

Zephaniah

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, . . . the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Book of Zephaniah using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Reading the Prophets*—especially the section on Zephaniah—will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don’t miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church’s criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God’s unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church’s living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit’s guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you’ll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§] And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||} and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵ that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven . . . earth . . . under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God’s g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

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Prepare

Read the Introduction to Zephaniah, paying particular attention to the *Historical Background*, the *Message of the Prophet*, and the *Christian Perspective* on it. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Zephaniah to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Zephaniah, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Zephaniah as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:4.** What does it mean that God stretches out his hand? To which place does the prophet refer? Who promoted the worship of Baal, the storm and fertility god of Canaanite religion, that had been firmly established in Judah? Who is the remnant of Baal, and what may its mention suggest about when Zephaniah ministered? Who are the idolatrous priests?
2. **1:7.** If one cannot protest when the Lord acts as judge, what is the only possible response? What is “the day of the LORD”? What does the prophet foresee? What will happen when this day of reckoning arrives? What sacrifice has the Lord prepared?
3. **1:12.** How are the men of Jerusalem like wine? What does Zephaniah’s generation no longer believe? To what does denial of God’s lordship over his people and their history amount?
4. **1:14.** Lest any mistake what is coming for good news, what does the prophet stress that Judah (including Jerusalem) is about to face? What sense does the expression “near and hastening fast” add to the prophet’s message?

For application

1. **1:5.** What is a “divided heart” when it comes to things of God? How do you think God responds to the prayers of those whose hearts are divided?
2. **1:7.** What does the command to be silent in a courtroom call upon those present to do besides stop talking? What attitudes of attention and respect are indicated? Why is silence before the Lord appropriate?
3. **1:12.** What is your view of the Lord’s role in everyday life? How do you answer someone who maintains that “the LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill”—that God is absent or is unconcerned with how people behave?
4. **1:15.** The hymn “Dies Irae” was once sung at funeral liturgies. What do the words mean? To what do they refer? Why do you think this sequence is no longer sung at funerals? What view of death has taken its place?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:3.** In urging his audience to seek the Lord instead of other gods, whom does the prophet address? How do they seek righteousness? How do they seek humility? Why does Zephaniah speak with cautious optimism? If divine mercy is not something upon which to presume, how does one attain it?
2. **2:4—3:7.** Against whom are these oracles addressed? Standing at the center of this regional map, by whom is Judah surrounded?
3. **Word Study: Remnant (2:7).** To what does the Hebrew noun *she’erit* meaning “what is left” refer? What theological significance does the notion of a remnant bear in the Bible? Even though the Assyrians and Babylonians carried thousands of Israelites into exile, what did God do with the remnants? In several places in the Minor Prophets, which was the remnant blessed by God?
4. **2:8.** Who were the Moabites and the Ammonites? For what are they mainly faulted? According to Genesis, how were both peoples born? While, ironically, they escaped the fate of these cities at the time of their conception, what will happen to them now?

For application

1. **2:3.** In an unsettled time such as this, for what might observant Catholics pray by seeking the Lord through prayer and fasting? From what wrath would they hope to be hidden?
2. **2:7.** Given that large numbers of people have been abandoning the faith as the world and even the Church become secularized, what hope do Christians have if only a small remnant is left? What will this remnant be like?
3. **2:9.** Zephaniah predicts that the remnant of Judah will possess the lands of Moab and Ammon. How does the possibility of a declining Christian population accord with Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations? How might this remnant renew the Church?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:1–7.** At whom is Zephaniah's final oracle of judgment aimed? Although the Lord who dwells in the city is righteous, what is nearly everyone else like? Because God is no longer trusted or approached in faith, what do Jerusalem's civil and religious leaders do? Instead of repenting, what does the city do?
2. **3:9–10.** With what are these verses concerned? If the negative side of judgment is bitterness, grief, and destruction, what is the positive side? What does Zephaniah foresee that survivors among the Gentiles will be doing? According to Vatican II, what day known to God alone does the Church still await?
3. **3:13.** Who are "those who are left"? How is this passage referenced in the Book of Revelation?
4. **3:14–17.** What does this oracle that celebrates God's restoration of Jerusalem predict about the city? In the midst of "those who are left", who will reign? What will happen to the humble community on Zion? At the Annunciation, how does Gabriel's greeting to Mary resemble Zephaniah's language? Owing in part to this prophecy, how has Catholic tradition thus come to view Mary?

For application

1. **3:4–5.** How valid are the sacraments if they are administered by priests who do not believe the gospel they preach? For example, how valid is a Mass if a priest does not believe that the Consecration of the elements confects anything (CCC 1128, 1550, 1584)?
2. **3:8.** According to the note for this verse, what does it mean to wait for the Lord? How do you wait for the Lord to act in your own life? In the lives of those whom you love or for whom you pray?
3. **3:9.** What do you think Zephaniah means by a "pure speech"? What kind of purity is involved here?
4. **3:17.** The note for this verse says that this is the only passage in Scripture that depicts the Lord singing. When Jesus rejoiced, how did he act (Lk 10:21)? About what did he rejoice? For what does Jesus encourage his disciples to rejoice (e.g., Mt 5:12; Lk 10:20; Jn 14:28, 16:22)?