

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOKS OF
**HABAKKUK,
ZEPHANIAH, JOEL
& OBADIAH**

9 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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DAY 1 **READ:** Zephaniah 1:1-2:3

This book begins by telling us a little bit about Zephaniah's heritage. He was an ancestor of King Hezekiah, the last good king in Judah. In the generations before Zephaniah ministered the people had drifted away from God. Child sacrifice, idol worship, fertility cults and many sexual sins had become the norm. The key theme of the "Day of the Lord", which is mentioned 23 times, is central to his message. This does not refer to a literal "day" but rather of a time when God would judge. Our response to this message should be one of repentance. In the first chapter, Zephaniah is concerned with the foreign religions which have saturated Judah. The people had drifted away from the Lord, abandoning Him for other gods (v. 4-6). In the next verses Zephaniah warns the people that the day of their punishment is close at hand (v. 7-9) and then describes how brutal the judgment will be (v. 10-18). The merchants will be wiped out, the complacent will be punished with their wealth plundered and their houses demolished. It will be a day of wrath, distress and anguish which will bring distress on the people because of their sins against the Lord (v. 17). Zephaniah then offers them the possibility of deflecting the coming judgment through seeking God and doing what He commands. If the people seek righteousness then perhaps they will be sheltered on the day of punishment (2:3). This is the same message that most prophets preach, calling the people to humble themselves through repentance so that God will forgive them and show mercy towards them.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. We often look back at Biblical times and think that we are much better than they are, but are we? Our society is filled with so many sins – abortion, human trafficking, prostitution, rape, drug use, greed, lust, abuse, apathy, murder, theft, gluttony, paedophilia, blasphemy, fornication, and the list goes on. The message of the coming judgment of the Lord is for us too! Take a moment to repent on behalf of our region, our province and our nation. We have rebelled against the Lord, we have turned from His ways and we have acted wickedly.
2. Ask the Lord to show you 2-3 areas of personal sin in your life. Spend some time in personal confession for those sins.
3. Thank the Lord for His forgiveness and pray that many more believers and unbelievers would turn to Him with repentant hearts and walk in His ways.

DAY 2 **READ:** Zephaniah 2:4-3:20

In the second chapter Zephaniah addresses the nations that are threatening Judah on all sides. He prophesies against Philistia to the west side of Judah (2:4-7), Moab and Ammon to the east (2:8-11), Egypt and Ethiopia to the south (2:12) and Assyria to the north (2:13-15). Each nation is told that they will be punished by the Lord who is Judge of the whole world. The third chapter reveals the future of Jerusalem. The people are not responding to the message of coming judgment with repentance, instead the leaders, rulers, prophets and priests have forsaken their role of preserving society and are instead destroying society with their rebellion. If these people don't change soon there will be a national disaster! Verses 8-20 of chapter three conclude with a message of hope, love and mercy. God will purify the nations and restore the scattered remnant (3:9-10) bringing justice and peace in the land (3:11-13). There will be great rejoicing because at that time no one will be

proud, do wrong or tell lies (3:12-13). Zephaniah even says that God will take great delight in His people and rejoice over them (3:17). God is full of justice but also grace, gladness and tenderness. He will remove their idolatry, pride, deceit, fear and enemies restoring to them safety, prosperity, purity, worship, trust, and joy.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Re-read Zephaniah 2:4-15. How many times do you see references to pride, mocking, taunting, arrogance, etc.? What Does God want to say to you about pride in your life? What impact does this pride have in your personal relationships?
2. Ask the Lord to show you ways that you can embrace humility and be dependent on God this next week.
3. Re-read Zephaniah 3:14-17. What do these verses tell us about God and the relationship that He has with His people? What does God want to say to you today through these verses?

DAY 3

 **READ:** Habakkuk 1:1-11

Habakkuk is a unique book in that it is a dialogue between the prophet and God. This prophet insisted on getting answers from God! In fact Habakkuk actually argued with God over His ways in the first two chapters. Their dialogue shows how the godly can struggle to comprehend the ways of God. The first chapter focuses on the question – why does evil go unpunished? Habakkuk noticed that the innocent suffered and the guilty seemed to go free. What is God doing in the world? Habakkuk was one of the good guys who feared God and obeyed Him but it was getting him nowhere. God answered Habakkuk and told him that He was raising up a foreign nation, Babylon, to bring judgment. This nation was so evil and powerful that nothing would be able to stop them. We'll see tomorrow how this answer did not satisfy the prophet. God doesn't always answer our prayers the way we would expect. Often we pray with an idea of how we would like Him to answer and when He responds differently we can become frustrated. This book encourages us to trust in God's ways even when we don't understand them.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What were some of the injustices that enraged Habakkuk? Do you ever feel that God doesn't care about the injustices in your life or in the lives of your friends and family members?
2. God answered Habakkuk's prayer for justice but not in the way the prophet would have expected. Have you ever questioned what God is doing in your life? Do God's ways sometimes not make sense to you?
3. Thank God for being in control of your circumstances even when you don't understand. Pray for a heart that is unoffended by God and His ways, even when you can't understand them.

DAY 4

 **READ:** Habakkuk 1:12-2:20

Habakkuk was confused that God seemed to be doing nothing about the wickedness in the nation. But when God told Habakkuk that He would do something about it through the wicked Babylonians Habakkuk became even more confused. God would use an ungodly nation to execute judgment on His own people. Habakkuk had been praying to God, pleading for society to get better but God's answer shows that things are only going to get worse. God tells His people to wait patiently and live by faith – trusting in His Sovereignty (2:4). The evil ruler to come will be puffed up (2:4), arrogant and greedy (2:5) but God will have the last word! Five woes are pronounced against Babylon (2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19). But we shouldn't think that they apply to them alone, these same woes could easily be applied to modern day societies.

Woe 1 (2:6-8) – theft and extortion/lust for control

Woe 2 (2:9-11) – greed and unjust gain

Woe 3 (2:12-14) – violence

Woe 4 (2:15-18) – drunkenness, lust and corrupting others

Woe 5 (2:19-20) - idolatry

The woes in this chapter speak of difficult times for Habakkuk's generation and even more so for our generation as we lead up to the return of Christ. Habakkuk had initially complained of how God seemed to ignore injustice but now he is finding out that God is going to do something about it after all!

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. In 2:3 God says, "*The revelation awaits for an appointed time*". God is telling Habakkuk that he needs to take a long-term view and warn the people of what will come. Is there something in your life where you need to take a long-term view? Ask God about this, what does He want to say to you about this situation?
2. Re-read each of the five woes in chapter two. Ask the Lord to show you how you can pray for our society in each of these areas. This may include repentance and intercessory prayer.
3. Read the promises in Habakkuk 2:14, 20. God is not blind to injustice or human suffering nor is He powerless to do something about it. Spend some time thanking and worshipping Him for this.

DAY 5

 **READ:** Habakkuk 3

Habakkuk made two complaints to God in chapters one and two and now in chapter three it seems that he finally understands that God has a much bigger picture in mind than he did. In verse 2 Habakkuk prays for renewal. Knowing that they don't deserve revival he prays for mercy. The basic idea is, "Lord, I know that we deserve your wrath but in the midst of your judgment remember mercy and send revival." In verses 3-15 Habakkuk speaks of the power of God on behalf of His people. As Habakkuk prays for revival he begins to praise the God who brings revival speaking of His glory and splendor (v. 3-4) and deliverance (v. 13). The chapter concludes with a statement of the prophet's faith.

DAY 7**READ:** Joel 2

This chapter begins with Joel describing a army coming on the Day of the Lord. An alarm should sound throughout Zion for the Day of the Lord is close (v. 1). This is a day of darkness and gloom as a fierce enemy marches onward. The fire and flames make the wilderness desolate; destruction will be complete (v. 3). What Joel describes is like nothing the earth has seen before (v. 2b) as a terrible and powerful army causes terror for the nations (v. 6). This army is disciplined and skilled and no one can withstand them (v. 11b) “?” Joel then calls the people to repent with fasting, weeping and with mourning (v. 12). Yet he adds a profound element to the meaning of repentance urging them to rend their hearts and not their garments. This shows that we can do things on the outside without actually doing them from the heart. Joel is urging the people to engage in heartfelt genuine repentance showing inner remorse with fasting and prayer for the Lords deliverance. The idea of corporate prayer and fasting is again urged in verses 15-16, this time Joel includes children and even babies! All are being urged to be involved in corporate repentance. In response to their repentance the Lord answers and has pity on His people (v. 18). As a result of the people’s repentance God answered with forgiveness and blessing. The land would be restored with grain, wine and oil (v. 19) which are basic agricultural crops and the army from the north would be driven into the sea (v. 20). The land does not need to fear any longer as the drought will end with abundant rain. The years that were lost to the disaster will be restored (v. 25). The purpose of this national crisis is to teach the people that Yahweh is God (v. 27). Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21 showing us that it refers to the messianic age that we are presently living in. This is one of the greatest promises given in the book of Joel. God will pour out His Spirit on all kinds of people regardless of sex, class or age allowing us to experience intimate communication with the Lord. The passage concludes with telling of signs in the heavens such as the sun being darkened and the moon turning to blood before the day of the Lord comes. Similar signs are given in Matt. 24:29 in regards to Jesus second coming. When Jesus was born, wise men followed the stars. When He died the sun darkened for three hours and when He returns there will be significant events in the heavens. The final verse in this chapter speaks of salvation coming to all who call on the name of the Lord. Joel’s message of restoration isn’t just about agriculture it is about humans turning to Christ for salvation.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Read Joel 2:12-13. What does the Lord want to say to you about repentance being a heart matter? Is there anything that you need to confess to the Lord today?
2. Read Joel 2:12-13 again. What do these verses tell us about God and His character? Thank Him for what He shows you.
3. Read Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:17-21. We are in relationship with a God who speaks and who communicates with us intimately. What does God want to say to you about this? How can you continue to develop your two-way communication with God?

Habakkuk shows the proper response, recognizing his own weakness and low standing before God. The Babylonians are coming with God directing their invasion. He speaks of a vision of the desolate countryside yet in the midst of this devastation Habakkuk can still rejoice (v. 18). The prophet finally understands that the power and majesty of God does not diminish during tough circumstances. He is no longer questioning God’s ways. There is no joy in the fig tree or the vines or in the fields or in the flock yet Habakkuk can still find joy in His unchanging God, who is greater than the calamity to come. Habakkuk rightly claims that he would not put his trust in fig trees or vines or fields or flocks but only in the Lord. He demonstrates this trust by praising God.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. How does Habakkuk’s prayer inspire you to endure tough circumstances?
2. Even though ruin and disaster is coming to Judah, Habakkuk realizes that God’s judgments are merciful, which brings strength and joy. Ask the Lord to reveal to you 2-3 things about His character that you can hold on to in the tough times. Thank Him for each one of them.
3. Re-read Habakkuk 3:16-19. What lessons does God want to speak into your heart today through these verses?

DAY 6**READ:** Joel 1

The first chapter of Joel is introduced with a natural disaster. A plague of locusts had hit the region as part of judgment from the Lord. These large grasshoppers devastated Judah. Verse four emphasizes the totality of the destruction mentioning the cutting locust, the swarming locust, the hopping locust and the destroying locust. Joel summons the people to hear, to awaken, to weep and to wail. The people are called to grieve and lament as a bride would mourn over her bridegroom if he was snatched away from her (v. 8). This disaster is so severe that there is no grain left for sacrificial offerings (v. 9). The situation was hopeless. A calamity of this magnitude calls for repentance. The priests led the way in verses 13-14 to a national fast. This fasting is corporate in nature as the people and elders are assembled in the temple together to cry out to the Lord. Joel refers to the Day of the Lord in verse 15 which is a major theme in this book. It refers to a day of destruction for the nation. If the locusts were not bad enough vs. 17-20 speak of a drought that destroys the seeds, storehouses and granaries. There is no water for the beasts of the field to drink (v. 18) and fire has consumed the pastures (v. 19). Nothing will escape this judgment, things are looking pretty bad!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. What does this passage teach us about God’s sovereignty over nature and natural disasters?
2. Read verses 13-15. This passage tells us much about corporate repentance when national sins have been committed which is something done regularly at Southland during Prayer Summits. What does God want to say to you today about the importance of getting involved in corporate prayer? Where can you get involved?
3. Is there an area in your spiritual life where you feel like you aren’t making as much progress as you would like? Ask the Lord to show you how you can fast about this area.

DAY 8 **READ:** Joel 3

In reading this chapter one can see that there are many elements that have not yet happened. This tells us that this prophecy has yet to be fulfilled. Most theologians believe that this will be played out in the end times. This prophecy will be fulfilled in the valley of Jehoshaphat (the valley of decision) where the nations receive the judgment due them because of their evil treatment of Israel. Verses 4-8 describe the reasons for their judgment. The next section (v. 9-13) speaks of a battle that will bring about the destruction of God's enemies. The warfare will be so fierce that farming tools will be made into weapons of warfare. Even the weak will become soldiers (v.10) as the Lord Judges the nations (v. 12). The final section of this passage focuses on the vindication of Israel with the final verse telling of a restored Israel which is inhabited forever (v. 20). God's people will live in unending security with Him that will be like a return to Eden for those who repent and choose to follow His ways. God is gracious and is willing to forgive those who repent. Ultimately the Lord will prevail and destroy that which is evil, upholding righteousness forever.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. The prophecy in Joel 3 tells us much about God's character and His activity in the world. Re-read Joel 3. What does God want to say to you about Himself today?
2. As tough as times get for believers in our world there is the promise that God will judge evil and restore the righteous to Him. How does today's passage speak of this? What does this mean for you?
3. Pray for the restoration of Israel and for many Jews to come to know Jesus as their Lord.

DAY 9 **READ:** Obadiah

This short book tells us that the nations whom oppose Israel and God's people will experience judgment. The first half of the book addresses Edom, pronouncing coming judgment. The Edomites descended from Esau who was Jacob's twin brother. Esau had the birthright, but in a moment of hunger, he sold it to the opportunistic Jacob (Gen. 25:27-34). Later Jacob tricked Esau out of their father's blessing (Gen. 27) and fled when he found out that Esau was planning revenge. Years later they met and reconciled but the wound was never completely healed leading to rivalry between these two nations. The prophet Obadiah told that nations were rising up against Edom, as directed by the Lord. Edom was a small insignificant nation but had been prideful, gloating over Judah. Unlike burglars, who take just what they want, this country will be pillaged with nothing remaining; they will even lose their land. Edom is being judged for the way they treated Israel (v. 10). They did not come to the aid of their brother nation when Israel was being invaded. Verses 12-14 list a series of "do not" statements which spell out Edom's behaviour. Obadiah's call was for Edom to stop treating Israel this way before it would be too late. God gave a rationale for His punishment of Edom in verse 15, "Verse 18 clearly shows how Edom's defeat was certain and that there would be no survivors. The final verses of the book speak of the return of the exiles from far away as they repossess the Promised Land.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. The Edomites had taken advantage of the invasion of Jerusalem for their own profit. Ask the Lord to show you how we should respond to other people's misfortunes.
2. Have you ever been tempted to gloat over someone's downfall? Confess this as sin and ask the Lord how you can make restitution. Is there a struggling person in your life whom you can show sympathy and mercy towards?
3. The Edomites have disappeared from the world today showing Obadiah's prophecy as fulfilled. God took His time to fulfill this prophecy because He is slow to anger but when He says He will do something then He does it. Edom is gone today and Israel is back in her land. What does this tell you about God?

The Books of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel & Obadiah

God used prophets to warn the people of His coming judgment and that restoration and blessing would come through repentance. Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Joel and Obadiah all preached to the nation of Judah (Southern Kingdom) before the Babylonian captivity. We can learn much about the character of God and what living for Him looks like through the writings of these prophets.

Zephaniah 2:3 (NIV)

“Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what He commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD’s anger.”