**What is Necessary for Revival?**

**The Book of Zephaniah**

**Week Four**

**Text Introduction:** The Prophets of the Old Testament are divided by scholars into the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. More precisely, we call Isaiah, along with Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel, Major Prophets. The remaining books of the Old Testament are called Minor Prophets. The terms major and minor refer to the size of these books, not the degree of their importance.

We usually assume that the word prophecy has to do with predicting the future or foretelling of coming events. This understanding is only partially true. Strictly speaking, a prophet is one who speaks for God. The prophets were called to speak forth the message of God. However, the prophet’s message usually told of some future doom if the receivers of the prophecy did not change their course of action.

Today, we are studying the Book of Zephaniah.

Zephaniah 1:1 tells us that Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah. That means something. It means that Zephaniah was born into one of the worst times in history, but he also lived to see a revival. In fact, I think we can assume that it is Zephaniah’s preaching in part that God used to bring about this revival.

Josiah was the king of Judah who had one of the most unusual resumes ever for a king. He was 8 years old when he began to reign. His father was Amon. Amon was only 22 years old when he began to reign. He lasted only two years before he was assassinated. Amon’s father was a king named Manasseh. He was only 12 years old when he began to reign, but he reigned for 55 years. Here is the first word we get about Manasseh in 2 Kings. “He did what was evil in the Lord’s sight, imitating the abominations of the nations that the Lord had disposed before the Israelites.” (2 Kings 21) Later in verse 16 of 2 Kings 21 we read, “Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem with it from one end to another. This was in addition to his sin he caused Judah to commit so that they did what was evil in the Lord’s sight.”

This is the world in which Zephaniah was born. Perhaps these times are the very reason that his parents named him Zephaniah. Zephaniah means, “the Lord hides.” Scholars take this two ways. Some say it is that dismal feeling that the Lord has hidden His face from them. Others take it to mean their abiding faith that the Lord would hide them from the coming judgment if they would individually repent.

Fifty-five years of Manasseh’s reign and the two years of Amon’s reign had left Judah far away from God. We cannot assume that things were any better until about the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign. This is the political, moral, and spiritual environment in which Zephaniah begins to speak. And his message is hard. The signature phrase of the book is “the day of the Lord.” The day of the Lord is a day of judgment. Read just a few of these verses to get the idea of the whole book.

Read Zephaniah 1:2-4, 1:12, and 1:18.

For a brief while through Zephaniah’s prophecy and Josiah’s leadership, revival does come. This context of Zephaniah’s prophecy helps us to identify things necessary for revival.

Revival comes at the point of …

* **Desperation—**Zephaniah was born to desperate times. It wasn’t as Charles Dickens wrote: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” It was just the worst of times. And these times made Zephaniah desperate for revival. This begs several questions.
  + How desperate are we for revival to come?
  + What is the evidence in our lives that we are desperate for revival? In our praying? In our personal holiness?
  + How difficult do things have to get before we get desperate?
* **Re-Discovery of God’s Word**—We said that King Josiah became king at eight years old. Probably, others ruled for him during those years. The Bible doesn’t give us much information about those early years. But, at 26 years old, Josiah commands some repairs to the house of God. The King sent some men with money to pay for the repairs. While there, the High Priest tells them that he had discovered the lost Book of the Law—the Torah—the first five books of our Bible. How they ever lost the Book of the Law is a different story! But, we assume it was lost because of the horrible reigns and leadership of Manasseh and Amon. The High Priest sends the Book back with the king’s men to deliver to Josiah. Upon hearing the Book of the Law, things begin to change. Josiah’s heart is changed. He begins to lead to reform. Revival comes.

There are all kinds of patterns for revival, but you will not find a model for revival that does not have surrender to the Word of God as the final rule and authority over our lives.

* **Personal Repentance**—Zephaniah 2:3 is an important verse in this book. This verse brings out the personal responsibility of revival, but it also brings the personal hope of revival. America may not have revival, but I can. America may not have revival, but our church can. It is easy to wail against the sin of others, but what about our own sin?
* **Judgment of God**—Interestingly enough, in this book about the judgment of God, as most of the prophets do, Zephaniah ends with a word of hope. The kind of hope that even has God singing over His people. Here’s what I want you to take away. The announcement of the judgment of God and even the actuality of the judgment of God may be the very thing necessary to bring about revival.

**And so, as Zephaniah had hope, we have hope for …**

* **Revival**
* **Repentance**
* **A Remnant**
* **Restoration**

About hope, someone said ….

* “Today, many people are adrift morally and spiritually, confused and fearful — not knowing who they are or where they are going. We live in a world dangerously torn by hate and violence and conflict, and yet we feel powerless to do anything about it.

Is there any answer? The Bible gives a resounding ‘Yes!' There can be **hope**, and there can be changed hearts and a changed society as we yield ourselves to Christ.”

* “Perhaps the greatest psychological, spiritual, and medical need that all people have is the need for **hope**.”
* “Christ wants to give you **hope** for the future.”
* “For the believer, there is **hope** beyond the grave, because Jesus Christ has opened the door to heaven for us by His death and resurrection.”
* “Faith points us beyond our problems to the **hope** we have in Christ.”
* “My **hope** does not rest in the affairs of this world. It rests in Christ who is coming again.

The author of all of these last words is the Rev. Billy Graham. No wonder his last message to America was *My Hope for America*. It should be our hope for America and the whole world. Christ is the only hope for America. Christ is the only hope for you.