

# Bible Studies for Life: January 8

*Joy in Place of Fear • Zephaniah 3:9-20*

*By Becky Brown*



Brown

Th  
is  
is  
ou  
r  
fi  
na  
l  
le  
ss  
on  
on  
pu  
tt  
in  
g  
fe  
ar  
in  
it  
s  
pl  
ac  
e.  
We  
ha  
ve  
le  
ar

ne  
d  
th  
at  
we  
ar  
e  
to  
fe  
ar  
th  
e  
Lo  
rd  
an  
d  
st  
an  
d  
in  
aw  
e  
of  
Hi  
m.  
Re  
ve  
re  
nt  
wo  
rs  
hi  
p  
is  
th  
e  
re

su  
lt  
of  
th  
is  
re  
la  
ti  
on  
sh  
ip  
. Th  
e  
cl  
os  
er  
we  
ge  
t  
to  
th  
e  
Lo  
rd  
, th  
e  
mo  
re  
we  
se  
e  
Hi  
s  
un  
li

mi  
te  
d  
gr  
ea  
tn  
es  
s.

This “fear” of God is not a trembling that causes us to crumble and shrink away, but rather deep, abiding, respectful honor and awe of Who He is and what He has done.

We saw the Lord in Psalm 33 as Creator of all things. He spoke and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. We are in awe of the One Who made our world and placed us in it. In Romans chapter eight, we embrace the security that comes when we know that death is conquered and we will never be separated from Him.

In 1 John chapter three, the Word shows us that love covers us and protects us and drives us toward the love of God. We serve Him by serving others. Perfect love casts out fear.

In Luke’s Gospel, we watched as Mary conversed with the angel Gabriel. Mary submitted herself freely and willingly to the plan of God for the birth of Jesus. Her fears waned as her submission flowed directly into the story of the birth of Salvation Himself.

In Matthew 14, Peter showed us how to short circuit fear with courage. Peter walked on water with Jesus!

This week, we study a message on replacing fear with joy from the three-chapter Book of Zephaniah, one of the twelve “minor” prophets in the Old Testament. (Their books were simply shorter in word count than those written by “major” prophets.) Whether major or minor in length, all of their messages are vital because they are from God.

Zephaniah certainly roars like a lion. His ministry of shock and shockability takes place in the days of Josiah, the eight-year-old child king of Judah who ruled approximately 640-609 BC.

The coming judgment of the Babylonian exile was breathing down their necks. The first group was deported in 605 BC. The second group departed in 597 BC. Jerusalem and the First Temple built by King Solomon were destroyed in 586 BC.

The sharp teeth of the deadly enemy were bared and aimed at the jugular of the nation: the city of Jerusalem.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed in 722 BC at the hand of the nation of Assyria. Babylon was on the rise as a world power as Assyria began to crumble. The Kingdom of Judah was Babylon's target.

Zephaniah and his fellow contemporary prophet Jeremiah would faithfully share the word of the Lord with Judah and Jerusalem, but they would receive a cold reception.

Here is my personal study time outline of the book of Zephaniah:

Seek and Hide

Deep and Wide

Worldwide and Terrified

Enemies on Every Side

Ruined, Rebellious, and Defiled

Humble Ones Can Come Inside

The outlook was grim for Judah. The Book of Zephaniah spends three chapters describing the coming day of the Lord. This was a prophecy for their generation and we would do well to heed the same message in ours. The day of the Lord will be a time

of reckoning and judgement for those who have thumbed their noses at the Lord and His plan.

Some of the people listening to Zephaniah's message would be brutally ripped from their sacred spot in the Land of Promise to which they felt so entitled, and spend the next 70 years in exile in Babylon. The proud will be removed. The humble will return to the Lord and be restored.

Pride was the fateful choice of Lucifer, and those who like him choose pride will also fall. The rebellious and defiled will experience complete ruin. Until they return to the Lord, they will soak and saturate in ruin.

There will be a day when the Lord will make all things right. His enemies will be defeated. Our fears will be washed away in His victory. There will be no need to be terrified any longer. God is a victorious warrior. He never loses a battle!

Oppressors will be dealt with as God gathers the outcasts and brings home the exiles. Restoration is in their future and ours!

Zephaniah 3:17 promises that God exults over those who return to Him. His love is quietly, tenderly secure. He sings over those He loves. Do not fear.

*Brown is minister of missions at First Church, Richland.*