



UNIT 14 | SESSION 3

ZEPHANIAH WARNED GOD'S PEOPLE TO REPENT

ZEPHANIAH

KEY PASSAGE:

Acts 3:19

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

What is repentance? Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to Jesus.

CHRIST CONNECTION:

Zephaniah prophesied about the Day of the Lord—a day when God will judge the world for its sin and Jesus Christ will return. Jesus will make everything like new, and everyone who trusts in Him will be safe.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION



LEADER Bible Study

The Book of Zephaniah serves as a stern rebuke of God’s people and a warning regarding a failure to return to Him faithfully. It also serves as a reminder of God’s expectation of holiness and a description of what that looks like when faithfully lived out among God’s people.

Zephaniah 2:3 offers a call to repentance and a promise of hope for this restoration of the faithful. “Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth, who carry out what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be concealed on the day of the LORD’s anger.” Through Zephaniah, the Lord provided a glimmer of hope amidst His stern rebuke and graphic warning. But He didn’t stop there. Zephaniah ended his prophecy with more than a glimmer of hope, a promise that likely warmed the weary souls of God’s people.

Beginning with Zephaniah 3:9, we find a beautiful picture of God’s fully-restored people. It’s a remarkable image of faithfulness, satisfaction, joy, and mutual benefit that ignites a desire for this reality. It may even ignite in the reader a desire for what could be called “a return to Eden.”

Zephaniah 3 describes an environment of pure speech where all are calling on the name of the Lord. There is also painted a

picture of generosity, humility, meekness, joy, singing, celebration, healing, praise, and fortune. Zephaniah also describes an end to failures, arrogance, rebellion, dispersion, lies, wrongdoing, and fear. Following a terrifying warning for God’s people to repent, this wonderful image of restoration leaves the reader with great hope.

The Bible is full of stern reminders of God’s expectation of holiness among His people, but it is always chased by a beautiful and redemptive reminder of His promise to restore all things and the hope that this promise offers to those who repent of their wicked ways and hope in Christ.

Spend some time today asking God to work out the message of Zephaniah’s prophecy in your own heart, to confront you with His holiness and a rebuke of the sin in your life, and to follow that with a reminder of the hope that belongs to all who trust in Christ for the restoration of their soul—and ultimately, all things in the heavens and the earth.

TERMS TO KNOW

Prophecy: word from God to a group of people. In Old Testament times, God spoke to the people through many prophets



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “ How do you feel when something that was wrong is made right, like when a broken toy gets fixed? How do you show what you are feeling? ”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Happy vs. Sad News” on the activity page.

SAY “ Sometimes we hear sad news, like when a child is sick. Other times we hear happy news, like when you get to go on an exciting vacation. In today’s Bible story, a prophet named Zephaniah gave God’s people both sad news and happy news. ”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: GET RID OF IT

Use a red marker to draw a dot on 5–10 marshmallows. Place the marshmallows with a dot in a box. Then add 15–20 dot-free marshmallows to the box.

Lead kids to search the box for the marshmallows with a red dot. Direct the kids to get rid of those marshmallows and throw them away. Instruct kids to not eat any marshmallows as some contain ink.

(Tip: Challenge the kids to remove the marshmallows with the red dot in one minute.)

SAY “ Some of the marshmallows were ruined by a red marker. These marshmallows needed to be thrown away. In today’s Bible story, the prophet Zephaniah tells the people of Judah that God is going to get rid of all the things that turn the people away from Him. Just as the red dot ruined the marshmallows so does sin ruin our hearts. ”

OPTION 2: CHANGE YOUR WAY



Invite kids to form a large circle. Direct kids to start walking, in a circle, to the right. Explain to the kids that you will play some music and when the music stops, they must change the way they are walking, and now walk to the left. Direct kids to change back to walking to the right when the music begins again.

Continue playing and stopping the music, directing kids to walk either to the left or the right. Consider asking kids to run, hop, or skip instead of walking.

(Tip: Start and stop the music quickly, multiple times to make the activity more challenging.)

SAY “ Throughout the activity, you all had to change the way you were moving several times. In today’s Bible story, the prophet Zephaniah tells the people of Judah to change their ways. God wants the people to turn away from sin and turn to Him. ”

Transition from **WELCOME** to **LEARN**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “ Hello! My name is [your name]. I’m so excited to have you here today! If you brought your Bible with you, raise your hand. [Pass out Bibles to kids who need one.]

The Bible helps us to understand how God wants to bring people back to Himself. The entire Bible points us to Jesus, who provides the way for our sins to be forgiven so that we can be together with God forever. Today, we will read from the Book of Zephaniah. Does anyone know if Zephaniah is in the Old Testament or the New Testament? [Allow responses.] Yes, Zephaniah is a book in the Old Testament. ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

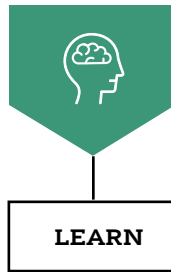
SAY “ As we have been studying some of the Old Testament prophets, we have been learning about the word ‘repentance.’ **What is repentance?** [Allow responses.] **Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to Jesus.**

We’ve learned that God’s people turned away from Him and worshiped the false gods of their neighbors. God warned His people of their sin and asked them to repent. God asks us to repent of our sin, too. Let’s say our big picture question together. **What is repentance? Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to Jesus.** ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “ The people of Judah rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem under King Joash. While the priest Jehoiada was alive, the people worshiped God. However, when Jehoiada died, King Joash and the people of Judah turned away from God and turned to idols. God sent prophets, including Isaiah, to warn the people of His judgment and ask them to repent. God was patient and merciful with the people of Judah. But He also warned them that their sin would bring His judgment. In today’s Bible story, another prophet named Zephaniah was sent from God to tell the people to repent. ”



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Zephaniah. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “Zephaniah Warned God’s People to Repent.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

ZEPHANIAH WARNED GOD’S PEOPLE TO REPENT

“When Josiah was the king of Judah, God gave a message to a prophet named Zephaniah. God said a day is coming called “the Day of the Lord.” On that day, God is going to punish people for their sin. “I will destroy everything on earth,” God said. “I will remove all people from the earth.” Zephaniah shared God’s message about the future with the people of Judah.

A few evil kings had been in power in Judah, and the people had turned away from God. God said, “I will get rid of all the things and places My people used to worship false gods. I will punish the leaders and the greedy salespeople. I will punish the people who think I just sit back and do nothing.”

Zephaniah told the people what an awful day the Day of the Lord will be: a day of wrath, a day of trouble, a day of destruction, a day of darkness, a day of clouds and blackness. The Lord will show His anger because everyone has sinned against Him.

This was terrible news! What were people to do? “Come together before it is too late,” Zephaniah said. “Change your ways. Turn to God and obey Him. Be humble. Maybe you will be safe from God’s anger.”

God would also judge the countries around Judah. Some people would lose their land. Others would be destroyed. Would anyone be safe from God’s anger? No, even the people in Jerusalem would be punished for their disobedience.

God told the people what was coming so that they would learn a lesson. “I want you to fear Me and respect Me,” God said.

Then Zephaniah gave the people hope. When all these terrible punishments happened because of sin, God would keep safe the people who trust in Him. God promised restoration; He will fix everything, making it like new.

The day when God makes things right will be such a happy day for His people. God’s people will be glad. “Sing and be happy! Shout for joy!” Zephaniah said. “The Lord will be with you, and you won’t need to worry about anything bad happening.”

“God will be with you,” Zephaniah said. “He will save you and show you how much He loves you.”

Christ Connection: Zephaniah prophesied about the Day of the Lord—a day when God will judge the world for its sin and Jesus Christ will return. Jesus will make everything like new, and everyone who trusts in Him will be safe. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Use a megaphone: Voice the words God told Zephaniah to declare to the people through a megaphone.

Hold up paper: Write the words, *Day of the Lord*, on a piece of paper. Hold up the paper any time the *Day of the Lord* is said or when God announces judgment for sin. Write the word, *Hope*, on another piece of paper. Hold up the paper when Zephaniah gives the people hope.



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ God is merciful. He warned the people of Judah to repent and return to Him many times. However, God is also just. He must judge sin because sin is an act of rejecting God and His holy character. God sent the prophet Zephaniah to remind the people of Judah of both God’s mercy and His justice. God’s love leads Him to act for the good of people, which means sin must be punished because sin separates us from Him.

Why did Zephaniah ask the people to change their ways? **[Allow responses.]** When we repent, our hearts must want to turn away from sin and turn to Jesus. But, we also show this inward change by the way we behave. Zephaniah asked the people to turn to God and obey Him. Repentance results in a change in how we live.

What hope did the people of Judah have against God’s judgment? **[Allow responses and choose a volunteer to read aloud Zephaniah 3:15.]** God had a plan to rescue them from the punishment of sin. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for the people of Judah’s sin as well as our sin. Jesus took the punishment we deserve. We no longer have to live in fear of God’s judgment because of our sin. Instead, we can rejoice and be thankful for God’s grace. We have hope that because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, all things will be made new. ”

3 CHRIST CONNECTION

SAY “ Zephaniah prophesied about the Day of the Lord—a day when God will judge the world for its sin and Jesus Christ will return. Jesus will make everything like new, and everyone who trusts in Him will be safe. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 14, Session 3” questions from kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. How can you not be scared when thinking about the future?
2. What are some promises God has made in the Bible that give us hope?

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

Display the photo of Adoniram Judson.

SAY “ Adoniram and Ann Judson worked hard in Burma to tell people about Jesus, translate the Scriptures, and start a Christian zayat. A zayat is a small shelter on the side of the road for travelers. In the Burmese culture, zayats also served as a place for Buddhist teachers to talk about Buddhist beliefs. The Judsons thought it would be a good idea to start a zayat to tell people about Jesus.



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

The first Christian gathering in a zayat was held April 4, 1819. About 15 adults and some children came to the gathering. Six years after the Judsons arrived in Rangoon, the Judsons saw the first Burmese person become a Christian. In the next year, they had a church of about 10 Burmese Christians. ”

Discuss how it can sometimes take a long time for people to believe in Jesus. Lead kids to understand that God’s timing is always perfect and that we can choose to be faithful to tell others about Jesus even when people do not believe right away. Close in prayer by praying for perseverance for missionaries around the world who are still waiting for people to believe in Jesus.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Acts 3:19 together.

Lay the key passage poster on the ground. Lead kids to line up across from the poster and say the key passage. Give the first kid in line a beanbag. Guide him to toss the beanbag at the poster. Cover the word that the beanbag hits with a sticky note. Lead kids to repeat the key passage. Continue down the line until all words on the key passage poster are covered.

SAY “ God promised He would restore His relationship with the people of Judah when they repented. Our key passage reminds us that God fulfilled His promise by sending Jesus. ”

Lead kids to sing “Repentance (Acts 3:19).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY “ God, You are just and merciful. Thank You for sending Jesus to take the punishment for our sin. Help us repent and tell others about Jesus so they can repent, too. Amen. ”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**

