

Through the Bible

ZEPHANIAH

Zac Poonen



Illustrations by Vinay Kuruvilla

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CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

**69 PARADISE ENCLAVE, BELAHALLI
KANNUR POST, BANGALORE - 562 149
INDIA**

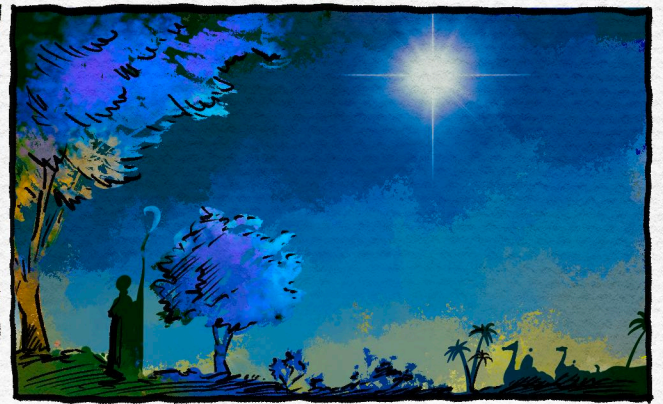
ZEPHANIAH



ZEPHANIAH PROPHESIED SOON AFTER **NAHUM**, BEFORE THE **BABYLONIANS** BECAME THE GREAT WORLD POWER AND JUST BEFORE JEREMIAH'S TIME. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT JEREMIAH WAS THERE TOWARDS THE END OF ZEPHANIAH'S TIME OF PROPHECY. ZEPHANIAH ALSO SPOKE ABOUT THE **DESTRUCTION** OF **ASSYRIA** AND THE **RISE** OF **BABYLON**. BUT HIS MAIN THEME WAS THE **SEVERITY** AND THE **GOODNESS** OF GOD.



THERE IS A **DECLINE** AMONG CHRISTIANS **TODAY** JUST LIKE THERE WAS A **DECLINE** IN ISRAEL IN THE PAST. THE TWO KINGDOMS -- **ISRAEL** AND **JUDAH** -- ARE A PICTURE OF THE TWO GROUPS IN CHRISTENDOM. ISRAEL, WITH 10 TRIBES, SYMBOLISES THE LARGER GROUP OF **MAINLINE** DENOMINATIONS. AND JUDAH WITH 2 TRIBES, SYMBOLISES THE SMALLER **NON-CONFORMIST** ASSEMBLIES. BUT **BOTH** THESE GROUPS ARE IN **DECLINE** TODAY. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, **JUDAH** DID **NOT** LEARN FROM ISRAEL'S **MISTAKES**. AND THE **NON-CONFORMIST** GROUPS TODAY HAVE **NOT** LEARNED FROM THE MISTAKES THE MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS HAVE MADE. BUT **ULTIMATELY**, FROM **BOTH** GROUPS, GOD HAS CHOSEN A **REMNANT** TODAY - MEN AND WOMEN WHO **LOVE** GOD AND ARE **SEEKING** TO **HONOUR** HIM IN ALL THINGS. THEY ARE FOUND IN **ALL** THE **DENOMINATIONS**



THE THEME OF THE PROPHETS WAS ALWAYS **RESTORATION**. THE **REMNANT** PREPARED THE WAY FOR THE **COMING OF THE LORD JESUS**. WHEN THE LORD WAS BORN, THERE WAS A SMALL **REMNANT** -- **SIMEON** AND **ANNA** IN THE TEMPLE, **JOHN THE BAPTIST**, THE **SHEPHERDS**, AND A **FEW WISE MEN** FROM THE EAST. TODAY ALSO THERE IS A **REMNANT** IN **CHRISTENDOM** WHO ARE **PREPARING THE WAY** FOR THE **COMING OF THE LORD**.

THERE WAS A **REVIVAL** IN JUDAH IN KING **JOSIAH'S** TIME, ABOUT 4 YEARS BEFORE **NEBUCHADNEZZAR** CAME AND TOOK THEM AWAY AS CAPTIVES. BUT IT WAS A **SUPERFICIAL** REVIVAL. THE PROPHETS LIKE **ZEPHANIAH** AND **JEREMIAH** SAW THROUGH THAT AND WERE **NOT DECEIVED**. BUT MOST PEOPLE IN ISRAEL WERE **DECEIVED**. MANY CHRISTIANS TODAY ARE ALSO BEING **DECEIVED** BY SO-CALLED "**REVIVALS**", AND ARE UNABLE TO SEE THROUGH THEIR **HOLLOWNESS** AND **SUPERFICIALITY**. THERE IS **NO REVIVAL** THERE TO **HOLINESS**, OR TO **HUMILITY**, OR TO FREEDOM FROM THE **LOVE OF MONEY**, OR TO **POVERTY OF SPIRIT**.



PROPHETS LIKE **JEREMIAH** AND **ZEPHANIAH** **EXPOSED THE SUPERFICIALITY** OF THE "**REVIVALS**" IN THEIR TIME. THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH, HOWEVER, FELT THAT THESE PROPHETS WERE "**BEING NEGATIVE**" BUT THEY WERE ONLY SPEAKING THE TRUTH WHICH GOD REVEALED IN TIME.



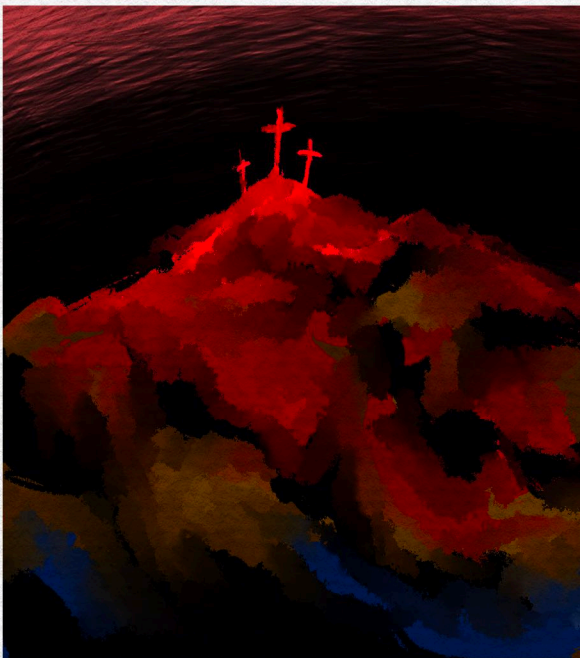
THE LORD SAID, "NOT ONLY OTHER NATIONS, BUT I WILL CRUSH **JUDAH** AND **JERUSALEM** AND **DESTROY** EVERY LAST TRACE OF THEIR **BAAL** WORSHIP, BECAUSE THEY GO UP TO THE ROOF AND BOW DOWN TO THE **SUN**, **MOON** AND **STARS**. THEY **CLAIM** TO FOLLOW THE LORD, BUT WORSHIP **MOLECH**" (1:4, 5). ISRAEL WENT TO **CANAAN** TO MANIFEST THE **TRUE GOD** TO THEM, BUT THEY **DROGGED** ISRAEL DOWN TO THEIR LEVEL.



"ON THAT DAY I WILL **PUNISH** THE LEADERS AND ALL THOSE FOLLOWING **PAGAN** CUSTOMS AND THOSE WHO FILL THEIR HOMES WITH **LOOT**." (1:8, 9). THE LEADERS WERE THE ONES WHO FOLLOWED THE PAGAN CUSTOMS AND **LOVED MONEY** AND FILLED THEIR HOUSES WITH IT. THE OLD TESTAMENT **PROPHETS** ALWAYS SPOKE AGAINST THE **LEADERS** OF GOD'S PEOPLE AND THEIR LOVE OF MONEY -- BECAUSE THEY WERE THE ONES WHO WERE **PRIMARYLY AT FAULT**.



AND SO, THOSE LEADERS CALLED THE PROPHETS "**HERETICS**" AND **PERSECUTED** THEM. IF GOD SENDS A PROPHET TO THE CHURCH TODAY, HE TOO WILL SPEAK **AGAINST** THE PASTORS AND THE BISHOPS AND THEIR **COMPROMISES** AND THEIR LOVE OF **MONEY**. STEPHEN ASKED THE JEWISH LEADERS, "NAME ONE PROPHET YOUR ANCESTORS **DIDN'T PERSECUTE!**" (ACTS 7:52). THEY COULD NOT NAME **ONE**.



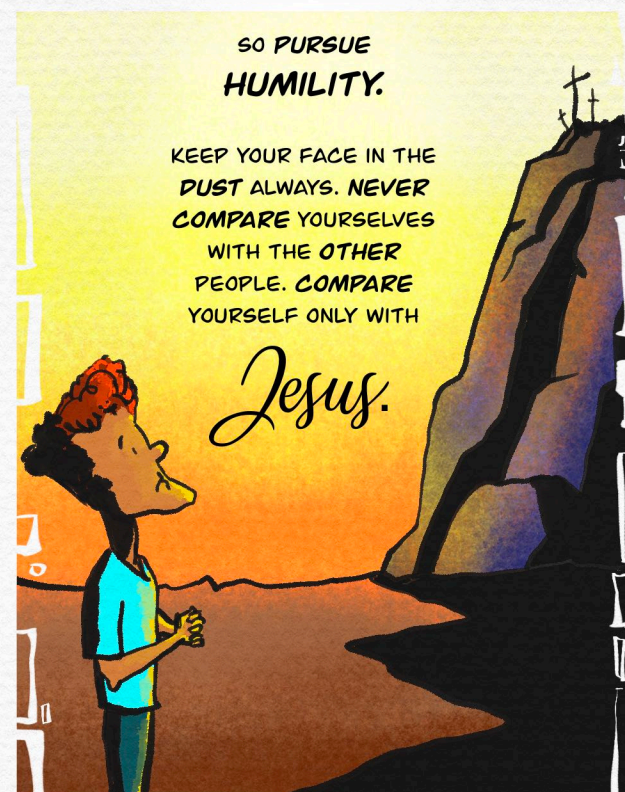
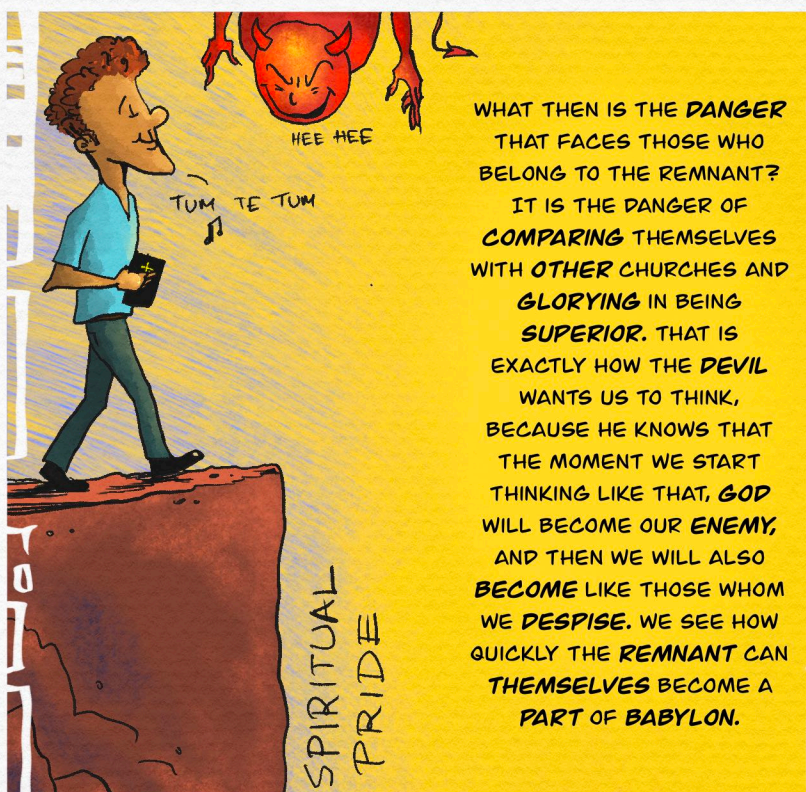
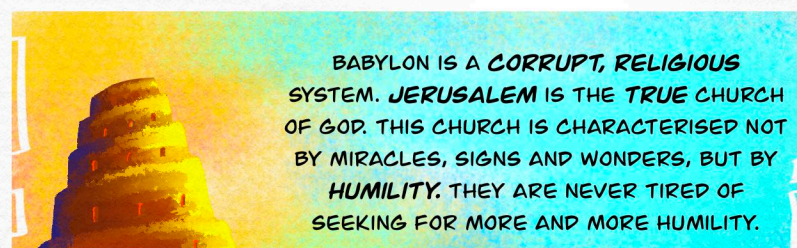
JESUS SAID, "I CAME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE SINNERS." BUT HE **LASHED** OUT MERCILESSLY AT THE **RELIGIOUS** LEADERS WHO HELD THEIR BIBLES, PREACHED IN THE **MEETING-HALLS**, **LOVED MONEY**, AND LIVED **HYPOCRITICAL** LIVES. SO THEY **KILLED** HIM. DO WE FOLLOW THIS **REAL** JESUS AND THE TRUE PROPHETS OR DO WE FOLLOW THE **FALSE** PROPHETS AND "**ANOTHER JESUS**" WHO ARE **FRIENDLY** WITH **WORLDLY CHRISTIAN** LEADERS, AND **FEAST** WITH THEM?



THE LORD SAID, "I WILL SEARCH WITH **LANTERNS** IN JERUSALEM'S **DARKEST** CORNERS TO FIND AND PUNISH THOSE WHO ARE **CONTENT** IN THEIR SINS, **INDIFFERENT** TO THE LORD, THINKING HE WILL DO **NOTHING**" (1:12). IN THE CHURCH TODAY ALSO THERE ARE LEADERS LIVING IN **LUXURY**, WHO HAVE BECOME **RICH** THROUGH THEIR PREACHING AND ARE **INDIFFERENT** TO THE LORD'S COMMANDS.



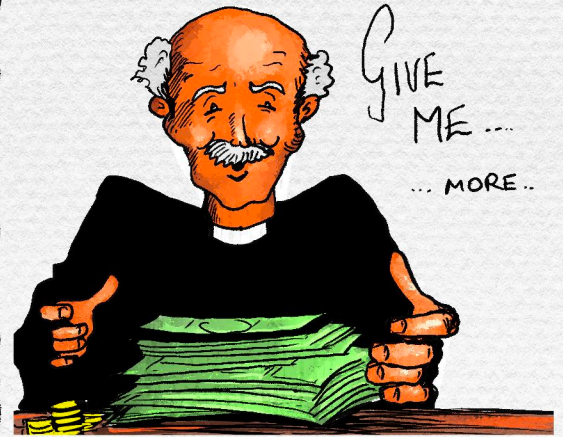
MANY YOUNG PEOPLE STARTED SERVING THE LORD WITH **ZEAL**, **SACRIFICE**, **PRAYER** AND **SERIOUS STUDY** OF GOD'S WORD. BUT **30 YEARS** LATER, THEY HAVE COOLED OFF, "**CHOKED** BY THE **DECEITFULNESS** OF **RICHES**". IF WE ARE **NOT FAITHFUL** TO FIGHT AGAINST THE DESIRES OF THE FLESH AND TO STAND AGAINST THE **CORRUPTION** IN **CHRISTENDOM**, WE WILL BECOME LIKE THE **CORRUPT LEADERS** AROUND YOU.



ZEPHANIAH PROPHESED THAT THIS REMNANT WOULD BE MADE **FUN** OF BY OTHERS (2:8). THEY WILL TELL YOU, "WHAT A **FANTASTIC MINISTRY** YOU COULD HAVE HAD, IF YOU HAD **NOT** JOINED THIS **LITTLE GROUP** OF **FANATICS**." MANY CHRISTIANS TOLD **ME** THAT WHEN I GAVE UP MY WIDER MINISTRY AND STARTED MEETING WITH JUST A **FEW** PEOPLE AS A CHURCH IN OUR **HOME** (IN 1975). I AM THANKFUL THAT I DIDN'T LISTEN TO ANY OF THEM. I SAID TO THE LORD, "LORD, I DON'T CARE WHETHER I AM WITH ONLY **TWO** OR **THREE**. I WANT TO BE WHERE **YOU** ARE AND I WANT TO **PROCLAIM** THE **WHOLE TRUTH** OF YOUR WORD." IF YOU TAKE A STAND LIKE THAT, YOU WILL FACE A LOT OF **OPPOSITION**. BUT YOU WILL **FINISH** YOUR COURSE WITH **JOY**, IF YOU **ENDURE** UNTIL THE **END**. KEEP YOUR **EYES** ON THE **LORD**.



THEN ZEPHANIAH SPOKE ABOUT THE **DESTRUCTION** OF ASSYRIA (2:13). ASSYRIA HAD STARTED **DECLINING** AFTER NAHUM HAD PROPHESIED, BUT SHE HAD NOT BEEN **DESTROYED FULLY**. THIS PROPHECY WAS **LITERALLY** FULFILLED: "THE LORD WILL DESTROY ASSYRIA AND MAKE ITS GREAT CAPITAL, NINEVEH, **PARCHED LIKE A DESERT**. ALL SORTS OF WILD ANIMALS WILL SETTLE THERE. **OWLS** OF MANY KINDS WILL LIVE AMONG THE **RUINS** OF ITS PALACES, **HOOTING FROM THE GAPING WINDOWS**" (2:13, 14).



THEN ZEPHANIAH **EXPOSES** THE SIN OF JUDAH'S **LEADERS** ONCE AGAIN, "THEIR **LEADERS** ARE LIKE **ROARING LIONS** **HUNTING FOR EVERYTHING** THEY CAN GET. THEIR **PROPHETS** ARE **LIARS** **SEEKING THEIR OWN GAIN**. THEIR **PRIESTS** **DISOBEY GOD'S LAWS**." (3:3, 4). EVEN TODAY, **CORRUPT** PASTORS AND PREACHERS ARE ALWAYS SEEKING "FOR **EVERYTHING** THEY CAN GET." **JESUS** ON THE OTHER HAND TAUGHT THAT IT WAS MORE **BLESSED** TO **GIVE** THAN TO **RECEIVE**.



THE LORD **WATCHES** EVERYONE. ONE DAY HE WILL COME DOWN IN **JUDGEMENT** ON EVERY **CORRUPT** LEADER. HE SAYS TO HIS PEOPLE, "BE **PATIENT**; THE TIME IS COMING **SOON** WHEN I WILL POUR OUT MY **FIERCEST** **ANGER** AND **FURY** ON THEM" (3:8).



NOTICE SOME **CHARACTERISTICS** OF THIS **REMNANT**. "I WILL **PURIFY** THE **LIPS** OF THE PEOPLE" (3:9). THE **SPEECH** OF THE **REMNANT** WILL BE **PURE**. ISAIAH WAS CONVICTED OF HIS **SPEECH** WHEN HE SAW THE **GLORY** OF THE LORD. IF WE ARE CAREFUL WITH OUR **MOUTH** AND OUR **MONEY**, WE CAN BECOME THE LORD'S **SPOKESMEN**.



"ALL OF THEM WILL **CALL** ON THE NAME OF THE **LORD** AND SERVE HIM **SHOULDER TO SHOULDER**" (3:9). THE **REMNANT** WILL BE UNITED AS **ONE BODY** AND SERVE THE LORD **BEARING HIS BURDENS -- SHOULDER TO SHOULDER**.



"I WILL REMOVE ALL THE PROUD AND ARROGANT PEOPLE FROM AMONG YOU. THERE WILL BE NO PRIDE ON MY HOLY MOUNTAIN. THOSE WHO ARE LEFT WILL BE THE LOWLY AND THE HUMBLE" (3:11, 12). THE REMNANT WILL COMPRISE ONLY OF HUMBLE PEOPLE, BECAUSE THE LORD WOULD HAVE REMOVED ALL THE PROUD ONES. "THOSE WHO ARE LEFT WILL TRUST IN THE NAME OF THE LORD" (3:12). THE REMNANT WILL BE A PEOPLE OF FAITH.

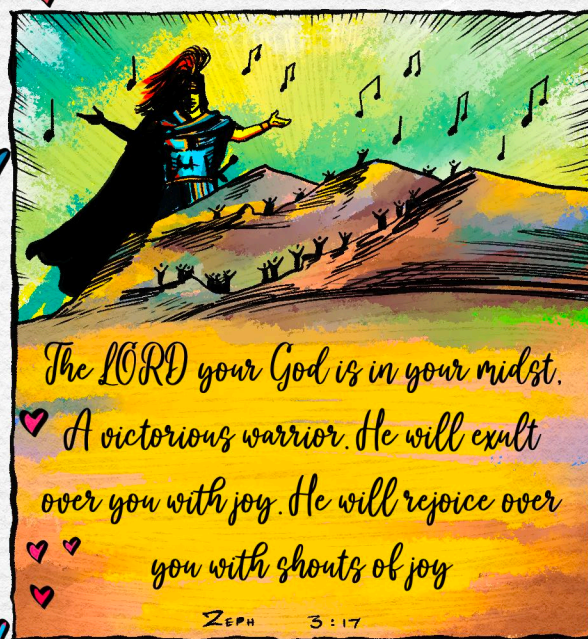


"SING, O DAUGHTER OF ZION; SHOUT ALOUD! BE GLAD AND REJOICE WITH ALL YOUR HEART! FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL LIVE AMONG YOU! (3:14, 15). THE REMNANT WILL BE A HAPPY PEOPLE WHO HAVE FOUND THEIR PERFECT SECURITY IN THE LORD'S LOVE FOR THEM.

"HE IS SILENTLY PLANNING FOR YOU IN LOVE" (3:17 -- PARAPHRASE). THE LORD PLANS FOR US IN LOVE AND HE HAS PLEASANT SURPRISES PLANNED FOR US IN THE DAYS TO COME, BECAUSE HE IS OUR LOVING FATHER.



"THE PEOPLE WILL DO NO WRONG TO EACH OTHER, NEVER TELLING LIES OR DECEIVING ONE ANOTHER. THEY WILL LIVE PEACEFUL LIVES" (3:13). THE REMNANT WILL BE A PEACEFUL PEOPLE WHO NEVER TELL LIES OR DECEIVE ANYONE OR HARM ANYONE.



The LORD your God is in your midst.
A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy. He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy

ZEPH 3:17

WITH GREAT GLADNESS GOD SHOUTS OVER THEM AND SINGS A SONG OVER THE REMNANT. THIS IS THE ONE PLACE IN SCRIPTURE WHERE IT SAYS THAT GOD SINGS OVER HIS PEOPLE. THERE ARE MANY PLACES WHERE WE ARE EXHORTED TO SING A SONG OF PRAISE TO GOD. BUT HERE IT IS GOD WHO IS SINGING A SONG OVER US.

CHAPTER 3:19, 20 TELLS US THAT THE REMNANT CONSISTS OF A PEOPLE WHO ARE WEAK AND HELPLESS IN THEMSELVES. THE LORD HIMSELF DEALS WITH THEIR ENEMIES AND GIVES HIS PEOPLE GLORY AND DISTINCTION IN THE FINAL DAY. THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH ENDS ON THAT TRIUMPHANT NOTE.