

05.17.23 Zephaniah – Hidden Things Introduction

We're in the book of Zephaniah. One of the advantages of going through the minor prophets is you get to turn to where they are. Because normally we don't and hopefully, by the time we get finished with this study, you'll know where it is. It is in the Bible. We're going to do some hunting and pecking. As we come to this book, the name of the book is the name of the prophet that is given to us. And what we've done is we've put his name up here, "šāp anyâ" would be Zephaniah. Every time you see or hear "ya" at the end of a name that's Yahweh. So, for instance, Isaiah, "eye-zay-uh", would be Yahweh at the end. So, it's something-Yahweh. Jeremiah would be something-Yahweh at the end. So, in this particular case, we're talking about "Zephan" dealing with the Lord hiding or specifically seeming that Zephaniah is like a treasure that the Lord has hidden for a particular reason for a particular cause. We're going to see that reflection in Chapter 2. If you look with me in Chapter 2, we'll just point to it while we're reading about it. If you'll drop on down to verse 3, he says, "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility, perhaps you will be hidden."

So, an interesting book as it begins to describe this individual at the very beginning, and we don't know a lot about Zephaniah. You couldn't do a study as you go through the Old Testament and say, "Oh, that's who Zephaniah is." You still wouldn't know. It doesn't matter how much studying; this is all we know of him. Which in and of itself is interesting. But on top of that, the genealogy that's given to us in this particular passage is more expansive than any other prophet is given. So, as he begins in the introduction of the book gives those that were the fathers before and the connection of Zephaniah to these individuals. So, if you look with me, it starts off this way in Zephaniah 1:1, "The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah." Hezekiah was king. So, what we're dealing with is a prophet in royalty. Now that in of itself is pretty interesting. What makes it even more interesting is we have no record of this genealogy. It almost matches the name- who the LORD has hidden. A treasure that has been hidden. So, what we have is a prophet that has snuck under the radar and we're not sure where he comes from. Now, what we know is that somewhere along the line his great-great-grandfather was Hezekiah. But if you look at the genealogy of Hezekiah, it only mentions one son. Do you remember? His name was Manasseh; and from Manasseh comes Amon. This is interesting because as you go on, this is in the days of Josiah son of Amon. So he's related to the king who was king at this time, that is Josiah. And he was the son of Amon, who was the son of Manasseh, who was the son of Hezekiah. So, it's the same lineage. What we're dealing with is once again, royalty, and yet we don't know anything about Zephaniah. His name has not even been mentioned as one of the children of Hezekiah. We go "Well, why don't we know anything about it?" God hid him very well. Case solved. We'll talk a little bit more about the story of King Hezekiah because he came to the point where God told him "Get your house in order, you're going to die." Hezekiah goes, "Whoa, I'm too young to die." and he was. He was 39 years old. I know for some young people, "Woah! That's really old." but as far as I'm concerned, that's too young to die. So here he is at 39 and he begs God and God says "Okay, I'm going to give you more time." He gives him 15 more years. He shows him this amazing sign of the steps and the sun and all this stuff. As you begin to read, of course, we understand that within about three years he has a child named Manasseh and he turns out to be the worst king that Judah ever had. It will be because of his gross immorality. Scripture says that during the time of Manasseh the nation of Judah was worse than all the other nations of the world. It's clarifying that God was going to bring judgment on His own people. He goes, "I can't let this go. I mean, if I bring judgment on the world, I can't let you get away with this." It's during the time of Hezekiah that God begins to work, and Hezekiah, with

his begging, gets to live longer; but it really brings perhaps more trouble with having Manasseh come out. Now, what's amazing is that Manasseh reigns for 55 years. His whole reign was wicked and towards the end, he repents. Chronicles records this. He repents and God forgives him. It's an amazing text. Manasseh will have a son by the name of Amon. Amon will only reign for 2 years. Then a conspiracy will happen, and his own men in the realm will murder him, so he'll be murdered. Afterward, Josiah will take the throne. When Josiah takes the throne, he's only 8 years old. So, if you can kind of put it in context, Josiah is 8 years old when he takes the throne, his father has just been murdered. So how are you dealing with these kinds of things? Clearly, he's seen some of the horrific things that have taken place. Even by the time of eight years old, you begin to comprehend some of the things that are happening. I can imagine it to be overwhelming to him. First of all, to take the position that is given to him, but to know all these things that are happening. What happens during the reign of Josiah is he begins to make changes in the Kingdom to follow the Lord. He begins to tear down all the idols and the places where there had been worshipped towards the false gods and he becomes very zealous about this. You go "Well, where does this guy, Josiah, come up with this idea?" because obviously his grandfather Manasseh was the most wicked guy that ever touched the ground, and his father Ammon was just as bad, Scripture says so. Where is he getting this from? Well, in some way you begin to understand that the Lord is clearly protecting his people by having different ones being taken out before they become an influence, and God knows those who are His. What is interesting is this 8-year-old begins to make changes in his own life. He actually begins to seek the Lord. You know, most of you aren't old enough to remember this but this is a \$64,000 question. The question is what encouraged him, what inspired him to do what he's going to do to make those changes? I believe it's Zephaniah. I believe God placed a relative in the camp, a prince, one who is in the Kingdom, and we begin to realize that Zephaniah has an influence among the princes and the kings. This is where Jeremiah will have an influence on the priests because he's coming from that particular realm of the priesthood, remember? Zephaniah and Jeremiah are contemporaries. So, about the same time, this is all happening. God begins to work in the realm of the Kingdom in Josiah's life.

As we go back to the book of Kings, we'll see some of these things happening and we're going to take a little bit of a journey so that we can kind of get a little bit of background. It's the background that helps you understand the book. One of the great themes I have found in the book of Zephaniah is it's fundamentally a "fire sale." Everything has to go. The point of the book is that all of these things have been pulling you away from God and everything that pulls you away from Him has to go. The way Paul would put it in Philippians, in Chapter 3, "Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." And so, you can hear him pushing away from the things. The fundamental question is what's drawing you away from God? Anything that draws you away from God is a horrible, horrific thing because really what we're dealing with is your eternal soul. It sort of matches up to Hebrews chapter 12. You're familiar with Hebrews chapter 12, in particular in verse 1, as it begins to tell us that there are things that can hinder our running the race. So, he says, don't get entangled with the sin that easily holds you back from this race. And so, in some way, Hebrews 12 is going to parallel this particular point: don't let the things of this world tie you up. Now the point is that the Lord desires for you to let go of those things on your own. Just like any relationship, you know if something was causing you to have a riff with someone that you said you loved and they said to you, "You've got to give up that other person" and you said "I just can't do it. I can't do it.", you know, then to have to force you to do it just takes the whole love thing out of the relationship. But what's interesting about the book of Zephaniah is God is fundamentally saying "You wouldn't do it, so I have to." So, the beginning of the

chapter is all about God saying "I'm going to have to do this, aren't I? I told you not to do it. I'm going to have to come in and do this." Well, this prophecy that is given through Zephaniah is going to be stirring in the heart of little Josiah. By the time he's 16, he's going to start making major changes in the Kingdom. I mean, major changes. Within about another eight years, he's going to have literally everything transformed. He's going to burn and tear down almost everything that has been elevated above God. God will give him a reprieve. God will give the nation of Judea a reprieve because he has done this. God says, "The judgment is still coming, but because you've done this...because you willingly took care of it." and it is kind of an interesting reminder to me. You know, 1 Corinthians chapter 11 talks about things that we might have in our life that are hindering our fellowship with the Lord. In the context of 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and talking about communion and you coming to communion and you're thinking of yourself or all kinds of things that come and separate you from the relationship. The Scripture says, "But let each one examine himself." Remember the phrase? So, what does God want you to do? You examine yourself, and if you'll change, then he won't have to bring change in for you. I mean, you can either let go of it or it can be destroyed. But if you're one of God's, it will happen. So, you decide. What's interesting is during the time of Zephaniah, God uses Zephaniah to tug at the heart of Josiah, and Josiah says, "We'll make the changes...we'll make the changes." If you'll look with me, the repetition of the text starts off this way, in verse 2, "I will completely remove" what? "All things", that's what we're talking about. Everything must go. One phrase that's going to be repeated throughout the book, probably more than any other prophet, is "the day of the LORD" and you'll see that consistently, "the day of the Lord is near" Verse 7. It will say in verse 10, "It's on that day", verse 14 "Great is the day of the LORD", "...on that day", "The day of the LORD", "Day of God's wrath and fire of jealousy". "The day of the LORD" all the way through the book is going to be emphasized. Here again, it's God saying, "Okay, it's my turn." But we also know that according to the song, this is the day that the Lord has made. These are all God's days. It's God saying, "You know, I made the day. Why are you giving the day to somebody else?" and the tendency is to allow other things to creep into our lives in which we give glory and praise and honor but "Oh, we don't have services.", but we embrace them. We worship them, we serve them. We work hard for them and we're going to see how that has been the whole point all the way through the Old Testament God is saying, "Why would you do that? Why would you give credit to this? Why would you embrace this? Why would you love someone other than Me? Why would you love something more than Me?". There's an interesting passage in Deuteronomy chapter 12. It starts this way in verse 1, "These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you..." Of course, one of the great texts in Deuteronomy is chapter 6 verse 5, "You Shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul...you shall teach them diligently to your sons...". These are the statutes you need to observe. "He's the God of your father. He's given you to possess all this land and so this is what you need to do." If you look with me in verse 2, in case there's any doubt, everything has to go that would draw you away from God. So, it reads this way, "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, and the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree." Now the word that he uses for "serve" is also another word that kind of conveys a sense of working or laboring. In other words, the point is, what are you working for? Scripture says that you and I need to do all that we do to the glory of God. If you're working for money, you're working for the wrong reason. I always have people say to me "I got to make money. How can I pay my bills? How can I?" I understand but don't work for the money, work for God. Do your best for God. Whether or not you like the boss. You don't like the boss. Whether it's easy, where it's not easy, you do the best as unto the Lord, you do it for Him. Let Him reward you. You know, I'm

probably going to make people feel bad about this, but don't ask for raises. Let God give you the raise. If you're serving the Lord and you're doing the right thing, let God give you the raise. He'll do it. The Scripture is saying to only destroy these things, don't work for their gods. Interestingly, the term "gods" is the same word that is oftentimes used to point to our God, which is, of course, Yahweh or Jehovah tetragrammaton, but the emphasis in this particular setting is Elohim. Now, Elohim is used and oftentimes translated throughout the Old Testament is God. And Yahweh is usually translated as "LORD" so it would be a difference. But Elohim, the reference to that particular word is "strong" and oftentimes God is referred to as EL Elyon, which refers to the "strongest strong One". The point is that the emphasis is on His strength. What's interesting is that man will serve other forces, gods; those that they perceive are strong are powerful. And what he's saying is don't go around working for the others that you perceive to be strong and powerful. That's what he's saying. And so, it goes on and says "...on the high mountains", of course, "...the hills" and if you look at the phrase "under every green tree." Now we know that Asherah is the goddess that was worshipped under every green tree. The picture of every green tree is a luxuriant tree and more specifically it is a picture of prosperity or flourishing. So, what you worship is that which produces prosperity and luxury in your life. Oftentimes, this kind of worship brought about immoral acts that were tied to that. So, when you would worship under every green tree, it was you worshipping prosperity. Does it sound familiar to you at all? So, if you're worshipping prosperity, in other words, you're living for prosperity. You're living for the wrong thing. If you're working hard for someone or something that you believe will give you something, as in the realm of strength, you're working for the wrong person. So, the passage establishes that. Now when you go back a little bit further in Deuteronomy and you read Deuteronomy chapter 8, God says "Okay, this is the deal. I took you through the desert and I let you be hungry. It's in the context of you're looking at all the other nations and they look to be very successful, and they get along well. But I took you through the desert and I let you be hungry." Now, as you go on and read, you begin to understand why he'd let them be hungry. Why was it? So, they would not depend on their labor, they wouldn't depend on what man could provide for them, but on God, and he will give them bread from heaven. The point is that God's going to teach His people to put their trust in Him. But in the process of you putting your trust in Him, He's going to let you be hungry. Because there is a transition of sorts. See, you're having to let go of what you can do and what you perceive others can do for you. You've got to let go of that. And in the process, it's going to look like you're a failure. But that's where you then turn to God, and you go "You're going to have to rescue me because there's nobody else that's going to do this." And He says, "That's what I want you to say." So, it's in these difficult times that God is growing us, obviously, and it goes on and says in verse 3, what shall you do? "You shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and burn their Asherim...", referring to their wooden symbols or in some cases, making reference to groves, according to King James. "...and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods, and you shall obliterate their name from that place." They shouldn't even talk about it. I think that's pretty clear. You can't even talk about it. A conversation that people oftentimes have around a given dinner table or something, just about money or investments and I could just hear the voice of Moses in the text, "What are you talking about this stuff for?" What are you talking about? Where does the worth come from? Where does value come from? Who's going to take care of you? This doesn't mean that you can't make investments. It's saying why are you putting your trust in these things? Why are you putting them center stage? It's God who makes us rich. It's not man. So, it's saying all of this has to go if it's drawing you away from the hand of God. In a way, the nation has been working up to this. If you go all the way back to 2 Kings in chapter 14 and we could go further back but I said to myself, I got to stop somewhere. In 2 Kings chapter 14, it takes us into

an interesting time. It's a time of Israel, the northern tribe. So, we're kind of jumping out just a little bit away from the tribe of Judah. We're going to see where did the ten tribes go wrong? Because they went wrong first and then after that, Judah followed. So, in 2 Kings chapter 14, we have a king by the name of Jeroboam, who is the son of Joash. You read verse 23 and you go, "I'm confused" and you should be because at this time there's a father by the name of Joash who was King of Israel. Then there was a father in Israel and one in Judah. Both names were Joash and then they both had sons who were kings and they mentioned both of them in the same text and you go "Well, is it this one or this one?" It's both of them. So anyway, not to get bogged down with that, but Jeroboam, it says, is the son of Joash, King of Israel. So, we're talking about Israel within the passage and verse 24 tells us that he wasn't doing the right thing. It says he was doing evil during his time. Right? This is the way it records it. So, this is not a good king. He's not pursuing the right things. I've often thought how bizarre it is that the prophet Jonah wanted him to succeed. And you go "How do you know that?", In Verse 25, "he restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through his servant Jonah..." In other words, Jonah gave him a good prophecy. What was the prophecy? You're going to restore some of the land that was taken away. If you go back to 2 Kings chapter 10, some of the lands had been taken away from Israel. Now God has allowed this evil king in Israel to take back some of the land. We go "Why would God allow an evil king to do that?" Do you know why God allows the rain to fall on the evil? I have no idea. I don't know. But God is gracious despite us. In the passage, we begin to read that Jonah is wanting this to happen and you go, "So God is showing compassion?" I would say, yeah. God is showing compassion. How do I know that? Verse 26 reads, "For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel..." and that it was very bitter upon him and there was neither bond nor free. Nobody to help him. So, God says "Okay. Alright, I'll help him." It's an interesting picture of a bully going around beating up people and then somebody goes and props the bully. Then you see the bully laying down there and nobody cares for him because he's a bully. Finally, someone walks, and they go, "Well, we can't let them suffer there by themselves." You can see the heart of God, but anyway, that's the kind of picture there in the passage. Here again, the setting is that during this time there are a lot of forces, Syria coming from the north, Assyria, a whole different nation. Assyria, coming from the northeast, is now becoming a grand and powerful nation. Their capital will ultimately be the city of Nineveh. But at this juncture, it's probably Assure it will probably then become Nimrod, and then during the time of Sennacherib, it will become Nineveh. Before Nineveh becomes the capital, Jonah is sent. Now we know that Jonah doesn't like Assyria. Of course, you know the story. He gets in the fish, well actually God gets him in the fish. He gets in the boat. He's ready to go in the fish. He'd rather be in the fish than go to Nineveh because he doesn't like these people. He doesn't want them saved. They're horrible people. They're wicked people, and they're very hateful people. Interestingly, he has no problem with God showing mercy to his people. Think about that. "There's no problem God. You can show mercy to..." how is Jeroboam described? In verse 24 "He did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam..." So, what you have is wickedness running rampant in his own state. He's good with that as long as "we grow and prosper". If you think about it a lot of times, we as Americans think the same way. I mean we could grossly sin. "It's okay, we're Americans. We can do that." But you know another nation does something bad and if you look at some of these other nations, some of them have higher standards than we do. So, we would deserve to be wiped out a lot faster than they would. Nevertheless, I won't go into that, but actually I already did. But you come down and you realize that Assyria from the north, with Damascus, has been hounding pretty hard. They've been taking a beating from Syria and Assyria and God demonstrates mercy upon them. As you then go on, you realize

that Israel continues in their rebellion. If you follow through this, you begin to realize that in 2 Kings chapter 15, verse 29, "In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and captured. And you begin to see all these cities that he captures. It says, "...Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah..." and then there were problems there. What you're going to see is that Assyria's becoming a major power, it's growing. And it is in that looming and that growing that God is warning them. In our days, we're watching nations grow in power. We can see them growing. God is warning us. God's warning us these are not nations that have a good record and they don't have good in mind. They're not fundamentally altruistic. They want to destroy, and they want to conquer. There are nations such as this. So, Assyria was such a nation. It is during this time as Assyria starts to grow that people like Ahaz is now the king of Judah. You're going to back up and you're probably around the time of about 100 years before Josiah at this juncture, just to give you some kind of context. If you pick up with me in chapter 16 of 2 Kings, it says, "Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king. He reigned for 16 years in Jerusalem, and he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord..." He walked in the same way as the King of Israel. So, the King of Israel has gone his wicked way. God has put pressure on him through the north and the northeast. You would think that Judah would go, "I'm going to take a hint" but they don't, and they continue the same way. It is during this time that Israel, the northern tribe says to themselves, "well, you know, maybe if we form a coalition with the Assyrians then maybe we can go and take Judah and we'll work together and fight our brothers." So, a civil war now begins to happen. And in Chapter 16, they begin to wage war in verse 5, against Ahaz. The reason I bring Ahaz into play here is because Ahaz makes the classic move, which God has been warning him not to do, and that is he begins to put his trust not in God but in man. So, strangely enough, you know, he's thinking, "OK, Israel tied with Syria. So, I'm going to make a tie and a coalition with Assyria." And you know what he does? He sends a lot of gold; he sends a lot of money. Proverbs says money can buy your friends. They're not good friends, but they can buy your friends. So, he starts sending all this gold, and even takes it from the temple and Assyria goes, "OK, I'll help you." So, they do it. Now the reason I bring that up is that Ahaz is the father of Hezekiah. It'll be in the time of Hezekiah that Assyria will surround Jerusalem. And threaten the life of Hezekiah and his nation. So, his dad is setting up this coalition that ultimately is going to come back at him, and of course, the same thing that sort of happened at the end with Hezekiah is he lets Babylon see all his gold. And you know, you bring another nation, and "You want to see all the gold I have?" and they go, "Oh, yeah, that's pretty neat. I'm going to come back; I'm going to get that stuff." So, what does Babylon do? They come back and take his gold. All the way through what we're seeing is, these kings instead of putting their trust in God, they're putting their trust in the coalitions. If you remember the story, with Ahaz, you probably do. In Isaiah Chapter 7 in that particular chapter what you have is God says, "OK, I know that you have forces coming at you. If you'll come to me and ask me, I'll give you high as the heavens, deep as Sheol. I'll take care of you." and Ahaz says "I'm not going to ask you. I'm going to talk to Assyria." So, he foregoes putting his trust in God. See, this is why everything has to go. God is going to say in the book of Zephaniah, "Oh, yeah, by the way, we're going to take out Nineveh too." Everything's going to go because man, just leave something out there. You know, man will worship a cake. I remember when we were younger there was a guy that was an artist and they said, "I bet you can't write a hit about a cake." And he says, "I bet you I can." And so, he writes this, "Someone left the cake out of the rain. I don't think that I can take it because it took so long to bake it and I'll never find that recipe again." Do you remember that was actually a hit? I don't know if you remember that. It was. Anyway, you have to be a little older to remember. Man will worship anything and everything, see. So, you begin to realize that God is saying "Look what he does." Now if you remember the story of

Hezekiah, God will surround Judah. At this juncture, Assyria has already come in and taken Israel into captivity. Actually, they've taken most of them and put them in Persia, where the Medes and the Persians are. They've taken them and placed them over there. So many of them. Then they brought many of their people and let them start populating the northern kingdom (i.e., kind of the mixture where we probably get Samaritans). At this particular time we see that the Assyrians now, and if you remember, Rabshakeh, who's the general starts laughing and he goes, "Hezekiah, you think your God's going to take care of you? I already wiped out Israel, you're not going to be a problem." And Isaiah actually records some of the dialogue that goes on as well as Kings and Chronicles. As you begin to read the dialogue, of course he's making fun of him. You know, "What are you going to do? Trust in Him?" At first, do you know what Hezekiah does? Do you know what his dad did? He sent money. Hezekiah sends money. And he said, "I'm sorry I'm sorry!" then he realizes, okay, they're going to kill me. They got my money now they're going to kill me. And at first, he tries to build up the walls and he finds out that's not going to happen either. And he finally just takes the paper and spreads it before the Lord and he goes, "You got to help me." and God has mercy. If you remember, God sends one angel and 185,000 people die that night. No problem for God. You know, it's one of those moments: "I could have had a V8. Why didn't I call God? Why didn't I call God right to begin with?" You know, you're wondering why didn't I do that right away? So, God begins to work in his life. Well, it's at the same time, Scripture tells us that when this attack begins to happen, he's in his 14th year. But we know that he reigns for 29 years, so God gives him 15 more years to live. So, we know it's at the same time God sends this sickness upon him and says, you know, you're going to die, get ready. Then he begs and God gives him 15 more years. You would think that Hezekiah would just be thrilled to death that God was doing something wonderful and that he had given him this moment to change. And yet Scripture goes on and says, but he never gave God thanks for doing what he did. Even though at the very beginning of Hezekiah's life we see him as kind of a righteous guy, and God says, "Because you've done what you've done, Hezekiah, the nation is going to be taken away from you." He goes, "but it's not going to happen in your lifetime" and Hezekiah goes, "Well, it's not going to happen in my lifetime. I'm okay with that. I don't care if it happens to my kids, just as long as it doesn't happen to me." So, he has this kid Manasseh. It's during this time that he lives that there was another kid born, Zephaniah. Now, Scripture doesn't record him because he's hidden. But God is still working in the midst of all this, and you begin to realize just the grace of God. As you read through Kings and here again, I don't want to go into great depth, In Chapter 17 you read about Ahaz and how he rejected the Lord. It goes into Hezekiah in chapter 18, but when you go into chapter 21 with Manasseh and what a wicked king he was. But I want you to drop on down to chapter 22 of 2 Kings because now we get to Josiah. It starts off this way, if you look with me in verse 1, "Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Jedidah..." If you look in the passage, which seems to convey "beloved". "...the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath." Now, each of these seemed to make reference to the fact that his mother was somehow greatly beloved, and perhaps in some way her husband, which was Amon, which was a wicked king and only reigned 2 years. If you back up into chapter 21, you can see the end of this, "Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years..." and then there's this conspiracy and then he's murdered. Then he was a wicked king, Scripture tells us even in the sight of the Lord, verse 20, as his father was, Manasseh. So, we know that he was a wicked king, but strangely enough, he must have had... Is it possible that horribly wicked people, powerful people, could actually come upon a good person as a spouse? I mean, you read of Esther and you're going "Ok, that's an ungodly king but he could see the beauty in this girl." I mean, even wicked people can see the good and they go, "I think I'd like to have a

good person in my repertoire." So anyway, he has his daughter and she's the daughter of, interestingly the way that it's pronounced is "the Lord adorns", which seems to convey that God had made this woman attractive. There seems to be an influence of the mother, I guess is my point. Just like there's an influence you'll see in a lot of the kings that their mothers had an influence. This mother had some influence on Josiah, being 8 years old, which was a good influence. It says this if you read it with me in verse 2, "He did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or the left." What would make an 8-year-old do that? and once again we have God planting a mother in the midst of all of this mayhem and murder. A woman that probably influenced him well and you have a cousin or a brother of sorts, Zephaniah, that God has placed and hidden in the realm to begin to stir in his heart, "You need to do the right thing. You need to do the right thing. You need to do the right thing." And so, it says in verse 3, "Now in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam the scribe, to the house of the LORD..." The point of the passages is that Josiah started searching for God. Now what we know is that things had been so terrible that I mean Manasseh and Amon had torn down all of the things that were of God. Whereas, Hezekiah had built up the things of God at least, but now his sons have just totally obliterated even the memory of God to such an extent that they don't even know how to worship God anymore. I mean, it has been 57 years, a lot can change in 57 years. Let's see, what's changed over 57 years in America? A lot can change and especially when you have the wrong people in control. So now what begins to happen, if you look with me in 2 Kings 22, is that he sends a priest, he goes, "I need to find out what God has to say" and so they start doing the right things but nobody knows exactly what to do because, and it's some minor detail, they've lost the book. They don't know where the book is. Keep your finger here, but if you can go with me to 2 Chronicles, we'll pick up at the same story. in 2 Chronicles 34, verse one, "Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He did right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his father David and did not turn aside to the right or left." That's kind of repeated from Kings, but watch what it says here in verse 3, "For in the eighth year of his reign..." Okay, now he's 16 years old. You know, an 8-year-old knows what's right and wrong, but he really can't, you know, make heavy decisions. The 16-year-old, he knows what's going on. He can make some right decisions. So, when he was 16 years old in his reign, "while he was still a youth, he began, watch the phrase, to seek the God..." He began to seek God. Now, one of the great passages go all the way back to Asa. But in 2 Chronicles 15, it tells us "And if you seek Him..." if you seek God, "He will let you find Him" He will let you find Him. This is very interesting and you might want to mark it in your own life. Sometimes we don't know where to begin. You know, where do I begin to have a relationship with God? Where do I start? Okay, here it is. Start tearing down all your idols. Get rid of them. You want to have a relationship with God? Don't do it with the other woman in the room. Get her out, right? So, start cleaning house. See, that's what Zephaniah is all about. You want to start having a relationship with God? start cleaning house..."Well, I don't know what God wants, I don't know what God wants." You know He doesn't want her in the room? Right. Get her out. So, the passage reads, "They tore down the altars..." verse four, "of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars that were high above them he chopped down; also the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images he broke in pieces and ground to powder and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. Then he burned the bones of the priests..." It's very interesting when you burn bones, which is a sign of a curse, which, by the way, is another platform I'm not going to get too much into, but anyway so, when you burn the bones, they turn white, turn the ashes white. What's interesting is, that the priests, and we're going to get to that in Zephaniah, he's going to talk about the idolatrous priest called Chemarims. They were named that

because they wore all black. It was a declaration of their zeal, which quite frankly, I don't know why priests wore black. You know what I'm talking about today. I think they were following the Chemarims. Anyway, they wore all black to declare their zeal for God, and it was a sign that they were so zealous that they'd be willing to be charred or burned. So Josiah goes, "You want to be zealous? I'll burn you." So, he burns them and says to them, "But when God is zealous, He'll make you white." So, it's a pretty interesting way of putting it. But anyway, "He also tore down the altars and beat the Asherim and the carved images..." So it was in the 18th year of his reign that he actually sends the priest to begin to do the work in the temple. I would say this, start getting those things out of your life that you know you need to get out and then turn to the house of God. You go, "I don't know what's in store for me here." Don't think about it. It's recorded in 2 Kings 22 as well as Chronicles. So, we clearly use both of them, but I want you to go back to 2 Kings 22 and it says, in verse 8, "Hilkiah the priest and Shaphan the scribe..." they come to him and they go, "We found the book!" And what's interesting is they say it's the book of the law, but all the way through, they're going to refer to it as "the book". The reason why is they haven't been using it and they begin to read from the book (i.e. The book of the law) and wouldn't you know it, they're reading from Deuteronomy, one of the main passages and what does it say? You need to tear down all the stuff and you can't have any of this around. In fact, one of the passages we read Deuteronomy chapter 12. But if you look at 28, you know what book he was reading from? Deuteronomy 28 basically starts off, if you'll diligently obey the Lord, then your city will be blessed, your offspring will be blessed. Your baskets will be blessed. Everything will be blessed, right? And it says in verse 7, "and the Lord will cause your enemies to rise up against you to be defeated before you..." Have you ever wondered why are things not going well? Okay, but it could have something to do with maybe you have something that you should have gotten rid of. Right, so verse 9, "because the Lord is establishing you as a holy people to himself." Does that sound familiar? Doesn't it sound like Peter? "But you are a holy people, a royal priesthood for God's own possession." So, kind of sounds like Titus too. Why do you think God saved you? You know it's to be a different kind of people than the world. So it is for the purpose, if you look in verse 10, "so that all the peoples of the earth shall see you who are called by my name..." and they're going, "Whoa!" God's on their side. See? God says, "That's why I've called you. So, they might see what the true God is." But of course, they went and followed other gods instead of Him, he says. "If you follow other gods, then what's going to happen?" Well, look at verse 20, "The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion..." Feel confused? Drop on down to verse 25, "The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies..." Verse 27, "The Lord will smite you with boils of Egypt...The Lord will smite you with madness", verse 28. "...blindness, and with bewilderment of heart; and you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness..." I mean, could you imagine? Could you imagine the priest reading this? And Josiah is gone. Quite frankly, one of the things that's conveyed in Deuteronomy is, that we're going to get the Kings first and Josiah goes, "No, you're not." So, Josiah starts making some major changes to the degree that he tears down. I mean, 2 Kings 23 is all about the changes of Josiah and his reforms. I mean, it goes into amazing detail in which, he literally purifies everything and it's a long list of all the things that he purifies. But he wasn't going to leave any stone unturned and that's what Scripture is saying. Everything has to go. Because it was when they allowed a little bit that some of the worst things came in. See, the interesting thing about Hezekiah is he starts making all these grand changes and they are wonderful changes. I mean, he starts serving the Lord and they're having these huge services and everything like this. We're having Billy Graham crusades in the time of Hezekiah. This is big stuff. The only problem is Hezekiah's heart is not in it. It's all show. You could have all that kind of stuff and it just is for show. You go "Well, how do you know it's just for show?" That's

all God had to do was send Assyria circling around him, and then where does he turn? He doesn't turn to God. He turns to another nation. He throws gold at him, cries, and says "Well, you know I can't do anything." He starts building. He starts trying to take care of it himself and he won't surrender until God says "You're going to die. I'm going to take your life." He goes, "Okay. That's where I draw the line. I'll submit to you." And he finally gets real with God. It's not until he gets real with God that God rescues him but even after God rescues him, he doesn't give God thanks. The point of the matter is, he can go through all of the things, and you can say, "I did all the things I needed to do. I got rid of this. I got rid of that." But where's your heart? Because if your heart's not right, you're still going to have Assyria coming at you and something's going to happen in your life that is going to be so overwhelming that not even your fake world can deal with it. That's what God is doing in our life. That's why everything has to go. That's why you have to be totally real. God, in his grace, is raising up Zephaniah. I mean the one thing that we see about Zephaniah is, here's somebody extremely zealous in the midst of nonchalance. We just got finished with horrific kings and Josiah is 8 years old, and God sends this Zephaniah and begins to stimulate this little 8-year-old. Then he becomes 16 and he makes these major changes and then 8 years later, he begins to make even greater changes, gets the word of God and he goes, "You guys, we've got to get on our knees. We've got to do what God says." Then fervor begins to take over. When you look at Zephaniah, that's what's happening at the very beginning and all we've done is just kind of give you an introduction to this particular book. But I want to read a little bit of Zephaniah before we leave, I got 5 more minutes. So, I want to do that, but if you look with me in Zephaniah chapter 1, once again it goes back to, "'I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth' declares the LORD. 'I'm going to remove man and beast. I'm going to remove birds of the sky, fish of the sea and the ruins...'" Another way of putting that is the stumbling blocks of the wicked. That really is the point. Paul says in Romans chapter 6 that he's not going to let sin be master over him and what Scripture is saying is don't let something else rule over you. You can't serve 2 masters. Who are you going to let rule over you? I mean, somebody's going to be calling your shots. You know the world is telling you "Serve money, serve money, serve money." You're serving something. Ultimately, what you're going to be dealing with in Zephaniah, is that, as he says, money has an answer for everything but in the day of wrath it's not going to help you. If you look with me in Zephaniah chapter 1, it says, verse 14, "Near is the great day of the LORD..." See that? It's coming very quickly. Right? It talks about the "day of wrath", verse 15, "day of trouble, distress, destruction, desolation, darkness, gloom, clouds of thick darkness." This is a bad day, Okay? Now if you look at the passage, it says this in verse 18, "Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the LORD'S great wrath when the earth is devoured." Money's not going to mean anything. So you know when He begins to talk about, that He's going to cut these things off, it says in verse 4 of chapter 1, "'I'm going to stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.'" Why? Because they've allowed the same thinking of the world to come in and infiltrate their thinking. What he's going to prove throughout this book is that as God begins to hit all of those resources and all those powers that surround them, He's going to say, "Now watch because theirs don't hold. Theirs doesn't work, theirs doesn't hold, and His hope is, "OK, you're seeing how they're falling. You're not going to trust them there." Yet, they continue to trust in the wrong thing. I mean, go to chapter 3 of Zephaniah. It says in verse 6, "'I've cut off the nations..." See that in verse 6 of chapter 3? "I've cut off the nations; I've laid them waste." OK, now watch verse 7, "I said, 'Surely now you'll turn to me and accept instruction.'" But how does it end, verse seven? No, no, no..." But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds." I've got to tell you where this is going. Otherwise, you're going to walk away a little depressed and I don't want you doing that. So, here's where he's going. What the world is doing is

they've been alluring you to follow them and to pursue their way of life. The thought is how wonderful their way of life is. He's painted an interesting picture with their priests. You know how they wear black, and you know, and there is a sense of we're worshipping our gods. The point is that they're luring you not into satisfaction, but they're luring you into a deep depression. If you think about it, everything that the world is calling you to do will lead you there. It will lead you into darkness. So, what the world is doing is alluring you into joylessness. Sorrow. the way Zephaniah is going to end is you'll be joyful again. The reason why everything has to go is because all these things are taking your joy from you. See if you don't read this right, you're going to miss it. You're going to think "Well, God's just mean." He's not mean. All these things are killing you. In fact, you're killing your kids by offering them to the god Molech. Right? You're sacrificing your kids on that altar. So, all these horrific things that they're doing have not brought them joy but literally have robbed them of this. That's why Zephaniah will actually end this way: God will shout joy over you. If I could put it this simply, if God is happy, you're happy. If God is pleased with you, you'll find joy. The joy will be that God's favor is upon you. It is getting right with God that brings the greatest joy and so where the book is going to end is with the praise and the shouts of joy and God rescues. However, one thing has to happen for that to happen; that is, you have to get rid of all this stuff and for that to happen, you have to humble yourself. That's why he says in Chapter 2, verse 3, "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden..." If you look at chapter 4, verse 12, ""But I will leave among you a humble and lowly people, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD"". There's not going to be any more sorrow. There's going to be great joy and we actually sing that song verse 17, ""The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy."" Don't we sing that song? So that comes out of Zephaniah. So, you did know Zephaniah. I trust that as we go through this many of these truths have become more clear. I apologize for going to so many places, but I felt like we needed to get some sort of background to understand who this man was and how the Lord called him.

Ending Prayer: Father, we give You thanks for Zephaniah and we give You thanks that you would hide this amber of zeal. That it might spark at the perfect time to ignite a heart of a young man by the name of Josiah. Lord, perhaps even tonight, hearts are being stirred. And you are preserving for yourself a people for this time, and we just asked that we would be that light that would be all in and that our intensity would be as Zephaniah. We pray this in your name, Amen