

Sunday, January 1, 2017

The Day of the Lord – Zephaniah

1. The Days of Josiah – Zeph 1:1

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 - 1. Hezekiah – 2 Chron 31:1, 20-21; 2 Kings 20:1-11
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Take your Bibles and turn with me to Zephaniah chapter 1, one of the minor prophets. One that is not looked at very often and is considered by some scholars to be insignificant because it repeats things already stated by others of the minor prophets, but there is a purpose for that as we will learn. Zephaniah mentions the Day of the Lord more than any other prophet.

What is amazing, or maybe by now not so amazing to you, is that from this short 3 chapter minor prophet we will be able to get at least 7 sermons out of it! And today, the first sermon on the first day of this new year will be a sermon from just the first verse. This morning we will look at Zephaniah 1:1.

The title of our series is “The Day of the Lord” as that is the focus of the prophecy. As we study what the prophet is saying to the people of God, we will see that he is prophesying about the first and second coming of Christ, giving us information about that great coming Day of the Lord.

And this first message is titled, “The Days of Josiah.” This sets the stage for the ministry and work of the prophet Zephaniah. So we begin:

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

And there is so much there in this first verse! There is history, there is theology, and all of this will help us understand the prophesy of the Lord through His servant Zephaniah. He begins by saying, “The word of the Lord.” This is where every true prophet of God will start. This is where every preacher should start – “This is what God says.” We have no business preaching or teaching anything other than what God has said! If we are to come and tell people how to live life, how to face the new year, how to deal with the fears and pains and regrets of the year that has passed, how to obey the gospel and the Word of God in daily life, how to bear spiritual fruit and be faithful and content – if we who preach share only our opinion, if we share funny stories, if we play the part of a motivational speaker or therapist, while that might be helpful from time to time, ultimately it is a failure to do what we have been called and commanded by God to do, that is to “Preach the Word, in season and out.” Speak the Word of God.

It is the Word of God that the Spirit uses to call us to salvation and to sanctify us as we are conformed by its application to the image of Christ. It is the inspired Word of God that He uses to teach us right doctrine, right living, and right thinking. Look even this week at our questions and answers from Spurgeon’s Puritan Catechism on the back of your bulletin – I hope you use these as a teaching aid for yourself, for your children, for your family...as we go in order with 2 questions a week, this week it is questions 71 and 72.

Question 71. What are the outward means whereby the Holy Spirit communicates to us the benefits of redemption? **Answer.** The outward and ordinary means whereby the Holy Spirit communicates to us the benefits of Christ's redemption, are the Word, by which souls are

begotten to spiritual life; Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Prayer, and Meditation, by all which believers are further edified in their most holy faith (Acts 2:41-42; Jas. 1:18).

Question 72. How is the Word made effectual to salvation? **Answer.** The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convicting and converting sinners, (Ps. 19:7) and of building them up in holiness and comfort (1 Thess. 1:6), through faith to salvation (Rom. 1:16).

So we need to come to the Scriptures always with this question, “What is it that God says to us? What has God said?” And in this short prophesy as Zephaniah begins to relay to us the Word of the Lord, he breaks the message down into 4 sections in these 3 chapters. The opening prophesy which is most of chapter 1 speaks to the coming Day of the Lord. It is Zephaniah telling people about the promises and the dangers of the coming of the Messiah – and how the people need to be ready, they need to be watching and expecting His coming. And that is a lesson just as much for us as it was for them isn't it? How much better would 2016 have been if Jesus had come!!

His coming is our hope. And we are told to with the people of God to look for the signs expectantly. His opening prophesy is a description of the signs of the times that will point to the coming day of the Lord.

Then he spends time in chapter 2 specifying judgments against the Gentile nations that surround Judah, the southern kingdom after the split under the reign of Rehoboam, David's grandson, the son of Solomon. And then he gets into judgments against Jerusalem because of their sin, their idolatry, and their failure to repent and return to the Lord. He is going to correct them and it will not be pleasant. And then the book closes in chapter 3 with an anticipation of God's blessing – with see the promise that if we listen to Gods Word and obey it – as we learn in this cycle, as we sin and as God brings about consequences and chastening, if we repent then He restores and blesses us – if we do not repent and instead harden our hearts, He will bring about conviction, consequences, and circumstances to bring brokenness to our lives, working to restore us to Himself.

This is the cycle of the Old Testament. The people sin as they anger God and bear up under His judgment He tells them through the prophets and judges that they need to turn away from their sin and repent and come back and be restored to Him. And we know that repentance is part of the gospel, right? It is that change of mind, that turn from sin to Christ in faith.

This is more than just deciding that sin is bad. Or that we are sorry for the consequences of our disobedience. We do not simply replace the sin with something else – we forsake sin and embrace Christ and His Word. This is the cycle that Zephaniah is going to explain to the people once again, because we all must confess that we rarely get things the first time...and sometimes it takes hearing the same message over and over and over before it sinks in and we understand and obey what God is telling us.

Zephaniah tells the people that there will be judgment, exile in Babylon, if they do not repent.

They are going to be judged – but if they will repent, God will restore them, bless them, and protect them. So he begins, “The Word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah.” Here is the prophet. His name means “The Lord hides”, not as the Lord is hiding, but that He covers. What has He hidden in our lives? If we have trusted Christ to save us He has hidden our sin, He has covered it with the shed blood of His Son. So Zephaniah’s name means “The Lord hides.”

Verse 1 continues and gives us the prophet’s genealogy. He is the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah.

Who is Hezekiah? We have heard of him, right? He is one of those characters from the Old Testament that we don’t know much about, isn’t he? He was a righteous King who ruled in Judah. As he ruled the people of Judah from Jerusalem, he was faithful to God. He ruled during the time that Isaiah was a prophet in the land. And we see here now a prophet who is a descendant of Hezekiah prophesying during the reign of Josiah. Zephaniah then is part of the Royal family. He has access to the King, to the palace, to royalty...as a family member descended from one of the more righteous kings in the history of Judah. He has the access and ability to preach to the King of Judah, his cousin.

We will see now through the rest of the message why that is so important. As we learn, or perhaps you already know, who Josiah is, when he came to reign, and what he accomplished and was dealing with as king of Judah, we will see how crucial it is that Zephaniah had access to him to speak the Word of the Lord to him.

Zephaniah, by the way, also ministered while Jeremiah was a prophet and was also preaching to the people about the coming judgment for sin if they did not repent and reject their idols and return to the Lord their God. As Jeremiah preached to the people as a major prophet, here Zephaniah was able to preach directly to the family of the king and to the king himself who ruled in Judah.

As I stated at the beginning there are many so-called scholars who look at this little book and think it is insignificant and simply too repetitive to take the time to study and digest what the Lord is saying through Zephaniah. Some have even questioned why Zephaniah is even included in the canon of Scripture – why do we have this little book in our Bibles today? What we will learn and hopefully understand is that as a Minor Prophet – and how many Minor Prophets are there in the Old Testament? Minor not in their ministry or message, but shorter, “minor” messages when compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. There are 12 Minor Prophets: Hosea (which we will study this year, Lord willing, after we finish this series and then a series through 2 Peter), Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

And Zephaniah summarizes the messages of the first 9 (of which he is one). And then after that there were 3 others. Nine of them prophesied before Judah was taken into exile into Babylon. And who were some of the people we know who were taken into exile during the time of judgment prophesied? Daniel, and Hananiah, Mishaal, Azaria (better known as Shadrack,

Meshach, and Abednego). They were the brightest, best of the young men in Judah – taken and put in school to serve the court of the king Nebuchadnezzar. And we know that each of these prophets came with a specific message to the people of God warning them that judgment was coming if they did not repent. They had sinned against God, broken their covenant with Him, were worshipping idols, intermarrying with the nations around them and embracing their cultural ways and deities, they were participating in paganism and if they did not stop and stop soon there were going to be serious and severe consequences.

Two hundred years before this, in 722 BC, Israel had been taken into captivity by Assyria, whose capital city we know from the story of Jonah, Nineveh. The Assyrians took Israel captive fulfilling the prophets words of judgment from God if the people did not repent – and now God has been giving a warning to Judah and they are about to be taken by Babylon if they refuse to repent. Exile and captivity was coming (we know now that it happened in 586 BC). So Zephaniah summarizes the ministry of the first 9 minor prophets. He gleans truth from them and gives us a nice neat little dreadful summary. He tells the people exactly what God is going to do and when He is going to do it!

He is summarizing this not just to the people, but to the king, to King Josiah. And the King will prove to be the tool in God’s hand either to bring revival or to bring further judgment. What we will learn in our study these next 7 or so weeks, is that Josiah listened to the message of the prophet and God used him to bring about a great reform and revival in Judah. He heard what Zephaniah said and acted in obedience to the Word of God and there was a time of blessing for a respite, until later when Josiah’s son came to reign, he brought wickedness to the people and they ran further back into their sin and God turned them over to Babylon as a result.

So we have read verse 1, “The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.” And I hope we all know the story of King Josiah. Even if so, we get to hear it again this morning! He became king as the age of 8 years old. He was “the boy king.” He reigned from 640 to 609 BC, and as we look at his lineage, his father was King Amon, his grandfather was King Manasseh, and Manasseh was Hezekiah’s son. Again Hezekiah was a godly king, and if we look at 2 Chronicles 31 and 2 Kings 20 we can see some of what happened to set the stage for the reign of the boy king.

In 2 Chronicles 31:1, we read about the reforms of King Hezekiah, “Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke the sacred pillars in pieces, cut down the wooden images, and threw down the high places and the altars—from all Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh—until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned to their own cities, every man to his possession.”

In verses 20 and 21 we read, “20 Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God. 21 And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.”

Hezekiah was a godly king. He was determined to do what was right. What marked his reign was that he tore down the high places set up for the worship of idols. He purified the worship of God and rid the nation of idolatry. He focused people on worshipping God according to His Word. What a great thing it is for the Scriptures to tell us that everything he did was good in the sight of God! What a testimony. Everything he did, every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandments he was seeking God and he did it with all of his heart.

As Hezekiah did this he did at one point disobey God. As the Babylonians were coming to meet with him he was told not to reveal the true treasures of the land of Judah. The prophet Isaiah warned that the Babylonians would want what Judah had, and they would come and take it. But Hezekiah did not heed this warning, and he showed the treasures of Judah to the Babylonian envoys, showing all that God had blessed His people with, and of course what happened was that the Babylonians decided that they had to have it – and they came to attack Judah and try to take it.

In 2 Kings 20 Hezekiah was told by Isaiah that he was going to die. The Lord revealed it to the prophet that the king was going to die and be replaced by his son. But look at Hezekiah's response. It is recorded for us in 2 Kings 20:1-11: In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.'" 2 Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, 3 "Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 5 "Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. 6 And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.'"" 7 Then Isaiah said, "Take a lump of figs." So they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. 8 And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What is the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord the third day?" 9 Then Isaiah said, "This is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing which He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?" 10 And Hezekiah answered, "It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees." 11 So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the Lord, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz."

When he received the word that he was going to die he did not bargain with God promising to do whatever God wanted if He would just let him live. When he turned to the Lord this is what he prayed, "Remember how I have walked before You." He simply wanted to remind the Lord all that he had done to please God. What was Hezekiah doing? He was preparing to meet God. He had heard the sure Word of God from the Prophet Isaiah that he was going to die and he accepted that as a Word from God and he prayed that the Lord would remember all that he had

done. He humbly and meekly prayed and said, “I have walked before you in truth with a loyal heart, I have done what was good in your sight, and he wept.

We do not know why he wept, we don't know what he was thinking, but as he prayed this simple prayer and began to weep while waiting to meet his Lord, verse 4 says, “it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 5 “Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. 6 And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.”””” 7 Then Isaiah said, “Take a lump of figs.” So they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. 8 And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “What is the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord the third day?” 9 Then Isaiah said, “This is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing which He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?” 10 And Hezekiah answered, “It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees.” 11 So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the Lord, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz.

All of that explains what happened. The Assyrians were about to attack, Hezekiah was afraid of losing the kingdom. He knew that his son, Manasseh, was wicked. And in the midst of preparing for what was about to happen, he gets sick with some kind of a boil, a malady, and Isaiah the prophet tells him that he is going to die. He prepares to meet God, he turns to the wall, he prays reminding God of his loyalty, of his walking and seeking to please God with all of his heart, and he cries – he weeps – and God stops Isaiah and sends him back to Hezekiah with word that in 3 days he is going to be healed. In 3 days he would be well enough to be at the Temple praying for a deliverance from the Assyrians.

As this happened Sennacherib came leading the Assyrian forces to attack, Hezekiah knew what he was facing, and he thought he was going to die, and when he prayed God healed him. And Isaiah gave him a sign – to prove that God's Word was true and sure, the sundial was going to move. Now sundials are not like watches. The shadow that tells the time is based on the shadow cast by the location of the sun in the sky. How do you make the shadow on a sundial move? The earth has to move in its orbit around the sun. So Hezekiah, when given a choice, do you want the sundial to go forward or backward 10 degrees, he wants it to go backward 10 degrees. That is 40 minutes of time! That is back to the future!

As sure as God's Word is true Hezekiah was healed, and in 3 days he was at the Temple and prayed before God as the Assyrian forces were preparing to attack, and an Angel of the Lord went out into the Assyrians camp that night and 185,000 Assyrian soldiers died. The Assyrians fled in terror.

Hezekiah was healed and given 15 more years to reign and at his death Manasseh became king

and he proved to be one of the most wicked kings to rule in Judah. In 2 Chronicles 33 that Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king, and he reigned 55 years in Jerusalem. Looking at the text, he was 12 years old when Hezekiah was told that he was going to die, and when his life was extended Hezekiah elevated his son to be co-regent with him. So Manasseh saw this godly king rule and assisted with his rule as co-regent for 15 years. From 12 to 27 years of age he saw how it should be done. After Hezekiah's death, Manasseh reigned on his own for 40 more years.

In 2 Chronicles 33:2 it says, "2 But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel." 3 For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. 4 He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem shall My name be forever." 5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. 6 Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. 7 He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; 8 and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses." 9 So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel."

He went so far as to set up idols within the temple at Jerusalem! He sacrificed his sons to Marduke (Molech). He was involved in the occult. He provoked God to anger.

There was a prophecy against Manasseh that said that he would be led away by fish hooks. When the Assyrians attacked again, they did capture Manasseh and they led him away by hooks set in his skin – they dragged him out of Jerusalem. The good news is that when that happened he repented! And let us not think we would repent before things got that bad!

in 2 Chronicles 33:10, "10 And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. 11 Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon. 12 Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, 13 and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God."

When Manasseh repented God set him free and restored him to his throne in Jerusalem. Then the king rebuilt part of the wall, tore down the places to worship idols, he removed the idols he had set up in the Temple, and yet the people were set in their idolatry, they still served false

gods.

Then Manasseh died and his son Amon became king. Verse 21 says, “Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. 22 But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done; for Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made, and served them. 23 And he did not humble himself before the Lord, as his father Manasseh had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more. 24 Then his servants conspired against him, and killed him in his own house. 25 But the people of the land executed all those who had conspired against King Amon. Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place.”

Eight year old Josiah became king after the people assassinated his wicked father. We read about it in 2 Chronicles 34:1, “Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem.”

As an 8 year old boy he inherits a kingdom that for 42 years had worshipped idols, was threatened by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, there was an internal struggle for control and no one knew how things were going to turn out or who they could trust. In 612 BC, just before the end of his reign in 609, near the end of his life, Babylon conquered and destroyed Nineveh, and then headed to attack Egypt – Josiah got involved, went into battle disguised so that no one would know he was the king, but he was hit with an arrow and died as a result of his wounds in the battle. Did you know by the way, Josiah is on the messianic line! He is in Matthew’s genealogy for Jesus.

However, before that, while he reigned, he set around him godly men to counsel him and help him rule. One of those men was his cousin, the prophet Zephaniah. And then in the midst of all the paganism and idolatry in the land, Zephaniah comes to the king and preaches the Word of God again and again and again. In 628 BC, 12 years into his reign as king, Josiah initiated a reform in the land. In verses 3-7 of 2 Chron. 34, “3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images. 4 They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars which were above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. 5 He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. 6 And so he did in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, as far as Naphtali and all around, with axes. 7 When he had broken down the altars and the wooden images, had beaten the carved images into powder, and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.”

Josiah, through the ministry of Zephaniah, became convinced, that he needed to bring reform to the nation in their worship. What we know from studying the book of Zephaniah, when he ministered, when he preached, he had started long before the reform setting the stage, laying the foundation for a revival in the land. Josiah became king at 8 and by the time he was 16 was

listening to the prophet and looking for ways to restore the land. Then by the time he was 20 years old, he had massive reformation underway as he was tearing down idols and removing false gods from the land.

The Bible tells us that Josiah was one of the godliest kings to reign. You can read about it further in 2 Chronicles 34 and 35. At 8 years into his reign he began to seek the Lord, and at 12 years he was tearing down idols, and at the 18th year, he started to rebuild the Temple. You see, the Temple had been in disrepair, During the repairs, Hilkiah discovered a book, he uncovered a scroll in the ruins of the Temple. They took and gave it to the King. They had found a scroll – they had found the law – they had found Scripture. In the midst of reforms prompted by the preaching of the prophets, Josiah is introduced to the scrolls of Scripture. In verse 19 it is described, “Thus it happened, when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes. 20 Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, 21 “Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for those who are left in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book.”

He mourned over sin. He grieved. He repented. And he sought to know what the words of the Lord meant. Upon having the judgments of God explained to him he brought even greater change, reform, and revival to the land.

Then Josiah restored worship at the Temple. One of the first things he did to accomplish this was to observe the Passover. He reinstated the Feast. The Scripture says he was a king who did what was right in the sight of God. His life teaches us 4 principles of reformation. They had fallen so far into idolatry that they were no longer worshipping God as He commanded and expected. And we see now that one person did make a difference in an entire nation.

Josiah was faithful. He was faithful to remove the idols from the land. This is what Zephaniah proclaimed. Repentance from sin. Josiah and Zephaniah teach us these principles of reform. We must start with repentance. Daily repenting of our sins of commission and omission.

This kind of repentance is what it takes to die to self daily. We realize the sin that is still in us, in our fallen flesh, and we reject it and walk by faith trusting Christ.

The second principle of Josiah’s reform is that he returned the people to the Lord. It was not enough to remove the idols, he had to restore faith in the one, true God. People had to hear and believe the Word of God.

The third principle of reform we learn from Josiah is that he read and obeyed God’s Word. He did not merely repent, or believe, but he also mediated in the Word of God with the intention to do what it said – to obey it. He prayed, believed, heard, and preached! He told people what he had found in the Word of God.

The final principle of reform that Josiah brought was that he restored right worship. Josiah determined that as the people repented of the sin of idolatry, trusting God's Word, praying and inquiry of God for direction and guidance, listening to His Word as it is read and preached, then the people needed to worship God as God desired to be worshipped. He did this through the Feast of Passover.

Does God tell us how He wants to be worshipped? Jesus had a discussion with a woman at a well. A Samaritan. A woman who had been married and divorced numerous times and even now was living with a man who was not her husband. This discussion in John 4 was about worship. She had a question. She asked, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." How did Jesus reply?

"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

What does it mean to worship in spirit and truth? That is what Zephaniah had taught Josiah. It means to worship God in the power of the Holy Spirit, coming to Him as it is revealed in His Word that we should come to Him, to give Him what He desires. What does God desire? Truth. Brokenness. Reverence. Faith. Contrition. Sacrifice.

Worship like this is worship empowered and led by the Spirit, who is, by the way, the Spirit of truth who will lead us into truth. We do not need to invent new ways to worship – the Bible refers to that as introducing strange fire to the altar and the consequences are spiritually deadly. We come to God to worship with an attitude of repentance and faith, submitting ourselves to the Word of God.

Imagine if we lived each day like this. Removing idols, repenting of sin, walking by faith, determining that everything we do throughout the day is an act of worship, for worship is not the singing at church, or the preaching at church, it is the way we live.

A family I know several years ago had a situation where the older brother was not living as he ought in the moment and mom asked him from their study of the catechism who it was that he was representing by his actions. Before he could answer, his younger sister blurted out, "The Devil!"

If we are not representing Christ in all that we do then we are indeed representing the devil. We do this all too often.

Judah, for all of these years, 40 under Manasseh and 2 under Amon, had been disobeying and dishonoring God. Eight years after Josiah became king he began seeking the Lord – after 50 years of wickedness throughout the land after Hezekiah's death Josiah brought reform. He found the Word of God, heard it, applied it, loved it, obeyed it. He brought about the greatest revival in the history of Judah. All of this due to the faithful preaching of a minor prophet who most people haven't even read. Zephaniah. Now we will devote these next weeks to studying the Word of the Lord proclaimed through this hidden prophet who tells us about the coming

Day of the Lord. As we study, keep these things in mind: The days of Josiah were a lot like today. The people needed revival and reform. Zephaniah and Josiah teach us that we are never done reforming. Semper Reformanda – always reforming. Always being conformed and transformed. Always being more and more like Christ. May that be our resolution in this new year. Faithfulness. Obedience. Reformation. This is Romans 12:1-2 in daily life:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Let us pray.