice, apple juice and enough small cups for all the children in your class. Before class prepare several small cups with grapefruit juice (enough for half of your class). Prepare several more with apple juice (the other half of your class). Pass out the cups to the children and ask them to take a drink. After they have taken a drink have the children who received the grapefruit juice stand up. Ask them how it tasted (sour, yucky, etc.). Next, have the apple juice drinkers stand up and ask them how it tasted (sweet, good, etc.).

Explain that sin and obedience is somewhat like the grapefruit juice and the apple juice. Sin is sour and may seem OK at first, but it is bad. But obedience is sweet and good like the apple juice.

ZEPHANIAH 2:1-3; 3:14-20

Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation,

Before the decree is issued, or the day passes like chaff, before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you!

Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.

Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!

The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more.

In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak.

The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

"I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden.

Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, and gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame.

At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; For I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes," Says the LORD.

The day of God's judgment for the near future did come when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered Jerusalem in the summer of 586 BC. He not only conquered it, he destroyed it. God was true to His word. The people would not turn to God so they suffered the results of their sin. When God tells us something, we need to listen and learn.

As we study the prophets in the Old Testament we always see that when they talk about judgment for God's people, they always follow it with the promise of forgiveness and restoration. **God is faithful to forgive when we turn to Him.** It would be no different for Judah. There is hope for those who turn away from their sin and turn to God.

God's judgment on Judah came with plenty of warning so the people had no excuse. There was still time to avoid judgment, but they refused. The people simply had to turn from their wicked ways, humble themselves, and obey God (2:1-3). God would be faithful to forgive them, giving them the opportunity to return to their heavenly Father, completely restored to fellowship with Him again.

Although God said He would destroy Judah, He also promised to save a remnant to keep His original covenant to preserve Abraham's descendants (Genesis 17:4-8). He is always faithful to keep His word. Those who humbled themselves and sought God's forgiveness were forgiven. **God is faithful to forgive when we turn to Him.** Zephaniah's prophecy started out with judgment, but it ended with hope.

In the last days, when God's judgment comes upon all of the earth, He will judge all people according to their deeds (Revelation 20:12). God will bring justice upon the earth and evildoers will be punished and the obedient will be blessed. It's a day of hope for all who long for God's righteous ways, because it is He who will bring salvation to all who have sought His forgiveness. There will be a new day when God is going to bless His people.

Zephaniah's message of doom in the beginning of the book becomes a message of hope by the end (3:14-20). When God restores the nations to Himself, He will also turn from wrath to bless His chosen nation Israel. Though God must punish sin, He is full of mercies and is always true to His promise. Just as God's

judgment will come to pass, His mercies will abound even more to save those who will humbly seek His forgiveness. **God is faithful to forgive when we turn to Him.**

Not only will God's people rejoice that He has removed His judgment, the Lord Himself will be singing with delight and joy over His people (verse 17). Oh how the Lord loves His people, blessing those who seek His loving kindness and mercies. He turns our life of gloom and doom into a wonderful life of hope and salvation. It is He who will deliver His people from sin, to gather us into His glorious presence (v. 20).

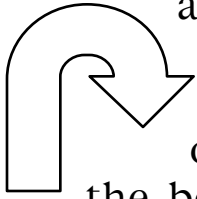
Everyone has an opportunity to be forgiven of his or her sins. We are never beyond God's grace and mercy. He will always accept us when we turn to Him to receive His love and mercy. He will always be faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9). We can all learn from those who chose to rebel against God, refusing to accept His offer for a blessed life. Those who turned to God were never disappointed.

God is so patient with us! Hopefully you will see that He is full of mercy. He is patient and longsuffering. He is patient and merciful to each of us. The fact that God has not judged each one of us today is because of His mercy and grace. He wants us to turn to Him and we will find wonderful forgiveness when we do. He will separate our sin from us as far as the east is from the west. It is His kindness that is meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). **God is faithful to forgive when we turn to Him.** Turn to Him today, and you will find Him faithful to do as He promised; He will bless your life.

Take a U-turn!

This craft will help the children remember the importance of repentance, or turning away from sin and turning towards God. You will need white and black construction paper, glue sticks, scissors, large tongue depressors and markers.

Give each student a sheet of white construction paper. Have them round the edges so it will look like a traffic sign. Next, using black construction paper have them cut thin strips to make a border and an arrow representing a U-turn.



Glue the strips and the arrow onto the white sheet of construction paper. Make sure to leave enough room at the bottom to write the theme of today's lesson and/or the memory verse. Glue a large tongue depressor to the bottom of the sign. You may need to glue an additional sheet to the backside of the sign to make it sturdy.

Use this craft as an opportunity to talk to the class about the importance of turning from our sin and turning to God.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to follow God and obey Him no matter what. If there are children who know Jesus, yet perhaps are following their own ways and not the Lord's give them an opportunity to recommit themselves to Him. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.