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# THE LOOKOUT

**AUGUST 2023**

## Unit: Minor Prophets (Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk)

### Theme: Justice Will Come

**Overview:** People cry out for justice when justice has been violated. Perhaps that indicates we all have an innate sense of fairness, honesty, lawfulness, and integrity built into us by our Creator. We seem to know that no one gets away with behaving unjustly forever and that only a fair and impartial judge can judge correctly. We all want justice—until it is imposed upon us. Then we want to avoid justice at all costs. The pre-exilic, seventh-century prophets Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk will help enlighten us that God will someday right all wrongs—even wrongs we have committed against him.

## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

**WEEK OF AUGUST 6, 2023**

**LESSON AIM:** God has the power and the will to correct injustice, so take heart.

**LESSON TEXT:** Nahum 1:1-15

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Zephaniah 1:4-15; Psalm 89:1-15

**STUDY**

**POWER FOR JUSTICE**  
BY MARK DEEPT

Readers often wonder why people cry out for justice when justice has been violated. Perhaps that indicates we all have an innate sense of fairness, honesty, lawfulness, and integrity built into us by our Creator. We seem to know that no one gets away with behaving unjustly forever and that only a fair and impartial judge can judge correctly. We all want justice—until it is imposed upon us. Then we want to avoid justice at all costs. The pre-exilic, seventh-century prophets Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk will help enlighten us that God will someday right all wrongs—even wrongs we have committed against him.

**What Do You Discover?**

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Arrows indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

**APPLICATION**

**GOD'S HOLINESS AND JUSTICE ARE MAJOR ISSUES**  
BY MARK DEEPT

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**DISCOVERY**

**BY MICHAEL C. PRICE**

1. How do you know when you are being unjust?
2. How do you know when you are being just?
3. How do you know when you are being holy?
4. How do you know when you are being unholiness?
5. How do you know when you are being righteous?
6. How do you know when you are being unrighteous?
7. How do you know when you are being just?
8. How do you know when you are being unjust?
9. How do you know when you are being holy?
10. How do you know when you are being unholiness?

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF AUGUST 27, 2023**

**LESSON AIM:** **Be glad and rejoice because the Lord has taken away the punishment we justly deserve.**

**UNIT:** Minor Prophets (Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk)

**THEME:** Justice Will Come

**LESSON TEXT:** Zephaniah 3:9-20

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Romans 8:1-2; Psalm 28:6-9

## STUDY

### JUSTIFIED

BY MARK SCOTT

A theological dilemma in the biblical story is this: How can God punish sin (and thereby stay true to his promise and character) and yet absolve the sinner? The answer is that he had to act on people's behalf when they could not act on their own. God himself had to become the one who is just and the justifier of those who put their faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). The result of this salvific act was release from condemnation (Romans 8:1-2).

Were it not for God justifying people, the book of Zephaniah would be terribly negative. Without this closing section, this prophetic work would be entirely doom and gloom. The good news is that God will justify (i.e., make right) the nations as well as Israel. Because of whom God is and what he did, punishment can be removed. So, what do justified people look like?

#### **They Look Humble**

Zephaniah 3:9-13

Our lesson text starts with the word *Then* (v. 9). It is a big word. After God announces all his judgments, *then* he steps in to cleanse those who call on his name. He will clean up the profane speech of the nations so they might call out to God to save them. They will be united in this (serve shoulder to shoulder). As far away as the *rivers of Cush* (the upper Nile in the land of Sudan and Ethiopia), people will come to find God.

God will remove the *boasters* (those who swell with self-importance) and the *haughty* (exalted or high ones). Jerusalem is the *holy hill* on which this will take place. Indeed, the cross is a death blow to pride (1 Corinthians 1:22-25). In place of the formerly proud, God will leave the *meek and humble* (poor and needy). These people, having experienced justification, will have clean speech (since what comes out of our mouths reveals who we really are) and peace and safety (*eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid*).

#### **They Look Glad**

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Justified people have a song in their hearts and a skip in their steps. The prophet challenges the people to *sing* and *rejoice* (shout for joy). They sing because God will take away their *punishment* (i.e., *mispāt*, the judgments

against them). And he also will *turn back* their *enemy*. Zephaniah foresees a time when Assyria and Babylon will no longer bother Israel.

Fear will be cast aside. No longer will *hands hang limp* (a sign of defeat and despair). God will save. God will act as a *Mighty Warrior* (valiant or strong). These will be things to sing about. But Israel will not be the only one singing. God himself will sing. Verse 17 puts it beautifully: “[God] will take great delight in you.” By virtue of his justification, God will choose to *no longer rebuke* them. And perhaps best of all, he will *rejoice over them with singing*. Like a mother singing sweet lullabies over her child, so the Lord will sing over his justified people. (Can you hear it? “He has made me glad; he has made me glad; I will rejoice because he has made me glad.”)

#### **They Look Hopeful**

Zephaniah 3:18-20

Zephaniah looks toward the future when Israel will go *home*. Many evangelical scholars believe this refers to literal Israel returning to their homeland in the special millennial reign of Jesus from Jerusalem. Other scholars believe its primary reference is to the return of the exiles from Assyrian and Babylonian captivity before the initial coming of Christ. Still others spiritualize the text and suggest that *home* simply means being forgiven.

To whichever one it refers, we are told that God will take away any mourning concerning the loss of the Jewish festivals. Those festivals were not just celebrations of the people's faith but also the means of being justified before a holy God. If their festivals are taken away, it must mean there is a new means of justification (Romans 3:21-26; the whole book of Hebrews). During this special time, after the Messiah's coming, God will *rescue the lame and gather the exiles*. He will give them *praise and honor*, he will *gather* them together, and he will *bring* them home.

God's people, Jews and Gentiles, will then become the envy of the whole earth. God will *restore* their *fortunes* (literally from their captivity). For the Jew, “going home” means to the land of Israel. For the Gentile, it means to the church (i.e., being included in the chosen people of God). For the Christian, it means going home to God to the land where there is no more night (Hebrews 4:9-10; Revelation 22:5). ■

## APPLICATION

# THE BEST SINGING VOICE OF ALL

BY DAVID FAUST

Earlier this year, *Rolling Stone* published a list of the 200 greatest singers of all time. Familiar names like Whitney Houston, Frank Sinatra, Adele, Barbara Streisand, Dolly Parton, and Johnny Cash made the list, but controversy arose because the selection team omitted great singers like Celine Dion and Judy Garland while including pop stars like Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish. The golden-voiced tenor Andrea Bocelli didn't make the list, but Bob Dylan—with his eccentric singing style—came in at No. 15.

Atop the list at No. 1 was Aretha Franklin, who described her mission as a singer like this: "Me with my hand outstretched, hoping someone will take it."

### Connecting With Our Hearts

Music educates and entertains. It stirs our emotions, shapes our moods, and communicates ideas. Music impacts our everyday lives. We listen to it while driving in our cars, shopping in stores, or relaxing at home. It enhances movies, starts and ends TV shows, and fires up crowds at sporting events. Music makes weddings more festive, parties more fun, and funerals more poignant. It can make us think, laugh, cry, and sing along.

Music stamps itself in our memories. Do you remember songs that were popular when you were in high school? Senior adults tap their toes to tunes recorded in the 1940s and '50s. The raucous 1960s spawned both patriotic songs that encouraged love for country and anti-war ballads and rock music that expressed bitter frustrations with the government.

Music touches something deep in our souls. It's not surprising that throughout history, worshippers have used "psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit" to express our love for God (Colossians 3:16).

### Beautiful Voices

Some of the world's greatest singers never receive any public acclaim. They don't appear on *American Idol* or *The Voice*, or perform in recording studios, theaters, and cathedrals. You may have heard their beautiful voices, though. A young mom whispers the tune of "Jesus Loves Me" as her baby falls asleep in her arms. A teenager with fresh faith and a bright future stands and praises God with all his heart at a CIY conference. An aging woman whose mind is fogged by dementia smiles and nods while her husband sings her a hymn.

Faithful saints like these have praised God with music down through the ages—in good times and bad. David wrote psalms and played the harp. Jesus sang with his disciples at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30). Paul and Silas sang in prison (Acts 16:25).

When God created the universe, "the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). The prophets predicted a majestic concert in the messianic age with nature itself serving as the worship choir. "The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isaiah 55:12). And there will be new songs to sing in heaven (Revelation 5:9).

The Minor Prophets feature bold, in-your-face calls to repentance, but they also offer hope. Zephaniah says, "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

The best singing voice of all belongs to the God of grace.

**Personal Challenge:** What is your favorite song of praise? Sing it to the Lord right now! **L**

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Since the last time we met, how have you been an influencer for God rather than being influenced away from God by others around you?
2. When have you been so glad and jubilant that you celebrated by shouting out loud and maybe even singing?

Ask two people to read aloud **Zephaniah 3:9-20** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What were some of the things God promised to do for his people? (*Look for the phrases, "I will" when God was speaking and "he will" when others were speaking.*)
4. How did Zephaniah encourage the people to respond to God for what he had done for them?
5. What descriptions of God do you see in this passage? What do you learn about him from that?
6. What do forgiven, justified, restored people look like, and how do they live?
7. Try to imagine God rejoicing over you—yes you!—with singing.
  - What do you imagine that looks and sounds like?
  - How does it make you feel?
  - What do you do in response?
8. Whom will you tell about your God who saves, loves you, and takes great delight in you? How can you retell what you've learned from this passage to them?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. Look back over this passage again at all the "I will" promises from God (or "he will" statements from others). Pick just one that you want to ask God to do in your life. (*Allow a few minutes for everyone to pick their statement.*) What do you want to ask God for?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Song of Songs 1:1-4, 12-14; 2:1, 3-7, 16-17** as we begin a new unit with the theme, "Speaking of Love." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■