

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 children 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 five books are the Major Prophets because they are longer than the last 12 books of the Old Testament, which are the Minor Prophets. The children 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 child with the eraser should then go to the

board and erase a book from either of those divisions. Then, ask the children to read together 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. Isaiah pleaded with them to turn away from their wicked ways and return to the Lord, so God's judgment would not come. He exhorted, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

Sadly, the people did not turn to God in repentance; and about 100 years later, after the time the nation of Israel had split into two nations--the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah)--God judged the northern kingdom of Israel through the nation of Assyria. Several years after, God prepared to judge Judah (the Southern Kingdom) for their disobedience. He sent the prophet Zephaniah and also Jeremiah, his contemporary, to warn the people.

You would think that God's people in Judah would have learned from the mistakes of the northern kingdom, Israel, as they saw them carried away as captives 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 knew if the people continued in their sin, the result would be captivity and bondage. He desired that His people turn back to Him, so He could bless them. **God is faithful to forgive those who turn to Him.**

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 spoke God's Word and proclaimed certain judgment and horrible punishment for all that would defy the Lord (Zephaniah 1:2-18). He encouraged them to turn from their own ways and seek God. **God is faithful to forgive those who turn to Him.**

Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah, king of Judah. Josiah was a godly king who led 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 revival brought the nation toward God, it seems it was shallow (more outward than inward) for it only lasted a short time. Twelve years later, Judah was conquered by Babylon and sent into exile.

What happened? Why did the people of Judah 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.

The people had allowed the influence of the surrounding nations to cause them to stray in their devotion to the one true God. They began to worship the many pagan gods of the land as well as worshipping God. 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 was a sad life, marked by cruelty and bondage, but Judah would not turn from them.

Zephaniah's prophecy of judgment has a double fulfillment, one for the near future—prophesying the destruction that occurred during the Babylonian invasion and reign and, also, prophesying the future destruction that will occur during the Great Tribulation—the time of God's judgment and wrath poured out on the world that has rejected His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

## 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;

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.

God called to His people through the prophet. He longed for reconciliation with His people. God delights in mercy, not judgment (Micah 7:18). His mercy is great toward those who fear Him—who turn to Him in repentance.

### ZEPHANIAH 3:14-20

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.

Though God repeatedly warned His people, the people did not repent, and the day of God's judgment for the near future did indeed come. 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. How sad that the people had not listened. They loved their sin more than they loved God.



However, Zephaniah's outlook brightens as he looks ahead to a new day in the distant future—the millennial kingdom--when Israel would be restored once more and enjoy all the blessings God desired to give His people. **God is faithful to forgive those who turn to Him.**

Not only would God's judgment upon His people be removed, but the Lord Himself would rejoice over His people with gladness and quiet them with His love. God will even sing with joy as He delights in His people. What a love song that will be! Oh, what blessings are in store for those who seek after His loving kindness and mercies!

What can we learn from the book of Zephaniah? God had lovingly entreated and warned His people through the prophet Zephaniah, but the choice, ultimately, was their own. They chose to remain in their sin, rather than turn back to God and experience the life of blessing He desired to bestow upon them. They brought judgment upon themselves. We are given a choice. We can follow after God and experience His blessings, protection, and goodness in our lives, or we can follow the ways of the world. Like the people of Judah, we can allow other things to become important, and even take the place of God. We can choose to reap blessing, or we can reap certain disaster. Let us choose wisely, knowing God is good and has a great plan for our lives.

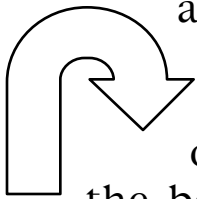
Do you know you are a Christian? The Bible says sin has separated all of us from God (Romans 3:23). God is holy and just and cannot dwell with sin. In Romans 3:12 we read, "They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." God yearns for fellowship with each one of us just as He yearned for fellowship with the people of Judah. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross, taking upon Himself the judgment for our sins in order that we would no longer be separated from Him, but enjoy reconciliation and rich fellowship.

In 1 John 1:9 we read, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”  
**God is faithful to forgive those who turn to Him.**

## Take a U-turn!

This craft will help the children remember the importance of repentance, 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.

If you find other things, the things of this world, have become more important to you than God, the road you are taking leads to destruction. You need to take a U-turn! His road leads to great blessing. In Psalm 16:11 we read, “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

## PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to choose rightly--to follow God and forsake the ways of the world. (For some who are Christians, this may be a good opportunity or re-commitment.) If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.