

ZEPHANIAH

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Inside Terry's Office:

The Book of Zephaniah: Just Another Trouble-Making Prophet

As we have been referencing the books of the Bible month by month in this newsletter, we have spent the last eight months on the "Minor Prophets". Zephaniah makes the ninth of twelve minor prophets. He is the last of the "pre-exile" prophets; the next three we will reference in the months to come are the "post-exile" minor prophets (making twelve in all).

Sooooo Why do we need so many prophets telling us basically the same thing: Repent or be destroyed as a nation? Well, it seems, that the Hebrews were very much like us! They seemed to think that if a new king were anointed or there were changes in the nations around them the plans and purposes of God must have changed. Somehow they were able to convince themselves that God didn't really require that they (PERSONALLY) should cast away their idols. They were able to convince themselves that their idols were acceptable even though their nation, as a whole, was to be judged. Apparently, they could point to what the kings did (those crazy politicians) and ignore what the prophets had to say about their personal idols.

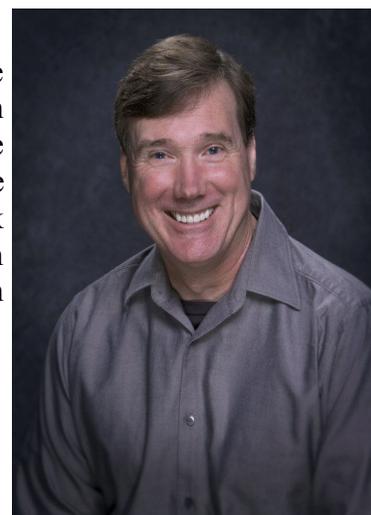
Like us, they could point out the deceptions, manipulations, and injustices practiced by their national leaders and consider that their PERSONAL contribution to the coming judgment of the nation was less than significant. Zephaniah proclaims that not only will God wipe out the corrupt political leaders, the self-serving religious leaders, and the greedy merchants but "*At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent,*" (1:12)

The "complacent"? Really? Is being complacent so bad, especially in light of the degradations of those others?

Yes, complacency is just as bad as Anything. And the alternative is the same for everyone; "*Seek righteousness, seek humility*". YEP, just SEEK righteousness and humility; the two things we can never actually claim for ourselves but that we all can set our hearts upon.

And consider this; The Lord didn't ask anyone to find the right king, correct the spiritual leaders, or put the merchants in their place. Those tasks are HIS. To address those in power the Lord sends His prophets and manipulates world events. All he asks of the common people ("the complacent") is to seek righteousness and humility; the very things we all say we want in others; the very things we can actually do individually and in corporate worship!

In His Grip, TWE



Here's Looking At you Kid!

My thirty-sixth letter begins with My promise to sweep away everything [1:2] and ends with My ironclad promise to bring My people home, to change their hearts so that I can look on them with delight, to pour into them the life of My Son [3:18-20]. (66 Love Letters, Larry Crabb)

Keep quiet now! You are standing before the Eternal Lord because the day of the Eternal One is near; His judgment is coming. He has prepared the sacrifice, and He has chosen His guests with care. (Zephaniah 1:7, The Voice)

Zephaniah's name means, "the Eternal one has hidden" or "protected." There is a message for the people of Judah that Zephaniah delivers and it is that "those who seek God and carry out His teachings may be hidden or protected from the Lord's coming judgment of the nations." (The Voice commentary on Zephaniah)

The Life Journey Bible (Commentary notes by Drs Henry Cloud and John Townsend) draws this conclusion about Zeph 1:7, "There is nothing about our status, financial security or relationships that we deserve or could have received without the planning and consent of 'the Sovereign Lord.' Because of this, we should actively seek humility, consciously choosing to humble ourselves and see ourselves accurately in relation to God."

As I reflect on these thoughts expressed in Zephaniah and on the commentary about Zephaniah, I am reminded of the teaching from

Stickman Theology on Healthy Emotional Investments and the 51% principle. Terry Ewing says, "When 51% of my emotional stock is safely invested in what I believe is God's view of me, I am also free to be sensitive, understanding, and caring toward the input of others. This is because, when I have laid within me a self-evaluation process that rests on the firm foundation of God's love for me and mine for Him, I become less defensive toward the input of others." We are reminded in Zephaniah it is not enough to just "work to impress." When that is our motivation then we need affirmation from others and our outside circumstances to affirm we are good. However, standing in the position of goodness, righteous before the Lord, we are open to hear truth. Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

I was very proud of a client recently who shared her response to a friend who was complaining that she was not responding to texts in a timely fashion and therefore was not being very caring. She was able to be responsive to the friend without being defensive. She knows she is a caring person and she also knows that she is a dedicated worker focused on her job and unable to respond to the text while at work. Humility allowed her, however, the freedom to evaluate the truth as to whether she was being neglectful and minister to the friend feeling neglected. We can minister without taking responsibility for the feeling.

When we are willing and open to receive correction, then the Lord dispenses His grace upon us and saves us from fretting over disagreements or being wrong or looking bad. We are

just like the people of Judah trying to hide our imperfections by giving the appearance of godliness or we might say "having it all together." I was just at a church function where I told a fellow attendee that I had reached my max in being social and I was ready to go home to my rocking chair. She looked at me wide eyed with great relief in knowing that she was not alone in that feeling. There was no shame I had had all I could stand and I couldn't stand no more! I am the most godly in my humility and willingness to embrace my weaknesses. May these words encourage the reader to move forward being fully you in grace and truth.

Carol Anne



Harsh or Loving ?

Zephaniah, I find, is a pretty tough book to write about. With lots of verses about God's judgement, it can seem pretty bleak and harsh. Let's see if we can dig a little and uncover some insight.

The overall theme I see, is God's desperate want for His people to come back to Him. **Chapter 3** begins with a description of where His people are. "...The city that wouldn't take advice, wouldn't accept correction, wouldn't trust God, wouldn't even get close to her own god! Her very own leaders are rapacious lions, her judges are rapacious timber wolves out every morning prowling for a fresh kill. Her prophets are out for what they can get. They're opportunists—you can't trust them. Her priests desecrate the Sanctuary. They use God's law as a weapon to maim and kill souls. Yet God remains righteous in her midst, untouched by the evil. He stays at it, day after day, meting out justice. At evening he's still at it, strong as ever. But evil men and women, without conscience and without shame, persist in evil." **3:1-5 MSG.**

In spite of the state of things, God is still there, hoping....hoping they will come back. Can't you just see the heart of a parent towards a child? Oh how our hearts hurt when our kids make decisions that will hurt them. We so desperately want them to see and choose a different path. We are still there with them but our hearts ache in the midst of it.

Verses 6-7 are, I think, God's actions in hopes of turning His kids back to Him. "So I cut off the godless nations. I knocked down their defense posts, filled her roads with rubble so no one could get through. Her cities were bombed-out ruins, unlivable and unlive in. I thought, 'Surely she'll honor me now, accept my discipline and correction, find a way of escape from the trouble she's in, find relief from the punishment I'm bringing.' But it didn't faze her. Bright and early she was up at it again, doing the same old things." Can you hear His heart saying, "Please! Please come back to Me. I don't want you to suffer and I'm showing you the way out if you only will.

Verse 8 is basically a "well, if that's what you want, so be it" verse. In my thinking, God is passionately committed to our healing. This sounds to me like the voice of sorrow. "I didn't want this for you but you leave me no choice. These are the consequences of your choices."

Verses 9-13 "In the end I will turn things around for the people...You'll no longer have to be ashamed of all those acts of rebellion...I'll leave a core of people among you who are poor in spirit... Content with who they are and where they are, unanxious, they'll live at peace."

I don't know about you, but I liked..."content with who they are and where they are, unanxious, they'll live at peace." Oh I can't wait for that day! As my kids would say, "I want that."

Verses 18-20 "...You've carried those burdens long enough...I'll get rid of all those who've made your life miserable. I'll heal the maimed...On Judgment Day I'll bring you back home—a great family gathering!...all those painful partings turned into reunions!"

Do you feel like there are oh so heavy burdens you've carried too long? Me too. Some of it is legitimate suffering. There are burdens we carry and will until we get to the other side. I'm thinking of **Romans 5:3-4 NIV** "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." And how about those reunions?!

My take away is God's tender heart towards us. He so longs to be in relationship with us and some of the choices we make so grieve His heart. I'd like us to look beyond what seems to be harshness and see how much He loves us. His love is passionate, committed, complete, and unfathomable.

Peace,

Michelle Elliott



ZEPHANIAH

“From a Certain Point of View.”

Since we as counselors encourage those we meet with to learn how to share their narratives (i.e. their stories), I guess I will share a part of mine that many may not know: I am a HUGE *Star Wars* fan! In the “original” trilogy, Luke finds out that Darth Vader is his father after his mentor, Obi-wan, had told him that his father was dead, killed by Darth Vader. Later in the series we see Luke talking to Obi-wan about this revelation and Obi-wan tells him that what he had told Luke was true; “from a certain point of view.” The point I am trying to make with this is that he was right. We all experience life from certain points of view. We call them things like filters, lenses, perspectives, and interpretations, but they are things that we use to shape the story we tell ourselves (our narrative) about the world around us.

You may now be asking the question “What does any of this have to do with the book of Zephaniah?” Good question! Let me share another piece of my story. I grew up in a denomination that preached at length about God’s justice, His wrath, and His judgements. All of those things were and are true about God, but painted a picture of this unapproachable being who was just waiting for you to mess up so He could zap you. This led me to think that I really have to perform well for Him so He will still like me. I think you can see where this led to a lot of struggles for me—even when I began to learn about His love, mercy, and grace. Now I don’t see God as this judge to be feared, but as a Father that loves me enough to correct me when I need it and to show mercy when I need that.

Prior to this deeper understanding of God, I would read the book of Zephaniah with the old filter/point of view and think “I really have to make sure I do all these things right so that I don’t fall into this type of judgement like they did.” I would read it as a warning: “Better shape UP!” Work harder, do more, fail less—perform, perform, perform. When I couldn’t live up to this, it was just more shame and condemnation. But what if I read it from a different point of view? What if God really IS a good and loving father? Can I try to empathize with how God might have felt to see His children turn away from Him or when other people began to lead them in a different direction? How do I feel when my kids can’t see my love when I try to help them? I get hurt, I feel rejected, sometimes I even had to punish them for choosing to disobey. I fear that they experienced my wrath and judgements without experiencing my love. Oh how I wish I had been healthier back then. But even in my dysfunction, my love for them was never in question. But then, as they got older, they began to face choices from outside the home. And again I saw some of these influences as a “threat” to the work that my wife and I had put in to “train” them. My prohibitive conscience would kick in and I would do all in my power to “remove” the threat. My love was still fierce for them and I wanted the best things for them, but my methods were not healthy. I see all these dynamics in Zephaniah. God’s love for His people and wanting the good things for them, but the correction needed for their choices (which He could give and I could not) and His desire to protect them from those that would lead them in a direction away from Him.

Maybe you’ve struggled like me when reading passages of the Bible like this. If so, you are not alone! Changing my point of view has really helped me to change my interpretations. And changing my interpretations, has changed the story that I tell myself! “Lord, help us to be able to look at our filters!”

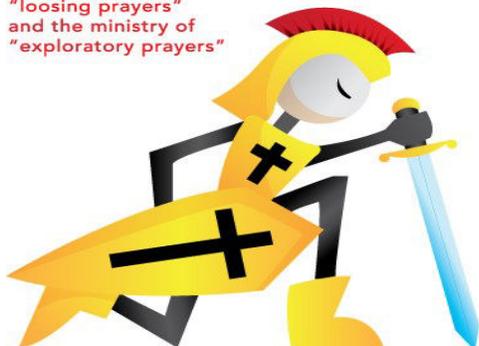
Be who you want to be!
Anthony Elliott

Stickman's Prayers

Plumblin's newest book, *Stickman's Prayers* has been published and is now available at Plumblin!

stickman's prayers

the everyday practice of
"loosing prayers"
and the ministry of
"exploratory prayers"



Michelle Carpenter
Terry Ewing
Erin Garcia
Margo Hanne
Carolyn Knippers
Carol McNamarra
Sue Merrill

Would you be surprised to know that the "Prayer of Jabez" was a joke?

Would you be happy to know what kind of prayers are appropriate for you to pray for yourself and what kinds are meant for you to pray for others and others for you?

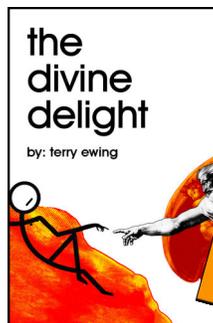
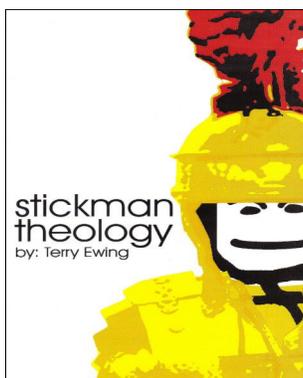
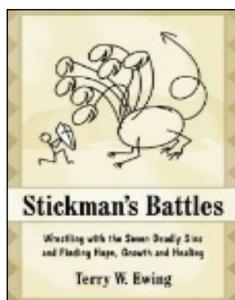
Would you like confidence and freedom to simply enjoy your personal and ministry prayers?

Praying is the most natural thing in the world for Christians; an on going conversation with our best friend, counselor, and confidant; gratitude to our Savior and provider; intercession on behalf of our friends; requests to our Creator. In this regard, a book on prayer may seem presumptuous. When you write a book on Prayer aren't you suggesting that some are praying wrongly, or, at least could be praying better?

That really is not the kind of message we look to promote. So...why the book?

The *Stickman's Prayer's* serves two purposes. First, to challenge some ideas that other teaching and preaching concerning prayer has promoted. And, to offer simple encouragements to personal prayer and prayer ministries.

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