

Lesson 10—May 3, 2020

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 47
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Zephaniah 3
PRINT PASSAGE: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Key Verse—Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee; and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. (Zephaniah 3:19, KJV)

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“At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame.” (Zephaniah 3:19, NIV)

The Return of Joy



Teacher's Resource Kit

- Townsend Press Commentary: Teacher's Edition
- Townsend Press Flashlight Commentary
- Bible Studies for Adults
- Bible Studies for Young Adults
- (Optional: Adults/Young Adults Leadership Resource Kit [materials for this lesson])

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, the participants should be able to do these things:

- Discern the need for the just restoration of God's people.
- Aspire to trust God for victory, hope, and renewal.
- Celebrate the return of joy and God's glory in salvation.



*Key Terms

Restore (verse 20)—Hebrew: *shub* (shoob): to reverse; to “turn back” (KJV).

Singing (verse 17)—Hebrew: *rinnah* (rin-naw’): a ringing cry; rejoicing; shouts of joy.

Zion (verse 16)—Hebrew: *Tsiyyon* (tsee-yone’): a mountain in Jerusalem.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Preparing the Lesson

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher's Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week's student assignments (“Your Life” and Your World!”).

- This guide offers two options for leading your class.
- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.
- See page 7 for how to plan each week's lesson.
- See page 6 for a student *Personal Growth Plan*.
- See page 113 for the *Faith in 3-D* as it explains how to live out their faith in the world.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

Oppression of the poor and powerless seems pervasive in our world. Is there any hope for reversal of this condition? The prophet Zephaniah proclaims the day of restoration when God's people shall be returned to righteousness, justice, and peace.

THE LESSON IN FOCUS

God's call and covenant promise to Abraham led to the birth of the nation of Israel through his grandson Jacob. Beginning with their exodus from Egypt, after a period of four hundred years of slavery, they proved to be a rebellious, disobedient people. After a golden period of the reigns of David and Solomon, the nation, now divided into two rival kingdoms, continued their downward spiral of moral and spiritual decay. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, was finally sacked by the Assyrians and its inhabitants scattered in exile. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, managed to forgo immediate judgment due to the reigns of godly kings like Hezekiah and Josiah who tried to turn the people back to God through spiritual revivals. Sadly, the results of these revivals lasted only for their lifetimes and Judah's moral and spiritual decay worsened. Because of God's grace and faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham, He called prophets to warn and exhort Judah to repent or suffer the same consequences as her sister kingdom, Israel. During the reign of the godly Josiah, God called and commissioned Zephaniah, Josiah's distant cousin, to proclaim the reality of the coming judgment. Zephaniah's prophetic message had two distinct but intimately related parts. One was the pronouncement of total and devastating judgment on Judah and the nations around them. The

other, a vision of hope and the return of joy for the surviving remnant of God's chosen people.

THE LESSON IN CONTEXT

Zephaniah is considered to be one of the least known among the prophets of the Old Testament. The first verse of the first chapter of his book provides most of what is known about him personally. His ministry is said to have occurred during the reign of Josiah (640–649 BC) and most likely before Josiah's reforms. We learn from the opening verse of the book that Zephaniah traces his genealogy back to Hezekiah, king of Judah (715–686 BC), and that his message was "the word of the Lord." Zephaniah ministered to a decadent society in Judah characterized by political servility and religious corruption. This sad state was the result of the almost half-century reign of the corrupt Manasseh and the reign of his equally corrupt son, Amon. The ancient faith of the worship of Jehovah had been all but lost and absorbed into the paganism of the Assyrians. It was in this cultural setting that Zephaniah stood up to declare the divine Word of God.

OPENING INQUIRY (Choose from the questions below)

1. Why does Zephaniah encourage Judah to rejoice? (verses 14-15)
2. How does knowing that God is in our midst serve as a source of assurance, as well as motivation to remain faithful to Him? (verse 17)
3. Why is there no need to fight our enemies and oppressors? (verse 18)
4. What future blessings await Israel? (verse 20)

INSIGHTS

God's faithfulness to His word and His grace and mercy are vividly illustrated in His dealings with the nation of Israel. Despite their continuous proclivity for spiritual adultery and disobedience, God never forsook them even when they suffered the consequences of their sins. He used Zephaniah as His messenger to warn them of the coming Babylonian captivity, but also to assure them of restoration and future hope for the surviving remnant. It

must be recognized that God is too just to overlook sin, but it should also be remembered that He is faithful and just to forgive those who repent and turn back to Him. Just as a loving parent disciplines their children but will lovingly embrace them as if they had never failed, God does the same for His children. The failing saint and the repentant sinner can expect restoration, hope for a better future, and the return of true joy.

EXPLORATION

A major theme in this lesson is God's faithfulness to fulfill His covenant with Israel despite their failure to uphold their required responsibilities to it. The lesson can be used to encourage your students to continue to faithfully serve God and trust Him to make things right in His set time. Compare God's promise of a future transformation of His people in this lesson to the transformation believers receive by putting their faith in Jesus Christ. Invite your students to engage in a period of celebration and praise for the promise of a better future and the joy we experience in being His children.

ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

Commentary on Zephaniah 3:14-15

KJV

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

15 The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.

NIV

14 Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem!

15 The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.

These closing verses of Zephaniah's message can be coined a postscript of joy or the rainbow after the storm. Peter C. Craigie, in his book *Twelve Prophets*, posits that these closing verses have the character of a hymn or psalm and if they were declared during one of Jerusalem's festivals, Zephaniah may have taken a festival hymn and adapted it. Whether this is the case or not, praise of God is clearly the purpose of this passage. The prophet is now full of praise because of God's revelation to restore His repentant people. This promised salvation will cause the returning remnant to Jerusalem to sing, shout aloud, be glad, and rejoice (verse 14). The fourfold cause of the rejoicing in verse 14 is the announcement that their punishment has been taken away, their enemies have been turned back, God is in their midst, and their reasons to fear have been removed (verse 15). Comparatively, God's people today can sing, shout aloud, be glad, and rejoice because of the salvation we have received through Jesus Christ. Each believer has experienced the removal of the condemnation of sin (see Romans 8:1). Second, the enemy death's power has been broken (see 1 Corinthians 15:55-57). Third, the presence of the Holy Spirit indwells each believer's life (see John 14:16-17). Finally, believers have no cause to fear because the Greater One resides in them (see 1 John 4:4) and they are guaranteed citizenship in the New Jerusalem (see Ephesians 1:13-14).



DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

How can we ensure that our worship is always motivated by who God is and what He has done for us?

- **Young Adult Question:**

We all have faced struggles and even fallen short in some situations. As believers, how can we reassure others that God is a just God and encourage them to wait on Him for the ultimate breakthrough?

Commentary on Zephaniah 3:16-17

KJV

16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to *Zion*, Let not thine hands be slack.

17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with *singing*.

NIV

16 On that day they will say to Jerusalem, “Do not fear, *Zion*; do not let your hands hang limp.

17 “The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with *singing*.”

Fear is the opposite of joy and can immobilize and prevent productive activity. God through Zephaniah told Jerusalem that in the future there would be no need to allow fear to intimidate them and hinder their service to Him (verse 16). All fear would be banished because “Yahweh” the “Lord your God” would be in their midst. The reference “your God” indicates a restoration of the relationship between God and the people. They are His special possession and He will overcome all enemies and oppressors because He is the “mighty One.” Their restored relationship and the Presence of God will enable them to confidently serve Him. Again, the nation will be the object of God’s love and will experience the return of joy. God Himself will rejoice, singing with joy because His people will realize their promised inheritance and receive His blessing. Imagine the Almighty transcendent God singing with joy over His people. Yet, God takes pleasure in those who obediently and faithfully serve Him (see Psalms 35:27; 149:4; Proverbs 11:1). God delights in and smiles on us daily by providing our needs, often despite our failure or laxity to express gratitude. Our response to Him should be spontaneous praise, thanksgiving, worship, living godly,

and producing works of righteousness that will put a smile on His face.



DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book’s related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

How does your knowing that you have a loving Father who loves you unconditionally and takes delight in you personally affect your perspective on life?

- **Young Adult Questions:**

As a church, we know that it is vital that we trust God and His grace in every situation. Are you trying to lead in your own strength? How can you rest in the strength supplied only by God?

Commentary on Zephaniah 3:18-20

KJV

18 I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.

19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

20 At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I *turn back* your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

NIV

18 “I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you.

19 “At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame.

20 “At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I

restore your fortunes before your very eyes,” says the LORD.

Zephaniah announced that God’s judgment was imminent, and restoration was in the remote future. To provide hope for the believing remnant of his day, God made seven “I will” promises to bolster their faith in Him and to comfort them. The days of captivity that lay ahead for God’s people would produce sorrow because they would be unable to participate in the appointed feasts. God’s first “I will” was a promise to remove this sorrow when they were regathered to Jerusalem (verse 18). These appointed feasts had become a burdensome ritual, but the years of separation from the Temple in Jerusalem would cause them to reflect, repent, and long to participate in them again. As we enjoy the privilege to gather in our designated places to worship, we need to make sure that worship does not become stagnant, routine, burdensome, and self-centered. In verse 19, God reminds the people that He will remove all their foreign oppressors. This “I will” is in accordance to His covenant with Abraham (see Genesis 12:3). Conditions around us may seem hopeless, but we have God’s Word that nothing and no one can separate us from His love (see Romans 8:38-39). Additionally, God promises to rescue those disabled by their enemies, regather and restore them as a nation, and restore their favorable reputation among all the nations. Zephaniah summarized Israel’s future hope in verse 20. All nations will see God’s transformation of His people. It is both the physical freedom from captivity in Babylon and the future spiritual transformation in the Millennial Kingdom. At that time, Israel will be a praise to all the earth. Zephaniah’s closing words—“says the LORD”—secures this promise. God’s people can confidently trust His word to be fulfilled because it is eternal (see Psalm 117:2; 1 Peter 1:25) and He is faithful to it. What He promises He will perform (see 2 Corinthians 1:20; Philippians 1:6) in His own time and way. Daily, as we are being transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ, our lives should be visible testimonies and blessings to others as God’s people.



DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book’s related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

What steps can be taken to ensure that corporate worship does not become lifeless and ritualistic as it had to Zephaniah’s audience?

- **Young Adult Question:**

As Christians, we know that God our Father is always with us. Have you thanked Him recently for His presence?

LIFE APPLICATION

- **Refer to Adult Book**

(See student lesson’s “Your Life” section.)

— You may be tempted to ask why it appears that God is keeping quiet about the evil around us in our neighborhoods and communities. Like a good parent, He desires that we learn patience and trust Him to act in His own set time and way. He knows when the time is ripe for His intervention. Resolve to remain faithful to Him and to remember that He has not forsaken us and has promised a joyous future for His own.

(See student lesson’s “Your World!” section.)

— The daily occurrences and reporting of so much evil in our world can make it so commonplace that it is possible to become desensitized to its effect on the lives of others. Yet, God expects His followers to work diligently and intentionally to alleviate evil, oppression, and injustice while pointing people to Him for spiritual restoration and hope for a better future.

- **Refer to Young Adult Book**

(See student lesson’s “Your Life” section.)

— In our lives, some of us get caught up in situations that are hard to get out of; this may be because we have turned away from God. But there is no better time than now to return to Him. Let’s rejoice!

(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)

— In today's society, we go through many struggles; however, we must remember that God is with us. We must reestablish our relationship with Him, for it is the source for our salvation.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The lesson topic for Sunday, May 10, 2020, is "A New Day Is Coming!" The Devotional Reading is Zechariah 8:18-23, the Background Scripture is Zechariah 8, and the Printed Passage is Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17.



Closing Prayer

Dear God, we praise You for the hope of a future filled with the joy of one day being in Your presence. We rejoice for Your salvation that restored us to a right relationship with You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY , May 4	"God's Worldwide Covenant with Abraham"	(Genesis 12:1-8)
TUESDAY , May 5	"A New Covenant of the Heart"	(Jeremiah 31:31-34)
WEDNESDAY , May 6	"Divided Peoples to Become One"	(Ezekiel 37:15-23)
THURSDAY , May 7	"Just Living in Church and the World"	(Romans 12:9-21)
FRIDAY , May 8	"Cultivate Peaceful and Just Relations"	(1 Thessalonians 5:12-22)
SATURDAY , May 9	"Joyful Feasts Draw Newcomers"	(Zechariah 8:18-23)
SUNDAY , May 10	"Enjoy Fruits of Peace and Justice"	(Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17)

INTERACTIVE LEARNING APPROACH

YOUNG ADULT FOCUS

This lesson plan is designed to provide a more interactive approach to the teaching of today's lesson. The focus is on student-teacher involvement. It can be formulated to use with the *Bible Studies for Young Adults* quarterly.

Materials needed:

- The movie *The Shack*
- Computers/Speakers
- Wi-Fi

Interaction—Introducing the Lesson (10-15 minutes)

- Introduce today's topic: "The Return of Joy."
- Have someone read the "Life Happens" section on page 54 aloud and then, as a class, discuss the corresponding questions.
- Share the Unifying Principle: "Oppression of the poor and powerless seems pervasive in our world. Is there any hope for reversal of this condition? The prophet Zephaniah proclaims the day of restoration when God's people shall be returned to righteousness, justice, and peace."

Exploring the Word (25-30 minutes)

- Show the clip "Healing Trail" from the movie *The Shack*, directed by Stuart Hazeldine. This can be found at www.wingclips.com. Share this: "Mack speaks with a man who encourages him to forgive, so he can overcome his bitterness and experience joy again." Discuss why it is sometimes hard to let go of bitterness and hurt, even missing out on experiencing joy.
- Ask for volunteers to share their all-time top three songs and why they are so meaningful to them.

- Give a brief overview of the book of Zephaniah, summarizing the first two chapters that have led us to today's text.
- Have someone read Zephaniah 3:14-17.
- Discuss what restoration looks like in this text and overall in the lives of God's people.
- Discuss the meaning of "in/on that day" and what it means for Zion to let her hands hang limp.
- Contrast the call for Daughter Zion to sing (verse 14) with the Lord rejoicing over her with singing (verse 17).
- Have someone read Zephaniah 3:18-20.
- List what God promises to do for His people and discuss how this brings encouragement to the oppressed.
- Find and list all the synonyms for "joy" in the Scripture passage. Compare and contrast the terms. Celebrate the return of joy and God's glory in salvation.

Life Application (10 minutes)

- Read aloud the "Your Life" section on page 58.

Life Response (5 minutes)

- Read aloud the "Your World!" section on page 58.
- Invite the students to reaffirm their commitment to God and ask that God will restore to them the joy of their salvation.
- Close in prayer and remind the students to prepare for next week's lesson.