

Community Groups |

Growing UP | Growing IN | Growing OUT



"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." – Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)

Why Community Groups?

Because God created us to live life in the context of relationships! This is an opportunity for you to connect with others as your experience real life-change in your Christian walk.

What is a Community Group?

A group of 6-10 people who "do life" together as they grow in their love for God, His word, and others. Community Groups encourage folks to take their "next step" in three areas: (1) **Spiritual Growth – UP** toward God, (2) **Relational Growth – IN** toward Group members, and (3) **Missional Growth – OUT** toward those in the church and world.

Thus, a Community Group is an environment where we are conformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ (*Romans 8:29-30*). Our conviction is that "real life-change only happens in the context of biblical community."

Not to be left out is the fact that a Community Group is also a place for folks to have fun as they celebrate and share life together! Come join us!

Our journey begins with a three-week study of the book of *Zephaniah*. The following Study Guide is intended to immerse you into God's word while you grow closer to Him in the context of relationships.

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Study One | Zephaniah 1:1-2:3

Background

Author: Zephaniah (“The LORD hides/protects”), the son of Cushi.

Date written: Circa 630 B.C.

Written to: The Southern Kingdom of Judah (primarily) *in order to* warn them of God’s impending judgment (i.e. the “day of the Lord”) and exhort them to turn back to Yahweh.

Zephaniah begins with a gripping warning of God’s coming judgment against His covenant people in the Kingdom of Judah. Pay close attention to the reasons why God will judge them.

1. Why do we get so much information about Zephaniah's ancestry in 1:1? How might his connection to “Hezekiah” be significant? Based on the name “Josiah,” when can we date this book (2 Kings 22:1-2)?
2. “What does “day of the Lord” mean? Why is the judgment language of these verses so severe (see Zephaniah 1:17 - yikes!)? Does this impact your view of God and His nature? If so, how? Why are even the animals impacted by this judgment (1:3)?
3. Who was Molech (Leviticus 18:21) and what is Judah’s sin that is being described? Why are the people of Judah told to be silent before God (Zephaniah 1:7)? How might this response of silence relate to God's response of judgment upon the world? How are you complacent like the people in Zephaniah 1:12?

4. *Zephaniah 1:14* states that the day of the Lord is "near" and "coming quickly." Yet it would appear that God has not carried forth this judgment. Why might God be delaying judgment upon those who follow Him by faith? What will this day be like?

5. How does this impending judgment impact your desire to proclaim the gospel message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ? What steps can you take this week to share that message?

6. Do you see any of the rebellious actions and attitudes listed here in our world today? How might you be embracing similar rebellious attitudes, even on a "lesser" scale?

7. *Zephaniah 2:3* is one of most clearly applicational verses in the book. Where do you struggle to seek the Lord, righteousness, and humility? Do you believe that this really is God's desire for His people? If so, why is this so often a struggle for us to do?

Memory verses:

Zephaniah 1:7 – *"Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited."* (NIV)

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."* (NASB)

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Study Two | Zephaniah 2:4-15

Zephaniah's oracle continues with specific judgments against other nations. We see that God is not only concerned with His people (Judah), but He desires these nations to repent as well.

1. Examine the places listed in this chapter (see also *Joshua 13:3*; *Genesis 19:36-38*; and *10:8-11*). Using a Bible Atlas, what does their geographic location reveal about the scope of God's judgment upon the nations?
2. *Zephaniah 2:6-7* is very different from the other verses in this section. Why? Why does Zephaniah write about the protection of this "remnant" in the midst of judgment? What does this say about God (*Genesis 45:7*; *Deuteronomy 30:1-4*; and *2 Kings 19:29-31*)?
3. What does this chapter say about those who "mess" with God's covenant people (i.e. the faithful people of Judah)? Why might it be such a big deal to God if other nations threaten His people? How might this apply to us as Christians (those who participate in the New Covenant; see *Jeremiah 31:31-34* and *Hebrews 10:15-22*)?
4. Observe the verses of this section closely. How many times do you see the terms "pride," "mocking," "taunting," "arrogance," etc.? What is God's response to this pride (*Proverbs 3:34*; *8:13*)? How are you proud (*Psalms 10:4*; *Proverbs 16:18*)? What impact is this pride having on you and those around you (*Philippians 2:3-4*)?

5. What do you know about the city of Nineveh (the capital of Assyria; see *Zephaniah 2:13-15*)? Why does Zephaniah mention all of the animals that will be present (flocks, beasts/creatures, desert owl/pelican; cf. *Isaiah 14:22-23*)? What will happen to this great and powerful city?

6. What does the desolation of Nineveh reveal about God's outlook towards worldly power (cf. *Isaiah 47:8-11*)? What attitudes are at the root of this kind of worldly power and where does such power find its security? Where do you find your security (*Proverbs 18:10*)?

7. Consider this week how you can embrace humility and be dependent upon God rather proud and self-sufficient. Who are the people in your life that you can ask to pray for you in this effort? Whose forgiveness might you need to seek because they have been hurt by your pride and arrogance in the past?

Memory verse:

Zephaniah 2:11 – *“The LORD will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his own place.”* (NASB)

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Study Three | **Zephaniah 3:1-20**

This final chapter of Zephaniah has a two-fold focus: Judgment and Blessing. Hopefully you will see that God's judgment is severe, but that His blessing is powerful as well!

1. Do you every question God's sovereignty (or control) over the world's (or your life's) circumstances? Explain. How can we best explain God's sovereignty when life is often full of pain and brokenness?
2. Why would God be so angered over His peoples' wickedness and rebellion (*Jeremiah 22:6-9*)? What does this tell us about God's nature and His attitude towards sin? How does this exhort you to examine your own life for ways that you might also be rebelling (see *Psalm 139:23-24*)?
3. What do you imagine this completed day of judgment (or "day of the LORD") to look like (*Zephaniah 3:8; Revelation 16:1ff*)? Why might God be delaying in bringing about this day of judgment (*2 Peter 3:9-11*)?
4. What attributes describe the "remnant" of God's faithful people (*Zephaniah 3:10-13*)? If the church is not the "new Israel," how do these verses apply to us as the church in the 21st century (see *John 13:34-35; Romans 12:9-13; Ephesians 4:1-3, 29-32*)?

5. What difference do verses 14 through 17 make in your life? How is it possible for God to “shout” over His people with joy while also being “quiet” in His love for them? What do these verses tell us about God and His relationship with His people?

6. Do these verses concerning blessing give you hope in the midst of your circumstances? Explain. What do you imagine this future time of salvation looking like (see *Revelation 21:1-5* for another description)? Do you know for certain that you will experience this eternity in God’s presence? Why or why not?

7. If you sometimes view the Old Testament as being “irrelevant,” how has study of the book of Zephaniah changed your outlook? How can you approach your study of the Old Testament in order to understand first what it says about God, while having personal application as a secondary goal?

Memory verse:

Zephaniah 3:17 – *“The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”* (NASB)

Resources for Zephaniah | TBC

For further study of the book of Zephaniah, see the following Bible Study Resources:

<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/zephaniah.pdf>

<http://net.bible.org/bible.php?book=Zep&chapter>

