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4 Habakkuk and Zephaniah



The opening to Zephaniah's message reveals that this word of the LORD came to Judah in the days of King Josiah. The Prophets Zephaniah and Habakkuk seem to have been contemporaries with Jeremiah. The

prophetic messages of these three men surely contributed to the revival initiated by Josiah, the godly young king of Judah.

Note: You will find the brief prophecies of Habakkuk and Zephaniah side by side near the end of the Old Testament. You will not be required to read all six chapters; however, the lesson commentary includes many references from these two books. You can enrich your understanding of these prophets' messages by keeping your Bible open and skimming the noted references as you read the lesson.

Search the Scriptures

 **Read Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; 3:17-19.**

KJV Vocabulary

Use the definitions to enhance your understanding of the passage as you read.

slacked (1:4): weakened

wrong judgment proceedeth (v. 4): justice is
perverted

watch (2:1): watch tower

tables (v. 2): tablets

run (v. 2): run, as a herald, to tell others

tarry (v. 3): linger; delay

lifted up (v. 4): puffed up with pride

just (v. 4): righteous

meat (3:17): grain; food crops

hind (v. 19): deer

Circle the letter of the best paraphrase for each passage.

1. Habakkuk 1:1-4

- a. "LORD, why don't You answer and set things right when I lament all this wickedness?"
- b. "LORD, You are deaf to my crying, and Your judgment causes strife."

2. Habakkuk 2:1-4

- a. "When I waited for God's answer, He told me that though His answer seems slow in coming, He will surely punish evil at the right time, and let the faithful righteous live."
- b. "God argued with me when I stood watching from the tower, and told me that I should stop waiting, because my soul was not upright."

3. Habakkuk 3:17-19

- a. "The crops will fail and the animals will die, but I will run away from the disaster like a deer running to the safety of the mountains."
- b. "Even if the crops should fail and the herds perish, I will rejoice in God, who is my strength and my salvation."

Habakkuk's Message

In his short book, Habakkuk declares quite a few things about the LORD. God answers in His own wise time frame, even when the one crying to Him is a prophet (1:2). When He does answer, mere humans at times find what He says hard to believe (1:5).

God is eternal and sovereign (1:12). He does what He will in creation and among the nations, freely exercising His eternal ways (3:6). God is trustworthy in bringing His message to all.

The LORD is holy, glorious, and praiseworthy (3:3). He sees evil through pure eyes and finds it intolerable (1:13). God's glory fills the earth, and someday everyone shall know it (2:14).

Unlike idols of wood and stone (2:19), God actually lives (2:20). Habakkuk repeatedly gives examples of God's powerful works. He saves His own (3:13). He gives strength, stability, and success to His people (3:19). God is cause for His people to rejoice (3:18).

“The LORD God is my strength.”

Habakkuk 3:19

Habakkuk's acquaintance with God gave him faith in God. In 2:4, Habakkuk was convinced that “the just shall live by his faith,” and he asserted his commitment to God in 3:17-18: “Although the fig tree shall not blossom . . . and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD.” Though all were

lost, Habakkuk was determined to trust God and be true to Him.

How do those who are just, or righteous, live by faith? The faith of righteous people guides them in their living. In other words, “the just shall live [now] by his faith.” If a person's relationship with God is one of faith and faithfulness, he also has the hope of eternal life. In other words, “the just shall live [forever] by his faith.” The person who has faith in God will live righteously even when he doesn't understand God's ways. No matter what happens, he is committed to obeying God.

Several New Testament verses quote Habakkuk's statement about the righteous living by faith. Romans 1:17 states that when God's people live out their faith in Him, they reveal His righteousness. In Galatians 3:11, Paul reminds Christians that it is not keeping the Law, but their faith in Jesus that justifies them in God's sight. Hebrews 10:38 declares clearly that those who draw back from a life of faith bring no pleasure to God.

According to Hebrews 12:2, Christians should look to Jesus as the perfect example of faith—His faith in His Father carried Him through all the temptations He faced and enabled Him to live the perfect life necessary for Him to become our Redeemer. It's only as we follow Him that we can be truly just.

Complete the truths about God from Habakkuk's message.

4. God answers His children's cries in His own _____.
5. God is _____ in bringing His message.
6. God sees evil through _____ and finds it _____.
7. God's glory fills the _____.
8. God gives _____, _____, and _____ to His people.

Circle **T** if the statement is true and **F** if it is false. If the statement is false, correct the italicized part.

9. **T** **F** God's answers to human questions are sometimes *hard for us to believe*.
10. **T** **F** God is cause for His people to *mourn*.
11. **T** **F** Habakkuk had faith in God because *he was acquainted with God*.
12. **T** **F** Habakkuk asserted that if crops failed and the animals died, he would *no longer* believe in God.

Search the Scriptures

 **Read Zephaniah 1:1-4, 14-18; 2:1-3; 3:12-20.**

KJV Vocabulary

Use the definitions to enhance your understanding of the passage as you read.

consume (1:2): destroy; sweep away

stumblingblocks (v. 3): the idols of the wicked

Chemarim (v. 4): pagan priests

mighty man (v. 14): soldier; brave warrior

dung (v. 17): rotting refuse

hid (2:3): sheltered

afflicted and poor (3:12): meek and humble

slack (v. 16): limp with fear

undo (v. 19): punish

halteth (v. 19): is lame; walks with a limp

Circle the letter of the best paraphrase for each passage.

13. Zephaniah 1:1-4

- a. "God says, 'I will consume everything on earth, put stumbling blocks before the wicked, and save Judah from Baal worship and the pagan priests.'"
- b. "God says, 'I will destroy the living creatures and the wickedness in the land, including the people of Judah, Jerusalem, Baal, and the pagan priests.'"

14. Zephaniah 1:14-18

- a. "Because you have sinned against God, He will hasten the day when He will bring judgment and distress on you. Nothing will be able to save or protect you; even the bravest warriors will cry with fear."
- b. "Very soon a mighty man will announce a day of profound darkness over the earth, and you will all be blinded, because God is jealous of your silver and gold."

15. Zephaniah 2:1-3

- a. "Before the day of the LORD's wrath comes, gather together, humble yourselves, and seek the LORD and His righteousness; you may escape punishment by doing so."
- b. "God has decreed that His anger will blow you away like chaff; therefore, everyone who is meek should gather together and hide from Him."

16. Zephaniah 3:12-20

- a. "God says He will spare a remnant of humble people who will do no wrong and tell no lies. Therefore, rejoice, Israel, that the LORD your king is with you. His punishments are finished, and He will remove your captivity."
- b. "God says only the poor will be afflicted; therefore the daughters of Jerusalem can rejoice that they were spared from His judgment. He will gather all the sorrowful together and praise them before the people of the earth."

Zephaniah's Message

The Prophet Zephaniah, like so many of the prophets, warned of God's judgment on the rebellious. The judgment Zephaniah spoke about was a warning to all nations, including God's chosen people. The inhabitants of Jerusalem had persuaded themselves that God

didn't care. "The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil" (Zephaniah 1:12). They saw no need to amend their ways; after all, God had given up both blessing and cursing. Or so they thought.

Like Joel, Zephaniah forewarned of the coming “day of the LORD.” He also called it a “day of wrath”—the wrath of the Almighty. The only way to escape that day was by seeking God, righteousness, and meekness. That is still the only hope for God’s people.

Once again, the Judge showed His redemptive heart by promising restoration after punishment and repentance. He called on the unfaithful to repent while they had opportunity. He encouraged the faithful to wait while He worked.¹ Ultimately, God would restore to Himself a people, a remnant after His own heart.²

“He will rejoice over thee with joy.”

Zephaniah 3:17

Zephaniah’s message pointed to the hope of future salvation. With this salvation would come singing and rejoicing.³ It would be a time of deliverance from judgment and oppression and evil, from fear and

1. Zephaniah 3:8

2. Zephaniah 3:9-20

3. Zephaniah 3:14

Zephaniah Declares the Day of the LORD

- A time of fear and remorse, even for the mighty (1:14).
- A day of trouble and distress, of destruction and darkness (1:15).
- A day of warning and alarm (1:16).
- A day brought on by man’s sin (1:17).
- A day of unbridled judgment (1:18).
- A day of life consumed as chaff (2:2).

discouragement.⁴ It would be such a full and thorough restoration that God Himself would also rejoice and sing!⁵ Though restoration hadn’t happened yet, the vision and promise of it was clearly set before God’s people.

4. Zephaniah 3:15, 16

5. Zephaniah 3:17

Circle the letter of the best ending to each statement.

- The inhabitants of Jerusalem saw no need to amend their ways because _____.
 - they thought God was on their side
 - they were more righteous than the heathen around them
 - they were living as righteously as they knew how
 - they were persuaded that God didn’t care
- The only way to escape the day of God’s wrath is to _____.
 - join up with God’s people
 - seek God, righteousness, and meekness
 - obey the Law in every detail
 - warn others of the future judgment
- The “day of the LORD” would _____.
 - give no hope to the faithful
 - be a day of peace and righteousness
 - show the wrath of the Almighty on evil
 - last forever
- If those who heard God’s message from Zephaniah repented while they had opportunity, they _____.
 - would escape all danger and distress
 - would die before the destruction happened
 - would be part of the remnant God would restore to Himself
 - would wreak vengeance on their enemies

Understanding the Commentary

Circle **T** if the statement is true and **F** if it is false. If the statement is false, correct the italicized part.

21. **T** **F** Habakkuk and Zephaniah prophesied *around the same time as Jeremiah*.
22. **T** **F** Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah were prophets in Judah during *Josiah's reign*.
23. **T** **F** The faith of righteous people *cannot guide* them in their lives now.
24. **T** **F** A person of faith and faithfulness has hope of *eternal life*.
25. **T** **F** Even when he doesn't understand God's ways, a faithful person *will still* live righteously.
26. **T** **F** When God's people are faithful, they reveal *His righteousness*.
27. **T** **F** The Christian is justified in God's sight through *faith in Jesus*.

Memory Work Focus

Write the memory selection for this section, including the reference.

28. _____

Review

Complete the exercises.

29. God promised that if His people would turn to Him with fasting and weeping, He would grant them _____.
30. Micah condemned the Jewish leaders, priests, and prophets for working for _____.
31. God's uniqueness is shown when He _____ transgressions and by His _____ toward the repentant.
32. Joel prophesied of a time when God would pour His _____ on His _____.
33. God's people are all those who _____ on the name of the _____.
34. It has been God's purpose in history to make Himself _____ to mankind.
35. The Prophet _____ announced the Redeemer would be born in Bethlehem.

Circle the attributes of God that are highlighted by Joel's message.

36.

gracious	merciful	judgmental	slow to anger	changeable
kind	unforgiving	unreasonable	fickle	unconcerned