

=BOOKS OF THE BIBLE=

Lesson 36

Zephaniah

Objects to have:

Your Bible (wrapped in paper) hidden in the room someplace away from where you stand to teach. You could have your Bible hidden in some papers, perhaps.

The sign for today's book: ZEPHANIAH
God's Judgments

Introducing the lesson:

(Review with the children the books of the Bible, starting with Isaiah. State that all the books from Isaiah and following are named for prophets, except one book: Lamentations. Then review all the books learned thus far in the Old Testament.)

(Talk with the children for a few moments about whom they would like to be like. Get them started by talking about our preacher, Brother Schaap or Brother Hyles. Talk with them about the fact that he has told us to choose heroes or heroines, and that we should watch them and try to be like them. Encourage classes of boys to be like Brother Schaap and Brother Hyles himself: to be manly, to love the Lord and to work hard to serve Him properly, to be generous, to be kind, etc. Encourage girls to be like Mrs. Hyles: thoughtful, well-groomed, loving God and doing His will, etc. Do not be too surprised if the children say that they would like to be like you, their Sunday school teacher. Thank them for their choice and tell them that you always try to do what God wants you to do.)

Our Bible book for today is the book of Zephaniah. This book is found in the Old Testament of the Bible. Zephaniah was a preacher. He preached during the time of King Josiah.

Telling the story:

(Teacher, imagine what life was like for boy King Josiah; dramatize this story.) Josiah was just a boy. He was eight years old. When he was just eight years old, Josiah became the king of Judah. Eight years old is very, very young to become a king. Most kings become king only after they have grown to be a man.

Becoming king of a whole country would be a frightening job! The king has to be sure that everybody in the country is doing his job, that the police are catching the criminals, that the judges and the courts are seeing to it that the criminals are being put in jail, that the tax collectors are doing their job, that the schools are being run right, that the cities are being kept clean, that there are enough parks in which people can relax and play in, that the roads are being kept in good repair, that the army is being well-trained and is ready to fight if an enemy should come against the country, and so many other things! A king has a big job to do! He always needs to know the right thing to do. Young King Josiah decided one thing: He decided that he would do right.

There were many people, I am sure, who tried to tell King Josiah how to do his job. King Josiah had to be careful to listen to the right people so that he would always do right. It would have been a good idea for him to always take the advice of his preacher, Zephaniah. He should have listened to his Sunday school teacher, also. Perhaps King Josiah had a very dear friend who always wanted to do right; he could also take the advice of his friend. He could not take the advice of his father or his mother because they had died. And, of course, Josiah should always have prayed to the true, living God about everything that was going on.

Josiah looked around the country. Do you know what he saw? In every city, including Jerusalem, he saw great big statues called idols. Some of these idols looked like ladies, some looked like men, some looked like animals, etc. Josiah saw people bowing down on their knees before these statues. He saw the people praying to these statues. He saw them bringing gifts to the statues. He saw some of them even building fires in front of the statues

and burning their own children as sacrifices to the statues. How terrible! The people had completely forgotten the true and living God! The people were not trusting Jesus as their Saviour. They were not doing what God wanted them to do, and so they turned to the horrible idols and statues and called them their gods. Other kings before Josiah had let the people do this: Josiah's grandfather let the people have the idols; Josiah's father let the people worship idols; somehow, however, Josiah knew that it was wrong to do it, and he was wanting to do right.

Because Josiah was wanting to do right, he listened to the advice of the preacher in the temple. He listened to Zephaniah. Zephaniah said that the people were doing wickedly. So Josiah began traveling around the country and giving some orders, "Break down those idols! Get great big hammers and pound them down. Grind them up until the stone idols or the wood idols are just like powder or sawdust. Then do not even let the sawdust or powder from those broken idols go into the ground. Throw the sawdust and the powder into the rivers and let it be washed away."

The men in the cities obeyed King Josiah. They broke down the idols. They ground the broken-up stone and wood into stone dust and sawdust, and put the stone dust and sawdust into the rivers.

King Josiah went back home after traveling all around the country. He looked at the temple in Jerusalem. He saw that the temple—the church building—needed some work done on it. There were big cracks in the walls. The doors were broken off. Windows were broken, and the temple was filthy dirty. King Josiah gave orders to his secretaries, "Call carpenters and bricklayers; get builders of all kinds. Have them come to the temple. Have them clean up the temple and rebuild it where it is broken up, and repair the broken places."

By this time King Josiah was not a young boy anymore; he was a man who was more than 20 years old. He was happy as he saw the work begin on the temple. (Act out the following.) The sight and sound of pounding, the sight and sound of sweeping and scrubbing, the sight and sound of laying cement blocks and putting mortar between them could be seen and heard every day for many, many days. How exciting it was for Josiah to see the temple of God being made pretty and clean again!

One day when King Josiah was not in the temple, a workman was cleaning up one of the last piles of dirt. (Walk over to where your Bible is hidden, and enact the following.) He was picking up the dirt and the broken pieces of plaster and splinters of wood. Then he bent closer to the floor. "What is this? It seems to be a big something!" The workman dusted off the thing that was in the pile of broken-up pieces, and he looked at it carefully. He turned it over, blew more dust off it, and then he opened it! "It's...!" Quickly he turned, holding the treasure that he had just found, and ran from the temple.

He ran to the palace of King Josiah. He stopped at the door to the throne room. He was panting from running so fast, and he was very, very excited. He said, "I must see King Josiah!" The soldiers who were guarding the palace led this man to King Josiah. "O King, something wonderful has happened," the man said after he had bowed to the king. "We have found something that has been lost for a long, long time. We have found the Bible." Can you imagine that? (Unwrap your Bible so that the children can see it.) Nobody in the country had a copy of the Bible. It had been lost and not one person had one, not even the king. "King Josiah, we were cleaning out all the dirt in the temple, and we found the Bible."

King Josiah said, "Will you please read to me from the Bible?" So, someone started reading the Bible to Josiah. As it was read, Josiah realized how sinful his people had been, more so than he had thought. Then Josiah heard the bad news from the Bible. Josiah heard the news about the punishment that God was going to give to His people because they had turned away from Him. God told Zephaniah all about that punishment.

Josiah was very, very sad at this news. He said, "Call the people together. I want them to hear what God has to say." All the people came into the meeting. Men came, ladies came, and their children came. The preacher stood up to read the Bible. They all listened. How sorry they were for the sin which had been in their country. They asked the Lord to forgive them.

God said, "As long as King Josiah is king over the country, I will not bring My punishment to you." This made Josiah feel much better. This made the people feel much better, too. As long as Josiah was king of Judah, the Jewish people did not worship idols; they wanted to do right, and God did not punish them.

In our Bible book for today, the book of Zephaniah, the preacher Zephaniah wrote down punishment that God would give. He wrote that God would destroy the wicked nations. He wrote also that God had to punish the people of Israel who would not trust Him. Then Zephaniah wrote the good news that after the punishment would end, the Jewish people would all be gathered again to their own country.

Our story for today about King Josiah is in these books (point to II Kings and II Chronicles). We read about Zephaniah in this book. (Point to Zephaniah) Zephaniah was the preacher or the prophet who lived during the time that Josiah was king of Judah.

LEARN OUR BIBLE VERSE: Zephaniah 2:2, 3, "...before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon you. Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger."