

# biblestudy: june 2016

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series

## June 5, 2016 Text: Zephaniah 1:4-6, 14-16, 2:3 "The Day of the Lord"

Okay. If Zephaniah is your favorite book in the Bible, raise your hand. Don't look now, but if your hand is up, you may well be the only person in this part of the state who prefers this book to all others. Zephaniah is kind of a little-known doomsday chronicle that more or less ends on a note of future hope. We shall be studying this prophet for three weeks.

"The Day of the Lord" (Zephaniah 1:14) is the prophet's way of giving us the final score. That day is described (in the Common English Bible) as "bitter," "fury," "distress," "anxiety," "desolation," "devastation," "darkness," "gloominess," "alarm" (Zephaniah 1:14-16). If the people of God continue in their sin, that is the way things are going to end.

How are God's people to escape these terrible fates? The prophet names three things to do: (1) seek the Lord, (2) seek righteousness, and (3) seek humility.

The word translated "seek" is *bâqash*. There is an urgency in the word that does not necessarily come through in English. I think of "seek" as sort of looking around for something; let's say I need a pen to jot down a note. It's not desperate, but it would be convenient to find one. On the other hand, *bâqash* is more like "I've got to be at the meeting in ten minutes and I can't find my car keys! Where are they? Hey, everybody! Help me look!"

The prophet is calling on God's people to have that kind of insistence

## June 12, 2016 Text: Zephaniah 3:6-8 "The Consequences of Disobedience"

Most of us enjoy a good sermon blasting the sins of other people. So, I imagine some of Zephaniah's readers were glad when the prophet took a potshot at the followers of Baal (Zephaniah 1:4b, 8), at Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron (Zephaniah 2:4), at Cretans and Philistines (Zephaniah 2:5), at Moab and Ammon (Zephaniah 2:8), at Sodom and Gomorrah (Zephaniah 2:9), at Cush and Assyria (Zephaniah 2:12-13).

Indeed, this is like a roll call of the leading cities and nations of the day. Oh, there is an occasional warning to Judah and Jerusalem (Zephaniah 1:4, 12; 2:1), but all of that seems tempered by this string of blasts against the foreign nations. "You tell 'em, preacher! All those other people are going to get what they deserve!"

Uh, not so fast, Judah. Uh, not so fast, Jerusalem. Speaking for God, Zephaniah gets very specific as to the ways that the people of God have sinned. Look at Zephaniah 2:2-4 and see how thoroughly corruption and evil have impacted every aspect of "respectable" society: princes, judges, prophets, priests. Personally, I do not mind being told I am a sinner as long as I am not held accountable for specific ways I have sinned!

Then comes the prophet's advice: "wait for the Lord" (Zephaniah 3:8). The word *châkâh* is translated as "wait." It literally means to adhere to

## June 19, 2016 Text: Zephaniah 3:9-14, 20 "Assurances and Joy for the Faithful"

It is no secret that these *Vine* Bible commentaries are written well in advance of their appearance. For example, I am typing this study on February 17, 2016. People ask me "What if something catastrophic happens in the future and you have already sent in your manuscript?" Of course, the answer is that what I have written months in advance will have to stand on its own, without any regard to whatever major unexpected event has occurred. (I don't even dare predict that the St. Louis Cardinals will be in first place in the Central Division of the National League, much less take a guess at national and world happenings!)

Zephaniah closes his prophetic word by looking at the future. When he writes, it is a future, of course, that has not yet happened. Nevertheless, words of a different flavor begin to show up, words that are never a part of the earlier portion of the book. There are words like "change" and "pure" (Zephaniah 3:9). There are words like "refuge" (Zephaniah 3:12) and words like "rejoice" (Zephaniah 3:14). There are words like "victory" (Zephaniah 3:17) and "praise" (Zephaniah 3:19-20).

in the search for God's presence, the search for right living, the search for meekness (Zephaniah 2:3). This is no casual matter. This is no "take your time" situation. This seeking is something you must do now if you want any chance of avoiding the wrath of an angry Yahweh. (Zephaniah 2:3).

The three goals of such seeking make an interesting combination: Lord, righteousness, and humility. The struggle may be in trying to be righteous without becoming proud, even, as we joked in college, we have pride in our humility. God is the one who gives the gift of right living and the gift of humbleness. No wonder Zephaniah puts "seek the Lord" first!

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt in *Living Grace* (Abingdon Press) have written: "In biblical terminology, righteousness is apparently not the formal, judicial righteousness, which acquits the innocent and punishes the guilty. Instead, it is the faithfulness of God to God's covenant and to God's people..."

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "O God, Who even now moves toward me with grace, I reach out to grasp the hand You offer to me. I seek Your presence only to learn that You have been looking for me..."

something, so that the fate of the one who does the adhering is the same as what happens with the one to which one is adhered. To wait on the Lord is to cling to the Lord so whatever happens with the Lord happens to me! In other words, to wait on the Lord is to put all my eggs into one basket and then to hand the basket to God.

This week's study verses end on that note. The prophet tells Judah (and us, as we eavesdrop) that the only hope is in the very One who has threatened to destroy Judah and other nations (Zephaniah 3:8). We might wish there were a better offer, but it seems that our only hope is in the very One who knows our sin. Looking ahead, someone has said that Jesus Christ is both our judge and our lawyer. Not such a bad deal—to have your lawyer as the judge!

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Adam's Gift* (Duke University Press), Jimmy Creech quotes Philip Wogaman: "The church is always better at loving than it is at judging. I mean we have to judge. We have to arrive at decisions and we have to sort things out, and we have to criticize, and be prophetic in various ways. But, the prophet's role is always to be grounded in grace."

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "God, the Judge of all humankind, hold me close as I wait..."

What has happened? The prophet has been speaking for an angry Yahweh. And now, Zephaniah sees a future with hope. Compare Zephaniah 3:16 ("on that day") with Zephaniah 1:14-15 ("the day of the Lord"). One vision is bitter, distressing, gloomy, and cloudy (Zephaniah 1:14-15); the new vision is of love, rejoicing, and singing (Zephaniah 3:16-17).

What has happened? It is all something God has done. Zephaniah 3:14-17 speaks over and over again of God's activity (The Lord has removed...The Lord has turned away the enemy...The Lord is bringing victory...The Lord will create calm and love...The Lord will rejoice...). The prophet acknowledges that it is only by the initiative of God that redemption and restoration can occur.

In the final analysis, we cannot know the map-print of the future, but we can know Who will have the final word on that map-print. As others have said, "We may not know what tomorrow holds, but we know Who holds tomorrow."

*continued on page 2*

**What Someone Else Has Said:** In the study *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Westminster), Joachim Jeremias wrote: “(…baptism in the primitive church) meant that the person baptized was snatched out of a world delivered over to the immediately impending judgment of God and incorporated into the company of the redeemed

by Christ’s saving work, an eschatological sealing in the last hour before the catastrophe.”

**Prayer:**  
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “God of tomorrow’s hope…”

June 26 2016 Text: Romans 1:18-23, 28-32 “Ignoring God’s Plain Truth”

These verses do everything but name names. I don’t know anyone (including the one I see when I look in a mirror) who can read Romans 1:21-31 without wondering “how did Paul know so much about me?”

Saying “oops” won’t quite cut it. The apostle says we are “without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Out of curiosity, I checked into the word translated “excuse.” I wish I hadn’t. The word is *anapōlōgētōs*. Look closely. At the end of the word, do you see our English word “apology?” Ah! That apology ought to be enough to cover these sins that I have carelessly committed. But, alas, look again. In front of “apology” is a prefix: “an.” That prefix negates whatever follows. So, the New Testament word means even an apology is not enough. We are simply left with our guilt.

How does God react to our guilt? Most translations refer to the “wrath” of God (Romans 1:18). The Berkeley Version says “indignation of God.” In the New English Bible, there is “retribution of God.” Even though some scholars make a distinction between wrath and anger, some translators call it “God’s anger” (for example, Goodspeed translation). Eugene Peterson paraphrases the text: “God’s angry displeasure.” In another paraphrase (Letters to Street Christians), the wording is “God comes down hard on rejection of Him.”

Any way you slice it, this is not good news. Or is it? Is it not good news to be warned when we need correcting? Is it not good news when we are taught that God wants holy living, even in the little things? Is it not good news when we get reminded of the very basics: our relationship with God is reflected in how we relate to people?

Paul does not give us much hiding place. Not only do we bear guilt for wrongdoing, but we applaud those who also do wrong (Romans 1:32). Dare we take it one step farther? Even if we keep our personal behavior in impeccable shape, how often do we enjoy the benefit that comes from a cultural, societal selfishness, greed, jealousy, or arrogance? (I live in a society that gives me benefit as a white, Protestant, southern, male.) I’m just saying. No, God is just saying.

**What Someone Else Has Said:**  
Clement of Rome, around the year 100, wrote (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, Volume VI*), InterVarsity Press): “Those who do such things are hateful to God---and not only those who do them, but those who take pleasure in those who do them.”

**Prayer:**  
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You know me well, O God. No longer can I hide from You…”



VIP Report

DEATHS

**WILSON III**, Arthur John "Jack" (retired) died January 8.  
Service was held January 30, at Davidson UMC, Davidson.

**HEDRICK**, Claudette Jane Miller , widow of Lonnie, died January 19.  
Service was held January 23 at First UMC, Washington.

**WARREN, Jr. ,** Henry Robert "Bob" , (retired) died January 25.  
Service was held January 28 in Knightdale.

**WOODCOCK**, Eldon (retired) died January 28.  
Service was held February 4 in Montgomery, NY.

**REINOSO**, Luis (Lucho) (retired) died January 31.  
Service was held February 13 at Franklinton UMC, Franklinton.

**DANIELS**, Frank (retired) died February 10.

**MORTON**, Bud (retired) died February 11.  
Service was held February 15 at Pollocksville UMC, Pollocksville.

**METHVIN**, Rayford H. (retired) died February 16.  
Service was held February 20 at Hollands UMC, Raleigh.

**CLINE**, Alice Blanche Stewart, widow of John, died February 18.  
Service was held February 21 in SC.

**PIERRE**, Yvon , Director -Ryan Epps Children's Home, Haiti, died February 19.

**AYCOCK**, Sarah Frances “Fran”, widow of Johnnie, died February 20.  
Service was held February 27.

**HIGGINS**, Lawrence (elder on medical leave) died February 29.  
Service was held March 4 at Rhems UMC, New Bern.

**LANE**, Pat, wife of J. Rodney, (retired) died Feb. 29.  
Service was conducted March 4 in Supply.

**SMITH**, Bill, husband of Bess Hunnings (retired), died March 1.  
Service was held March 4 at Mt. Sylvan UMC, Durham.

**WARREN**, Barbara, wife of the Whit (deceased) died March 4.  
Service was held March 6 at Tiplett UMC, Mooresville.

BIRTHS

David Luke Whitehead (Nashville, Associate) and wife Anna, welcomed Mary Hatton Whitehead into the world Jan. 20.

Kenna Vergara-Navarrete, firstborn to Kenna and Edgar Vergara (City Road) arrived March 3.

Congratulations to Amie (Sunrise, Deacon) and Michael Stewart upon the birth of daughter, Kylie Joanne Stewart, March 4.

