



Zephaniah

Get Started

As believers, we long for and pray for revival. By "revival" we can either mean a multitude of persons coming to know The Lord for the first time, or a season of spiritual growth in the life of a church.

Nothing wrong with praying for that kind of revival, and we see throughout history many revivals breaking out in response to (or at least in conjunction with) prayer.

At the same time, it's possible to experience revival, to even be a part of it, but not really be changed all that much.

We can, and should, pray for revival. But what we can and should do even more is pursue revival for ourselves.

While we get a quickstart look of this book, we want to keep in mind that prayer for revival should look inward first. It should cause me to ask, "Am I pursuing the things that speak of revival in my own life, rather than just hoping God will touch others so that I am swept along, too?"

Get Studying

Zephaniah must have seemed out of touch with the times in which he lived. He announced God's imminent and catastrophic judgment, but he did so during a time of revival.

The nation had been suffering from the corrupt reigns of kings Manasseh and Amon. But in the eighth year of Josiah's reign, the king's heart was turned to the Lord; and in the twelfth year, he instituted a program of moral and religious reforms. Later, in the course of repairing the Temple, the high priest found a copy of the book of the law – long neglected under the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. This led to even greater reform, even revival, in 621BC.

Yet here was Zephaniah declaring the day of the Lord – the impending day of God's judgment and wrath. How could he be so out of touch with the times?

He wasn't. The revival under King Josiah was impressive; but immediately after his death, Josiah's own sons plunged the nation back into idolatry. In just a few short years the Jews would be taken captive by Babylon.

What happened to the revival? Why did it fail? The Lord showed Zephaniah two responses among the Jews to King Josiah's reforms and the ensuing revival:

1. In chapter one, the majority of Jews were shown to be only outwardly reformed.
2. In the first three verses of chapter two, only a minority of Jews were shown to be also inwardly transformed.

Revival that leads only to outward reform will fail. There must be an inward transformation of the heart.

The first nine Minor Prophets, ending with Zephaniah, all precede the Babylonian invasion and captivity. The final three Minor Prophets – Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi – deal with events after the Jews return from Babylon to Judah.

Zephaniah comes last in biblical order of those who preceded because he summarized all the warnings of the other eight. It's as if he was saying, "The revival of King Josiah is the last chance to get right with God before it's too late!" Those who wanted to take his warning seriously would have looked for the signs that their inward lives were transformed.

Zephaniah warned of the impending invasion by Babylon and of the "day of the Lord," the final and universal judgment at the end of human history. Looking still further into God's plans for his people, he foretold Judah's return from Babylon and the final, triumphant page of human history, the glorious millennial kingdom of God.

Zephaniah is the first of the generation of prophets which will include Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Ezekiel. These are the men who will not only proclaim God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem, but also be caught up in it themselves. Some of them will live right through the disaster as God's representatives and commentators, announcing and interpreting events.

Zep 1:1 The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

Zep 1:2 "I will utterly consume everything From the face of the land," Says the LORD;

Zep 1:3 "I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, The fish of the sea, And the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land," Says the LORD.

Zep 1:4 "I will stretch out My hand against Judah, And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, The names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests -

Zep 1:5 Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops; Those who worship and swear oaths by the LORD, But who also swear by Milcom;

Zep 1:6 Those who have turned back from following the LORD, And have not sought the LORD, nor inquired of Him."

Zephaniah describes three kinds of people in these verses:

1. Those who have forsaken Jehovah and who worship only idols.
2. Those who worship both Jehovah and the idols.
3. And those who have forsaken the Lord openly and want nothing to do with Him.

Examine yourself; be sure you are not one of them.

It is especially dangerous for us to fall in category two - worshipping both Jesus and idols.

The coming judgment is described in verses seven through eighteen. Zephaniah calls it "the day of The Lord." It has a two-fold meaning:

1. Locally, God's judgments on Israel and Judah in the past.
2. Prophetically, that future time of judgment when God will pour out His wrath on the whole earth.

In this case, “the day of The Lord” would be the Babylonian invasion in 606BC and the destruction of the city and temple in 586BC.

Verses fourteen through sixteen use eleven different words to describe the coming day of the Lord.

Zep 1:14 The great day of the LORD is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out.

Zep 1:15 That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness,

Zep 1:16 A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And against the high towers.

There should be no doubt about the extent of the coming destruction.

Why do this to the Jews? They would not repent and were in danger of destroying themselves on account of their sin. God, in His providence, could not allow the people from whom the Savior of the whole world was to descend, to cease to exist, or for there to be no believing remnant. He intervened in the way most likely to cause them to repent and seek Him again.

Your trials and afflictions may have something to do with God disciplining you for your own ultimate good. Not all suffering, however, is a discipline. Some is part of the warfare we face in a world hostile to God, in which men by the exercise of their free will do terrible things.

In those cases God uses your suffering to reveal His strength in your weakness; to reveal that His grace is always sufficient. And He redeems your suffering for His glory.

In chapter two the prophet turns to Jerusalem and Judah and pleads with the people to turn to the Lord and repent of their sins.

Zep 2:1 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation,

Zep 2:2 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!

Zep 2:3 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.

In wrath God remembers mercy. The burden is on men to repent. God gives plenty of warning; there is also ample time.

But you must repent; you must turn to, and return to, The Lord.

From verse four into chapter three Zephaniah names the various Gentile nations around Judah and announces that God will judge them for their sins as well.

- He begins with Philistia and predicts that their populous coasts will become pastures for the flocks.
- Then he names Moab and Ammon. They had mistreated God's people and proudly "magnified themselves"; therefore God would humble them. Their lands would be ruined. Their idols would prove powerless.
- Egypt is next on the list, and he promises them war that will slay their youths.

- Assyria and her capital city Nineveh will be so completely destroyed that their land will be a wilderness.

Zephaniah closes out his message with a great farsighted promise.

Zep 3:8 "Therefore wait for Me," says the LORD, "Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All My fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured With the fire of My jealousy.

Zep 3:9 "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.

Zep 3:10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, The daughter of My dispersed ones, Shall bring My offering.

Zep 3:11 In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds In which you transgress against Me; For then I will take away from your midst Those who rejoice in your pride, And you shall no longer be haughty In My holy mountain.

Zep 3:12 I will leave in your midst A meek and humble people, And they shall trust in the name of the LORD.

Zep 3:13 The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness And speak no lies, Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, And no one shall make them afraid."

God will one day regather His people, punish the Gentile nations, and restore Israel and Judah to their land. Verse eight is certainly a prediction of the Battle of Armageddon, when all nations shall gather against Jerusalem in the last days.

But Jesus Christ will return and judge these nations, and then establish His kingdom. He will regather the scattered Jews, cleanse them of their sins, and establish His righteous kingdom, sitting upon David's throne in Jerusalem.

Get Spiritual

What is revival? As indicated earlier, it is something that can affect both nonbelievers as well as believers.

1. Revival is making alive those who are dead. Those who are dead are nonbelievers – described in the Bible as “dead in their trespasses and sins.” They are spiritually dead and need to be made alive by God. We would call this aspect of revival, *evangelism*.
2. Revival is also restoring the life of those who are alive. These are believers whose walk with the Lord lacks vitality. They have the Holy Spirit; *but the Holy Spirit does not have them!* Leonard Ravenhill is quoted as saying, “Evangelism affects the other fellow; revival affects me.”

Josiah experienced revival, and so did a remnant after him, while most of the Jews did not. It looked like a national revival; but it was only in the hearts of a very few who were genuinely transformed.

King at eight years old, he came to know The Lord at age sixteen. He began to wage a war against idolatry in the land.

In the eighteenth year of his reign he proceeded to repair and beautify the temple, which by time and violence had become sorely dilapidated. While this work was being carried on, Hilkiyah, the high priest, discovered a roll, which was probably the original copy of the law, the entire Pentateuch, written by Moses.

When this book was read to him, the king was alarmed by the things it contained, and sent for Huldah, the prophetess, for her counsel. She spoke to him words of encouragement, telling him that he would be gathered to his fathers in peace before the threatened days of judgment came.

Josiah immediately gathered the people together, and engaged them in a renewal of their ancient national covenant with God. The Passover was then celebrated for the first time in a while.

You and I are believers who are, hopefully, fighting idolatry in our lives. We, too, can rediscover God's neglected Word - either by reading it if we haven't been, or by applying it if we have been reading it too casually.

We, too, can gather together with God's people to celebrate our salvation.

In other words, **we can pursue revival**, not just pray for it.

Remember a few years ago the ads for the search engine, yahoo? The slogan was, "Do you yahoo?"

Perhaps our slogan ought to be, "Do you pursue?"