

ZEPHANIAH

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to the book of Zephaniah as we continue our study through the Word of God. And this evening we will finish up this book with some powerful lessons that the Lord has for us.

As we saw last week Zephaniah prophesied just prior to the time of Jeremiah. They both spoke to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet as he was broken over the condition of the nation and his people. He saw the coming judgment for their sin and refusal to repent and get right with God. And Jeremiah preached into the Babylonian captivity.

On the other hand, Zephaniah was more like a hammer of judgment upon the nation, coming down upon the people for their sin, striking them hard. And he preached during the reign of Josiah and he reigned from 640 to 609 B. C. That puts Zephaniah's prophecy between 640 and 612 B. C. because Zephaniah predicts the destruction of Nineveh (which happened in 612 B. C.)

Make no mistake about it, God does judge not only His own people but as we will see tonight God will judge the nations as well because they too are without excuse. And really, from chapter 2 of Zephaniah through chapter 3 verse 8 we see these judgments of the nations.

And even in all this judgement we see the grace, the longsuffering of God and thus, He calls His people to repent and get right with Him. And we will see that as we get to those verses in a few minutes.

First of all I want to share with you these words from H. A. Ironside regarding this judgment of the nation's found here in Zephaniah. He wrote,

A principle that is emphasized repeatedly in the Scriptures is that although God will overlook nothing in His people's ways that merits rebuke, He will, on the other hand, visit severest judgment on all who lift their hands against His people. He may use Philistia, Moab, Ethiopia, or Assyria to chastise Israel, but they should not delight in such service and glory over them. Because of their unholy hatred and vindictive spirit, their own punishment would be all the more severe.

This is all a picture of the time of the end. Judah then will be much in the position she occupied in Zephaniah's day – in the land, surrounded by enemies, the mass, apostate, swayed by the Antichrist, a feeble remnant, crying, "How long, O LORD?" – and all because of their rejection of Messiah when He came in grace. Therefore, they must drink the cup of retribution to the dregs. But when the cup is emptied, the Lord will arise in His might as their Deliverer, and their enemies who have gloried over their helplessness, shall become the objects of His avenging wrath, preparatory to the ushering in of the world kingdom of God and His Christ.

- H. A. Ironside, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 209

That is a good summary of what we will be looking at tonight. Now as we closed last time we did so with these words from Zephaniah 1:18, "**Neither their silver nor their gold Shall be able to deliver them In the day of the Lord's wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance Of all those who dwell in the land.**" In other words, nothing is going to save you from the judgment of God!

Well, that is not exactly true as we will see as we get into chapter 2 of Zephaniah. With that as our background, let's begin reading in Zephaniah chapter 2 beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

ZEPHANIAH

VERSES 1-2

1. Here we see Zephaniah speaking to the nation of Israel, the Jewish people to gather together in a kind of sacred assembly. This is not a time to gather together for tea and crumpets! It is a time to gather together to mourn and repent before a holy and righteous God!

And as I read this I get this sense of urgency. That they are to do this **“Before the decree is issued, before the day passes like chaff, Before the LORD’S fierce anger comes upon you, Before the day of the LORD’S anger comes upon you!”** Zephaniah 2:2.

Don't neglect, don't ignore, don't put off the most important thing in your life, getting right with God and staying right with God! And the Devil is so good at messing us up on this issue.

He doesn't need to prove there is no God. He does not need to prove that the Bible is not the Word of God. Yes, he does those things but I think his most powerful lie that so many follow is that “There is no hurry!” And thus, people keep putting off coming to Christ and as they do their hearts get harder and harder until they reach that point of no return! Thus, this is a wakeup call. It is a call to come to the Lord and receive that gift of salvation. To repent of your sins and receive Jesus! It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 6:2, **“... Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”** Don't pass it up!

And as much as the Lord was speaking to the Jews back then, I think the Holy Spirit is speaking to us in America today! May we listen.

VERSE 3

1. Now as some read this verse they see this as speaking to believers who will be Raptured before the Lord's wrath is poured out on a Christ rejecting world. As true as that is, I don't think this is what this verse is speaking of. You see, God is speaking to the faithful remnant of Jews and it is a call to seek the Lord before it is too late. And as we look ahead to the Tribulation Period, we see God preserve many of His people, the Jews, in the rock city of Petra, hidden until His wrath is over!

2. For people living today, they need to seek the Lord before it is too late. Jesus said in Luke 21:36, **“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**

Now some freak out by that statement and they hope that when the Lord comes back to take His bride, the Church before the Tribulation Period begins that they are **“worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**

First of all let me ask you a question. Why do you think you are going to heaven? Now if you tell me because you are a pretty good person then you are not worthy! I know, shocking to some people but it is a reality. You are not worthy, never were in your own goodness, your own righteousness!

Now some of you may have heard this already but the Pope believes that even atheists will go to heaven if they are good enough! Listen carefully to what this Catholic website had to say,

On Wednesday he [Pope Francis] declared that all people, not just Catholics, are redeemed through Jesus, even atheists.

However, he did emphasize there was a catch. Those people must still do good. In fact, it is in doing good that they are led to the One who is the Source of all that is good. In essence he simply restated the hope of the Church that all come to know God, through His Son Jesus Christ.

Francis based his homily on the message of Christ to his disciples taken from the Gospel of Mark. Francis delivered his message by sharing a story of a Catholic who asked a priest if atheists were saved by Christ.

“They complain,” Francis said, “If he is not one of us, he cannot do good. If he is not of our party, he cannot do good.” He explained that Jesus corrected them, “Do not hinder him, he says, let him do good.”

The disciples, Pope Francis explained, “were a little intolerant,” closed off by the idea of possessing the truth, convinced that “those who do not have the truth, cannot do good.” “This was wrong . . . Jesus broadens the horizon.” Pope Francis said, “The root of this possibility of doing good - that we all have - is in creation.”

“Even them, everyone, we all have the duty to do good, Pope Francis said on Vatican Radio.

“Just do good” was his challenge, “and we’ll find a meeting point.”

Francis explained himself, “The Lord created us in His image and likeness, and we are the image of the Lord, and He does good and all of us have this commandment at heart, do good and do not do evil. All of us. ‘But, Father, this is not Catholic! He cannot do good.’

Yes, he can . . . “The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ, all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! ‘Father, the atheists?’ Even the atheists. Everyone!” We must meet one another doing good. ‘But I don’t believe, Father, I am an atheist!’ But do good: we will meet one another there.” . . .

The Holy Father was not teaching anything new. In fact, this hope that all who do not yet know God are not only capable of doing good - but will progress toward that knowledge of God by doing good - is ancient. . . .

- <http://www.catholic.org/news/hf/faith/story.php?id=51077>

That may sound good but it is unbiblical. Listen to what the Bible says about our goodness. In Isaiah 64:6 says, “**But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.**” Did you see that? All our righteousness, all the good that we do is like used menstrual rags in Hebrew! That is how a holy and righteous God sees our goodness.

Now some of you may be thinking that was in the Old Testament and we don’t see that in the New Testament! Of course we do. Paul said in Romans 3:10-12, “**As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.’**” So how many of you think your goodness will get you into heaven? Hopefully none of you because none are good, not even one of us!

And if you still doubt it Paul reminds us that, “**. . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” Romans 3:23. That means all of us, every single one of us and thus, none are good, there is no righteousness done by man that God will accept!

So what can we do. We come to Christ, we repent of our sins and ask Him to be Lord and Savior of our lives and once we do something amazing happens. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:21, “**For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**” You see, He takes our sin and He gives to us His righteousness, which is perfect and it is the only righteousness that God will accept!

You see, we are only counted worthy by the blood of Christ! And thus, if we come to Him, Jesus tells us in Revelation 3:10, “**Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.**” Jesus will keep us out of this trial that is coming upon the earth dwellers and we are not earth dwellers, we are citizens of heaven! You see, what a comfort that should be to us knowing that we are not appointed for wrath, but for Salvation in Christ!

3. As we read on we will now see the judgment of the nations.

VERSES 4-7

1. The area that the Philistines occupied was along the Mediterranean Sea. Their cities were located in an area known as the Gaza Strip and they were Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron, they were the four of the five primary Philistine cities, Gath is the one that is not mentioned. This area will be wiped out in the day of the Lord as it comes under severe judgment in the Tribulation Period.

And yes the Philistines are gone and for the most part, Israel occupies this land. But again, I see that as a partial fulfillment and ultimately during the Tribulation Period we will see the complete fulfillment take place.

Also, according to Baker, the name Cherethites is “a reference to their early geographical links with Crete.”

VERSES 8-11

1. First God looked to the west and saw the Philistines; now He looks to the east and sees the Moabites and the Ammonites. And God promises to bring His judgment upon the land of Moab and Ammon, located east of the Jordan River.

And it is interesting that in verse 9 these two nations are linked to Sodom and Gomorrah and many wonder why. I like what Walker wrote, “The comparison of Moab and Ammon to Sodom and Gomorrah is not surprising in view of their origin: Moab and Ammon were the offspring of the incestuous relations of Lot’s daughters with their drunk father after he fled the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.” Exactly!

And keep in mind that they were family, the descendants of Lot. And yet they treated the children of Israel cruelly. After the Babylonians invaded the Southern Kingdom of Judah they came in and took some of the land for themselves, increasing their borders.

2. Also, keep in mind that there is coming a day when the gods of this world will be done away with and the true and living God will be worshiped. It is as Paul said of Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11, **“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** You can either do it now willingly, or in judgment latter!

VERSE 12

1. The Lord now speaks of His judgment upon the land of Ethiopia, the land south of Israel and again, I see this as a worldwide judgement that occurs during the Tribulation Period, this is the final judgment!

VERSES 13-15

1. And lastly, the Lord speaks of His judgment upon the land of Assyria to the north of Israel. Their capital, Nineveh, was thought to be indestructible. But God did bring it down to the ground. So much so that many did not believe Nineveh existed until the 19th century when its ruins were discovered. Pride did come before their fall!

But again, I see the complete fulfillment during the Tribulation Period. You see, if we look at all these judgments upon the nations here in Zephaniah, we see that judgment was coming from the north to the south and the east to the west. God will judge them and none will escape!

2. One more point before we move on and that is what is said in verse 15 of chapter 2 in Zephaniah. We are told, **“This is the rejoicing city That dwelt securely, That said in her heart, “I am it, and there is none besides me.”**

I think that sums up America today, don't you? It was not that long ago that we didn't even know what a “selfie” meant and now everyone is doing it! We are self-consumed, self-centered and that is reflected in the way we talk, the things we do. And the reason self is so important is because we have taken God out of the picture and now it is all about me!

Let me show you what I mean from this article and this is not a Christian article by any means. We are told,

It's not just millennials who are narcissistic, according to a new study out of the University of Michigan - it's Americans in general.

In a study that reviewed “self-interest” in the U.S. by analyzing presidential State of the Union addresses from 1790 through 2012, researchers found that egotism and self-interest has been steadily increasing since the beginning of the 20th century. This so-called self-interest was higher during economic booms, and lower during tough times - such as the 2008-09 recession.

They examined the types of words used in State of the Union addresses, measuring the ones that related most to self-interest and others that were associated with care or concern for other people. “The focus seemed to be on the needs of other people, rather than on the needs and desire of the president or people close to him,” Sara Konrath, a social psychologist, said in a press release. Interestingly, self-interest was lower during the 1800s but increased during the 1900s.

“We found that self-interest trends tend to peak after economic booms,” William Chopik, an author of the study and a doctoral candidate in psychology, said in a news release. “In the 20th century, it peaked after World War II and again in the 1970s.” And during the 2008-09 recession, self-interest decreased, possibly because “the challenges facing the country increased the nation’s sense of togetherness and focus on the needs of others,” Chopik said.

The authors of the study wanted to understand self-interest trends, as self-interest “still motivates much of adult cognition and behavior, at least within Western cultural contexts,” they wrote in the introduction. Scientists have studied these trends before, finding that college-age students have developed increasing levels of “positive self-evaluation statements” since the 1960s. There have also been rising levels of narcissism, self-esteem, and “simultaneous decreases in empathy,” the authors wrote.

It was through the constructs of State of the Union addresses that researchers measured self-interest in this study. They found that words relating to “other-interest” - such as “his/her,” or “neighbor” - decreased over time. Words relating to self-interest became more common, such as “I, me, mine,” and “mother.” But though these trends may be fairly obvious, it’s much more difficult to pinpoint the underlying reasons for it. “Historical changes are complex, and it is hard to point a finger at one specific cause,” Chopik said. It could possibly be due to an increase in prosperity among Americans, as well as a desire for security and instant gratification (augmented by the fast-paced technological and social media world).

Plenty of studies have delved into the link between social media and increased narcissism, blaming Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for making jealousy, self-promotion and competition so ingrained in our day-to-day lives. But at least millennials can rest assured it's not just them. "[T]here may also be more pressure to succeed over the past couple of centuries," Chopik added. "In some ways, we've become a more competitive society, and perhaps what we're seeing in presidential addresses is a reflection of this trend."

- <http://www.medicaldaily.com/americans-are-more-egotistical-ever-self-interest-levels-have-skyrocketed-over-past-200-years-281696>

I thought the article was interesting because they could not figure out the reason for this. Again, the answer is rather simple. If you negate God from your life you are going to think of yourself more highly than you should. "I am a good person" or whatever. And we have seen that is not true.

In fact, in these days we are living in Paul reminds us what we will be like as he wrote in II Timothy 3:1-5, "**But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!**"

Two points I want to make here. First of all, "**... men will be lovers of themselves ...**" We see that so much today, it is all about us and what we can do, have done or will do. We love ourselves so much that we spend all kinds of money to make ourselves look better and-so-on.

The second point is based in the first. There are a bunch of ugly things that are spoken of after this idea of men loving themselves or being self-centered and I think that is the point. It is out of that self-centeredness that all these things flow.

We lust after money, we boast about ourselves, we are proud, we are blasphemers, we are disobedient to parents because we are smarter than they are, we hate good because we love to do what we want when we want, and then list goes on. But I think you can clearly see that these problems are born out of self-centeredness.

Now the solution is simple, **“Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, Before the decree is issued, Or the day passes like chaff, Before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you, Before the day of the Lord’s anger comes upon you! Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the Lord’s anger.”** Zephaniah 2:1-3. Humble yourself before God, repent of your sin and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior! If you refuse then pride, self-centeredness will keep you out of the Kingdom of God!

ZEPHANIAH 3

VERSES 1-4

1. Remember how Zephaniah chapter 2 ended with God’s judgment upon the Assyrian’s and thus, as we read of this oppressing city here in Zephaniah chapter 3 we might be inclined to think this is speaking of the Assyrian city of Nineveh. But it is not. This is speaking of Jerusalem being that oppressing city!

And we see the tragedy of a people who had turned from God. You see, what was going on in their hearts was now being manifested in their actions, the land and its people have become polluted, Jerusalem was in trouble!

And as you can see, there are four indictments upon Jerusalem. First of all we are told that, “**She has not obeyed His voice.**” The Lord had instructed them on what they should do and they did not listen. That is a powerful lesson for us to learn. God does not just put things in His Word as filler but they are there for our reading and then applying those things to our lives so we can live out our faith. May we obey His voice!

The second indictment upon Jerusalem is that, “**She has not received correction.**” First of all they were not obeying what the Lord had said and thus, when they went astray, and they did in a big way, idols everywhere, immorality, violence and-so-on, when the Lord tried to correct them they refused to listen. Again, another powerful point. When the Lord corrects us it is best for us to be corrected and stop doing those things that are wrong. Yes, we can do what we want but there are consequences for not receiving correction as the Jews found out!

The third indictment upon Jerusalem is that, “**She has not trusted in the LORD.**” And I guess the idea here is that it is hard to trust someone that you do not know. But they should have known the Lord and yet, they chose to distance themselves from Him and they did not trust what He was telling them. Here is another powerful point for us as well. When we start moving away from God’s Word we will begin to not trust Him and we end up trusting in our own feelings, our own ideas and that is very dangerous. God has what is best and what He tells us is what we need. We must learn to trust in Him more and more every day!

And the fourth and final indictment upon Jerusalem is that, **“She has not drawn near to her God.”** Now that may sound strange when you think about it. They went to Temple, they observed the feasts. I guess you can say they were very religious but there was no relationship with the Lord and that was obvious because they did not obey His voice, they did not receive correction, they did not trust in the Lord and thus, they did not draw near to Him, there was no fellowship with God. It was all an outward façade! God wants that deep relationship with us, we draw near to Him and He will draw near to us. Again, a powerful lesson for us to learn.

And if you don't think it was that bad with the Jews and specifically Jerusalem, listen to what Habakkuk 1:3-4 has to say, **“Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.”**

You see, the leaders devoured the people. The prophets who were to speak forth the Words of God lack truth, they were on an unsteady course. Her priests have profaned the things of God, speaking their own words as if God was speaking. What a sad picture.

We see today many in the church speaking from the wisdom of their own heart instead of the truths of God and they are ripping the people off. Making them feel good about living in sin. Let me share the following article with you to see how we are moving people, especially the young away from the Word of God and to other things. We are told,

Ed Stetzer, whose employer – *Lifeway “Christian” Resources* – sells more than a few Andy Stanley books, interviewed the Georgia pastor on the topic of preaching related to his book, *Communicating for a Change*.

The second of such interviews on this topic, Stetzer posts the Q&A on his blog, hosted by *Christianity Today*. What follows is nothing short of a shocking (but refreshingly honest and explicit) rejection of expository preaching, and although is not new, is making its way around social media as of late.

The question posed to Stanley was this . . .

What do you think about preaching verse-by-verse messages through books of the Bible?

Stanley's answer . . .

Guys that preach verse-by-verse through books of the Bible— that is just cheating. It's cheating because that would be easy, first of all. That isn't how you grow people. No one in the Scripture modeled that. There's not one example of that.

It's "cheating." Do you hear that, you exegetes? You small church pastors, sweating away in your study on Friday and Saturday nights to finish up before Sunday . . . you expositors checking the Greek and Hebrew and grasping the etymology of key words and phrases, putting it within Scriptural context, cross-referencing all the important verses, studying the commentaries of all the great scholars to unwrap the oracles of God verse by verse at a time. People *don't grow that way*. . . .

If what Stanley means here is "*That isn't how you [spiritually] grow people*" then, essentially, we're left to believe that Stanley's understanding of growth is that it's done by the person, the pastor, the "communicator" and not by God through the Scriptures. Notice the phrasing, "That's not how *you* grow people."

You're right, Stanley. That's not how *we* grow people. It's how *God* grows people, through his Spirit, via the Holy Scriptures. Stanley continues . . .

No one in the Scripture modeled that. There's not one example of that.

Well, that's true. It's hard to find a didactic and authoritative model of preaching Scripture in Scripture. That would be like finding characters in a movie rewinding or fast-forwarding itself to provide commentary, which as far as I know, has only been done in one scene of *Space Balls*. There is not a chapter of the Sacred Text describing expository, topical, thematic or narrative preaching. We do, however, see how Scripture is handled in Scripture, even if there aren't books entitled 1st and 2nd Homiletics. Chiefly, the Scripture is saturated with the Scripture. The Psalms, the Prophets, the Epistles are all wrapped up in one another and soaked in Inspiration.

We see New Testament writers (via the Holy Spirit) preach their oratories and saturate their divinely-inspired epistles from the verses of the Old Testament, roughly 850 times. We see Jesus discussing doctrine from the Old Testament with the scholars in the temple from age 12 onward. We see Him resisting Satan by a recitation of the Scriptures. We see Jesus daily contending with the Pharisees over the Scriptures. And we see that the most famous sermon in the history of mankind was an exegetical outline of the Old Testament Law and Ten Commandments (what was provided in Matthew was not a word-for-word account of Jesus' Sermon preached upon a mountain top, but an outline, and from which you can see how He was working his way through Mosaic Law). The same is said for Peter's sermon in Acts 2 and Stephen's sermon in Acts 7. Unless you believe these are word-for-word transcripts of 4-minute long orations, these are clearly exegetical outlines that were ambitious in the amounts of Scripture being cited and covered.

Stanley and other seeker-friendly “creative” preachers improve upon the Text by incessant story-telling and personal anecdotes. That’s the “engaging” part of his shtick. I’ll remind you, beloved, that Jesus taught in parables not to *reveal* engaging and compelling truths from Scripture, but to *conceal* truth from those who didn’t need it at the time (Matthew 13:11-17). I’m convinced the non-exegetical approach of modern-day story tellers and dreamers is for the same, but non-divine, purpose – to conceal truth and not to reveal it. Cloak scripture in stories and endless illustrations like riddles, the oracles of God that have now been made clear to us; the choir will get it and the lost won’t see anything offensive and stumble on no Cornerstone. Stanley continues . . .

All Scripture is equally inspired, but not all Scripture is equally applicable or relevant to every stage of life. My challenge is to read culture and to read an audience and ask: What is the felt need? Or perhaps what is more important, what is an unmet need they need to feel that I can address?

We see here what Stanley is busy reading – and it’s not the Scripture. After all, the Scripture isn’t equally applicable or relevant to every “stage of life” (which is why the typical seeker-friendly church preaches from only a dozen different scripture texts – David and Goliath, Jonah and the whale, Joshua and the Sun, etc – repackaged over and over and over again in an endless sea of regurgitated life advice in a camouflage of changing phraseology). No, Stanley is reading *culture*. He’s reading the *audience*. He’s not a preacher – he’s contemporary anthropologist. His job is basically the same as Ed Stetzer’s – except applied as ecclesiastical methodology instead of as helpful missiological data – Stanley studies culture and provides to the consumer what it is asking for. Stanley’s king is not Christ. The consumer, in Stanley’s ministry, is king.

Stanley then gives an example for why expository preaching is over-rated and it’s the icing, and not the cake, that makes the difference . . .

I believe the true defining moment of my life as a communicator took place when I was in seminary. I was asked to do a chapel for the high school academy at First Baptist Church, Dallas. So I got the message all ready to go, and I was going to preach on the story of Naaman. And God told him to dip in the water seven times and he would be healed. I had all this great stuff. And I was sitting in my one-room efficiency apartment and I was thinking, "These kids have heard everything. They go to church all the time. They are not going to remember this. This is just another chapel. What can I do so that they can remember this? I am just going to come up with one phrase and I am going to say it so many times that they can't possibly forget it."

So I came up with this phrase: "To understand why, submit and apply." That was over 30 years ago and I still remember it. So I told the whole story. And I said the bottom line was: "To understand why, submit and apply." And I said that God is going to ask you to do some things that you might not understand why, but you must submit and apply. I had them say it over and over.

Three years go by, and I am working in the college department in the same church and a freshman walks in and says, "I remember you. To understand why, submit and apply." He didn't remember my name. He wasn't even sure where he had seen me before. But it stuck in his head. And I'll never forget thinking, "That is what I want to do for the rest of my life."

I think the story says it all. It's not a catechism of Scripture that the next generation needs or wants. No, we need to catechize ourselves in Stanley and other wordsmiths who take the sharp-as-any-two-edged-sword Word of God that divides souls and spirits, that regenerates hearts and makes us born again through its incorruptible seed and create pithy little, theologically shallow slogans that end up on bumper-stickers and tshirts and eventually are debunked by discernment blogs for being so doctrinally anemic and usually preposterously and biblically incorrect until even the originators of those slogans grit their teeth in an awkward smile, throw up their hands in a defensive posture and walk backward slowly from their messed up semantic children. *That's* how you grow people.

I want to take all this stuff in the Bible, and I want to say it so simply that it gets so lodged in people's hearts that in the moment of transition or temptation or whatever it might be, they think: What is that statement? What is that phrase?"

Not from the Bible, but from Stanley. Not from the collection of 66 Books of Inspired Writ, but from this book sold at Lifeway. Yes. That's the ticket.

- <http://pulpitandpen.org/2015/05/08/andy-stanley-trashes-expository-preaching-calls-it-easy-and-cheating/>

Apart from God's Word we have nothing else that we can fully trust. God's Word is enough for us to live out our faith and how are you going to obey His voice, receive correction, trust in the Lord, draw near to God if you are not reading His Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to teach you, correct you, direct you and-so-on? You won't be able to!

And let me add this because I do think the Bible shows us how we are to present the Word of God to people. In Nehemiah 8:7-8 we are told that they, **... helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.**

It is as simple as that. You read the text, the Bible. You explain what was going on in that story. And then you make the application so that they may not only learn but grow in the Lord. That is how you grow as a Christian, not from the wisdom of man but by the Word of God opened up and applied to your life!

VERSES 5-7

1. Again we see God trying to correct them, to reprove their actions but they refused to listen and obey. In fact, they were proud of the way they were living, they showed no shame. A society is in trouble when they are proud of their sin, flaunting it! Yes, the people may be unfaithful, but the Lord isn't. Morning by morning He is there trying to correct them. God is faithful!

And one of the ways that God tried to get their attention is that God brought His justice to the nations around Judah. That should have warned Judah what would happen if they rejected God. But, instead of learning from the surrounding nations they dedicated themselves to ungodliness all the more.

God kept trying to get their attention but they were bent on doing evil, rising up early in the morning, eager to get started. You would think that after God punished them through a series of judgments that they would repent and get right with God, but not so. Man's heart is very evil and only the love of God can change that, He can give us a new heart! It is as Paul says, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** II Corinthians 5:17.

VERSES 8-13

1. In verse 8 we see this word, **“indignation”** and in the Old Testament this word is synonymous with the Tribulation Period which we see in the New Testament, specifically but not limited to the things that are spoken of in Revelation chapters 6-19.
2. Now that is a pretty dark place to say the least. But our God always gives hope, He always gives them a way to come through those times and that is what we see here. He is going to give them something to look forward to as He will re-gather His people and establish His Kingdom here on the earth!

3. Now in verse 9 we are told, **“For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord.”** First of all this may be speaking of the Hebrew language. Keep in mind that it was a dead language and that is why we see the Jewish Scriptures translated in around 250 B. C. or so into the Greek language. But today in Israel we see that the Hebrew language is once again spoken!

What I want you to notice here is that the world will worship the Lord with this language so I think it does speak of the Jewish people and it goes far beyond that. You see, after God judges the world He will set up His Kingdom on this earth and the people who enter into His Kingdom will speak this, **“pure language.”**

Now we don’t know for sure if it will be Hebrew but that is a very good possibility! One of the reasons some speculate it is the Hebrew language is that there are no swear words in that language. If you want to swear you must use another language. It is possible that this is the language, but whatever the case, all will call upon the Lord and serve Him in the Kingdom Age. But I do lean to this language being the Hebrew language!

4. In verses 10 and 11 of Zephaniah chapter 3 we see these people from Ethiopia and this could be speaking of the dispersed Jews. And these people from Ethiopia – these blacked skinned Jewish people are called FALASHAS. We are told that, “Jews in Ethiopia call themselves Beta Israel which means ‘house of Israel.’ They are also known as the Falashas. Falasha means ‘stranger’ or ‘immigrant’ in the classical language of Ethiopia (the Ge’ez tongue).”

You may remember several years ago, when Ethiopia suffered a great famine, tens of thousands of these Falashas were airlifted by the Israelis to safety and a year later the Knesset ruled that these people are full Jews! In any case, the focus will be the Lord and not self.

5. And as we see with verses 12 and 13 the Jews as a nation will repent of their sins and no iniquity will be found in them, no lies, no deceit will be found in them. A beautiful work of the Lord which will bring us into the Kingdom Age.

VERSES 14-20

1. As we move into the Kingdom Age we see that joy has filled the land, music and singing unto the Lord. Why? Because as verse 15 tells us, the enemies of God's people have been done away with and the true King, Jesus will now rule and reign as righteousness flows throughout the land. You bet joy will fill the land, and we await that day!

And what a day that will be. But how can God rejoice over me? Because He sees me as I will be, not as I am. He sees me in glory, that good work He has begun in me He sees as completed already even though I have a long way to go.

His love will still our anxious hearts and He will rejoice over us with singing. I wonder what the Lord's voice is like? I can't imagine how beautiful it will be. And you know what, you can experience His salvation, His gladness, His love, His singing now if you would only come to Him and trust in Him.

Spurgeon put it like this, "If God sings, shall not we sing? He did not sing when he made the world. No; he looked upon it, and simply said that it was good. The angels sang, the sons of God shouted for joy: creation was very wonderful to them, but it was not much to God, who could have made thousands of worlds by his mere will. Creation could not make him sing . . . When all was done, and the Lord saw what became of it in the salvation of his redeemed, then he rejoiced after a divine manner." How true!

2. And I love that in the Kingdom age there will be no sorrow, no persecution, no affliction, no handicapped people, no homeless, just praise unto God. It is as Isaiah 55:1-3 says “**Ho!**

Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you - the sure mercies of David.”

3. As this chapter and book close here in verse 20 we are told, “**At that time I will bring you back, Even at the time I gather you; For I will give you fame and praise Among all the peoples of the earth, When I return your captives before your eyes,’ Says the Lord.**”

Yes, a tough message but God has this prophet end in hope, restoration, a glorious day when God will rule and reign over His people.

Whatever you are going through right now, if your heart is broken, if it is sad, take heart and have hope in the Lord. You see, the message God gave through His prophet Zephaniah to His people speaks to us today - God will see us through our troubles - therefore do as Habakkuk did, “**Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.**” Habakkuk 3:18.

Or, this verse can be translated, “*Yet I will jump up and down in the LORD, I will spin around in the God of my salvation.*” Our God is a God of hope, never forget that. All you need to do is turn to Him and place your faith upon Him, trusting in Him!

May we learn to obey His voice. May we learn to receive His instructions. May we learn to trust in the Lord. May we learn to draw near to God!