

[Go ahead and read Zephaniah](#)

Overwhelming grief, prolonged distress, incessant abuse, continual persecution. and imminent punishment breed hopelessness and despair. "If only," we cry, as we search our mind for a way out and look to the skies for rescue. With just a glimmer of hope, we would take courage and carry on.

Hope is the silver shaft of sun breaking through the storm-darkened sky. words of comfort in the intensive care unit, the first spring bird perched on a snow covered twig, and the finish line in sight. It is a rainbow, a song, a loving touch. Hope is knowing God and resting in his love.

As God's prophet. Zephaniah was bound to speak the truth. This he did clearly, thundering certain judgment and horrible punishment for all who would defy the Lord. God's awful wrath would sweep away everything in the land and destroy it, will sweep away people and animals alike. I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish in the sea. I will reduce the wicked to heaps of rubble. and I will wipe humanity from the face of the earth, "says the LORD" (1:3). No living thing in the land would escape. And that terrible day was coming soon: "That terrible day of the LORD is near. Swiftly it comes—a day of bitter tears, a day when even strong men will cry out, It will be a day when the LORD'S anger is poured out—a day of terrible distress and anguish, a day of ruin and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness" (1:14. 15). We can sense the oppression and depression his listeners must have felt. They were judged guilty, and they were doomed.

But in the midst of this terrible pronouncement. there is hope. The first chapter of Zephaniah's prophecy is filled with terror. in chapter two. however, a whispered promise appears. "Seek the LORD, all who are humble, and follow his commands. Seek to do what is right and to live humbly. Perhaps even yet the LORD will protect you—protect you from his anger" (2:3). And a few verses later we read of "the remnant of the tribe of Judah" (2:7) who will be restored.

Finally in chapter three, the quiet refrain grows to a crescendo as God's salvation and deliverance for those who are faithful to him is declared. "Sing, O daughter of Zion: shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! For the LORD will remove his hand of judgment and will disperse the armies of your enemy. And the LORD himself. the King of Israel, will live among you! At last your troubles will be over, and you will never again fear disaster" (3:14. 15). This is true hope. grounded in the knowledge of God's justice and in his love for his people.

As you read Zephaniah, listen carefully to the words of judgment. God does not take sin lightly, and it will be punished. But be encouraged by the words of hope-- our God reigns, and he will rescue his own. Decide to be part of that faithful remnant of souls who humbly worship and obey the living Lord.