



2022

HOPE REMAINS

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A Cornerstone Message Series Guide
Part 1 of 3



A Word Before We Get Started

I grew up in church. Now to clarify, when I say I grew up in church, we met more than just on Sunday mornings. My parents took my brothers and me to church on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings. We had youth on Monday nights, went to revival meetings, attended conferences, and frequently found ourselves at the church with mom or dad volunteering throughout the week. Believe me, when I say I grew up in church.

I heard some great and not-so-solid preaching and teaching throughout those years of growing up in church. I honestly wish I could recall more specific sermons and lessons I heard throughout the years. Unfortunately for me, I find myself remembering more of failed attempts at jokes, two pastors cursing as part of their illustrations, and comments made that would make the world blush. I digress.

Back to my main thought, because of having grown up in church, spending a year at a Christian high school, going to Bible college, and being able to participate in part-time or full-time ministry since 2002, I have heard countless sermons. Depending on how long you have been a follower of Jesus and how big of an appetite you have for listening to or watching preaching, you have heard your fair share of sermons as well. With all that said, I think you would agree that some texts and books get their fair share of attention in preaching, and others are often ignored or overlooked.

I believe Zephaniah is often an overlooked book of God's self-revelation to us. I don't think I've ever heard a message in person from the book of Zephaniah. I think it is often neglected either accidentally or on purpose because its contents are pretty heavy on the subjects of God's anger, jealousy, and judgment.

Yet woven throughout these prior subjects in the book's three chapters are gems concerning God's grace, love, plans, and how we can have genuine hope. Let's be honest, after the past couple of years of experiencing Covid, racial tensions, growing opposition towards the Church, a heated election, continued political division, inflation, general life struggles, and an uncertain world stage - who doesn't want or need hope?

Our second series of 2022 is Hope Remains. In this series, I pray that the Holy Spirit would help you gain an overall grasp of the book and its place in the biblical storyline, have correctly placed faith resulting in genuine hope, and help you live with hope now as you point others to the One who is our hope.

Since Zephaniah is possibly one of the more unfamiliar books of the Bible, I thought it would be helpful to spend some time in the biblical books that set the stage for the historical setting of Zephaniah's ministry and prophecies. Towards the end of the week, we will briefly examine how faith and hope differentiate, which will prove beneficial going into our message in chapter one.

As we journey through the book of Zephaniah together, if you have any questions, please email them to me at Thomas@cornerstonego.com.

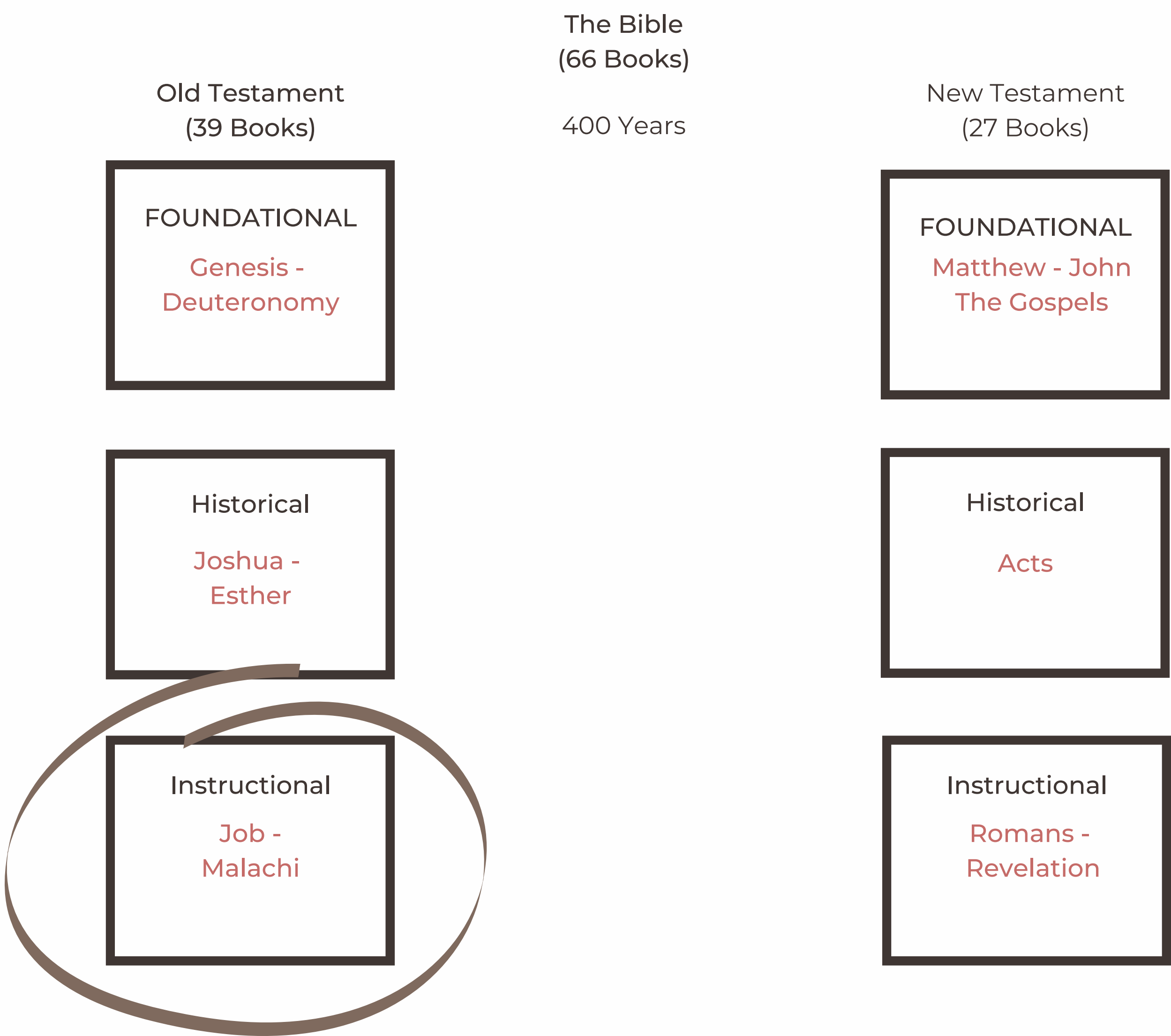
Living for our Daddy together,

Pastor Thomas





Where does Zephaniah fit into the Big Picture of the Bible?



What Historical Books of the Old Testament does Zephaniah speak into?

The Instructional Books in the Old Testament do not further the Biblical story or the historical timeline. The Old Testament Instructional Books include what many call Wisdom Literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) as well as the Major and Minor Prophets. These books serve us by providing a behind-the-scenes look at the hearts and lives of God's people as they live with the truths given to them by God through the Foundational Books of the Old Testament. Their lives provide us with both examples to follow and avoid as we seek to live for God during our time.

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

Setting the Table

Zephaniah 1:1 (NLT)

The Lord gave this message to Zephaniah when Josiah son of Amon was king of Judah. Zephaniah was the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah.

I once heard another pastor say that we, as pastors, should serve a hot homecooked meal from the Word of God for our people every week. This pastor's charge is my desire each week. And while the sermon itself needs to be a hot, homecooked, Spirit-led meal, a correctly set table is essential for enjoying a good homecooked meal. No matter how good some mashed potatoes and gravy are, I'm not taking turns with my family eating out of the bowl with my hands. Please don't miss understand me, I'm not talking about the correct placement of utensils on the table, but that every utensil or item needed to sit down and savor the cook's work is available. As I look ahead to our next few meals in Zephaniah, I feel like it is of utmost importance for me to offer some resources to help set the table so that you can savor what God has for us in this lesser-known book.

I am attempting to provide some background to better understand the book and the time it was written with each resource. This first thought tries to explain how the current cultural and spiritual climate Zephaniah, Josiah, and Jeremiah found themselves in came about.

Zephaniah is the only prophet who identified himself by going back four generations. He traces his family line back to King Hezekiah of Judah. The prophet probably doesn't include Hezekiah's King of Judah's title out of respect for Judah's current King, Josiah. King Hezekiah served as Judah's King for 29 years and did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight, seeking Him with all his heart. Hezekiah's heart for the LORD, his religious reforms, and God's blessing on the people of Judah during this time of obedience are more than likely why the prophet made an effort to connect his lineage to the former king.

From the beginning, Zephaniah causes his audience to recall the last time the nation as a whole had dedicated themselves to the LORD and what He required of them in the Mosaic Covenant. As a result of their obedience, they experienced God's blessings as described in Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

This prophet had a family history of religious reform and zeal for Yahweh. Zephaniah calls the people to remember the covenant God made with their ancestors and the benefits of their obedience to it by referencing this former King of Judah. He then delivers his messages of coming judgment for nearly six decades of abandoning their God who rescued them from slavery in Egypt to worship and follow other gods resulting in evil behavior.

At this point, you might be wondering why Judah was in such dire need of religious reform. In other words, how did they get so far off track in their relationship with God? Josiah is King of Judah when Zephaniah carries out his ministry. As a member of the royal family, there is little doubt that the prophet had the ear of Josiah and knew the spiritual condition of the royal leadership. His messages had to affect how Josiah led and the religious reforms performed under his reign. But why the need for such an overarching reform and Zephaniah's effort to influence his king?



While Josiah's great-great-grandfather Hezekiah set a godly example for generations to follow, both Josiah's father, Amon, and his grandfather Manasseh did not. Manasseh ruled in Judah for 55 years and led the people to worship many false gods. Even though he finally realized that the LORD alone was God after He freed him from Assyrian captivity and encouraged the people to worship the God of Israel alone, the damage was irreversible (2 Chronicles 33:10-17).

After Manasseh died, his son Amon ruled in Judah. The chronicler summarizes Amon's life and reign in a few short verses. Amon did what was evil in the LORD's sight, did not humble himself like his father had, and instead sinned even more. Amon's officials assassinated him in his palace. After the rest of the people of Judah killed those who had conspired against Amon, they installed his son, Josiah as king at just eight years of age.

After the 57 years of poor spiritual leadership by Manasseh and Amon, the time for the LORD to be faithful to His end of the covenant was quickly approaching. God will be faithful to His Word, and this includes His promise of cursing for disobedience as described in the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19:5, 8). God revealed this truth of Himself and about the coming judgment to Zephaniah and commissioned him to warn Judah of coming judgment in an effort to cause the people to see the error of their ways and humbly repent so that they might have hope, even amid God's judgment.

Reflection Questions

- 1. One constant truth that we see throughout the history of Israel's leadership, both when a united and divided kingdom, is that as leadership goes, so goes the people. When a king sought the LORD with their whole heart, the people followed suit. When a king or queen chased after other gods and did what was evil in the LORD's sight, so did the people. With this principle in mind, answer the following questions.
 - a. Who has God placed in your life that He expects you to influence positively for Him through your leadership?
 - b. Would you say that the example of Hezekiah or Manasseh best picture your current walk with Christ? Why? How and what do you need to pray in light of your answer?
 - c. Pray for people on your list. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you become the person of Christ that leads those under your influence closer to God and not further from God.

2. **Further Reading:** Read all of the following passages of Scripture or the selections from 2 Kings or 2 Chronicles to help give you a better understanding of the cultural and spiritual climate in which Zephaniah ministers. As you read about each of these kings, ask yourself the following:
Do they set an example for me to follow or to avoid? Why?

Hezekiah: 2 Kings 18:1-20:21; 2 Chronicles 29:1-32:38
Manasseh: 2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20
Amon: 2 Kings 21:19-26; 2 Chronicles 33:21-25

Wednesday, January 26, 2022

God's Fence

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-29

My kids and I were playing in the backyard the other afternoon when my youngest, Gavin, asked me a question. He asked, "Daddy, why you build a fence?" He was referring to our chain link fence that encloses the backyard. I explained as best I could to an almost-three-year-old that we had put the fence up so that he and his siblings could safely play in the backyard. The fence helped keep them in and safe, and it kept bad things out. My answer seemed to satisfy his curiosity as he then turned to climb on the playset that had served as the backdrop of our quick conversation.

In Deuteronomy 28, we find Moses again reminding the Israelites of what they needed to do to enjoy God's blessings in the land they were about to enter. This land they were about to enter would later become known as Israel. For things to go well with them in their new land, they were to keep their end of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, to enjoy the benefits listed in verses 3-13, they were to obey the LORD their God fully, carefully following His commands, and worship Him alone (Exodus 19:5, 8; Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 14).

We can think of the LORD's commands as His fence for His people, Israel. Under the Mosaic Covenant, if His people stayed within the boundaries of His commands, He would provide for them, care for them, and protect them. Yahweh's commands were for their good (Deuteronomy 6:64; Jeremiah 7:6, 19). To step outside those boundaries was to step out from God's provision and protection and instead invite God's loving discipline on themselves as a nation.

The remaining 54 verses in chapter 28 spell out the curses for not staying within the fence of God's commands. Despite Moses spending more time explaining the cursings than the blessings, the Israelites often found themselves experiencing God's discipline as described in these verses.

By Zephaniah's time, the people of Judah could look back at the time of the judges and see how God disciplined His people when they forsook Him and worshipped other gods. A more recent and vivid example of God being faithful to His promise of judging His people's lack of faithfulness was the decimation of Israel. Approximately 90 years earlier, in 722 B.C., God used the Assyrians to conquer and disperse the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Despite these examples of divine judgment, the people of Jerusalem and Judah were persistent in worshipping other gods (Zephaniah 1:4-6). Because of the people's relentless rebellion, the day of the LORD was approaching (Zephaniah 1:7). The coming onslaught by the Babylonians was God's way of remaining faithful to His end of the Mosaic Covenant when the Israelites didn't hold up to their end. The warning of the coming judgment also served as an invitation and a motivation for anyone to repent and humbly seek their God (Deuteronomy 3:19-20; Zephaniah 2:1-3) before it was too late.



As with any of the prophets, we are privileged to see how well or how poorly people lived out the truths and instructions God gave in the Foundational Books (Genesis - Deuteronomy) of the Old Testament. The content of Zephaniah's message reveals that the majority of the people were not doing well at all in keeping their end of the Mosaic Covenant. Many people had faith in idols and had false hope for the future due to their misplaced trust. As a result of Judah's unfaithfulness to and abandonment of God as a whole, we see the effects of the covenant that God made with Moses and the Israelites at Sinai begin to play out in real-time. Having a general knowledge and understanding of this covenant between God and Israel helps provide a framework for understanding the background of Zephaniah's messages. I find this knowledge of the Mosaic covenant helpful in understanding God's actions towards His people and their sins.

The spiritual and moral climate to which Zephaniah and Jeremiah preached and Josiah reigned reminds us that the Israelites needed Jesus like us today. Galatians 3:19 tells us that God gave the Mosaic Law to guide Israel and show them their need for a Messiah.

Like the people of Judah during Zephaniah's time, we need a mediator to go between a holy God and us (1 Timothy 2:5). The God of the Bible is perfectly holy (Isaiah 6:3) and demands us to be holy like He is holy (Isaiah 6:5; 1 Peter 1:15-16). Whenever and wherever unholiness or sin is found, the logical result is cursing. By God's grace, Jesus has become the curse for all those who have faith in Him and His work (Galatians 3:10-14)! Placing our faith in Jesus results in us being made permanently holy before God (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 10:10). His Spirit gives us the desire and the ability to become more and more like Jesus as we yield to Him and God's Word in obedience (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Reflection Questions

- 1. Do you see God's commands as a way to keep you safe and to help you have an abundant life or as invisible boundaries to keep you from enjoying life? Why? Can you support that answer with Scripture?
- 2. Read Galatians 3:10-14. Can you turn it into a prayer of praise to Jesus for what He has done on our behalf?

Thursday, January 27, 2022

The Difference Between Faith and Hope

Read Hebrews 11:1-2; 8-10; 24-28

Two topics will be at the center of our first week's message as we begin our sermon series through Zephaniah. These two items of focus are faith and hope. Faith and hope are not the same things as we see them listed separately in 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV):

"And now these three things remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

To continue in prepping our minds and hearts for the Word of God this Sunday, let's explore the difference between faith and hope. Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) provides us with a concrete definition of faith.

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

In combination with the examples of Old Testament saints, this verse defines faith as believing God's promises about the future despite the appearances of the present. It is a complete trust or confidence in something and involves a mindful agreement to a set of facts and belief in those facts.

Hebrews' author cites Moses' faith as an example. By faith, Moses believed God's promise of a coming Deliverer or Christ (Genesis 3:15) and chose to suffer with his people, pursue holiness, and reject the treasures of Egypt. Moses had complete confidence in God's promises that his faith in God's Word guided his life's direction (11:27-28). Moses' faith in God and His Word was the foundation for his hope.

A quick online search about hope will provide you with several definitions. According to the American Psychological Association, "hope is an expectation that something good will happen in the future or that something bad won't happen." An article from USA Today describes hope as being about "using personal agency to achieve a desired outcome." Yet, every non-biblical use or definition of hope is used as a motivator for mental health or as a way to help achieve personal goals.

I appreciated this definition of biblical hope by Wiley Online Library compared to how the word is generally used.

"Hope is commonly used to mean a wish: its strength is that of the person's desire. But in the Bible, hope is the confident expectation of what God has promised, and its strength is in His faithfulness."

Biblical hope is built on faith in God and His Word. Abraham had faith in God and God's faithfulness to His promises. He demonstrated his belief in God's promises by leaving home and going to a new land that God would show him. Abraham's faith led to his hope. The hope was that God would keep his promises if Abraham was obedient to Him. Abraham's hope was built upon the fact that God had made a covenant with him and the terms of the covenant that Yahweh had spoken to him. We see in 11:10 that Abraham's faith in the LORD led to a hope that was rooted in eternity.

A hope birthed from faith in God and His Word is the only type of hope that will sustain us when things all around us look seemingly hopeless now and for eternity. It is biblical hope alone that can provide confidence, security, and



victory over worry. As we will see in our series, Hope Remains, if the people of Judah had put their faith entirely in the words God gave them in Deuteronomy 28, their hope would have been one of substance and blessing. Instead, we see God lovingly discipline His people for their good as He reveals the worthlessness of the things they have placed their faith and hope in.

If there is still any fogginess between faith and hope, maybe this illustration will help clear the fog.

My family has a tradition of going to the Outer Banks of the North Carolina Coast. My parents started taking us as a family to the Outer Banks when I was in middle school. Since then, there have been many changes in our family dynamic. My two brothers and I are married, and my parents are now Papa and Nana to 9 grandchildren. While all of us and at times none of us have made it to those distant beaches of the North Carolina coast every year, more often than not, most years, a good part of the family takes a week and vacations from the rest of the world.

My kids love these beach trips with their grandparents and cousins. Last year we didn't take that family trip, and as the coolness of fall set in, the longing to travel to the coast grew greater. This desire for a family vacation wasn't limited to my kids. The wanting of a family trip was also a longing for my parents. It wasn't long till my parents reserved a house big enough for the whole family for November of 2022.

Our kids have been told that they are going to the Outer Banks this year. They believe they will go to the beach with everyone based on their grandparents' words - this is faith. At the same time, the belief that my children have in their grandparents' word kindles a joy that has to be expressed - this is hope. My childrens' natural trust in their grandparents' promise of a beach trip is faith. Their expressions of excitement (including asking Siri how many days are there till November) are the expressions of the hope they have in my parents' promise.

Biblical hope results from building our lives on the unshakable foundation; that foundation is believing that God always keeps His promises.

Reflection Questions

- What or who have you been placing your faith in as of late? Is your trust in anyone or anything other than God and His Word? If so, why do you think your faith has gravitated away from God and His Word and towards another?
- How would you explain the difference between the biblical definition of hope and how culture generally uses the word hope? Which definition would best describe your reason for hopefulness for life right now?
- What is the difference between faith and hope? Why is what we place our faith in so important?
- Pray and ask the Lord for an unshakable hope as you trust in Him and His faithfulness in keeping His Word.

Friday, January 28, 2022

Hope Remains Message Primer - Week 1



Read Zephaniah 1:1-2:3

Zephaniah found himself being the LORD's prophet during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah, the most recent king to rule Judah and who did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight. Josiah became king of Judah at just eight years of age after his father Amon was assassinated just two years into his rule as Judah's king. This child king found himself the ruler of a nation who had, for the majority, turned away from its God. Instead of placing their faith in God and His Word, they trusted in other gods.

It had taken almost six decades to produce the spiritual climate of Judah that Josiah found himself, king, over. After his great, great grandfather Hezekiah had passed away, Josiah's grandfather ascended to the throne. Manasseh did what was evil in God's sight by following the customs and religious practices of the pagan nations around him. It was these same nations that the LORD had driven out of the land of Canaan so that the Israelites could possess the land that God had promised them. As is always the case, as leadership goes, the people go. This leadership principle was proven true again during the rule of Manasseh. The Bible tells us that he led the Israelites to do even more evil than the nations God had given them victory over (2 Kings 21:9). After ruling poorly over Judah for 55 years, Manasseh dies, and his son, Josiah's father, takes the throne for two years before being murdered, as mentioned before.

God's judgment is coming because of the peoples' idolatry, wickedness, and willing abandonment of God and His commands. The LORD calls upon Zephaniah to proclaim His coming day of judgment. This day of judgment will eliminate everything that His people have wrongly placed their faith and hope in. God's warning of judgment reminds us of His holiness and justice. However, His warning also reminds us of His grace. God manifests His grace by reminding the Israelites that He alone is the One they should place their faith in. If they put their trust in Yahweh alone, they would have hope despite the future attack from the Babylonian army (2:1-3).

God's pure and deep love for His people is the reason that He is willing to eliminate every idol they had wrongly placed their faith and hope in. God is a jealous God. He deserves our supreme love as His people and knows that this type of relationship with Him is the best thing for us, period. His love for us causes Him to do what He knows is best for us, though it might be painful for us.

In 1:1-2:3, we see Zephaniah point out the sins for which God's judgment is coming but also a call to experience God's grace through repentance. Experiencing God's grace leads to hope in the present and the future for Zephaniah's original hearers and us today. God warned them once again of His coming judgment in an effort to draw His people back to Him. God would use the world's new emerging super-power, the Babylonians, to discipline His people.

This week's message challenges us to see if we have misplaced our faith and hope in anything but God and His Word. As we will see, any misplaced faith results in false hope. God loves us enough not to allow us to live with false hope. God will discipline us lovingly to bring us back to trusting in and hoping in Him alone - for His glory and our benefit.



Message Notes