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ZEPHANIAH

A 4-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 4 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

The Day of the LORD Is Near — Zephaniah 1:1–18

Scripture Scope: Zephaniah 1:1–18 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

LEADER GUIDE EDITION

Complete Participant Text + Interleaved Pacing, Hebrew Word Studies, Facilitation Probes & Pitfalls

Zephaniah — 4-Week Group Bible Study (Leader Guide Edition)

Week 1: The Day of the LORD Is Near (Zephaniah 1:1–18)

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- **The title:** The book is named for its prophet, Zephaniah, whose name means "the LORD hides" or "the LORD protects." Zephaniah's genealogy extends four generations to a man named Hezekiah (1:1). Some interpreters identify him with King Hezekiah, which would place Zephaniah within the royal family, but the text does not explicitly call Hezekiah a king and the identification remains uncertain.
- **The setting:** Zephaniah ministered during King Josiah's reign (640–609 BC), before Jerusalem's fall and before Habakkuk's likely late-seventh-century setting; Nahum also belongs to the seventh century, but the precise relative order of Nahum and Zephaniah is uncertain. The long reign of Manasseh had filled Jerusalem with idols, star worship, and mixed loyalties, and Zephaniah's denunciation of continuing idolatry may fit a period before Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22–23) were fully implemented, although the book does not provide an exact date within the reign. Assyria was still standing, and Nineveh would fall in 612 BC.
- **The main theme:** The day of the LORD, the time when God acts decisively to judge and to save. Zephaniah gives one of the prophets' most concentrated portrayals of the day of the LORD: a day of wrath for the whole earth, beginning with Judah, and then a day of joy for a humble, purified people.
- **The main characters:** The LORD, the prophet Zephaniah, Jerusalem and its leaders, the nations around Judah (Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, and Assyria), and the humble remnant.
- **The structure (three movements):**
- The day of wrath against Judah and the whole earth (1:1–18).
- The call to seek the LORD, and judgment on the nations (2:1–15).
- Jerusalem rebuked, and then restored with singing (3:1–20).
- **Why it matters:** Zephaniah takes sin and complacency seriously, and it ends with one of the most tender pictures of God in Scripture: the LORD in the midst of his people, rejoicing over them with singing. The New Testament teaches that Christ bore the curse and divine judgment due to sinners. His saving work secures deliverance from final wrath for those who belong to him. This is a canonical gospel culmination of the judgment theme, not a claim that the crucifixion was the historical event Zephaniah directly described—and in Christ, God dwells among his people and will come again.

How This 4-Week Study Works

You may notice this study is shorter than our usual eight weeks. Even though we are 8weekbiblestudy.com, stretching Zephaniah to eight weeks would have left it thin on content, and we never want to trade quality for quantity.

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, each week of Zephaniah invites you to move with a prophet from the day of wrath to a day of singing together through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.
- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's chapters inside the structure of Zephaniah and the ancient Near Eastern world.

- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.
- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.
- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV. Zephaniah uses strong images of judgment, including the day of wrath and the fall of nations. The study retells its harshest images briefly in its own words and does not read them aloud, so that the focus stays on God's holiness, his call to seek him, and his joy over his people.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Zephaniah:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.

- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 4-Week Zephaniah Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**The Day of the LORD Is Near** (1:1–18)	Judgment on Judah's Idolatry and Complacency (1:1–13) / The Great Day of Wrath (1:14–18)	The day of the LORD, deliverance in Christ, and his return
2	**Seek the LORD** (2:1–15)	Seek Him Before the Day Comes (2:1–3) / The Nations Brought Low, Nineveh Made Desolate (2:4–15)	The humble who seek the Lord and the nations who bow to him
3	**A City That Would Not Listen** (3:1–8)	The Oppressing City and Its Faithless Leaders (3:1–4) / The Righteous LORD Within Her (3:5–8)	Jerusalem's refusal and Christ's faithful obedience
4	**The LORD Rejoices Over His People** (3:9–20)	Pure Speech and a Humble Remnant (3:9–13) / Sing Aloud, O Daughter of Zion (3:14–20)	The LORD in our midst in Christ, and God's joy over his redeemed people

How to Use This Leader Guide Edition

This **Leader Guide Edition** is built on a synchronized two-edition architecture so you never have to juggle two separate books during your small group or mini-church gathering:

1. 100% Word-for-Word Participant Text Included: Every section, Scripture reading prompt, verbatim ESV anchor verse callout, teaching narrative, table, and discussion or reflection prompt appears here **word-for-word identical** to what your group members see in their Participant Study Edition. Section numbers and question labels match exactly, so leaders and participants can stay on the same page.

2. Interleaved `[LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY]` Blocks: Immediately following each section, you will find a dedicated leader block containing:

- **Pacing & Time Targets** calibrated for a 75–90 minute session. Pacing targets appear in every Leader section header. Zephaniah weeks are short (8–18 verses), which leaves room for discussion. Chapter 1 is heavy with judgment; keep the book's ending (3:17) in view from the first week.
- **Hebrew Word Study & Ancient Near Eastern Research Quick-References** so you can explain terms naturally without lecturing, when they add something useful.
- **Question-by-Question Facilitation Probes** listed in question order, designed to move conversation past polite answers into honest reflection.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around** so you can gently redirect common rabbit trails back to the biblical text.
- **Additional Research Notes** appear when they add something useful.

3. Leader Flags: Numbered in reading order, they mark passages that need pastoral care or tend to raise hard questions, with guidance on handling them. Zephaniah includes sweeping language of judgment, the day of the LORD, complacency, harsh scenes of distress, the fall of nations, corrupt leaders, and a remnant called to humility. The flags give a consistent approach: hold judgment together with God's mercy, retell hard scenes briefly in your own words, never read harsh verses aloud, avoid speculation about end-times dates, avoid aiming warnings at other groups, and make room for members who carry their own wounds, including fear of

God's anger, anxiety, or the trauma of violence. If someone discloses abuse, exploitation, trafficking, coercion, or immediate danger, listen without interrogation, take the disclosure seriously, help the person reach safety, and follow applicable law and your organization's safeguarding and reporting procedures. If someone expresses current thoughts of suicide or self-harm, ask directly whether there is immediate danger, intent, a plan, or access to means. Do not leave the person alone when imminent risk is present. In the United States, call or text 988 (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), and call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate danger. Outside the United States, use the appropriate local crisis or emergency service. Inform the appropriate pastor or safeguarding leader while prioritizing immediate safety.

4. Reading aloud: Assign readers ahead of time for the Guided Scripture Reading. Printed anchor verses are for quick reference; read the longer focal passages from an open ESV. Passages marked "in brief" are summarized or retold by the leader rather than read.

5. Facilitating well: Ask the printed question, wait, and let silence work. Use the probes to deepen, not to lecture. Aim for every voice to be heard at least once each session.

Week 1 Session Pacing at a Glance (75–90 Minutes)

Section	Focus	Time Target
Section 1.1	Opening: The Day of the LORD Is Near (Zephaniah 1:1–18) (1.1 Q1)	**10 mins**
Section 1.2	Historical & Literary Context: Jerusalem After Manasseh (1.2 Q1–Q3)	**12 mins**
Section 1.3	Movement 1: Judgment on Judah's Idolatry and Complacency (Zephaniah 1:1–13) (1.3 Q1–Q5)	**22 mins**
Section 1.4	Movement 2: The Great Day of Wrath (Zephaniah 1:14–18) (1.4 Q1–Q5)	**20 mins**
Section 1.5	Canonical Horizon: The Day of the LORD, Deliverance in Christ, and His Return (1.5 Q1–Q3)	**12 mins**
Section 1.6	Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer (1.6 Q1–Q3)	**9 mins**
Total	**Full Week 1 Group Session**	**75–90 mins**

WEEK 1 OF 4

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · ZEPHANIAH 1:1–18

Week 1: The Day of the LORD Is Near

Scripture Scope: Zephaniah 1:1–18 (ESV) • Focal Passages: Zephaniah 1:2; 1:7; 1:12; 1:14–15; 1:18 • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: The Day of the LORD Is Near (Zephaniah 1:1–18)

Opening

The young King Josiah sits on David's throne, but Jerusalem is still full of the idols his grandfather Manasseh set up. Some people bow to Baal; some burn incense to the stars on their rooftops; some swear by the LORD and by the god of the Ammonites in the same breath. Officials dress like foreigners, and the wealthy fill their homes with what they took by violence and fraud.

Many have simply stopped expecting God to do anything at all. Into this city Zephaniah announces that the day of the LORD is near. God will search Jerusalem with lamps. The day is coming fast: a day of wrath, distress, darkness, and gloom, when silver and gold will save no one.

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Zephaniah 1:1–18 (the heading, the LORD's announcement that he will sweep everything away, judgment on idolatry and mixed worship in Jerusalem, the call to be silent before the Lord GOD, punishment of corrupt officials and traders, God searching Jerusalem with lamps for the complacent, and the great day of the LORD's wrath that no wealth can escape)
Focal Passages	Zephaniah 1:2; 1:7; 1:12; 1:14–15; 1:18
Literary & Structural Anchor	Humans, beasts, birds, and fish (1:3) echo the categories of Genesis 1 in reverse order as sweeping poetic imagery of total judgment. Judgment begins with the whole earth (1:2–3), narrows to Judah and Jerusalem (1:4–13), and widens again (1:18). God prepares a sacrifice and consecrates guests (1:7), using solemn sacrificial banquet imagery as a metaphor for judgment falling on Judah. God searches the city with lamps for hidden complacency (1:12). The word "day" beats like a drum in 1:14–16. Building without dwelling and planting without drinking (1:13) echo the covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:30, 39).
Big Idea	The day of the LORD is near, and no idol, wealth, or complacency can shelter anyone from the holy God.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD **Know the Day of the LORD:** Understand what Zephaniah meant by the day of the LORD and why it began with judgment on God's own people.

HEART **Take God Seriously:** Let God's holiness wake us from complacency and lead us to awe.

HANDS **Turn from Divided Loyalty:** Take one concrete step to remove a rival loyalty or a complacent habit from your life.

Opening Frame: The Day of the LORD Is Near

Habakkuk's vision ended with the LORD in his holy temple and all the earth called to keep silence before him. Zephaniah opens with the same hush and then describes the day of the LORD in full. Zephaniah takes us a step back in time, to the reign of good King Josiah, before Babylon's armies came, when Judah still mixed the worship of the LORD with idols and many had grown comfortable, assuming God would do neither good nor harm. This week is heavy, but the book ends with God singing over his people. This is a 4–Week study: the day of the LORD, the call to seek him, the city that would not listen, and the LORD who rejoices over his people. Zephaniah gives no date for the day; he calls God's people to be ready. The question for this week: what does it mean to take God's judgment seriously without fear or speculation, and where have we grown complacent? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question): Why can people delay preparing for something they know is approaching?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.1 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 10 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 10 minutes. Opening and At a Glance, 3 minutes; Head, Heart, Hands, 2 minutes; Opening Frame, 2 minutes; Opening Entry Question, 3 minutes.
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Welcome the group to Zephaniah and point to the front matter. If the group studied Habakkuk, remind them of Habakkuk 2:20. Tell the group up front that chapter 1 is heavy with judgment and that the book ends in joy (3:17).
  - Follow-up probe for **1.1 Q1**: Why do people postpone preparing for known realities? Keep examples general.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not let the icebreaker turn into end-times speculation.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Zephaniah is the ninth of the twelve shorter prophetic books and the last in the Twelve before the exile. Its main themes are the day of the LORD, idolatry and divided loyalty, complacency, the humble remnant, judgment on the nations, and God's joy over his redeemed people.
- **Hebrew Word Study:** Yom YHWH (יוֹם יְהוָה), "the day of the LORD," in 1:7 and 14. The time when God acts decisively to judge and save. In this opening it names the theme of the whole book and prepares the group for a day that begins with judgment on God's own people (compare Amos 5:18).

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: Jerusalem After Manasseh (Zephaniah 1:1–18)

Entering the World of Zephaniah and Josiah's Judah

1. Historical Background

Manasseh (697–642 BC) rebuilt the high places, set up altars for Baal and the starry host in the temple courts, and practiced child sacrifice (2 Kings 21:1–9). His grandson Josiah began to seek God as a teenager and launched sweeping reforms when the Book of the Law was found in the temple in 622 BC (2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 34). Zephaniah's denunciation of continuing idolatry may fit a period before the reforms were fully implemented, although the book does not provide an exact date within Josiah's reign.

2. Cultural Setting

Baal was a Canaanite storm and fertility god; Milcom was the national deity of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:5), sometimes connected in biblical tradition with Molech (1 Kings 11:7), though scholars debate their exact relationship. Incense to the sun, moon, and stars was burned on flat rooftops (2 Kings 23:12; Jeremiah 19:13). Officials who wore foreign attire (1:8) likely signaled political alignment with foreign courts or imitation of foreign prestige and customs. Jerusalem's districts included the Fish Gate, the Second Quarter, and the Mortar, likely a market area.

3. Literary Structure of Zephaniah 1:1–18

- **Heading** (1:1)
- **Everything swept away** (1:2–3)
- **Idolatry in Jerusalem** (1:4–6)
- **Be silent, the day is near** (1:7)
- **Officials and the violent** (1:8–9)
- **Wailing in the city** (1:10–11)
- **Searching with lamps** (1:12)
- **Lost wealth** (1:13)
- **The great day near** (1:14)
- **A day of wrath** (1:15–16)
- **Distress** (1:17)
- **No ransom** (1:18)

4. Key Themes

The day of the LORD; idolatry and mixed worship; corrupt leaders; complacency; the uselessness of wealth before God.

5. Theological Considerations

Israel hoped the day of the LORD would bring victory over its enemies, but the prophets warned that it would begin with judgment on God's own people (Amos 5:18–20). God's judgment is real because his holiness is real, and Zephaniah's book will end with mercy.

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

The sweeping language of 1:2–3 echoes the categories of Genesis 1 in reverse order as prophetic imagery of total judgment rather than a literal claim that every creature immediately perished. A few phrases, such as the stumbling blocks of 1:3 and the threshold custom of 1:9, are uncertain, and translations differ.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

1.2 Q1: Zephaniah preached while Josiah was king, and Josiah led great reforms. Why might a city still need a hard warning even when its leader is seeking God?

1.2 Q2: What characteristics indicate divided loyalty between worship of God and another source of ultimate trust?

1.2 Q3: Israel expected the day of the LORD to be good news for them and bad news for their enemies. Why is it dangerous to assume God's judgment is only for other people?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.2 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 12 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 12 minutes. Context summary, 5 minutes; discussion, 7 minutes (about 2 minutes per question).
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Keep the history simple: Manasseh's idolatry, Josiah's reforms beginning in his teens and the Law found in 622 BC, Nineveh's fall in 612. Mention Baal, Milcom, and rooftop star worship in one sentence each.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.2 Q1**: What had Manasseh left behind? Can reform reach every heart? What does that say about outward change?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.2 Q2**: What "other gods" compete for loyalty? Why is it tempting to keep both? What does God ask?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.2 Q3**: What did Amos say (Amos 5:18)? Where do we make the same assumption? How does humility change things?
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not turn 1.2 Q2 into a list of other people's idols; invite personal reflection.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Zephaniah's genealogy (1:1) runs four generations to a man named Hezekiah; some interpreters identify him with King Hezekiah, though the text does not explicitly call him king and the identification remains uncertain. Jeremiah began his ministry in Josiah's thirteenth year (Jeremiah 1:2), about the same time.

- **Ancient Near Eastern Research Notes:** Rooftop worship of the sun, moon, and stars reflected Assyrian astral religion, which spread in Judah while it was an Assyrian vassal. Leaping over the threshold (1:9) may refer to a superstition about temple thresholds (1 Samuel 5:5) or to officials bursting into homes to seize goods; its meaning is debated.

Section 1.3

Movement 1: Judgment on Judah's Idolatry and Complacency (Zephaniah 1:1–13)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Leader summary of Zephaniah 1:1** — The heading: the word of the LORD to Zephaniah, a descendant of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah king of Judah.
- **Reader 1: Zephaniah 1:2** (focal passage) — The LORD declares that he will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth.
- **Leader summary of Zephaniah 1:3–6** — People and animals, birds and fish, and the stumbling blocks of the wicked will be swept away. God will cut off what remains of Baal worship, the idolatrous priests, those who bow to the stars on their rooftops, those who swear by the LORD and by Milcom, and those who have turned back or never sought him.
- **Reader 2: Zephaniah 1:7** (focal passage) — Be silent before the Lord GOD, for the day of the LORD is near; he has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests.
- **Leader summary of Zephaniah 1:8–11** — God will punish the officials and royal sons who dress like foreigners and those who fill their masters' houses with violence and fraud. Wailing rises from the Fish Gate, the Second Quarter, and the market, where the traders are cut off.
- **Reader 3: Zephaniah 1:12–13** (focal passage) — God will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish the complacent who say in their hearts that the LORD will do neither good nor ill. Their wealth will be plundered; they will build houses and plant vineyards but never enjoy them.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Zephaniah 1:2:**
>
> “I will utterly sweep away everything
> from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.
>
> **Zephaniah 1:7:**
>
> Be silent before the Lord GOD!
> For the day of the LORD is near;
>
> the LORD has prepared a sacrifice
>
> and consecrated his guests.
>
> **Zephaniah 1:12:**
>
> At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
> and I will punish the men

> who are complacent,
>
> those who say in their hearts,
>
> 'The LORD will not do good,
>
> nor will he do ill.'

Teaching Narrative: Judgment on Judah's Idolatry and Complacency

1. A Prophet in Josiah's Judah (Zephaniah 1:1)

Zephaniah speaks during King Josiah's reign, addressing Judah and its leaders—whether or not the Hezekiah of 1:1 refers to the former king.

2. Everything Swept Away (Zephaniah 1:2–3)

God's judgment is pictured through sweeping reverse-creation imagery, showing how gravely sin threatens the world God made.

3. Divided Worship (Zephaniah 1:4–6)

Baal, the stars, Milcom, and the LORD all at once. Mixed loyalty is no loyalty. Retell in brief.

4. Be Silent (Zephaniah 1:7)

The right response before the holy God is awed silence; using solemn sacrificial imagery for judgment, the prophet pictures Judah under God's prepared sentence.

5. Leaders and Traders (Zephaniah 1:8–11)

Those with power and wealth who used violence and fraud will answer to God.

6. Searching with Lamps (Zephaniah 1:12)

God hunts down the quiet indifference that says he will never act.

7. Futility (Zephaniah 1:13)

What is built on sin will not be enjoyed, as the covenant warned.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: What literary effect does Zephaniah's sweeping language create, and how should it be read alongside the book's closing promises?

1.3 Q2: What does the command for silence communicate in Zephaniah 1:7, and what alternative practices may help participants for whom silence triggers anxiety or traumatic memories?

1.3 Q3: What accountability and what protection are present in the truth that God sees hidden complacency, fraud, violence, and suffering?

1.3 Q4: The complacent say, "The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill" (1:12). What does it look like to live as if God will never act?

1.3 Q5: How do the lost houses and vineyards function within Zephaniah's covenant warning, and why should failed work, foreclosure, displacement, or financial loss not automatically be interpreted as judgment?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.3 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 22 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 22 minutes. Guided Scripture Reading, 6 minutes; Anchor Verses and Teaching Narrative, 5 minutes; discussion, 11 minutes (about 2 minutes per question).
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Have readers take 1:2, 1:7, and 1:12–13. Retell 1:1, 1:3–6, and 1:8–11 yourself in a few sentences.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q1**: What does it say about sin? What does it say about God? What does the end of the book add (3:17)?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q2**: What does 1:7's call to silence communicate? Offer alternatives for anyone for whom silence triggers anxiety or trauma.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q3**: How does God seeing everything bring both accountability and protection?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q4**: How does it show up in daily life? Why is it so easy? Where have you seen it in yourself?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q5**: How do lost houses function in covenant warning without blaming personal loss or displacement on sin?
- **LEADER FLAG 1: Total judgment (1:2–3)**
  - Some members will find the sweeping language frightening. Explain it as the language of creation undone, showing the seriousness of sin, and hold it with the book's ending, where God rejoices over his people (3:17).
- **LEADER FLAG 2: Complacency (1:12)**
  - Keep this self-searching. Avoid aiming it at other churches, generations, or groups.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not read 1:3–6 or 1:8–11 aloud in full. Do not build teaching points on the uncertain phrases in 1:3 and 1:9.

- **Additional Research Notes:** The complacent are literally "thickening on their dregs" (1:12), an image from winemaking (compare Jeremiah 48:11). Building without dwelling and planting without drinking (1:13) echo Deuteronomy 28:30, 39 and Amos 5:11. "Be silent" (1:7) is the same Hebrew word as Habakkuk 2:20 and Zechariah 2:13.
- **Ancient Near Eastern Research Notes:** Wine left too long on its sediment became thick and syrupy; the image pictures people settled, stagnant, and unmoved. Merchants and traders gathered in Jerusalem's market districts, which may explain the wailing in 1:10–11.
- **Hebrew Word Study:**
  - 'Asof 'asef (אָסֹף אֶסֵּף), "I will utterly sweep away," in 1:2. A doubled verb for emphasis; 'asaf (אָסַף) means gather or remove. In this movement it shows that God's judgment is total, a reversal of creation.
  - Has (הַס), "be silent," in 1:7. The same hush that closed Habakkuk's vision (Habakkuk 2:20). In this movement it shows that the right response to the holy God's coming is awed silence.
  - Chippes bannerot (חַפֵּשׂ בַּנֵּרוֹת), "search with lamps," in 1:12. A thorough search of dark corners. In this movement it shows that nothing is hidden from God, including the quiet indifference of the heart.
  - Qof'im 'al-shimreyhem (קֹפְאִים עַל־שִׁמְרֵיהֶם), "complacent" (literally "thickening on their dregs"), in 1:12. An image from winemaking. In this movement it pictures complacency as spiritual stagnation: believing God will not act.

Section 1.4

Movement 2: The Great Day of Wrath (Zephaniah 1:14–18)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Zephaniah 1:14–15** (focal passage) — The great day of the LORD is near and hastening fast; its sound is bitter, and even the mighty cry aloud. It is a day of wrath, distress, anguish, ruin, devastation, darkness, gloom, clouds, and thick darkness.
- **Leader summary of Zephaniah 1:16–17** — It is a day of trumpet blast against fortified cities and high towers. People will stumble like the blind because they have sinned against the LORD.
- **Reader 2: Zephaniah 1:18** (focal passage) — Neither silver nor gold can deliver them on the day of the LORD's wrath; in the fire of his jealousy all the earth will be consumed.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Zephaniah 1:14:**
>
> The great day of the LORD is near,
> near and hastening fast;
>
> the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter;
>
> the mighty man cries aloud there.
>
> **Zephaniah 1:15:**
>
> A day of wrath is that day,
> a day of distress and anguish,
>
> a day of ruin and devastation,
>
> a day of darkness and gloom,

> a day of clouds and thick darkness,
>
> **Zephaniah 1:18:**
>
> Neither their silver nor their gold
> shall be able to deliver them
>
> on the day of the wrath of the LORD.
>
> In the fire of his jealousy,
>
> all the earth shall be consumed;
>
> for a full and sudden end
>
> he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Teaching Narrative: The Great Day of Wrath

1. Near and Hastening (Zephaniah 1:14)

The day is not far off. Even the mighty will cry out. Zephaniah gives no date or timetable for the day of the LORD, and neither should we; the call is to readiness and to Christ, not to date-setting.

2. A Day of Wrath (Zephaniah 1:15)

The drumbeat of "a day of" names the day's character: wrath, distress, ruin, darkness.

3. Against Fortresses (Zephaniah 1:16–17)

No defenses will hold. Retell the distress of 1:17 in brief.

4. No Ransom (Zephaniah 1:18)

Silver and gold cannot buy anyone out of God's judgment.

5. The Fire of His Jealousy (Zephaniah 1:18)

God's jealous love for what is right will consume all that opposes him. Zephaniah's movement from 3:8 to 3:9 joins judgment and renewal without requiring the judgment fire to be interpreted as a simple refining experience for every person.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: What forms of faithful readiness does Scripture commend without encouraging date-setting, panic, or neglect of ordinary responsibilities?

1.4 Q2: "A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish" (1:15). Why is it important not to soften what Scripture says about God's wrath?

1.4 Q3: What limits does the day of the LORD place on military power, wealth, status, and human self-sufficiency?

1.4 Q4: "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them" (1:18). Why do people trust wealth for security, and what does this verse say to that?

1.4 Q5: "In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed" (1:18). How is God's jealousy different from human jealousy?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.4 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 20 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 20 minutes. Guided Scripture Reading, 5 minutes; Anchor Verses and Teaching Narrative, 4 minutes; discussion, 11 minutes (about 2 minutes per question).
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Have readers take 1:14–15 and 1:18. Retell 1:16–17 yourself in one sentence. Let the drumbeat of "a day of" in 1:15 be heard slowly.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q1**: What would you do if the day were near? What does readiness look like? What keeps us from it?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q2**: What happens if we ignore it? What happens if we only talk about it? How do we hold it with God's love?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q3**: Whom do we see as mighty? What will their strength do then? Where do you lean on your own strength?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q4**: What does money promise? What can it not do? What does Psalm 49:7 say?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q5**: What is God jealous for? Why is that good? How does 3:9 show the fire's purpose?
- **LEADER FLAG 3: The day of the LORD and end-times anxiety (1:14–16)**
  - Members may bring fears or strong end-times views. Avoid speculation about dates and charts; focus on readiness and on Christ, whose saving work secures deliverance from final wrath. Do not set or endorse any date or timetable for the day of the LORD. If someone expresses current thoughts of suicide or self-harm, ask directly whether there is immediate danger, intent, a plan, or access to means. Do not leave the person alone when imminent risk is present. In the United States, call or text 988 (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), and call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate danger. Outside the United States, use the appropriate local crisis or emergency service. Inform the appropriate pastor or safeguarding leader while prioritizing immediate safety.
- **LEADER FLAG 4: People stumbling like the blind (1:17)**
  - Retell in brief only and do not read aloud. Members who have witnessed violence or death need care.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not set dates or identify modern events with the day of the LORD.

- **Additional Research Notes:** The day of the LORD appears across the prophets (Isaiah 2:12–22; Joel 2:1–2, 31; Amos 5:18–20; Obadiah 15). Zephaniah 1:15 lies behind the medieval hymn "Dies Irae" ("Day of Wrath"). No ransom in wealth: Psalm 49:6–9; Proverbs 11:4; Ezekiel 7:19.
- **Ancient Near Eastern Research Notes:** The trumpet (shofar) sounded alarm in war (1:16). Fortified cities with corner towers were the strongest defenses of the age, yet none would stand.
- **Hebrew Word Study:**
  - Yom 'evrah (יוֹם עֶבְרָה), "day of wrath," in 1:15 and 18. 'Evrah (עֶבְרָה) is overflowing anger. In this movement it shows that the day is personal: it is the day of the LORD's wrath against sin.
  - Qin'ah (קִנְאָה), "jealousy," in 1:18. Zeal that will not share what belongs to God. In this movement it shows that the fire of the day comes from God's jealous love for what is right, the same jealousy that later purifies a people (3:8–9).

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: The Day of the LORD, Deliverance in Christ, and His Return

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

As a canonical resonance rather than a direct citation of Zephaniah 1:15, darkness covered the land at noon when Jesus bore the curse for sinners (Matthew 27:45; Galatians 3:13), and believers are not destined for wrath but to obtain salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:9); the day of the Lord will come like a thief (2 Peter 3:10), and we were ransomed not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19). Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. Darkness at Noon (Matthew 27:45; Romans 5:9; Galatians 3:13)

Darkness covered the land at the cross as canonical resonance with day-of-the-LORD imagery. The New Testament teaches that Christ bore the curse and divine judgment due to sinners, securing deliverance from final wrath for those who belong to him—a gospel culmination rather than a direct prediction in Zephaniah.

2. Not Destined for Wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:2–9)

Believers are not appointed to wrath but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ.

3. Like a Thief (2 Peter 3:9–10)

The day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, and God's patience gives time for repentance.

4. Against Complacency (Luke 12:16–21; 17:26–30)

Jesus warned against living as if God will never act, like the rich fool and the days of Noah.

5. A Better Ransom (1 Peter 1:18–19; Mark 10:45)

Believers were ransomed not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

> **Zephaniah 1:18:**
>
> Neither their silver nor their gold
>
> shall be able to deliver them
>
> on the day of the wrath of the LORD.
>
> In the fire of his jealousy,
>
> all the earth shall be consumed;
>
> for a full and sudden end
>
> he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: What contrast do you see between wealth being unable to deliver in Zephaniah 1:18 and Peter's proclamation that believers were ransomed through Christ rather than silver or gold?

1.5 Q2: Paul writes, "God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). How does the cross change the way a believer faces the day of the Lord?

1.5 Q3: Peter says the Lord "is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). Why is God's patience good news, and how should we use the time?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.5 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 12 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 12 minutes. Canonical Horizon teaching, 5 minutes; discussion, 7 minutes.
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Assign participants to look up Matthew 27:45–46, 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, 2 Peter 3:8–10, and 1 Peter 1:17–19 ahead of time.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.5 Q1**: What could silver and gold not do? What did Christ do? What does that mean for you?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.5 Q2**: What did Jesus bear? What do believers receive? How does this replace fear with readiness?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.5 Q3**: How can Christians communicate God's patience and call to repentance humbly, without singling out or pressuring another participant?
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not let 1.5 Q2 become a debate about end-times timelines.
- **Additional Research Notes:** The darkness at the cross (Matthew 27:45) serves as canonical resonance with day-of-the-LORD imagery in Zephaniah 1:15, Amos 8:9, and Joel 2:31 rather than a direct citation.

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	The day of the LORD is near; God will search out idolatry and complacency, and no wealth can shelter anyone from his holy wrath.
HEART	In Christ, whose saving work secures deliverance from final wrath, believers are not destined for wrath but for salvation.
HANDS	Faith takes God seriously, turns from divided loyalty, and lives ready.

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: What patterns can indicate spiritual complacency, and what practices encourage attentive, honest faith?

1.6 Q2: What principles help a person identify when a legitimate role, possession, relationship, institution, or desire has become an ultimate loyalty?

1.6 Q3: What qualities should mark the way Christians speak about judgment, repentance, and Christ's saving work?

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, Zephaniah announced the day of the LORD: God searching Jerusalem with lamps, and a day of wrath that no idol or wealth can escape.

Transition: The day is near, but it has not yet come. Next, Zephaniah calls the humble to seek the LORD before it arrives, and turns to the nations around Judah.

Week 2 Overview — Seek the LORD (Zephaniah 2:1–15): Movement 1, Seek Him Before the Day Comes (2:1–3), covers the call for a shameless nation to gather and the humble to seek the LORD, righteousness, and humility. Movement 2, The Nations Brought Low, Nineveh Made Desolate (2:4–15), covers judgment on Philistia, Moab and Ammon, Cush, and Assyria, a remnant inheriting the land, the nations bowing to the LORD, and proud Nineveh left desolate. The Canonical Horizon traces the humble who seek the Lord and the nations who bow to him.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Zephaniah 2:1–3
- Zephaniah 2:7
- Zephaniah 2:11
- Zephaniah 2:13–15

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

Closing Group Prayer

Lord GOD, we are silent before you in awe. We confess our complacency and our divided loyalties. Search our hearts with your lamp, and show us where we have assumed you will not act. We pray for any who fear your judgment or the end of the world; give them peace in Christ. Thank you for Jesus, whose saving work secures deliverance from final wrath and who ransomed us, not with silver or gold, but with his own blood. Help us live ready and awake. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.6 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 9 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 9 minutes. Application and questions, 5 minutes; Looking Ahead and Focal Readings, 2 minutes; Concrete Step and Closing Prayer, 2 minutes.
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Allow a moment of silence for 1.6 Q1 and 1.6 Q2. Encourage members to read Zephaniah 2 before next week, and remind them that the book ends with God singing over his people.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.6 Q1**: Where do you see it? What has dulled you? What one step would stir you?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.6 Q2**: What is it? Why does it hold you? What will you do?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.6 Q3**: Who comes to mind? What would you say? When?
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not press anyone to name a rival loyalty aloud.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Next week's call to seek the LORD (2:3) offers a "perhaps" of shelter on the day of wrath, the first ray of hope in the book.