

Rescuing and Rebuilding

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Introduction

I have mentioned my fascination with weather before..

And I don't really know where it started, but I loved to read books about hurricanes and flood and tornadoes from a ver young age...

I still have a desire to take the family on a summer vacation to chase tornadoes...

They always choose the beach, but one day I am heading to Oklahoma to chase tornadoes..

Now, tornadoes are incredible weather phenomena...

The have often been called the finger of God because of their awesome power of destruction..

But they are simply a result of a fallen world...

There were no tornadoes before the fall of Adam and Eve, but there have been plenty afterward...

And they have claim countless lives and caused trillions of dollars of damage in the world ever since.

They they usually follow a somewhat predictable path once they are on the ground, they are usually very unpredictable on where they will strike...

As a country, the United has the worst tornadoes, so you might expect that there would be companies who specialize in building tornado shelters..

That is actually a picture of one on the screen...

You bury this entire shelter under ground with the door level with the top of the ground....

When a tornado approaches, you run to the shelter open the door and go down steps to safety...

The purpose is to wait there until the storm passes and then go outside to examine the damage...

Here is good picture of the protection a storm shelter provides..

And another one...

And that is really a great picture to keep in your mind as we come to talk about the book of Zephaniah tonight...

Zephaniah: Safe in the Storm

Like all the prophets, Zephaniah has a message of judgment for the nations around Israel and also for the nation of Israel...

In fact, the book is 3 chapters and Zephaniah will spend 2 1/2 chapters talking about the coming judgment and destruction...

But for a couple verses in chapter 2 and the final 11 verses of chapter 2, Zephaniah is going to call people to find shelter from the storm in the Lord God.

When we see pictures of the aftermath of tornadoes, our minds can't really take in what we are seeing...

Homes demolished, car thrown hundreds of yards in the air....

2 by 4s driven into trees....

The pictures are startling, but the comfort is that the damage isn't widespread...

That has not been the case when God sends judgment on a nation...

God had judged some nations so harshly that they disappear from the face of the earth never to return.

Imagine a tornado that sweeps across the entire state of Oklahoma or the entire state of South Carolina...

Everything from Clemson to Charleston is gone...

That is how we should view the complete judgment of the Lord at times..

Not a slice of destruction here and a few miles of devastation there...

But nation wide and world wide destruction...

That is the destruction that Zephaniah is going to describe in his prophecy...

Israel is going to be totally destroyed...

The Babylonians are going to carry them off into captivity..

The whole land is going to be destroyed...

The temple is going to be torn down...

This is a nation wide tornado of God's judgment that is going to come to them...

But in the midst of such an awful forecast of judgment, Zephaniah is going to remind his readers to build a storm shelter...

A storm shelter that is built on believing in God and trusting in His word to provide safety for His true followers...

The main point of Zephaniah is how to be safe in the coming storm....

When the worst tornado on record hit Moore, Oklahoma in 2013, one weatherman was famous for saying...

If you aren't underground when this tornado comes your way, you will die in this storm...

Get underground...

The message of Zephaniah is much the same...

The storm of God's judgment is coming.

If you aren't right with the Lord, you will not survive the storm...

Now, let's take quick look at Zephaniah tonight, and then we will also take a quick look at the Haggai tonight as well..

I have divided Zephaniah into just 2 basic sections...

I. The Storm is Coming (1:1 - 3:8)

II. The Son Will Follow (3:9-20)

Let's begin in verse 1 of Zephaniah as we always do to set the stage of the book...

Zephaniah begins like most of the books of the prophets begin...

I. The Storm is Coming (1:1 - 3:8)

1 The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah:

Here's what we know about Zephaniah...

His great-great grandfather was the king of Israel at one time..

We also know that he wrote his prophecy during the days when Josiah was the king of Israel

So, let's look at our chart....

Zephaniah gave his prophecy as the southern kingdom of Israel, known as Judah, was about to be overtaken by the Babylonians...

If you remember from last week, God used the Babylonians to destroy Nineveh and then he turned them south so that they could also be used to deliver his judgment against Judah...

Israel has been a disobedient for some time now...

Their original disobedience led to the nation being split into two kingdoms, a northern and a southern one...

But as their rebellion against God continued, their judgment continued as well....

First, the northern part of Israel fell in 722 BC, and now the time is fast approaching for the southern kingdom to fall..

Zephaniah is the one to tell the people that God's wrath is coming....

Some prophets offered hope to their listeners, saying that judgment could be avoided if they would turn and repent...

Other like Zephaniah wrote to tell people to get out of the way that the judgment of God is already on the way...

If you think of it in terms of weather forecasting, some prophets said there is a good chance of judgment, so make preparations if it comes...

Kinda like a tornado watch...

Conditions are right, but we haven't seen any tornadoes yet...

Zephaniah was issuing a tornado warning...

Judgment has been spotted and it coming our way, get right with God now...

Look at how he begins his prophecy in verse 2 of chapter 1...

***“I will completely remove all things
From the face of the [a]earth,” declares the Lord.***

3

***“I will remove man and beast;
I will remove the birds of the sky
And the fish of the sea,
And the [b]ruins along with the wicked;
And I will cut off man from the face of the
[c]earth,” declares the Lord.***

4

***“So I will stretch out My hand against Judah
And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.***

This dramatic language continues in verse 14 of chapter 1...

14

***Near is the great day of the Lord,
Near and coming very quickly;
Listen, the day of the Lord!
[I]n it the warrior cries out bitterly.***

15

***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,***

16

***A day of trumpet and battle cry
Against the fortified cities
And the high corner towers.***

17

***I will bring distress on men
So that they will walk like the blind,
Because they have sinned against the Lord;
And their blood will be poured out like dust
And their flesh like dung.***

This is graphic language of complete and certain destruction...

And then Zephaniah takes a break from this actual forecast to give a word of advice to his readers in verses 1-3 of chapter 2...

2

***1 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather,
O nation without [a]shame,***

2

***Before the decree [b]takes effect—
The day passes like the chaff—
Before the burning anger of the Lord comes upon
you,
Before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon
you.***

3

***Seek the Lord,
All you humble of the [c]earth
Who have carried out His [d]ordinances;
Seek righteousness, seek humility.
Perhaps you will be hidden
In the day of the Lord's anger.***

In the midst of a difficult sermon to preach, Zephaniah simply says...

“This is going to be be bad people. Before the judgments gets here, seek the Lord. Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps that will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.”

The word for hidden there is literally, maybe you will be sheltered from the coming judgment...

Look, this is the gospel right?

The good news is simply this...

Your sin brings judgment.

Repent and trust in Christ to save you...

To hide you from the wrath you deserve...

That is the promise of Zephaniah as well...

And let me point out a word here that so many Christians need to be reminded of...

And the word is humility...

The more I study the Bible I study the Bible in depth....

The more blessings I see promised to those who are truly humble....

And the more trouble I see promised to those who are proud...

Humility alone won't save you...

Repenting and trusting in Christ saves you...

But once you are saved, humility should define who a Christian is...

Pride leads to destruction, humility leads to safety in destruction...

After that little piece of advice, Zephaniah goes back to his message of coming destruction and talks specifically about the coming destruction of specific nations and then the destruction coming to Judah...

You can read that from 2:4 all the way to 3:8....

Then the forecast of a storm is followed by a promise of the Son coming out at the end of chapter 3.....

II. The Son Will Follow (3:9-20)

In verses 9-11, Zephaniah writes that God will leave a remnant of Gentiles that will survive his wrath..

And then in verses 13-16, Zephaniah writes of a remnant of Jews who will survive his wrath as well...

Let's read verses 14-15..

***Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!***

15

***The Lord has taken away His judgments against
you,
He has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
You will fear disaster no more.***

Look at the joy of the ones who have taken shelter
in the Lord and though this applies specifically to
Jews who truly believe...

This also applies to any Gentile who sought shelter
in Christ...

And you see the words to describe how those
people will feel..

Shout in joy, shout in triumph, rejoice and worship
in your heart....

And why is that?

Verse 15...the judgments have passed over you...

Your enemies are gone...

The King of Israel is now in your midst...

You will fear disaster no more...

Couple quick questions and answers...

#1 - Who is this king of Israel?

In you didn't figure it out in the text this morning....

Jesus is the king of Israel...

It was even written on his cross...

#2 - What time period is this describing?

It is describing a period of time when Jesus will live among his people and end all the judgments against them...

And stop all natural disasters...

That certainly fits the time period of a 1000 year reign of Christ upon this earth...

A time when Jesus will fellowship with his people, and rule this world as it was meant to be ruled...

The conclusion of Zephaniah is this....

A storm of God's judgment is coming, but everyone who finds shelter in God's son will survive that judgment and be a part of a world that they have never laid eyes on before.....

It will be world ruled by a single king, and it will be from any more threat of storms...

I remember as a kid learning about weather trying to figure out the safest place to live in the United States...

And after trying to see where tornadoes occur rarely, and trying to see where earthquake rarely hit, and then taking into consideration the frequency of hurricanes...

I decide that Phoenix AZ was the best place to live..

After driving through there on the way to California, it is now off the list...

Too hot and sandy....

May die in a sandstorm or heat stroke...

Do you actually where the safest weather place on earth is?

It is being saved through Christ and living in obedience to him...

And guess what I am promised if I am truly in Him?

I will one day live a world that He rules and where tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes don't even exist...

Let's quickly move from Zephaniah to the next book in the OT, which is the book of Haggai..

Now, we need to fast forward in time when we open the pages of Haggai...

Haggai: First Things First

In order to get the accurate picture of the book of Haggai, we have to take a leap forward in time..

Let's look at our chart to set the stage...

You will that Haggai was a prophet to Israel after the exile...

Now, don't let the word exile throw you off...

Often people talk about Israel before and after the exile...

The exile was simply the fulfillment of what Zephaniah just predicted would happen to Israel...

In 586, the Babylonians did overthrow Judah...

The tornado of God's wrath did arrive in the land, and they were carried off to the land of the Babylonians...

Here is a map to show how that happened, and though hit happened in stages...

All of Israel was out of the land by 586 BC and the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians...

The whole land truly looked like a tornado went through, and the Jews were carried away to live in a foreign land..

While they were in Babylon, a couple of interesting things happened...

Namely, the story of the book of Esther happens while Israel is away in captivity...

The book of Daniel is written as an encouragement to Israel that they won't be in captivity forever...

And to ultimately remind Israel that God will win in the end and Israel will be a great nation in a future day...

So, they are gone from the land for 70 years, but eventually they are allowed to leave Babylon when the Babylonians are taken over by the Persians...

The Persians are the next great empire like the Assyrians and the Babylonians were...

And the Persian king who takes over Babylon allows the Jews to leave and they go back to their land in stages just like they left...

When they get back, they find the ruins of their former way of life...

And you will be able to understand what happens next because the people come back and at first, they come back and get to work on building the temple of God first..

They understood that they ended up in exile because of their disobedience to God, so when they first get back, they put their effort into temple construction first...

That would make sense to most of us who fall into sin and feel the sting of God's consequences when we do...

WE first need to repent and get things right with the Lord before we can do anything else...

And that is exactly what Israel does first...

They set out to rebuild the temple...

Now, here is key point in understanding the temple of the OT....

For a while, God's glory resided in the temple in the OT...

God is spirit and his glory was part of the temple...

However, when Israel continued in disobedience, God's glory departed the temple and was long gone

before the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians...

However, when Israel got back to the land, they wanted to rebuild the temple as a way of inviting God back to dwell among them...

If you have ever seen the baseball movie Field of Dreams, a man has a dream to build a ball field in the middle of his Iowa farm in order for dead baseball players to come play there...

In his dream, he keeps hearing a voice that says....

“If you build it, they will come..”

That is the same mentality of Israel after getting back in the land....

Let's build the temple back, and hopefully God will return and take up residence in it again....

So, they get back in the land and they go straight to work rebuilding the temple...

Now remember, the whole land has been destroyed and on top of that, 70 years has passed...

They have a mess to get things back to working in the land, but they begin re-building the land by making the temple a priority...

However, it doesn't take long until they stop on the temple and just focus on their priorities...

The reason is that the people got discouraged by others who were criticizing their efforts...

And they got distracted by their own rebuilding of their own lives..

They began to focus more on their personal situations and they let the rebuilding of the temple go.

And for 16 years, work on the temple stopped in Israel.

This led to Haggai being called by God to go to the people and encourage them to get their priorities back in order.

Now look, we all understand how this happens...

It is so easy to have a vibrant relationship with the Lord be interrupted by the cares of the world...

It is easy to let Bible study and prayer slip because you are busy at work or play or whatever seems to be more important at the time...

But Haggai is going to remind us that placing God lower on your list of responsibilities leads to major problems...

Think about it this way...

You can buy a new car, and you can spend all your money and time shining that car up...

You can wash that car everyday and clean every part with a toothbrush, but if you can't afford or don't have the time to put gas in it, it ain't going anywhere..

You gotta have gas to make the car run, and when you neglect the most basic part of a car, it just sits there and collects dust...

The Lord is the most basic, foundational part of everyone's life...

All of you starts and ends with Him...

Neglect the Lord and reap the consequences of your actions...

It may seem more important to skip your Bible reading in the morning to get to work a little earlier to make the day go better...

But a good day isn't always based on getting there earlier; it is based on starting your day with your Creator in His word...

You gotta fill up every day to keep going...

Haggai was a reminder to Israel that they must keep first things first...

Sure, the nation needed to be rebuilt and the people needed to re establish their lives, but if they let the Lord out of those plans, it would never happen...

So, Haggai writes to encourage them to get back to work on the temple..

It is fairly easy to divide this book into 3 sections...

I. The Problems of Putting God Last (1:1-11)

II. The Process of Putting Things in Order (1:12-15)

III. The Promise of Putting God First (2:1-23)

Let's begin in verses 1-2 of chapter 1, and we will take a quick look at this book....

I. The Problems of Putting God Last (1:1-11)

1 In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, 2 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘This people says, “The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.””’

Once again, we come to a prophet that we know very little about..

Nothing is told to us about his family or where he was from...

We just know that God inspired him to deliver his prophecy to two men in particular...

Zerubbabel and Joshua...

And the prophecy begins in verse 2 with God's displeasure with what the people in Israel were saying...

In verse 2, the people were saying that it wasn't time to resume working on the temple...

Now remember, they have been stopped for 16 years....

If it wasn't time to start back by now, it was never going to be the time to start back o the temple...

So God called Haggai and he tells him to tell the people what neglecting the Lord leads to...

And so let's look at verses 3-6....

3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?" 5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, "[b]Consider your ways! 6 You have sown much, but [c]harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is [d]not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes."

Here, Haggai is simply reminding Israel of what happens when you neglect to put the Lord first...

You sow a lot of seed in the field, but only have a little harvest...

You put on clothes, but it never seems to keep you warm..

You earn money, but it seems to go into a pocket with a hole in it....

Then the Lord says the same thing again in verses 10-11...

***10 Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld [h]its dew and the earth has withheld its produce.
11 I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of [i]your hands."***

Though this isn't always the case, sometimes unfortunate events are not just the result of a fallen world...

Sometimes, things don't go right because we don't have God in the right place in our list of priorities...

It may be impossible to know with certainty, but when your life seems upside down, the first place to look is how are things with me and the Lord...

Is there an unconfessed sin?

Have I been neglected my prayer and Bible reading?

Am I putting other things higher on my list of priorities?

Though we may like to blame our misfortunes in life on other things or even on other people, don't forget to first make sure that God is still the priority of your life..

So, with that said, let's see how Israel reacted....

II. The Process of Putting Things in Order **(1:12-15)**

Long story short, the people listened to Haggai and began rebuilding the temple of the Lord...

Now, let me add a word here...

The point of this passage is not to dedicate all our efforts on making sure the church building is in good shape...

A lot of preachers will preach this verse in an attempt to get his church to work on the appearance of the church building...

Now, let me be clear, the appearance and upkeep of a church building are very important...

And I believe we should give careful attention to the church....

But this passage is not to be applied to the church in that way....

The temple of the OT and the church building of the NT are not the same thing...

The point of Haggai was to get God back in his rightful place and in that day, it meant working on the temple came from a heart that was putting God back in the place of importance in their lives...

The same is true today...

In order to show that God has priority in your life, it isn't always necessary to come to the church and doing a little work on the building...

It is simply necessary to show that God is number one in how you live...

It could be that you give up a hobby to serve the Lord in a ministry...

It could be that you take some money you are spending on yourself and you give it to the Lord in some way...

It could be that you say no to your desire to sleep a few more minutes in the morning and set your clock to get up and start the day with the Lord in His word..

God desires the place of prominence in your life..

And you can't just say he is #1....

Your actions need to prove He is...

The people in Haggai needed to get back to work on the temple, and that is exactly what they did...

The book of Haggai then ends with this final lesson...

III. The Promise of Putting God First (2:1-23)

Once God saw their commitment to restart the work on the temple, God promised to be with them and to return his hand of blessing to the country....

Look at Haggai 2:18-19....

18 'Do [s]consider from this day [t]onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month; from the day when the temple of the Lord was founded, [u]consider: 19 Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree, it has not borne fruit. Yet from this day on I will bless you.'"

You want the lesson of Haggai...

Put God where he belongs on your list of priorities, and he will put you on his list of priorities to bless...

Israel had neglected to put God where he belonged, and Haggai was sent to tell Israel to wake up and get to work on what really mattered...

And by God's grace, they responded and God blessed their efforts...

Conclusion

How do we put a period on Zephaniah and Haggai?

Contrary to what so many people think, the story of the OT is still a story of God's grace...

In Zephaniah, judgment was coming but God was gracious to save those who sought shelter in Him...

In Haggai, not only was God gracious enough to bring Israel back to the land after judgment,...

He was also gracious enough to give them another opportunity to get their priorities straight and restart their work on the temple..

And when they did, he graciously forgave them and blessed them in their work and in their daily living...

Yes, God judges, but thanks be to God that he extends grace and mercy to those who love Him as well...

Let us pray.