

33. Jesus in Zephaniah and Haggai

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Zephaniah

Some Books of the OT blare Jesus so loud in their Books, it doesn't take theologians to find Jesus in them. At the same time, some Books, like this Book of Zephaniah, you have to look hard to find Him. This Book has a couple of remote connections with Jesus that we can learn.

Before we get into those connections, let's go over the preliminary part that we always check into first.

The Scriptures reveal very little about Zephaniah's personal life like the majority of the minor prophets. But we know that he was a great-great-grandson of king Hezekiah from v1. Zephaniah ministered in Judah during the time of king Josiah (640-609 B.C.), who led the nation in a spiritual reformation triggered by the finding of the Book of the Law in the temple in the year 622 B.C.

The author's name Zephaniah means "Yahweh hides" – which was his message in a nutshell. The day of the Lord was coming and there was no stopping it. But if the people would repent, God would give them a place to hide. He would preserve them through the hour of testing and usher them into His glorious kingdom.

A. JESUS IN THE DAY OF THE LORD

Zephaniah 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. 2 "I will utterly consume everything From the face of the land," Says the Lord; 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. 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

The Book of Zephaniah's major theme is "the Day of the Lord," that period of time when God will judge the nations and usher in His righteous kingdom. This theme is found in almost all the prophets, but it is particularly evident in Joel and Zephaniah.

"The Day of the Lord" is an important biblical concept that we must take seriously. If we know how, where, and when we are going to end our lives, we would do many things differently than what we are planning to do now, wouldn't you agree? As a matter of fact, if all the human beings knew what would happen after they die – not when they are going to die, I don't believe that there would be one person who would not accept Jesus into their hearts before they die.

God warns the world that judgment is coming, and it's foolish for anybody to be unprepared. The big question is "Where would unbelievers hide from the all seeing eyes of God Almighty on the Day of the Lord?"

Zephaniah 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 Zephaniah's day, an attitude of arrogance and invincibility filled the hearts of the Jewish people. God's judgment against Judah was the furthest thing from anyone's mind. A good king Josiah was on the throne; the nation was growing; the Assyrians and the Philistines were no longer a threat to them. Besides, Judah had the temple. God wouldn't destroy His temple, would He? They presumed that God would protect them for the sake of the temple no matter what they did.

Some biblical scholars argue that the Day of the Lord will be a longer period of time than a 24 hour single day. They insist that it will be a period of time when Christ will reign throughout the world before He cleanses heaven and earth in preparation for the eternal state of all mankind. The other group of scholars believe that the day of the Lord will be an instantaneous event when Christ returns to earth to redeem His faithful believers and to send unbelievers to eternal damnation.

Without question, the Day of the Lord is a day of God's vindication. The main emphasis is on the future "day of the Lord" when the nations will be judged after the Great Tribulation period and Christ shall return to set up His glorious kingdom.

God's holiness and justice will be a fierce and terrifying reality on the day of the Lord. Yet those who trust in God's merciful way of salvation by grace through His own Son, Jesus, are given the confidence that their judgment day has already taken place – on the day when Jesus died on the cross. Jesus himself endured "a day of distress and anguish" in our place. In Christ, sinners are forgiven and secure.

2 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.

B. JESUS AS THE RESTORER OF THE REMNANT

Zephaniah 3:14-20 Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more. 16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. 17 The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing." 18 "I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, Who are among you, To whom its reproach is a burden. 19 Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, And gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame In every land where they were put to shame. 20 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.

Although the Book of Zephaniah rumbles with judgment and doom, thankfully, it ends with joy and deliverance. This is the final chapter of the "day of the Lord," the light at the end of God's tunnel of judgment against the unbelieving world.

Through Zephaniah, God gives us a glimpse into the millennial kingdom, the time when the Messiah will rule the earth in perfect peace and righteousness. When, as one great body, the redeemed will lift their voices to God in praise and adoration. Judgment and heartache will be a distant memory. God's love and joy will rule the day.

I don't know how many times I've read Zephaniah, but I have not caught this one word in v17 – "singing". The Lord our God will sing in joy over the restoration of His people. God sings! Why wouldn't He? Finally, the people whom He loves will be in His presence; the evil ones are gone; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. There is nothing but purity and holiness through Jesus Christ. I am sure that we will sing as well – "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing! Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" as it is written in Revelation 5. Yes, we will sing unto the Lord throughout eternity.

Haggai

Now we are in the new era of the history of God's people in the OT. So far, we've studied about the prophecies that had been fulfilled before the captivity by Babylon through prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the other minor prophets. But the Book of Haggai and the next two Books were written by the prophets who lived in the time of the postexilic in Israel.

In 536 B.C., Cyrus, the king of Persia, signed a decree that allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. Ezra led about fifty thousand of them back to Jerusalem. He and Zerubbabel began the process of rebuilding the temple. This can be easily confused with Nehemiah's project which was building the wall around Jerusalem. Haggai was involved in the temple building project around 520 B.C. The temple was completed in 515, B.C.

Haggai is the first postexilic prophet. His name means "festal" or "festival." He was a "Get-It-Done" type of leader, a highly motivated man. Haggai and later Zechariah, were used by the Lord to chastise the comfortable, convincing them that there was no excuse for delaying finishing the temple. Haggai's message is greatly needed in our "Me First" day of self-centeredness, entitlement, and apathy.

This Book's main theme is, "Rebuild the temple!" But threaded throughout the Book is the strong admonition to place God before all else – and keep Him there. In other words, first things first.

A. JESUS' PRIORITY, OUR PRIORITY

Haggai 1:3-11 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" 5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways! 6 "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes." 7 Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways! 8 Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the Lord. 9 "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the Lord of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. 10 Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. 11 For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands."

The message was to Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua (or a.k.a. Jeshua), the high priest. Zerubbabel was king David's descendant, God's chosen royal line through whom the Messiah would come. Joshua was a descendant of the Aaronic line of priests.

Rather than trusting God to overcome their enemies and work on their behalf for His glory, it looks like the newly-freed Jewish remnants had buckled under their enemies' pressure. Their excuse was, "Maybe it is not God's time to rebuild His temple just yet" So for fifteen years they had concentrated on less objectionable projects, such as their own houses – luxurious "paneled" homes.

Obviously the Jewish people in the days of Haggai had their priority mixed up bad. But are God's people today any different from those ancient Jews? No.

When it comes to good sports games on TV or Sunday morning services, guess which one people choose? If you've noticed, more and more sports games are on Sunday morning intentionally rather than afternoon like a couple of decades ago? Wonder who is behind this idea? Satan doesn't want people to go to church to hear the truth, so he provides them entertainment and amusement.

Have you ever thought of what the word 'amusement' means? 'Muse' means "to think," and 'a' is "the negative," so 'amuse' means "not to think" in the literal sense. The devil finds all sorts of things to amuse the people in order to keep them from thinking and facing the realities of eternity.

People are willing to save money for their special vacation trips, but they don't care to think about giving tithes and offerings to the Lord. People would argue, "Come on, we have not had a decent vacation for a long time." God is not against their rest or vacation, but against their mixed-up priorities. Either people flat out ignore the biblical principles and instructions or they make excuses why they cannot do it. If they are honest, it is never "can not", rather "will not".

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

When we put God first and give Him what's rightfully His, we open the door to spiritual enrichment and the kind of stewardship that honors the Lord. A century after Haggai ministered, the prophet Malachi accused the people of robbing God of tithes and offerings and thereby robbing themselves of blessings. His words need to be heeded today.

Because of their selfish priority, the Jewish people were the ones who suffered financially. It still happens the same way. Many Christians who do not put God as their first priority, suffer spiritually, financially, physically, and emotionally. They may not suffer right away, they still have to pay their consequences later.

B. JESUS' PROMISE OF THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

Haggai 2:6-9 "For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the Lord of hosts. 8 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the Lord of hosts. 9 The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the Lord of hosts."

Though the second temple they were building may look inferior to Solomon's temple, it points ahead to the crucial role of God's redemptive plan through Jesus Christ. Herod's temple was far better than Solomon's if you only look at it from the viewpoint of architecture.

But the Herod's temple was only a building until Christ came to Jerusalem to die on the cross. The moment Jesus died on the cross for our sins, the veil in the temple that separated the holy of holies from the holy place was torn in two from top to bottom. It signified God's permission for us to enter into His presence without any delay and without anyone's mediation other than Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus