

The Day of the Lord

Teaching Tips

June 5, 2016

Bible Study Guide 1

Words You Should Know

A. Sought ([Zephaniah 1:6](#)) *baqash* (Heb.)—To seek, often the face of the king or God with a request.



B. Enquired (v. 6) *darash* (Heb.)—To consult a person or God, or to investigate closely.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Maintaining the Good of the Earth. People sometimes greatly damage strong relationships with others and the earth. What happens when someone harms a relationship? Zephaniah describes the Israelites marring creation as sinning against God, earning the Lord's promised punishment. The prophet, offers an opportunity for the people to seek righteousness and save their relationship with Him.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Readings.

B. Complete Lesson 1 in the *Precepts For Living*® Personal Study Guide.

C. Reread the Focal Verses in a modern translation.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer and have students read Aim for Change.

B. Ask for a volunteer to read the In Focus story.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask for volunteers to read the Focal Verses and The People, Places, and Times. Discuss.

B. Read and discuss the Background section.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Discuss the Search the Scriptures, Discuss the Meaning, and Lesson in Our Society sections.

B. Ask students to share the most significant point they learned in the lesson and how to use that point this week.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Complete the Follow the Spirit and Remember Your Thoughts sections.

B. Remind students to read the Daily Bible Readings in preparation for next week’s lesson.

C. Close in prayer, thanking God for His presence in our life.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: The Day of the Lord

Song: “In Christ Alone”

Devotional Reading: [Isaiah 25:6–10](#)



Bible Background • [GENESIS 1:1–2:3](#); [ZEPHANIAH 1:2–2:4](#)



Printed Text • [ZEPHANIAH 1:4–6, 14–16, 2:3](#) | **Devotional Reading** • [ISAIAH 25:6–10](#)



Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **LEARN** that on the Day of the Lord, God will punish those who have not repented; **RECOGNIZE** the relationship between righteous living and one’s responsibility to maintain “the good” found in God’s created order; and **REPENT** and reaffirm our faithfulness to God.



In Focus

Terrence sat on the porch with his friend Mark. He couldn’t stop talking about the new album he had just downloaded. It was made by his favorite rapper, and he had already memorized many of the lyrics.



Mark listened for a while. “Seems like he’s confused. I can’t figure out whether he’s a Christian or a Muslim.”

“Yeah, he believes the Bible and the Qur’an. He likes to quote both because he reads both and follows the teachings of both. It makes sense.” Terrence proceeded to recite some of the lyrics that promoted the mixture of religions.

Mark thought for a second. “But what does that mean? What does he do when those teachings conflict?”

“I don’t know.”

“I don’t think you should base your beliefs on what rappers say. We don’t know what they’re like in their private lives, and all either one of us knows about the Qur’an is from this guy. Our faith should have something to do with our real lives. Get to know God through reading your Bible, not listening to the latest album.”

The Lord will judge the world. Seek the Lord wholeheartedly and walk in His ways. How are you currently seeking the Lord?

Keep in Mind

“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” ([Zephaniah 2:3](#)).



Focal Verses

KJV

Zephaniah 1:4 I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;



5 And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham;

6 And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.

14 The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.

15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

16 A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

2:3 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.

NLT

Zephaniah 1:4 "I will crush Judah and Jerusalem with my fist and destroy every last trace of their Baal worship. I will put an end to all the idolatrous priests, so that even the memory of them will disappear.



5 For they go up to their roofs and bow down to the sun, moon, and stars. They claim to follow the LORD, but then they worship Molech, too.

6 And I will destroy those who used to worship me but now no longer do. They no longer ask for the LORD's guidance or seek my blessings."

14 "That terrible day of the LORD is near. Swiftly it comes—a day of bitter tears, a day when even strong men will cry out.

15 It will be a day when the LORD's anger is poured out—a day of terrible distress and anguish, a day of ruin and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness,

16 a day of trumpet calls and battle cries. Down go the walled cities and the strongest battlements!

2:3 Seek the LORD, all who are humble, and follow his commands. Seek to do what is right and to live humbly. Perhaps even yet the LORD will protect you—protect you from his anger on that day of destruction.

The People, Places, and Times

Zephaniah. Zephaniah was born during the long reign of Manasseh, an evil king who reigned for fifty-five years. His ministry, however, took place mostly during the reign of Josiah, the grandson of Manasseh. Josiah was a godly king who instituted sweeping reforms and commanded that idols be destroyed.

Zephaniah prophesied after Israel had been taken captive by Assyria. His was one of the last prophecies given to Judah before being carried into exile in Babylon. Before him, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had all prophesied about the coming Day of the Lord.

Host of Heaven. The term "host of heaven" refers to the celestial bodies. Ancient people believed that the stars and

heavenly bodies in the sky formed an army. This army guided the fate of nations and controlled the destiny of individuals. This is the reason the sun, moon, and stars were some of the first objects of idolatry and continued to be a temptation for the Israelites. God condemns this type of worship ([Deuteronomy 17:2–5](#)).



Background

In the beginning of the book of the same name, Zephaniah prophesied of God's coming judgment because of the idolatry that had filled Judah and Jerusalem. Zephaniah dealt with this particular aspect of the unfaithfulness of God's people in major detail. Many of the practices condemned by the prophet anticipate the reforms of King Josiah in 622 B.C.

Zephaniah started off giving a sweeping vision of what will happen on the Day of the Lord, a day when everything would be consumed. This picturesque description of God's wrath will serve as a bookend to chapter two, which is more encouraging and offers hope. Here, in the midst of judgment, God's people were encouraged to repent and seek Him.

At-A-Glance

1. Judgment is Coming ([Zephaniah 1:4–6](#))
2. The Day of the Lord Is Near (vv. 14–16)
3. Repent and Seek the Lord (2:3)



In Depth

1. Judgment is Coming ([Zephaniah 1:4–6](#))



Judgment is coming for the people of God. Even the City of God, where the temple stands, will feel His wrath. This first section of Zephaniah's prophecy indicates that mankind is responsible for the condition of the earth. In verses 1–3, the Lord promises to send judgment on the whole world. His judgment will include everything, even animal life and the land.

This judgment will also fall on those with divided loyalties. In Zephaniah's day, the people of Judah were swearing allegiance to both God and Molech. Not only is the Lord displeased by their half-worship, He will impose the same punishment on Judah as on idolaters. The very names of the Chemarims, the priests of Baal, will be erased from memory. Those who worship the heavenly bodies would also be destroyed. Those who worship the Lord and Molech will be judged for their unfaithfulness.

Verse 6 speaks of those who used to worship the Lord but no longer do. Zephaniah proclaims that these, too, will be destroyed. Judgment will come on all classes of people, and all who worship the sun, moon, stars, and other gods will be consumed.

2. The Day of the Lord Is Near (vv. 14–16)

The Day of the Lord is described as being a terrible day when the Lord's wrath will be poured out. Even mighty men will cry like children.

Zephaniah describes the Day of the Lord as a day of gloom, darkness, and distress, as well as trumpets and battle cries. This indicates military invasion and alludes to Babylon's invasion of Judah in 597 B.C. The attack will be directed at Judah's defenses, which will fail on that day.

Zephaniah prophesies the Day of the Lord, the ultimate judgment of the earth. He also refers to the immediate

judgment of Judah, called the “voice of the day of the Lord,” which will come before the Day itself. It will be a terrible day when even the strongest will be in distress and anguish. Judah will experience the Lord’s judgment, and the full impact will be released on all creation at the last judgment.

It will be a day of trouble and distress for all sinners, and a day of ruin and desolation for all creation. The animals and the land will be wiped away. In verse 17, Zephaniah describes how the people will grope like the blind. Their blood will be poured out, and their bodies will rot on the ground. Rich and poor alike will suffer the same fate (v. 18).

3. Repent and Seek the Lord (2:3)

Zephaniah urges the people of Judah to gather together and repent while there is still time (v. 1). The fierce fury of the Lord is set to descend on them but they have the opportunity to repent and turn from their wickedness. Judah needs to collectively humble themselves and seek the Lord earnestly. Refusing to seek the Lord is one of the causes for judgment (1:6). Now, Judah must seek the Lord once again, pursuing righteousness and doing what is right by following the Lord’s commands. Judah must live humbly, submitting to the Lord in everything. In order to be saved, Judah must show humility, or meekness. Humbly seeking the Lord would cause Him to spare them.

Search the Scriptures

1. What has Judah done to deserve punishment ([Zephaniah 1:5–6](#))?
2. How can the people of Judah demonstrate their repentance (2:3)?



Discuss the Meaning

1. One of Judah’s main problems was spiritual complacency. Have you become complacent in your walk with God? How can you begin to seek Him with all your heart?
2. Like Zephaniah, we should be pointing others toward God. How can we alert others to the dangers of sin and judgment and encourage people to pursue a relationship with the Lord?

Lesson in Our Society

Sin is destructive. Not only does it affect the individual and his or her relationship with God, it affects others, sometimes on a large scale. On the prophesied Day of the Lord, all creation will suffer judgment. Like the Lord’s prophets and disciples, we are called to preach the Gospel of God’s grace. We should call people to repent, turn from their wicked ways, and seek the Lord. We should boldly proclaim the message of God: both His punishment of sin and His abundance of grace.

As in the past, the Lord has promised judgment for sin. He will not let sin go unpunished. The Good News is that Jesus took the punishment for every believer. We are to warn people of the consequences of sin and proclaim salvation in Christ.

Make It Happen

Spiritual complacency is very common in our society. Many say they are Christians, but their lifestyle and worldview do not reflect Christian beliefs. Many also take elements of various religions and mix them with Christianity. God’s Word states that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Believers must be careful not to add other false religions, teachings, or practices (e.g., Islam, Buddhism, New Age, numerology, etc.) to the Gospel.

As believers, we must take seriously the teachings of the Lord and endeavor to please Him in all we do. We must turn away from sin and follow God wholeheartedly. Spend some time reading the Bible and praying. Seek the Lord with all your heart. Seek His guidance and meditate on His goodness.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

Zephaniah 1:4–6, 14–16, 2:3

4 I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; 5 And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; 6 And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.

In the previous verses, Zephaniah begins with a thunderous pronouncement speaking in proxy for God: “I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD” (v. 2). This sweeping away includes all of creation. Judah and Jerusalem would not be safe as God declares that He will “stretch out” His hand. The word to stretch out (Heb. *natah*, **nah-TA**) is often used in the context of God’s hand in judgment. This stretching out of judgment is focused on cleansing, as the Lord says that He will “cut off the remnant of Baal from this place and the name of the Chemarims with the priests.” The word “remnant” (Heb. *shear*, she-**AR**) is often used to describe whatever is left whether in reference to people, animals, or inanimate objects. It is a general term for “the rest,” and in this context, anticipates when the Lord would judge Judah and Jerusalem and eradicate Baal worship with finality.

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah, which was characterized by religious reform. The book of the Law was found and the temple was restored. Josiah proceeded to eliminate the worship of idols in the nation of Judah. The people of Judah had worshiped not only Baal, a principal Canaanite deity, but wicked kings had installed “Chemarims,” or priests of foreign gods. These priests would worship other false gods to supplement the worship of Yahweh (2 Kings 23:5). They also worshiped the host of heaven, another term for the sun, moon, stars and other celestial bodies. This type of idolatrous worship was prevalent in the ancient Near East and originates in Mesopotamia. God’s people were tempted by this even in the days of Moses (Deuteronomy 4:19). The cleansing of the nation from idol worship would not just cover those who proactively and brazenly sought after false gods, but also include those whose loyalties were divided as they swore by the Lord and also Malcham (Heb. *malcham*, **mal-KAM**), which means “their king” and could refer to the Ammonite deity Milcom or to the Israelite name Molech, which probably also refers to Milcom (see 1 Kings 11:5; Leviticus 18:21). This statement makes clear that the Lord would not tolerate a half-hearted commitment and loyalty but wanted full covenant devotion. The Lord would judge all those who have turned back (Heb. *sug*, **SOOG**). This word is commonly used to refer to backsliding. This was not a passive drifting away but an intentional avoidance and refusal to follow the Lord, the attitude and lifestyle of all those who have not sought (Heb. *baqash*, **bah-KHASH**) after the Lord. In this context, “sought” is to seek in order to find. This is also the attitude of those who have not inquired (Heb. *darash*, **da-RHASH**) of Him. The word means to frequent or consult. Those who turn back from God avoid His counsel.

14 The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. 15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, 16 A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

Zephaniah goes on to announce that the great Day of the Lord is near (Heb. *qarov*, **ka-ROVE**). This word can be used for nearness of place or time; in this context, time. He adds “it is near and hasteth greatly.” The word “hasteth” (Heb. *maher*, **mah-HER**) which means hurrying or speeding is not a verb in the Hebrew but an adjective describing

the day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is not a far off concept but a very near reality. Zephaniah then goes on to describe voice (Heb. *qol*, **KOL**) or sound of the Day of the Lord. It will be a day when a mighty man will cry bitterly (Heb. *tsarach*, **sah-RAHK**). This word for cry means to suddenly cry aloud with a penetrating and high pitched sound. Strong men cry out in pain and agony as they experience God's judgment.

This day will be filled with wrath (Heb. '*ebrah*, **ev-RAH**) or outpoured anger. It will be a day of trouble (Heb. *tsarah*, **tsah-RAH**) which is extreme anguish of body or mind. It will be a day of distress (Heb. *metsuqah*, **met-su-KAH**) or extreme psychological suffering. Zephaniah adds that it will be a day of wasteness (Heb. *sho'ah* **sho-AH**) and desolation (Heb. *mesho'ah*, **me-show-AH**). The word for wasteness means damaging something beyond repair and desolation is from the same root as wasteness, also indicating total annihilation. The Day of the Lord would be filled with total devastation. Desolation means something that is decayed or destroyed. Zephaniah goes on to describe the day as one where there would be no light or happiness. It would be a day of the trumpet (Heb. *shofar*, **sho-FAR**) and alarm (Heb. *teruah*, **te-roo-AH**). The trumpet was used as not only an instrument of merriment, but also war. It gave the call to arms. The alarm was the sound it made; a more specific definition would be "battle cry." This "battle cry" was sounded throughout an entire battle. From this, we can see that the Day of the Lord would be a day of war and destruction.

2:3 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.

Zephaniah calls those who want to be saved from the devastation of the Day of the Lord to seek Him. The prophet particularly announces this to the meek (Heb. '*anaw*, **ah-NAHV**) of the earth—the poor, afflicted, and humble. Zephaniah further adds that they are to seek righteousness and meekness (Heb. *anawah*, **ah-naw-AH**). Righteousness is what is right, normal, and just. Meekness is lowliness of mind and status. It is having the attitude of proper self-estimation in relation to God as one who is poor and humble.

Say It Correctly

Chemarims. ki-mah-**REEMS**

Malcham. mal-**KAM**.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Day of Celebration

([Exodus 23:14–19](#))



TUESDAY

A Day of Rest

([Exodus 16:25–30](#))



WEDNESDAY

A Day of Agreement

([Deuteronomy 26:14b–19](#))



THURSDAY

A Day without Tears

([Isaiah 65:13–19](#))



FRIDAY

A Day to Finish
([2 Timothy 4:1–8](#))



SATURDAY

A Day for Faithfulness
([Matthew 24:42–47](#))



SUNDAY

The Day of the Lord
([Zephaniah 1:4–6, 14–16, 2:3](#))

