

# The Minor Profits

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, let us open our Bibles, please, to the prophecy of Zephaniah. He is next up in our ongoing list of the prophets we are trying to deal with in a chronological order.

And Zephaniah is probably one of the more underrated prophets, and he is often confused with Zechariah. So, the spelling is just a little bit different, but they are entirely different.

And one of the big things that separates them is that Zephaniah is one of the minor prophets that God raised up to deliver a message to Judah prior to the Babylonian captivity.

And he is the last one in that order. The others that we have yet to consider are referred to as post-exilic prophets.

That is, they will be prophesying after the Babylonian captivity, after 70 years in Babylon, and people are returning to the land of Israel, at least those who came back. So, we've got two different classes of prophets.

[ 1 : 10 ] We've got pre-exilic, that is, those who prophesied before the exile. And then we've got post-exilic, those who prophesied after the exile.

And understandably, they have a radically different message, because the one before, which we are looking at now, one of which we are looking at now, is prophesying judgment and the wrath of God to come.

But in the post-exilic prophets, the message is, the wrath has come, the Babylonian captivity has taken place, Israel has undergone national punishment for their 70-year period of captivity, and God is returning them to the land under Nehemiah and Zerubbabel, and they are beginning to rebuild the land.

So, that will be the last three prophets, the post-exilic that we will be considering, and we will be wrapping up our study of the prophets. Suffice it to say, however, that when we get to Zechariah, Zechariah is consumed with prophecy that is not yet fulfilled.

So, we will, of necessity, be spending quite a bit of time in Zechariah, particularly considering he's got 14 chapters, and it is very detailed regarding that which is to come.

[ 2 : 34 ] So, that's something that we'll be looking at ahead. We won't be into that until next year. But for now, realize, if you will, that this is the last day of October, and hard as it is to believe, tomorrow is the beginning of Turkey Month.

It's Thanksgiving Month, and I can't believe it is upon us, but the older I get, the faster these times go. I don't know if it works that way with you, but it certainly does with me. So, we are opening the prophecy of the book of Zephaniah, and I want you to note, at the beginning, the target of his audience.

The word of the Lord, which came to Zephaniah, son of Cushai, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah, son of Ammon, king of Judah.

Now, you may wonder, well, what in the world is, what are all these names? The reason all of these names are given is because that is the way we can accurately plot the time and day in which Zephaniah prophesied.

All you have to do is historically look at these individuals when they were on the throne and who they followed, etc. And when you do that, it is possible to pinpoint the time and the prophecies of Zephaniah.

[ 3 : 54 ] So, that kind of nails it down, and it removes any guesswork of when he actually had his ministry. And then he says, beginning in verse 2, he doesn't waste any time.

He's getting to warm to his subject right off in verse 2. I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth, declares the Lord.

Well, now, is that to be taken literally? Well, of course not. It is important that we allow, particularly in the Old Testament, but you find it in the New also, to allow the writer to engage in the literary devices that are common to all of us.

And one of these is called hyperbole. Hyperbole simply means, and the word hyper and belay simply means to cast over or throw over.

And the idea of hyperbole is that it is an exaggeration. It is not a lie or a misstatement, but it is for the effect of emphasis that the writer is deliberately exaggerating the point that he is making.

[ 5 : 12 ] He does this for the sake of emphasis. He wants you to get a picture of how dramatic this is. And when he says, I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth.

Well, now, that's quite a stretch. He never did that. And that's not what he meant, literally. But in using this kind of poetry and this kind of drama, he is demonstrating or illustrating the fact that the cataclysm of which he is speaking is really going to be something.

It is not a small work that the Lord is engaging in. This is serious stuff. And he begins with that hyperbole right at the beginning. I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth, declares the Lord.

I will remove man and beast. I will remove the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea and the ruins along with the wicked. And I will cut off man from the face of the earth, declares the Lord.

Now, what does that sound like? Sounds like the end of everything. But that's exactly the point that he's trying to make. He is saying that the coming judgment is going to be so severe that you need to pick up on this.

[ 6 : 29 ] So. Worse than Noah's. I'm sorry? Worse than Noah's flood. Well, it's going to. It's. And, you know, all of this stuff, fellas, that we're talking about, all of this judgment and conflagration that is coming.

And without exception, it is all because of one thing. And that is human sin and unbelief. It is the story that begins.

It is as old as beginning. It goes all the way back to Genesis. And it will not conclude until you get to Revelation. The whole thing is a contest. A contest between good and evil.

And as you go through the Bible, it is simply illustrated in different segments, in different millennia, in different centuries. But the problem is always the same.

And it has to do with God having given humans and angels a volition. And that volition provides them with an opportunity to rebel against the maker.

[ 7 : 36 ] And they utilized it. Angels did. And men did. And we've looked at Revelation 4 and 5 before. And we won't go back there now. But we see that God created all things simply because he was pleased to do so.

Knowing full well. Knowing full well there was going to be the fall of Lucifer who would become Satan. The fall of Adam and Eve who would become our first parents.

And as a result, the wreck and ruin that would be brought upon all of humanity. Knowing that full well in advance, it was still God's pleasure to create as he did.

And this, of course, is one of the great criticisms that is leveled against the Almighty. Is that didn't God know in advance the wreck and ruin, the heartache, the misery, the death, the disease, all the rest that would come from his?

Yes, he did. Then why was he pleased to create like that? We're not told. We're only told that he was pleased to do so. It served purposes in his mind and heart that are not completely revealed to us.

[ 8 : 44 ] But in connection with that, as you look at chapter 5 of Revelation, we see that God has provided the remedy for all of the misery and ruin and devastation, and it is called redemption.

And in both cases, God is praised in the first, in chapter 4 of Revelation, it is because he created all things. And in chapter 5, praise and honor is given to him by the 4 and 20 elders, because thou hast redeemed us from every tongue and people and climate nation and so on.

So along with the creation and the fall, which was known well in advance by God, he built into the system the provision and the promise of redemption.

And that surfaced just as soon as the fall took place. The fall took place in the early chapter, early verses of Genesis 3, and the promise of a Redeemer was given in that same chapter in verse 15 about the seed of the woman.

So God, in creating volitional creatures, angelic and human, set the stage for the cosmic conflict that is going on even as we speak.

[ 9 : 59 ] It started in Genesis 3. It will not conclude until Revelation chapter 20. And everything that is in between is a history of this cosmic conflict.

It will be resolved, and we'll see that when we get to Zechariah, but that will be later. So, I will stretch out verse 4. I will stretch out my hand against Judah.

This refers to the two tribes in the south, Benjamin and Judah. This is where the temple is located. Benjamin is the territory in which Jerusalem is located, and of course the temple is there, and that makes it very strategic.

And this prophecy is leveled against these two tribes in the south. I will stretch out my hand against Judah.

This is God speaking through the prophet Zephaniah. Yes. Marl, are the ten tribes gone? I'm sorry? Have the ten tribes been taken away by Judah? Yes. The ten tribes fell in 722 B.C.

[ 11 : 14 ] They were carried into Assyrian captivity. And the southern two tribes did not benefit or learn from the invasion and the judgment of the northern ten tribes.

Now they're going to have to learn on their own. And this, by the way, is a remarkable thing. You would think that the people of Judah and the leadership there could easily see and understand what happened to their sister ten tribes from whom they were divided back in 931 B.C.

and say, look at what God allowed to happen to them. We better clean up our act or we're going to be next. But apparently that was never their sentiment.

Too bad it wasn't because that's exactly what's going to happen. I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the capital, and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place.

Well, what's he doing there? That's part of the problem. The Baals, the false gods. The Baals were the gods of fertility. And they believed, well, I won't go into that.

[ 12 : 25 ] But anyway, it's just one of the many false idols that the Jews had. I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place and the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests.

You've got both categories of priests here. Idolatrous priests. Think of that. Of all the people in the world that were given the real scoop of what the priesthood was supposed to be, as God originally established it under Aaron and so on, it has become fully and thoroughly corrupt in so many ways. Verse 5, Astrology is an ancient vice.

There's nothing new about it. Matter of fact, it's kind of curious that we still see this in the newspapers almost every day. The astrological column that supposedly tells you what month you're born in and whether you're going to have a good day today or what you should be aware of or what you should avoid and all the rest of that nonsense.

This is as old as the hills and it goes all the way back to this time, even predating this. So it has to do with worshipping the stars of heaven. And by the way, is not this a perfect example of the point that has been made time and again and will be made time again in the future is that fallen man thinks and reasons with a skewed logic, with a faulty reasoning power.

[ 14 : 04 ] And this is a perfect illustration to think that your life and the events that enter into your life are determined by the placement of the zodiac and what star is where, when.

Is this not... Actually, it almost defies description. I can understand people dabbling in something like that just out of some kind of a fun thing, but to actually take it seriously, like some do, is one of the most dramatic examples that I can think of of man's thinking power being skewed with a faulty logic.

Wow. Those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven. And those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom.

What does this mean? This means that these people are a category, at least a category of them, involves the worship of the true God, but they also place alongside Him the worship of Milcom, one of the false deities.

Why in the world would anybody succumb to something like that? And the answer is this. Well, you've got to cover both sides of the street. I mean, just to be sure. You want to make sure that you worship all of the deities that you are supposed to.

[ 15 : 37 ] So in this case, the true God is just one alongside a false deity. We see this evidence today in so many different religions and cults throughout the world where people have this fleeky

idea and it goes all the way back.

In fact, it even predates this. And yet, verse 6, and those who have turned back from following the Lord and those who have not sought the Lord or inquired of Him.

One of the things I'm working on currently in the Christianity Clarified series, I think it's volume 51 or 52, something like that. The Bible has a great deal to say, Old and New Testaments, about seeking the Lord.

seeking the Lord. How do you go about that? How do you do that? And I've discovered two things in particular regarding that.

Seeking the Lord is an opportunity that is presented to us and it is also a responsibility that is required of us so that those who do not seek the Lord are responsible for not having done so.

[17:03] But in order to seek someone or seek anything, there has to be some impetus. Why would you do that? And Romans chapter 1 makes it very clear.

through the things that are made so that man is without excuse. And the reason, the rationale for seeking the Lord is something that God has put on display through the heavens and all of nature and it is designed to evoke within the human being and the human heart one basic question and that is, where did all this stuff come from?

Who made this? How did it get here? Why is it here? Why am I here? And to seek the Lord is predicated upon the acknowledgement of those things because they are virtually undeniable.

They are there. You cannot deny them. And they are designed to evoke a question. Who made this? And is there any way I can know this one who made this?

That is seeking the Lord. And he says, if you seek me, you will find me. Yeah, Larry. Is there a verse that says, seek the Lord while he can be found or while he is...

[18:21] Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Yeah. Absolutely. And how would you interpret that? It is found many, many places in Scripture while you seek the Lord. Old Testament and New Testament.

And it is leveled as a criticism against those who sought not the Lord. And in part, that may mean not only for his creatorhood and his lordship, but it also means direction and wisdom when you seek the Lord.

And here's another expression that is used time and time again. And I've often wondered about this and I want you to get some thought to it too. Seek his face.

Expression that is frequently used. They did not seek the face of the Lord. Well, I don't have any trouble seeking your face. It's pretty obvious. You're right here. You can seek my face.

But what does it mean to seek the face of the Lord? And it has to do with a closeness and intimacy because when you see the face of someone else, you've got to be relatively close to them.

[19:31] And that's the whole point, of course, with the Lord. So, we are to seek the Lord and to seek his face because he has made himself available. He is the God who is self-revealing.

In other words, creation itself has not left man to try and figure out God. Creation itself, the things that are made, is designed to put man on the track, to give him impetus, to cause him to ask questions.

Where does all of this come from? And, fellas, let me make this very important point and I am convinced of it as much as I can be convinced of anything, and that is this. Anyone, anywhere, at any time, if they really want to know the truth of God, God will get it to them no matter what it takes to do it.

He will not leave a sincere seeker unsatisfied. The problem is being a sincere seeker.

and a sincere seeker, a sincere seeker has to be one who is pre-committed to finding and knowing this one with an intent of submitting oneself to him.

[20:58] That's a sincere seeker. And, that's the problem. That's the problem. And it goes back to this human volition thing. Someone has said, and one of my favorite sayings, because it is so true, the average person cannot find God for the same reason that a thief can't find a policeman.

He just doesn't want to. Because inherent, in finding this deity, in finding this Lord, in finding this God, means, you are no longer in charge. You are not in first place.

You have to be subservient to that. And there is something within us that rebels against that because, I want to run me. I want to be my own boss.

I don't want anybody telling me what to do. And this starts out when we're about two years old. And we have ways of magnifying that, do we not? Joe. Now, I know this sounds strange with what you

just said, but I was always, I got the feeling that reading the Bible that God was seeking us. He wanted a relationship with us. A close relationship. It was God that made the first attempt to know us and to get us close to Him.

[ 22 : 10 ] Absolutely. And He has done that principle, He's done that two ways. One is called general revelation. That's creation. Romans 1 talks about the things that are made are clearly seen so that man is without excuse.

General revelation is the first way that God has made Himself known insofar as His power and His Godhead is concerned. And then, that is followed with what we call special revelation and that's the Scriptures.

That's the Word of God. So, we've got those two prongs of revelation. He is the self-revealing God. In other words, God has not left Himself to humanity with the idea of Him saying, okay, I'm God and you're a man.

Now, figure me out if you can. He's never done that. And we can be grateful because He is the self-revealing God. He is the God who cannot be figured out but has been pleased to reveal Himself.

He is the self-revealing God and He is there in revelation beginning in creation for any who would seek Him and more positive, definite answers are provided in the Scriptures.

[ 23 : 26 ] Wow. We've got... What we've got is man is left with no excuse. No excuse at all. And that's the burden of Romans chapter 1. So, let us be going. Verse 7. Be silent before the Lord God for the day of the Lord is near.

And fellas, this is not a 24-hour period. The day of the Lord is a block of time. I cannot tell you exactly how long it is but some scholars are of the opinion that the day of the Lord is actually seven years in length and that it is the 70th week of Daniel or the time of tribulation and that is the time when God is going to do His thing on this earth.

And it will culminate of course in the second coming of Christ. And then he says for the Lord has prepared a sacrifice. And what do you suppose a sacrifice is?

Not animals. It's people. It's His own covenant people who have rebelled in unbelief and disobedience against Him.

They are the sacrifice. They are the sacrifice. Read on. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice. He has consecrated His guests.

[ 24 : 46 ] Then it will come about on the day of the Lord's sacrifice that I will punish the princes, the king's sons.

This is starting at the top tier of government and authority. this is striking at the very peak of the corruption and defilement in Israel.

I will punish the princes, the king's sons, and all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.

Scholars are pretty much divided over exactly what that means and I wish I could give you a better interpretation but I don't have one.

Some think that it simply has to do with the Jewish people taking on the clothing garb and dressing like some of the pagan neighbors around them.

It may be as simple as something like that. It may be more involved in a way that is not more fully explained here so I can't really. And some even couple this with the passage in Deuteronomy where God condemns men dressing as women.

[ 26 : 00 ] And women dressing as men. And it has to do with presenting yourself, if you are a male presenting yourself as a female, well we've got a lot of this stuff going on today in spades, but all I'm suggesting is there's nothing new.

I mean this goes way back if this is exactly what it involved in, I don't know, but it could be. Dana? At first glance it seems to me that they were just talking about the other guys Baal and Baal rather. Could they be dressing themselves in the foreigners' gods? Yeah, well that could very well be. That is one of the acceptable explanations, but it's just difficult to pinpoint it, so we just don't know. But let me put it this way. It is an area for judgment. It is an area that is displeasing to the Lord. And I will punish on that day all who leap on the temple threshold, who fill the house of their Lord with violence and deceit.

And on that day, declares the Lord, there will be the sound of a cry from the fish gate. Now what he's talking about on this day here is the time of judgment that is coming for Judah.

[ 27 : 19 ] A whale from the second quarter. That has to do with a particular district in Jerusalem. You know, just about every large city has certain geographical areas within it that are known and are identified by name as a particular district.

And everybody knows exactly where you're talking about. Like right here in Dayton, Ohio, for instance. We've got what's called the Oregon District. And it's a specific geographical area that is known for whatever it is that it is known for.

And it's what he's talking about here in Jerusalem. A whale from the second quarter and a loud crash from the hills. Whale, O inhabitants of the mortar.

For all the people of Canaan will be silenced. All who weigh out silver will be cut off. This is striking at the economy. And it will come about at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps.

And I will punish the men who are stagnant in spirit. Boy, that's quite an expression. Stagnant in spirit. When something is stagnant, it doesn't move.

[ 28 : 37 ] It's stationary. Spiritually applied there. Who say in their hearts, the Lord will not do good or evil.

How would you translate that? What does that mean? What they're saying is, God doesn't care. God isn't involved in this. God will not judge.

It is one of many forms of denial. And one of the easiest things it is for any human being in any day or age, including today, one of the easiest things that he has to do is to deny our culpability and to protest our innocence.

That is characteristic of the fallen humanity. It's not my fault. It's always the fault of somebody else. I am pure as a driven snow. I am innocent in this. It's not my fault. This is a kind of denial that he's talking about here. They say in their hearts, the Lord will not do good or evil.

[ 29 : 49 ] Moreover, their wealth will become plunder. And all that is saying is they have accumulated to themselves over a period of time a great deal of wealth from their dealings, from their investments, from their captives, and all the rest of it.

They have built up a treasure trove and guess what? They're going to lose it all. Somebody else is going to take it. That's the point here. Their wealth, their wealth will become plunder.

And that's exactly what's going to happen when the Babylonians come in. They're going to strip everything, all the wealth, everything of value, all of the garments, all of the jewels, all of the gold. They're going to go into the temple of the Lord and take all of the items of furniture and carry them all off to Babylon, including the ark and all the rest of it. And all of these things are going to be surrendered to an invading enemy.

Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit them, and plant vineyards but not drink their wine. And the meaning is that catastrophe and invasion is going to come that's going to short-circuit all of those things.

[ 31 : 07 ] Near is the great day of the Lord. Near and coming very quickly. Listen, the day of the Lord. In it, the warrior cries out bitterly.

A day of wrath is that day. A day of trouble and distress. A day of destruction and desolation. A day of darkness and gloom. A day of clouds and thick darkness.

A day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the high corner towers. And I will bring distress on men so that they will walk like the blind because they have sinned against the Lord.

They not only sinned against the Lord, but they sinned and sinned and sinned and sinned and sinned in the midst of all of the rebuke and all of the warnings and they with a high hand tell God, take a walk.

And they persist in their unbelief and in their sin. And all the while this is going on, the long suffering of God is becoming less and less and less.

[ 32 : 14 ] And when it runs out, that is Judah's day of the Lord. That is coming. About as negative as you can get.

They have sinned against the Lord and their blood will be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord's wrath and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of his jealousy for he will make a complete end.

Indeed, a terrifying one of all the inhabitants of the earth. Gather yourselves together. Yes, gather, O nation without shame. Boy, that's a telling thing.

A nation without shame. What does that mean? It means they've got an inactive conscience. It means that their conscience has been seared as it were with a hot iron.

It means that they do not have the ability to be embarrassed. I don't recall which one it was but it was one of the famous poets that said that man is the only creature with the ability to blush or with the need to.

[ 33 : 41 ] Think of that. Fellas, we've got a situation going on right now in Washington, D.C. and it involves people that you cannot shame.

You cannot embarrass them. They're beyond that. And listen, when you can't shame a person or embarrass a person because they're incapable of it, you don't have any leverage.

The sky's the limit for these people. And how is it that they have arrived at this shamelessness and inability to be embarrassed? Where do they get that? It's very simple.

Follow me now. This is a very important principle. Once you abandon moral absolutes and replace them with relative absolutes so that each person becomes their own judge and evaluator as to what right and wrong is, sky's the limit.

You can do whatever. And you can justify it. Because nobody can say what you are doing is wrong. Because who is the one to determine what is wrong?

[ 35 : 04 ] You are. And if you don't consider it wrong, it isn't wrong. That's what happens when you get into moral relativity.

Moral issues and right and wrong standards are not those things that are fixed and in place so that we've got that north star to guide us.

So that we've got an overarching authority that is over all for everywhere at all times.

That's gone. Relativism sets in and right and wrong becomes relative. It is what you view. So you have your truth and I have my truth and they may contradict each other but the nice thing about it is neither one of us have to be wrong.

We are both right. What's right for me and what's right for you? And this is exactly where we are.

And do you know when this started? It started way back in the 50s and 60s with the with Joseph Fletcher and this and what developed into that was I'm okay, you're okay, we're all okay.

[ 36 : 20 ] So everybody is right and it degenerates then into not only moral relativism but into religious pluralism and religious pluralism takes all religions, all cults, all isms, all big faiths, all little faiths, all medium sized faiths, everything puts them all in the same plane.

Which one is true? They all are. Isn't that wonderful? They all are. But it doesn't work out that way. No, you can't work it that way. But this is the philosophy under which they try to operate.

But they don't operate that way. They don't. You know where this really falls down? Where it really breaks down? In a court of law. Because when you impanel a jury and somebody is there, there is just one thing, one thing only that really matters.

What is true? And the jury and the judge, they don't care a hoot about your opinion or your preference.

They only care about, remember, remember Jack Webb and the old Dragnet movies? Just the facts, man. Just the facts. Yeah. That's all that counts in a court of law.

[ 37 : 35 ] Opinions don't amount to a hill of beans. All that matters is the fact. And that's exactly where we are. So we try to operate with this and it's very accommodating.

And this, by the way, is in keeping with political correctness. That way, nobody's wrong. Now let me ask you a question. What then, fellas, what does this do to the missionary enterprise?

It scraps it. It scraps it. You don't have a basis for missions. You don't have a basis for preaching the gospel because when you preach the gospel, you are inferring that somebody needs that and somebody is wrong with where they are and what they believe now and they need to be what?

They need to be converted. But religious pluralism says that's ridiculous. Nobody needs to be converted because everybody is right where they are. That's what we're dealing with today.

agree with me. That's why the missionary enterprise is down the tubes. And the cause of missions has suffered over the last 10 or 20 years like it hasn't in the history of missions.

[ 38 : 49 ] And this is what's going on today. And it's all part and parcel of the same package. And you know what? There's nothing new about it. It's as old as the hills and it is found here too. Well, the day passes like a chaff before the burning anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord comes upon you.

And here is your last hope. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have carried out his ordinances. Seek righteousness, seek humility, perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.

That's the only hope you've got is to seek the Lord. And that's the message that Zephaniah is delivering to Judah. So, thank you ladies for your service and we appreciate your get-ups this morning.

All I can say is it takes a lot of nerve to put those things on. That's not right. It takes a lot of nerve. Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much.