

# Minor Prophets' Major Gripes, IX

## *Zephaniah on Complacency*

August 10, 2003

### PARADE OF KINGS

Most of the prophets we've covered: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum and Habakkuk were dirt-poor wanderers.

- Zephaniah was the only one with a royal lineage.

The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah. – Zephaniah 1:1 NIV

Zephaniah's great-great-grandfather was King Hezekiah, an outstanding, righteous, God-fearing king:

Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. – 2 Kings 18:5 NIV

However, Hezekiah's son Manasseh was his polar-opposite; in fact, Manasseh may have been Judah's most *wicked* king:

But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites. – 2 Chronicles 33:9 NIV

Manasseh's son Amon followed in his father's vile foot-steps and was assassinated by his own officials ... which led Amon's eight-year-old son Josiah to the throne:

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD ... – 2 Chronicles 34:1-2 NIV

- Zephaniah's ministry took place during Josiah's 31 years.

Many scholars believe that because of Zephaniah's lineage, he would've had access to the palace, and therefore would've played a key role in shaping the upbringing of little Josiah.

## JOSIAH BRINGS CHANGE

- When Josiah was 16 he began to seek after God. (2 Chron 34:3a)
- When he was 20 he cleansed Judah of its idols. (2 Chron 34:3b-7)
- When he was 26 he began to restore the temple. (2 Chron 34:8)

As the temple was being repaired, a scroll of the Law (written by Moses) was discovered ... the only copy in existence ... that had been lost for decades.

- Josiah was able to reinstate temple services.
- God withheld His hand of judgment from Judah.

But when Josiah was 38 he disguised himself and fought in a battle against Neco (king of Egypt) and was killed by archers.

- And 31 years of progress went to the grave with him.
- The Israelites abandoned Josiah's spiritual reforms.

And so the first chapter of Zephaniah is aimed at these people:

"I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests – those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molech, those who turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him. – Zephaniah 1:4-6 NIV

## DREGS OF SOCIETY

- Pagan alters were torn down, but core values didn't change.

Zephaniah's counsel and message had penetrated the heart of King Josiah, but it really hadn't affected the people.

- Moral behavior can be legislated; moral attitude cannot

As soon as Josiah died, the people exhibited the true heart underneath the imposed actions.

Q: How much of your spiritual life is attached to a leader (or pressure from parents or a spouse) - as opposed to your own heart-felt devotion to God?

Q: That's a good one! Why do you come to church?

Q: Have you ever noticed that we usually don't announce in advance when we're going to have a guest speaker?

Q: Do you know why we don't? Can you guess?

A: Because so many of you stay home! Shame!

It's not like it's a horrible sin; we just have to examine ourselves and make sure that we're not just maintaining a Godly appearance on the outside, but a Godly attitude on the inside.

To be spiritually healthy is to be actively embracing and engaging God and to be relating and responding to His Word.

We are to be active in our pursuit, not passive, because we can turn our backs on God even while facing Him

They have turned their backs to me and not their faces ... - Jeremiah 2:27 NIV

It wasn't that they hated God; they just didn't love Him with all their heart. They were indifferent toward Him.

- And, spiritual complacency really ticks God off.

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.' - Zephaniah 1:12 NIV

- They didn't think He'd keep His promises or His threats.
- Our complacency leads us to think God is complacent too.

Q: Do you know what "dregs" of wine are?

A: Stagnant wine that sits too long forms a hard crust and the liquid becomes coagulated, bitter, and quite disgusting.

This is what happens to us when we sit back and take a passive role that allows our faith to remain stagnant.

- Spiritual complacency is a form of practical atheism

This is why God holds us responsible for the truth of our words - the quality of our example - and the purity of our actions.

## THE REMNANT

The first chapter of Zephaniah is filled with prophetic terror. But in the second chapter there's this "whispered" hope.

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands.  
Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of  
the LORD's anger. - Zephaniah 2:3 NIV

Spiritual complacency can only be counteracted by two things:

1. A genuine spirit of humility

Understanding how totally, abjectly, and desperately dependant on Him we really are - for every breath and every heartbeat. I am not self-sufficient, but God dependant.

2. An authentic aim of obedience

Recognition of dependence helps us act and live as though He is an important part of our lives - as opposed to an impotent part.

- I need His help to be a good husband, father, and friend.

Q: Do I approach God in humility on a daily basis?

Q: Am I sincerely determined to obey His commands?

Q: Am I experiencing real change in my inner life?

## THE THIRD ACT

The 1st chapter is prophet terror; the 2nd a promise; but the third contains a declaration of salvation and deliverance to those who actively seek after the Lord.

The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." - Zephaniah 3:17 NIV

I want to be like King Josiah who found the scroll and got excited about living by the truth it contained.

And just like those people who were rebuilding the temple: as we actively work to restore and build onto the foundation of our faith and our relationship with God, He will reveal Himself in ever greater measure.