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Zephaniah

Chapter 2 – Hidden Humility

Well, one of our goals as we go through what are called the minor prophets (which they're not minor at all, are they?) is to help you see that every word of God is appropriate and necessary in our lives. And you begin to see that they all have specific emphasis. It is that emphasis that we hope to convey to you as we go through these studies so that the book itself just becomes something that sticks with you. You're going to have times in your life where this is going to be extremely applicable to you in your life, maybe today. But each book has its emphasis and "thy word I have treasured in my heart" that I might not error, that I might not go astray, and God keeps us from going astray by virtue of these wonderful books that He gives us. It is a marvelous point that Scripture is written, not in a vacuum, but in historical settings. Don't you think that's an interesting point? It's not like we're reading some tall tale of Iliad's exploits, but God is demonstrating to us through true historical events, His presence in true historical circumstances. When you begin to see that, you realize that each of the historical circumstances in which a particular Scripture was written at that time for a particular purpose. So, it's kind of history that we're going to be talking about as we begin to bring in some of the wonderful truths of Zephaniah.

We know that Zephaniah is written during the time in which a nation by the name of Assyria is growing really strong. Assyria is going to have as its capital, doesn't immediately have as its capital, but will have as its capital around the 700's, Nineveh. Up to that point, the capital of Assyria was Assur; but Assur is actually where you get the word Assyria, which was the god that they worshipped. So, you had this great nation and it started becoming great, I would say around 911 BC. By the time you get into an 807's, the late 700's, it became known as the greatest nation that ever existed. It actually became what historians feel like was the first world power. Assyria was the first world power. So, it's one of the reasons why you see in the prophecy of Daniel specific nations that are being mentioned. Of course, he takes on from that point, from Babylon and he goes and begins to talk about world powers from there. But what we're talking about is the nations that really existed and existed as world powers. I think it's interesting. So, Assyria became a formidable force. At first, they were not perceived to be somebody that was going to bother somebody way down in Jerusalem because the thought was that they're going to have their own battles up there. Babylon was in existence and the Medes are like over here, and they would come over and there was back and forth bantering for power. With this bantering back and forth for power, I suppose that in many respects the kings of Jerusalem thought, "Eh, it's not going to be a big issue with me." Really, if you consider the promises of God, God virtually says, "I'll take care of these enemies of yours, if in fact you follow Me and obey Me." But as Israel itself and Jerusalem and the outskirts became rebellious

against God, then these forces began to get more intense. It was during the time of Jonah, which would probably date around, I'd say anywhere from 750-780 BC, somewhere in that neighborhood. You have Jonah, and he's dealing with Assyria, and Assyria at that juncture was starting to come down to Syria and they were taking over this area and around the time of Jonah, they were hitting Samaria. Now, Samaria is a part of Israel, and that was Jonah's neighborhood. So, they were starting to come into his region and that's when God says you need to go and share the truth to them. Of course, Jonah didn't want to do that. So, he goes the opposite direction; but it is interesting that at this time they were becoming more powerful, and they were growing in strength. Now, what's also interesting is that the king of Judah, because he was being attacked by the northern tribes of Israel and Samaria i.e., Syria as well. They were coming down, attacking him. His thought was "Well, there's a large nation up a little bit further north of them. I'll ask him to help me." I don't know if you remember the story, but it's actually written in the book of Isaiah.

In Isaiah 7, the King Ahaz, who was the king of Jerusalem at the time, because he was being attacked by Israel and because he was being attacked by the Syrians, which are not to be confused with Assyrians (by the way, they'll get very upset at you if you confuse them), but his thought was "Well, I'll get Assyria to help me out." Not really thinking about well, that could be a world power. You know, you don't take these things into consideration when you're trying to get whatever you want to get. You'll make the deal with the devil. It is interesting that, Isaiah 7, the prophet comes before Ahaz, and he goes, "Ahaz, God says you can ask anything, and He'll give you as high as the heavens, as deep as Sheol. You can have anything you ask for." And Ahaz says, "I'm not going to ask God, I'm going to go to Assyria for help." Well, little does he know that Assyria is going to become the biggest problem, and one of the biggest problems in their life. What's going to happen and what is recorded in Isaiah 10, is that Assyria will become so powerful it will start taking out all these areas and then it will come to Jerusalem. It will surround Jerusalem. They're literally surround Jerusalem after they've been taking out all these others. In fact, they'll take out Ammon, they'll take out Moab, and they'll have already gone to Egypt and taken out a lot of Egypt. So, you have little Jerusalem left with a small empire of Judah at this juncture, because the northern tribes have already been taken out. They surround them, and the thought is that "You're not going to beat us. We've already taken out all these places and we've whipped them."

It's actually recorded, if you look with me in Isaiah 10, and the way that this particular chapter starts off is as an indictment against God's people. God is saying, "It's a horrible thing that I have to discipline My people because they've rejected Me." Ultimately really, they've become worse than the nations. So, it starts off in chapter 10 this way:

Isaiah 10:1. "Woe to those who enact evil statutes
And to those who constantly record unjust decisions,

Isaiah 10:2. So as to deprive the needy of justice
And rob the poor of My people of their rights,

So that widows may be their spoil
And that they may plunder the orphans.

Isaiah 10:3. Now what will you do in the day of punishment,
And in the devastation which will come from afar?
To whom will you flee for help?
And where will you leave your wealth?"

So, the question at this juncture is: How is God going to discipline His people? The answer becomes very clear within the passage, He's going to send to Assyria to come after them. So, He does and it says in Isaiah 10:5,

"Woe to Assyria"

Now, what you're going to see in the next few verses is the arrogance of Assyria. Once again, one of the reasons why Jonah didn't like them too much is they're not only very hostile people, and hateful, and violent, but they're very boastful. At this juncture, Sennacherib is the great king, which really tells us historically that Assyria was at its apex. That is to say, it was at its greatest during this particular time. So, the text reads in which God says, "Ok, I'm going to use Assyria." Sometimes you wonder, why is a particular nation growing so strong? Have you ever wondered that? Well, there's a reason and one of the points of the prophets and one of the points of Scripture and the historical settings is to reveal to you that things aren't just happening. Nations don't just become great. God is sovereignly orchestrating these things.

So, God begins to indict the "rod"- that is Assyria. He's going to use Assyria as a rod to discipline his people, Judah, which is telling us something. At this juncture, He's not going to allow Assyria to take over Jerusalem; but He is going to allow them to take all the cities around Jerusalem in Judah, and He is going to allow them to put the squeeze on them. So, if you look at the passage, it says this in Isaiah 10:5:

"Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
And the staff in whose hands is My indignation,

Isaiah 10:6. I send it against a godless nation
And commission it against the people of My fury
To capture booty and to seize plunder,
And to trample them down like mud in the streets."

Now, what's the godless nation that He sends it against? Jerusalem, Israel, right. So, specifically Judah.

Assyria's intention is a key point. It is interesting that God uses nations to do certain things. It's also to be noted that that particular nation may have a different intention than God does. What's God's intention? To discipline His people. What's their intention? Well, it says within the passage. Its intention is to destroy. Do you see the passage?

Isaiah 10:7. "Yet it does not so intend,
Nor does it plan so in its heart,
But rather it is its purpose to destroy
And to cut off many nations."

They already have. They've already literally changed the map of nations and Assyria at this juncture is the world power that's in control. Then it goes on and says in Isaiah 10:8:

"For it says, 'Are not my princes all kings?'"

Then it gives an interesting example:

Isaiah 10:9. "'Is not Calno like Carchemish,
Or Hamath like Arpad,
Or Samaria like Damascus?'"

Now, Carchemish was one of their major cities and what he's talking about is that they had taken over Calno, which was a great city like the city Carchemish; and that was a Syrian city. So, it's basically saying: Didn't you have a great city like Carchemish and what do you think we did? We just ran it over, no problem.

Same thing is true with Hamath. Hamath is a Syrian fortress, and they just took out the fortress and they said, "Isn't that like one of our kings? But look how easily we took it out." The point was that nothing was too hard for them to take out. It's easy. You have this world power, he's taking out nations so easily that he's probably even wondering, "Why is this so easy?" If you've ever studied history and looked at Alexander the Great and gone through some of his exploits, you're going, "That guy had a small army. How is this guy able to take over so many nations?" Of course, you see the prophecy of Daniel and you see that God has ordained it, but it wasn't just good karma for him. It was God directing his hand and everything that was going on.

So, the passage goes on, this is Sennacherib basically talking, and he says:

Isaiah 10:10. "'As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols,
Whose graven images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria'"

In other words, "We went into kingdoms far greater than Jerusalem. Do you think we'll have a problem with Jerusalem? There's not going to be any problem."

Isaiah 10:11. "'Shall I not do to Jerusalem and her images
Just as I have done to Samaria and her idols?'"

This is telling us that they've already pretty much conquered. Now, the reason I tell you this is that it's at this juncture that Assyria is getting this powerful, and has been this powerful, and has been wearing and breaking down all these places and surrounding them. It is at this time that we're reading Zephaniah the prophet; and what's interesting is that during his time, Babylon is becoming greater, and Babylon is starting to swallow up Assyria.

So, in the whole play of things, in the chapter that we're looking at in Zephaniah, God is saying, "Don't you see the things that are happening? What do you think they're just happening? You don't think I'm talking to you through these things?" I guess in many respects, what we're saying is that these books are demonstrating to us that in the scheme of world events God's talking to us. It's very important to understand that. Clearly, as you go to Revelation, once again, this wasn't just happenstance, this wasn't just a fluke that happened, or a king that just decided to take over or maybe by the strength of his might, that it happened. No, no, no. This was God raising up certain powers to do certain things. So, what you see in the passage is that it has another intention, but God is going to use it for this; and you see the arrogance of the heart.

Isaiah 10:12. So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness."

In other words: Why is He sending? To discipline His people. He's using the "rod," that is Assyria. (Isaiah 10:5)

Now, you probably remember that whole scenario is recorded when Sennacherib sends his general down to Jerusalem to taunt King Hezekiah. That event is recorded in Isaiah, Chronicles, and Kings. So, what does he say to Hezekiah? He says, "What do you think? I haven't stopped. Nobody stopped us yet. You think you're going to stop us with this these little walls?" At that time while Hezekiah was patching up the walls, he was tearing down houses inside the city. He was tearing down houses inside the city to patch up the walls. So, Rabshakeh, who was a general of Sennacherib's army, says, "All we need to do is blow on this thing and it'll fall apart."

The point of the passage, Isaiah 10:13, he goes on, and he's basically quoting Sennacherib:

"For he has said,
'By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did this,
For I have understanding;
And I removed the boundaries of the peoples
And plundered their treasures,
And like a mighty man I brought down their inhabitants,

Isaiah 10:14. And my hand reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest,
And as one gathers abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth;
And there was not one that flapped its wing or opened its beak or chirped."

"It was just too easy." - is what he's saying within the passage. So, what's interesting about the passage is that this had been going on and the kings of Jerusalem had seen this, and God had been warning them. Now, during the time of Zephaniah, another turn of events has happened. The turn of events is that Babylon, with Nabopolassar, who was the king, who was the father of Nebuchadnezzar, he starts wanting to take over, and he starts attacking the cities of Assyria.

One of the cities that he attacks is Nineveh. Well, you have the prophecy of Nahum. Remember, Jonah goes, "I sure would like it if Nineveh was destroyed." And Nineveh, during the time of Sennacherib, becomes the capital city of Assyria; but when Babylon begins to go after them, they're going after the capital, the Medes are helping them, the Sethians are helping them, and they level the place in 612 BC. In fact, there's historical writings that we have of Nabopolassar. He wrote letters to Nineveh, and he told the king, "I'm coming in, I'm going to obliterate your town and there's not going to be one brick upon another." And that's one of the reasons why they had a difficult time ever finding Nineveh; because it had been so destroyed, had literally been burned down to the ground. They had pictures in their historical literature. They have pictures of kings being mutilated, and 10-year-olds being slaughtered in front of everybody. So, did these things happen? Yeah. Did Nineveh ultimately pay? Yes. Nahum gives that prophecy that it was going to happen. So, Babylon comes in and starts taking over and taking power. Well, what's interesting about this is that with Babylon coming into Nineveh, then the soldiers of the Assyrian army start going a little bit further South, a little bit further West and they go to a place called Hamath. Well, Nabopolassar goes there and wins the battle. Actually, Nebuchadnezzar's father was more the warrior, and he was the conqueror. So, they keep chasing him and they keep winning. Finally, they end up in Carchemish. Carchemish is interesting because it was actually a headquarters of Egypt in the Assyrian area. They had an alliance and they worked together. There was kind of a safety net there because the whole trade thing, "We want to keep everything working so that we can have trade." So, you have Egypt in Carchemish, and you have the Assyrians going there for some sort of safety. The great battle of Carchemish happens at this time.

If you remember the story in Kings and Chronicles, in which Josiah is the king of Jerusalem. Now, the reason I bring him up is Zephaniah starts off in the days of Josiah, king of Jerusalem. Zephaniah was written during this time and if you remember, Josiah was a great king. He was making all these reforms. Remember? He's making all these reforms, doing all these good things. So, here you have Josiah doing good things and then Egypt catches wind that this new great nation, Babylon is starting to swallow up their trade. The Egyptian pharaoh, Necho starts going up to intercept and to work with the Assyrians to defeat the Babylonians; but now it's too late. What's interesting is, right about here (Samaria), is Megiddo. Have you ever heard of Armageddon? Ok, so, Josiah, king of Jerusalem tries to stop Egypt from going up there. Now, it's not really clear why he tried to stop them. Nowhere in Scripture does it really define exactly why he tried to stop them. However, even though he was a righteous king, he went against God's command, which basically was: Don't stop him. Let him go. Now, what we find out is that there's a reason why God had him let him go, because this battle of Carchemish is going to go down in history as one of the greatest battles; and what's going to happen is Nabopolassar is going to go in with his army and he'll fall ill, and he'll die at the age of fifty-three. In that process, his son will be sent for, Nebuchadnezzar, and he'll go in and finish the battle. He'll walk out a great king. It will actually be that moment that installs upon him the throne. Now, what we know is that God is preparing Babylon to take Jerusalem into captivity, and He specifically is

going to use Nebuchadnezzar; and we know the story with Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. God is orchestrating all this, and He doesn't want His plan stopped. Josiah was doing it just to get a feather in his cap, but God wasn't going to let him stand in the way of what His plans are. It's very interesting when you think about it. We oftentimes think logistically, "Well, that'd be a bad thing. This would be a bad thing. This would be bad thing." But God has other plans and I know that we intend certain things, and we think certain things should happen a certain way or if we do something, this is what we're going to get out of it; but God goes, "I've got another outcome." So, you see all these things coming into play during the reign of Josiah, during the time of Zephaniah. Now, what's happening in the midst of Jerusalem at this time are people are still going in their worship, and they're still doing all their things, and it's like they're pretending like everything's ok.

At the beginning of the book of Zephaniah, you begin to see God saying: Everything's got to go. Why? Because you're hiding your sins. "You're playing church with Me. You're offering offerings..." God doesn't just say that without giving you warning. See, all of this warning is God's stirring up, and all you have to do is look over the hill and you can hear the rumbling. You can hear the soldiers. I mean, this is happening intensely, and Josiah knew it very well. He knew what was going on, he knew what was going on at Carchemish, that there was a great battle. Nebuchadnezzar goes in there and he takes over and God is going to use him in a great way. In fact, you read the book of Jeremiah and God even uses Nebuchadnezzar to take care of Jeremiah, even though his own people were trying to kill him. So, very interesting dynamics that are happening in the passage.

When you come to Zephaniah 1, if I could just define that chapter, what we're dealing with are things hidden by men. Basically, our title of the book is: Hidden Things. Why do we take that particular title? Do you remember? Yeah, Zephaniah means *who the Lord hides*. That's what his name means. So, what are the hidden things that we're seeing? Well, the first chapter is about things that men hide, the hidden things of men. Within the passage you can see this. They have a remnant of Baal from the place, and He says, "I'm going to cut them off, and the idolatrous priest..." and though they worship in the temple, they jump over the threshold and it's all talking about a rebellion. You know how people go to church, but inwardly they're really rebellious about it. "I'm not going to do that." Ok. Of course, the thought is, "Well, nothing's going to become of that because it's just the way I think. God doesn't care about the way I think." But if you look at Zephaniah 1:12:

"It will come about at that time
That I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
And I will punish the men
Who are stagnant in spirit,
Who say in their hearts,
'The LORD will not do good or evil!'"

“He's not going to do anything about this.” Now, the whole time they're saying this, all of this is going on, and Babylon is becoming a world power. They're just swallowing up everything that comes along, and they've already had interplay all the way down to Egypt. It's almost like they bypass Jerusalem, they come back, and they bypass it again.

How did Babylon become a world power if Assyria took over Babylon and Carchemish?

Well, Assyria becomes a world power and probably at its pinnacle, I would say, around 705, 681 B.C., Babylon is going to get strong with Nabopolassar as he begins to take over. So, at that juncture Assyria is the world power, but Babylon will then come and become a greater power and then take over. You sort of have to think of, ok, Russia became a world power, then China comes over and they swallow up Russia. Babylon just swallowed them up because as a world power, Babylon was going to take over everything that Assyria had. Once again, they kept chasing Assyria. Assyria kept moving, and finally Carchemish was the final battle, which Egypt was helping Assyria at that juncture and wasn't able to sustain them. That's when Nebuchadnezzar came in and actually took control. Which is interesting because after he takes control for a few years, he's almost stagnant and they're almost wondering if they got the wrong king in. But then when he comes in and takes Jerusalem and he gets all the money from Jerusalem, then they begin to recognize him as such. Babylon will become the greatest world power, even beyond the greatness of Assyria. Which is very interesting how that begins to take place and that's why Daniel will demonstrate as he shows the statue, “Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, you're the head of gold. You're the greatest kingdom that's ever existed.” The reason why is that Nebuchadnezzar would unilaterally be king. In other words, the Medes and the Persians, in order for the king to make a decision, he had to have other rulers make that decision with him. But Nebuchadnezzar could by himself make laws, break laws, decide what he wants to do, and no king has ever been that powerful. But all of this transition is happening at the time of this book. Once again, in a person's mind, they're thinking, “Status quo, everything's going ok.” And God's saying, “Everything's going to go.” And just a reminder, your money is not going to be any help. Now, of course, there's a lot of bargaining and abuse and everything within his kingdom, and God says, “I'm not going to let this continue.”

Zephaniah 1:14. “Near is the great day of the LORD,
Near and coming very quickly;
Listen, the day of the LORD!
In it the warrior cries out bitterly.”

Babylon will be in there taking over their kingdom, probably within a few short years. They'll take out the princes first. So, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were princes of Judah, will be taken into the kingdom first around, probably 605 B.C. Which is interesting because Nineveh was obliterated in 612 B.C. So, this is where Nabopolassar and Babylon begin taking control of Assyria, and then they defeat him ultimately in Carchemish, which is the deciding battle. Then you're looking at them now coming down into Jerusalem, and that's when

they start taking the princes out of Judah. Well, that was within Zephaniah, probably 20-30 years within that time.

So, God says, "It's coming near." All these things can't be happening, and you not know about them. Once again, Josiah is a perfect example of a king that knows exactly what's going on. He's trying to stop it, but he knows exactly what's going on. Now, if you remember, Josiah was taken out because he tried to do that, and it was at that battle Megiddo that Josiah was killed. In the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah mourns over his death. So, the book of Jeremiah, the book of Habakkuk, and the book of Zephaniah are all contemporaries at this time. Ezekiel would come into play as well during this time.

Zephaniah 1:14. "Near is the great day of the LORD,
Near and coming very quickly;
Listen, the day of the LORD!
In it the warrior cries out bitterly.

Zephaniah 1:15. "A day of wrath is that day,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of destruction and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloom,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,"

I mean. How else could you be warned? It's a bad day. Bad things are going to happen, and it doesn't matter how fortified your cities are.

Zephaniah 1:16. "A day of trumpet and battle cry
Against the fortified cities
And the high corner towers.

Zephaniah 1:17. I will bring distress on men
So that they will walk like the blind,
Because they have sinned against the LORD;
And their blood will be poured out like dust
And their flesh like dung."

You go, "It couldn't be that simple." Oh, it is that simple. Scripture tells us God raises up one, he brings down another.

Assyria will be a world power for quite some time if you consider them building up from 911 B.C., but Babylon will only probably be a world power a little over 100 years. Then the Medes and the Persians will take them over. Of course, all that's part of the prophecy. But you know, as God says, "I'm going to use you to do this, and when I'm done with you, then I'm going to bring somebody else to discipline you." So, in each case we see the hand of God in this. But if you look in Zephaniah 1:17, he talks about the distress of man because they sinned against the Lord.

Zephaniah 1:18. “Neither their silver nor their gold

Will be able to deliver them

On the day of the LORD’S wrath;

And all the earth will be devoured

In the fire of His jealousy,

For He will make a complete end,

Indeed a terrifying one,

Of all the inhabitants of the earth.”

Now, of course they're thinking, “I live in a nice home. I just built it. I even built a wall around it. Everything's going to be safe.” And God says, “Safety can't be those things. None of those things are going to in any way give you safety.”

So, when you come into Zephaniah 2, what you begin to see are things hidden by God. One of the things that are clearly hidden by God are those that are humble.

Zephaniah 2:3. “Seek the LORD,

All you humble of the earth

Who have carried out His ordinances;

Seek righteousness, seek humility.

Perhaps you will be hidden

In the day of the LORD’S anger.”

So, what is the Lord hiding? Well, as you go in the next few verses, you begin to see that God's going to start taking out and we went through this, but God's going to take out the Philistines. How is He going to do that? Babylon. Babylon is going to come out, take out the Philistines. Of course, He mentions the cities of the of the Philistines in the text.

Zephaniah 2:8. “I have heard the taunting of Moab

And the revilings of the sons of Ammon,

With which they have taunted My people

And become arrogant against their territory.”

Well, where are they? They're around where the Dead Sea is. So, they're in the mountains and the caves, and they're laughing it off going, “Nobody's going to touch us. We live in the mountains. Nobody's going to touch us.” I think it was, uh, not the “The Ark of the Covenant” or “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” but what was the second one? The one with the chalice. Anyway, at the end you see them in this place where there's a city in the rock. Yeah, that's Petra. The Edomites in the Moabites also lived in that particular area. So, here they are in this place, and they're saying, “Nobody's going to touch us.” Of course, the taunting and “the revilings of the sons of Ammon,” and what's going to happen? Well, Babylon is going to come and take them in. The point is that Jerusalem is going to watch this happening. It's like watching a nation come in. They're going to take out Cuba, they take out the Bahamas, they take out Bermuda, they

take out Canada, they take out Mexico. Who do you think is next? How uncanny it is when all around you is being taken out and you haven't been taken out yet?

God is revealing. In fact, even at the end, He mentions the Ethiopians who are Egyptian. The word is "Kush," who are Kushites, who are Egyptians. What you're literally seeing is Egyptians, Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites are all taken out, and then He turns, and He says:

Zephaniah 2:15. "This is the exultant city
Which dwells securely,
Who says in her heart,
"I am, and there is no one besides me."

How she has become a desolation,
A resting place for beasts!
Everyone who passes by her will hiss
And wave his hand in contempt."

Really, it's a summary statement of any nation that begins to brag about how powerful they are, but of course, He's been talking about the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and the Egyptians. At this point, it's those great cities that say, "I am, and nobody's going to touch me."

In Zephaniah 1, we've been dealing with things that men hide and their thought is, "Well, God doesn't really see and He's not going to do anything." Yeah, He's going to move everything. It's an interesting picture. He says, "Everything has to go," and it's sort of like God goes in and cleans the house out and starts throwing all the stuff out. We would call them renovations and it's taking all the cabinets out and everything's thrown on the lawn. Well, that's the picture that's given here. That's what's going to happen because man thinks, "I can hide some of my stuff." God goes, "Nothing's going to hide." So, God's going to be revealing this to them.

Well, by the time you come to Zephaniah 3, what you begin to see at the very beginning of this chapter are things that man refuses to see. This is what makes it so interesting, because the mantra of the Jews is: "We didn't see this coming." And God goes, "Really, you didn't see it coming?" It's sort of like Amos 4, He goes, "Ok. I rained on this side of the street. I didn't rain on this side of the street. So, do you think maybe something's wrong in the place that it didn't rain on? Did you think that there might be a connection there? So, there are things that God does that are really obvious, but man doesn't see it. Why? The answer is going to be because he's simply incorrigible. He wants to do wrong and he's not going to listen to any direction, any correction, any discipline by God at all. In fact, he gets mad when God begins to chastise him. He gets angrier, instead of softening up.

So, it starts off this way:

Zephaniah 3:1. "Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,
The tyrannical city!"

I remember I asked you this last week: Who's the tyrannical city in this text? It's Jerusalem. How do we know that? Well, now we know that because if you look in Zephaniah 3:4,

“Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men;
Her priests have profaned the sanctuary.
They have done violence to the law.”

God doesn't mind if you profane in another city or the other sanctuaries; but they profaned their sanctuary, which is in the sanctuary in Jerusalem. The passage begins to convey just how tyrannical they are. Once again, we know according to Jeremiah, why they're declared as tyrannical. It's because they've been hiding their sins and outwardly saying that they love God, and God says, “That's worse than if you just said you didn't like Me.” It's one thing to say that, at least you're honest about it, but fake it, and now you're being treacherous, and it becomes tyrannical.

The description:

Zephaniah 3:2. She heeded no voice,
She accepted no instruction.
She did not trust in the LORD,
She did not draw near to her God.”

“She heeded no voice.” It's kind of an interesting way of describing, “You didn't regard anything that I said as important at all.” It is interesting how the world has become really cavalier about what God says. Here again, it's not like they haven't heard. They've been hearing. How do we know that? Well, because every day the instruction goes out from the temple of the Lord. Right? They even brag about it in Jeremiah 7, “This is the temple of the Lord. This is the temple of the Lord.” But then you go out and you worship, and you do all these other things.

“She accepted no instruction.” That's a very strange word that He uses, and probably I need to ask Greg Harlow about this, but the word interplays with an ostrich. It's a picture of an ostrich flapping its wings. The picture is that the ostrich going around in its arrogance, flapping its wings. It's seen as an unclean act, in Scripture Job mentions it as well. But the word itself is making reference to the fact of a pride that flaps its wings, but it can't fly. So, it's a picture of boasting great things. Rightly so, it should hide his head in the ground. But actually, Greg says they don't do that. He said that's a misnomer, right? They don't, actually. The reason we asked Greg is because he raised them.

But it goes on and says:

Zephaniah 3:2. “She heeded no voice,
She accepted no instruction.
She did not trust in the LORD,
She did not draw near to her God.”

Once again, the city of Jerusalem would not. That's what made it so tyrannical. I mean, God was there.

Just to kind of give you reference, once again, a contemporary, Jeremiah 2. If you look there with me. God within this particular passage is dealing with the fact that they are contending with Him, i.e., arguing with Him. He basically says, "I've done all these good things for you, but nobody ever said, 'well, let's go talk to God. Let's go see Him.'" There's no gratitude at all, and what's going to happen is that because of their wickedness, because they pursue the things of the world, i.e., the things of Babylon... I don't know if you remember this, but Hezekiah invited the king of Babylon to look at all his treasures because he's so proud of himself. Hey, you know, if you could hob knob with Babylon then hey, those are important people. Of course, Babylon goes, "Ok, treasures. We'll just put it on the list. That's the next place we'll attack is Jerusalem." But if you remember, it was his desire to be like another nation. That's why Jeremiah 2 says, where are you going?

Jeremiah 2:18. "But now what are you doing on the road to Egypt,
To drink the waters of the Nile?
Or what are you doing on the road to Assyria,
To drink the waters of the Euphrates?"

Which is pretty interesting because a lot of the water in the Euphrates was muddier than the water in Jerusalem, but his point is that you want to identify with these people.

Jeremiah 2:19. "Your own wickedness will correct you,
And your apostasies will reprove you;
Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter
For you to forsake the LORD your God,
And the dread of Me is not in you,' declares the Lord GOD of hosts."

And I would say this: Be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it. You don't control what package it's going to come in. "Oh, I want to be like Babylon." "Ok, they're coming."

"Your own wickedness will correct you,
And your apostasies will reprove you;
Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter
For you to forsake the LORD your God,
And the dread of Me is not in you,' declares the Lord GOD of hosts."

What's happening? Well, it's not just an accident. Even though they argue with God and begin to contend:

Jeremiah 2:29. "Why do you contend with Me?
You have all transgressed against Me," declares the LORD."

People say, "I can do whatever I want to do. I'm an American. I can do whatever." Of course, they weren't saying that back then, but they were saying, "I'm a Judean."

Jeremiah 2:31. "O generation, heed the word of the LORD.
Have I been a wilderness to Israel,
Or a land of thick darkness?
Why do My people say, 'We are free to roam;
We will no longer come to You'?"

Why do the people say, "we're free to do whatever we want to do"? Ok, but you're not free to disrespect God. That's the freedom you don't have.

Jeremiah 2:32. "Can a virgin forget her ornaments,
Or a bride her attire?
Yet My people have forgotten Me
Days without number."

There's clearly a time of disrespect. It's clearly a time of dishonor. Clearly, a time of disdain. You see that same thing many years later in Malachi, and the biggest problem is that when they're reprimanded, they're denying it. So, they're arguing and fighting about it, that's why He says, "you're contending against Me."

Jeremiah 2:30. "In vain I have struck your sons;
They accepted no chastening.
Your sword has devoured your prophets
Like a destroying lion."

"They accepted" what? "No chastening." The word that is used within the passage is "mûsâr," which is dealing with a correction. Probably, the closest word in the Greek, in the New Testament, that is there is the word "reprove." Remember in 2 Timothy 4, where he talks to Timothy and he says, "Ok, what you need to do is rebuke, reprove, exhort in sound doctrine." Well, that word "reprove" is a very interesting word because it has the idea of shaming somebody. Now, I know the world goes, "Oh, you don't want to shame anybody." No, you do. If they're doing something shameful, you want to shame them because it's a shameful thing and you don't want them to do it again. One of the great problems in the book of Jeremiah is he says, "You don't even know how to blush." And we live in a world that has no sense of shame for doing something wrong. I found that out. I remember when it first struck me, I was a kid, we had gone to New York, and we'd actually gone to the towers, and there we are at the towers. I guess I was a little bit older, but we were looking at towers and we parked our car. We actually drove there. As we walked away from the car, about five guys try to break into it, and we go, "Hey!" And they look at us and they go, "Hey!" We say, "You're breaking into our car." And they

go, "So what?" And we said, "We're going to call the police." "Go ahead." And they kept breaking into the car. Finally, a police car came by, and they just slowly walked off. Nothing was done and we were just thankful the police car happened to drive by; but there was no shame and there was clearly disrespect for something that was somebody else's.

You see that in Proverbs, that a scoffer does not love the one who reproves him. But it goes on and says, he will not go to the wise. In other words, if a scoffer is corrected, he gets mad. Then he starts attacking, or he just says, "I'm not going to have anything to do with that person anymore." And that's what a scoffer does. But Scripture goes on, and says, when you do that, when you hate reproach, you're going to die from that. It's in Proverbs 15:10, a very interesting passage that makes reference to that.

The point is that they wouldn't accept the chastening. They wouldn't accept the instruction, and that's what He's saying in Zephaniah 3:2,

"She heeded no voice,
She accepted no instruction.
She did not trust in the LORD,
She did not draw near to her God.

Zephaniah 3:3. Her princes within her are roaring lions,
Her judges are wolves at evening;
They leave nothing for the morning.

Zephaniah 3:4. Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men;
Her priests have profaned the sanctuary.
They have done violence to the law."

I think one of the things that bothered me so much about the whole COVID thing is that churches didn't seem to be concerned that they were blaspheming the name of God; by treating Him in such a cavalier way. "We can do whatever the world tells us to do." And I'm going, "Wait a minute. Who's in charge?" Clearly, there are some things that the government has been given authority over, but not over my worship of God. What was bizarre is just to see how quickly churches would acquiesce to it. Just threw in the towel. "Ok, you know, I guess that's what we ought to do." And nobody seemed to be concerned that they offended God. Nobody seemed to be concerned about that. I'm going, "You didn't put Him first. You didn't put Him first, and you don't see that as a problem?" "No, not really."

"Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men;
Her priests have profaned the sanctuary.
They have done violence to the law."

That's what he's talking about. When you ignore the law, you do violence to the law, you say it's not important. You marginalized it at first, but then you just rebel against it after that.

Zephaniah 3:5. "The LORD is righteous within her;
He will do no injustice.
Every morning He brings His justice to light;
He does not fail.
But the unjust knows no shame."

I wish I could go through all the passages that come to my mind at this particular juncture, but what's clear is that you can almost feel Lamentations 3 coming into play; "His lovingkindness is new every morning, great is His faithfulness." But you begin to also realize that it was in the morning that the judges would make the decision, and God is saying, "They hear the word of God every morning, and they know also that I don't let things go." I don't know if you remember as we went through Jeremiah, but you began to see God taking out certain prophets. He takes out certain kings and people could say all they want to, "I don't think God's going to do anything." But He keeps taking them out.

An interesting passage in Luke 13, and I know oftentimes it's been read, and I think there's a little bit of confusion with it. But people were coming to Jesus during that particular time, and there were certain things that had happened that seemed like they were accidental. It seemed like maybe, as we were talking about Sunday, bad karma, maybe just hit a bad day or bad luck, or maybe they were just bad people and bad things happen to bad people. Right?

So, 2 examples are given by Jesus.

Luke 13:1. "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices."

In other words, there had been rebellion with these particular people in the worship of God. While they were offering their sacrifices, Pilate comes in and slaughters everybody, and they go, "Wow, they must have done something really bad."

Luke 13:2. "And Jesus said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?'"

And you would go, "Yeah, they were probably worse people."

Luke 13:3. "'I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'"

Now, listen to the next one:

Luke 13:4. "'Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?'"

Luke 13:5. "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Now, He's not saying that they were innocent, but He's saying you're just as guilty as they are. Now, this is the interesting point, that God and His grace is dealing with everybody in a perfect

way; but don't for one moment think that because that guy got it, that you're not going to be touched. And don't think for one moment that God's not going to do what's right. So, you have to then ask yourself: Why are these things happening that I see and witness? God is saying it's to warn you. I know we'd like to go around pointing our finger at everybody else, but He goes, "This is for you."

So, if you go back to Zephaniah, He says in Zephaniah 3:6:

"I have cut off nations;
Their corner towers are in ruins.
I have made their streets desolate,
With no one passing by;
Their cities are laid waste,
Without a man, without an inhabitant."

What is He talking about? Well, Babylon has come in and Carchemish is history. Syria is basically history. Samaria is history, the Moabites, the Ammonites, are basically history. Egypt is subverted under the thumb of Babylon, and He says, "Look around."

"I have cut off nations;
Their corner towers are in ruins.
I have made their streets desolate,
With no one passing by;
Their cities are laid waste,
Without a man, without an inhabitant."

That's this excellent picture of Nineveh, by the way.

Zephaniah 3:7. "I said, 'Surely you will revere Me,
Accept instruction.'

So her dwelling will not be cut off
According to all that I have appointed concerning her.
But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.'

Why do you think things are happening around you? I oftentimes think of this particular passage because I realize that the things that are happening around me is God teaching me something, and He's given me another day to breathe so that I might learn. So that I might be receptive and sometimes the things that happen are so horrific that it takes your breath away. It's just amazing to me when you saw the towers fall in New York and everybody is kumbaya the next few days. We're having prayer meetings, we're talking Jesus in the middle of New York, which that in and of itself could bring towers down. But we're all together and within a month or two, we're worshipping with the enemy. They're God. I'm going, "Wow, how fast..."

So, the passage says:

“I said, ‘Surely you will revere Me,
Accept instruction.’
So her dwelling will not be cut off
According to all that I have appointed concerning her.
But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.”

Isn't that strange? That's strange. I guess in a way, to give you the big picture of the things that are going on and you're not going to remember necessarily all the city's names, but you are going to remember there was a lot of turmoil going on and it was irrefutable evidence that things were changing. Life was changing for everybody. Borders have been changed that had been borders for thousands of years and now everything was changing overnight. Now, if you're seeing that happen, don't you stop and think maybe I need to humble myself? As He says, seek the Lord all you humble and perhaps He'll hide you during this time. Don't you think that that's maybe what you ought to do?

So, it's an interesting passage because you begin to see that there are certain things that are hidden, not because God is hiding them, but because man refuses to see them. Just as a closing note, we were in Luke, if you look with me in Luke 12. To me, it's a sobering reminder. Jesus pulls the disciples aside and He says, “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.” “What do you mean leaven of the Pharisees?” Because leaven is something that spreads rapidly once it's put in the whole bread thing. What is the leaven of the Pharisees? Well, He says in the text what it is, hypocrisy and how quick it is to put on a mask and act a certain way. Virtually, what's happening here in Josiah's time is everybody's playing a role, but nobody's really getting serious about God. Of course, their thought is God doesn't care either. That's not true.

Psalm 50, God says, “I kept quiet, and you thought I was just like you?” No, no, no, no. Something's going to happen, and if God's quiet, wait for it, it's coming.

Luke 12:2. “But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.”

Now, I'm going to give you all a warning and I'm going to take the warning myself. 1 Corinthians 11 tells us we can either get it right with God or He'll get it right with you. Which do you want? That's why Zephaniah is saying, “seek humility.”

1 Corinthians 11 says, examine yourself. If you examine yourself, then you won't be examined by God. Examine yourself. That's what we encourage people, get right with God, repent. I know that in many respects the perception is “Well, you're talking about an angry God.” No, we're talking about a righteous God, and we're talking about a God that will not allow hurt and pain to continue. But all these things are here that the humble would hear His voice and would listen to the instruction that He's given you. There's instruction that God has given you every single day of your life, and there are things that are happening. Don't sit around, pointing your finger going, “They deserve that.” Don't do that. Just go, “God, what are You teaching me?”

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your word and this passage in Zephaniah. The context in which it was written, and the story that it tells. Lord, speak to our hearts as we begin to see things hidden being revealed, even in our own life. As You tell us that the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, and it goes in and it begins to cut, it begins to operate, and begins to reveal things that are hidden; and this is Your goodness to us, to operate and get out the cancer, and get out that malevolent spirit within us. So, we give You thanks in Jesus' name, Amen.