

July 24

## Zephaniah

Welcome to the July 24 daily accelerator. I'm Lori Eccleston and I'm so grateful you are on this journey of reading through the Bible with us. Today we read the work of another of the "minor" prophets -- Zephaniah. I hope you understand by now that the twelve Old Testament books we call the "minor" prophets are "minor" only in relation to the length of their written work. Some of them -- like Jonah or Amos for instance, had very powerful and very public ministries in their day.

In case you haven't had a good look at the table of contents at the beginning of your Bible in a while, the twelve minor prophets are the last twelve books in the Old Testament. Unfortunately they remain "minor" prophets to many simply because they remain unread and therefore unknown.

Zephaniah prophesied to the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the years leading up to the Babylonian captivity. The Book we read today is dated to the reign of the good King Josiah who brought real reformation to his kingdom only to have his successors return to all the idolatrous ways of Manasseh and Ammon. It is apparent that either Zephaniah wrote this Book in the very early part of Josiah's reign or else the reforms we read about back in 2 Kings 23 and 2 Chronicles 34 were fairly short-lived as the people slipped quickly back into idolatry. In any case, it is clear that though there was a faithful remnant of people who truly worshipped the Lord and kept His commands in Zephaniah's time, there was a much greater group of people who practiced idolatry, lusted after material wealth and made themselves at home in a society characterized by greed and violence.

Zephaniah's subject, like that of Joel and some of the other biblical prophets, is the day of the Lord -- Judgment Day.

Nearly every single passage in both the Old and New Testaments that deals with the subject of this day of the Lord seems to have a double focus. There is the short range day of judgment that is near at hand and then there is a far off "ultimate" day of the Lord that is coming at the end of history. When Joel and Zephaniah wrote, the short range judgment day was the one that Nebuchadnezzar was about to bring to the gates of the city of David. When Jesus gave the Olivet Discourse to the disciples in the week before His crucifixion, the short range judgment day was the one Titus, the Roman general, was about to bring to the gates of the same city of David. But there is always that other focus as well, the great day of the Lord that is coming to the entire human race -- the whole world. The day when the wrath of God's judgment is going to fall upon the entire human race -- all at once and out of which only the righteous will emerge unscathed.

Zephaniah's words apply mostly to the near day -- the one that will arrive with Nebuchadnezzar's armies for Jerusalem. Some of his words reach far beyond that nearby appointment: "On the day of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the

earth" (1:18). "Therefore wait for me ... for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them -- all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger". It is on the basis of these verses that Christians believe the next (and last) worldwide destruction will come not by water, but by fire.

Zephaniah cries out -- wake up people -- the day of the Lord is coming! A day of judgment is coming and perhaps much sooner than we know. Zephaniah says when it comes it will be for some a day of great comfort because they are righteous and they are ready. But for most it will be a day of unimaginable terror. A day when unprepared, unequipped and unredeemed mankind will face the wrath of an angry God.

Are you frightened? You don't need to be -- at least not if you have trusted Jesus to be your personal Savior. I hope you are filled with a deep desire to reach others with the gospel before it is too late for them. For those of us who have placed our trust in Christ, Zephaniah has great words of comfort. For us the day of the Lord will be a day of great rejoicing and worship and service and purity and holiness and peace.

Thanks for joining me for another day of Project 4:4.