

Zephaniah



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day and that the people of God
were filled with joy!

Doctrine for the Mind and Heart

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question Q 60.

How is the sabbath to be sanctified?

Answer

The sabbath /or Lord's Day, which is given for man's good and as a pointer to his eternal destiny, is to be kept holy by resting all that day from our work and recreations, and spending the whole time in the public and private worship, except the time spent in works of necessity and mercy.

Proof Texts

Mark 2:27; Hebrews 4:4-5, 9-11; Exo 20:10; Nehemiah 13:15-22; Isaiah 58:13,14; Exodus 20:8; Leviticus 23:3; Luke 4:16; Acts 20:7; Matthew 12:1-13

Memory verse of the week - Psalm 68:1

God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered, and those who hate him shall flee before him!

Psalm of the Week. Psalm 112A. The words are on page 8.

Pray for:

Mon – Evan, Kaylea, Lauren, Nash, Axl Clarke

Tues – Spencer Clifton

Wed – Mark Cousins

Thur – Matthew Dehann

Frid – Mark, Alison, Robin, Irelyn Dumalski

21st-25th December 2020

Produced by Ottawa RPC to help family worship.

*The notes on Zephaniah by Rev. Craig Scott (RPCNA)
have been slightly modified, with questions added.*

Monday - Zephaniah 2:1-2 – Repentance

What are men and women to do when faced with the awful prospect of an abyss such as that which has been described in Zephaniah 1? What can any of us do, confronted as we are with the twin realities of our own sinfulness and the inevitability of God's judgement? We are to 'Gather together, yes, gather.' Zephaniah is preaching the doctrine of repentance; we are to turn away from our sins and trust in the Lord. How glorious is this? God who judges sinners gives the hope of salvation to those who would repent and gather again under His wings. Here there is grace for a backslidden and cold church. This reviving grace will only come if we, by God's grace, repent and turn from our worldliness and coldness and seek the Lord. But see the urgency here, we cannot wait, we are to see the state of things now and quickly gather again to God.

- 1) There is little time; we are to turn now 'before the decree takes effect.' We do not know when we will die, and we do not know when Christ will return. Today is the day of salvation, let us turn today before it is too late.
- 2) There is fierce wrath to come so turn 'before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord.' We cannot take God lightly for we are all 'sinners in the hands of an angry God' who will consume us in the hot fire of His wrath lest we turn from our sin.
- 3) There is endless wrath to come as we are warned to repent 'before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord.' If we are found guilty on the day of Judgement there will be no second chances and the sentence will be eternal.

God offers us the grace of salvation, but only if we turn from our wicked ways. We must think upon these solemn truths and strike while the iron is hot. Do not wait; repent from your worldliness and sin. If you do, you will find grace and love in the Lord.

Questions:

1. What should our response be when confronted with God's judgement?
2. When should we respond?
3. What hope does God offer to us?

Tuesday - Zephaniah 2:1-3 - Seek the Lord

What would you do if you were diagnosed with a terminal illness and there was only one cure? No doubt you would put everything aside and seek the cure. It is the very same in the spiritual realm, we have the disease of sin and the only cure is the Lord. All we need to do to receive salvation is 'seek the Lord.' Here is the free offer of the Gospel, simply seek the Lord and you will be saved. But how do you know that you truly seek the Lord? Here Zephaniah explains the heart of a true seeker of the Lord.

- 1) Humility. One who truly seeks the Lord is humble; he or she knows there is no good thing in them. The Christian confesses he is a sinner and wretched, he totally relies upon God for all things including salvation.
- 2) Righteousness. To stand before a holy God we need to live a perfectly good life. The Christian knows he is not good and therefore seeks the Lord for righteousness. It is only in Jesus Christ can we receive righteousness for our righteousness is as 'filthy rags' (Isaiah 64:6).
- 3) Obedience. One who is humble and trusting in Christ for righteousness is one who also seeks to obey God and keep 'his just commands.' When we are born again, we receive new hearts that seek to please God and heed the words of Christ 'if you love me keep my commandments' (John 14:15).

When we truly seek God, we know that we are His children and receive the joy of salvation. However, it does not necessarily mean we will not suffer on earth. This is why the last sentence says 'perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.' God will judge the nations (vv. 4-15), and often when nations suffer so too do Christians. This is because we live in the same society and communities, when society collapses, we bear the consequences too. This should cause us to pray for our rulers and the salvation of our neighbours.

Questions:

1. What must we do to be saved?
2. What are the three characteristics of a true seeker of the Lord?
3. What do we receive from God when we seek him?
4. Does this guarantee a life free from suffering?

Wednesday - Zephaniah 2:1-7 - Judgement to the West

The Lord God continues the theme of repentance in chapter 2, but in a way one would not expect. In verses 4-15 Zephaniah prophesies of what will come upon the nations surrounding Israel. As the nations are lined up, the judgement given, the pattern should bring to remembrance the solemnity of God's awesome power. Seeing that there is nowhere to escape, the church is to turn away from her sin and trust alone in God Almighty.

In verses 4-7 Judgement comes to the west of Israel. All the cities mentioned make up the 'land of the Philistines.' The Philistines were an ancient sea people along the Mediterranean coast who attacked God's people throughout the Old Testament. It is important to note that when God's enemies attack His people, He is not a spectator who sits on the side-lines of history anxiously observing the world, unable to do anything. In fact, it is the opposite, because His laws are just as relevant to the Gentiles as they are to His people, He will judge all the earth. Here, it is the Philistines who are judged as God declares: 'I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left.'

All is not lost, however, as there is hope. For the Gospel will flourish and referring to the church Zephaniah proclaims: the 'Lord their God will be mindful of them and restore their fortunes.' The pagan people of Philistine will be judged, but the land 'shall be pastures, with meadows for shepherds and folds for flocks.' This means that God will save a people for Himself and they will be well fed. In the Old Testament this is seen in the return from exile as the Israelites repopulate the western coast, but ultimately it looks forward to the worldwide prosperity of the Gospel in the golden age to come. There is joy and fulfilment to be had in Christ, but it only comes through repentance and faith. May we all, individual and nation alike, turn from our sin and rest in the Lord.

Questions:

1. Can we escape God's judgement?
2. What nation is to the west of Israel?
3. Why is God judging this nation?
4. What hope is offered?

Thursday - Zephaniah 2:8-11 - Judgement to the East

If there is one judgement that we in the western world should take comfort in it is this one here. God turns to the eastern nations of Moab and Ammon and declares their end. Their particular sin is in their taunting and reviling of God's people. How wonderful to know that Almighty God does not just stand back when we are mocked for our faith, He hears and has compassion on us. In this case, the mocking of the church is done by her cousins. Moab and Ammon descend from Lot through his incestuous relationship with his daughters in Genesis 19:30-38. They are ethically related to the people of God, but mock them for their faith. This is like our own situation in the western world where the Gospel once flourished and Christianity was respected. Now our nation has turned her back on Christ and now mocks the church in both the media and society. Like Moab and Ammon, our nation is judged by God for her mocking. We often look upon our nation with tears and think how can it get any worse, but there is hope as a better day is coming.

God has promised by His own name 'Therefore, as I live', that he will judge those who mock us and they will fall in their pride. There is a time coming where He 'will be awesome against them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth.' Their idols will be destroyed as Christ's enemies are made His footstool and by His power and might they 'shall bow down, each in its place, all the lands of the nations.' It is difficult living in the secular west, this should bring us to our knees to pray for Christ's kingdom and cause us to spread the Gospel with hearts full of faith. Dear Christian, do not lose heart, keep fighting the good faith and know that God is in control and His kingdom is being built.

Questions

1. What was Moab & Ammon's particular sin?
2. How were Moab & Ammon related to Israel?
3. What has God promised to do?
4. What should be our response to this promise?

Friday – Zephaniah 2:12 - Judgement to the South

The shortest statement in this list of prophecies is reserved for Cush. It is important again to note who the direct spokesman and executioner is: 'You also, O Cushites, shall be slain by my sword.' The Cushites are to be identified as the remote Ethiopians, possibly the most southerly people known to the Hebrews. It is probably the remoteness of this nation that makes them the most perfect example to set before the people of God. If even the wicked in Ethiopia are not safe from the judgement of God, what hope is there for a disobedient covenant people? Too often covenant children and adults who do not profess can fall into some kind of religious comfortability. They can fall into a subconscious belief that they are better than outright pagans in other lands and that God will be 'merciful' to them. The truth is the opposite, for our Lord Christ says in Matthew 10:15 'Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for...' those who know the truth yet do not profess His name.

But why is this statement in Zephaniah so brief? It may be to highlight the immediacy of Ethiopia's devastation; no sooner is it identified than it is destroyed. God will yield His own sword by His own hand and destroy all who act so wickedly. Read Deuteronomy 32:39-42 to see this solemn truth. This short verse tells us how jealous God is for His own holiness. No sin can stand in His sight. This should cause to further see how God is to be revered. He is our holy God. If we are to have the mind of Christ, we should have the same mentality towards our sin. We should seek out the spiritual Ethiopians of our lives and pray that God gives us the grace to slay sin with the power of God's sword. What sins are we actively committing today? Seek it out and put it to death (Colossians 3).

Questions

1. Who are the Cushites?
2. What warning does this judgement of Cush hold for us?
3. What do we learn about the character of God from this verse?
4. What should be our attitude towards our own sin?

Psalm 112A - O Praise the LORD

1. O praise the LORD! The man is blessed
Who fears the LORD aright,
The man who finds in His commands
His pleasure and delight.
His children will be mighty men
Upon the earth renowned;
The generation of the just
In blessing will abound.

2. Abundant riches in his house
Will ever be in store;
And his unspotted righteousness
Endures forevermore.
Though darkness may surround the just,
To him arises light;
Compassionate and merciful,
He follows what is right.

3. The man is good and truly blessed
Who freely gives and lends,
Who justly governs his affairs,
Who truth and right extends.
There surely is not anything
That ever will him move;
The righteous man's memorial
Will everlasting prove.

4. And when he hears disturbing news
He will not be afraid;
His heart is fixed; his confidence
Upon the LORD is stayed.
Established firmly is his heart;
He will not fearful be,
Until upon his enemies
He his desire will see.

5. He has dispersed his wealth abroad
And given to the poor;
His horn with honor shall be raised,
His righteousness endure,
The wicked looks on angrily;
He grits his teeth, dismayed,
But melts away, and his desire
Will into nothing fade.