

**MONDAY**  
**16 AUGUST**  
**Judges 2:11-19**  
**Psalm 106:34-42**  
**Matthew 19:16-22**

**TUESDAY**  
**17 AUGUST**  
**Judges 6:11-24**  
**Psalm 85:8-end**  
**Matthew 19:23-end**

**WEDNESDAY**  
**18 AUGUST**  
**Judges 9:6-15**  
**Psalm 21:1-6**  
**Matthew 20:1-16**

**THURSDAY**  
**19 AUGUST**  
**Judges 11:29-end**  
**Psalm 40:4-11**  
**Matthew 22:1-14**

**FRIDAY**  
**20 AUGUST**  
**Ruth 1:1. 3-6. 14-16. 22**  
**Psalm 146**  
**Matthew 22:34-40**

**SATURDAY**  
**21 AUGUST**  
**Ruth 2:1-3. 8-11; 4:13-17**  
**Psalm 128**  
**Matthew 23:1-12**

## REFLECTION

Continuing last week's theme of loving the stranger, Jesus stresses on Friday that loving other people is second only to loving God, and is actually "like" doing so. It brings us closer to God.

The Roman philosopher Cicero once said, "Virtue is its own reward." Generosity makes us feel good – but that shouldn't be our motivation. On Friday and Saturday, Ruth (ancestor of David and Jesus) is amply rewarded for her selfless help of her widowed mother-in-law. But she isn't to know that.

We're also cautioned this week against thinking ourselves better than others. Several words from Jesus about "first" and "last" warn us against any kind of condescension in our giving, our helping. Loving others should be a relationship of equals. If the first will be last and the last first, then we all meet in the middle.

On Thursday Jephthah makes a bargain with God, promising that, if he defeats the Ammonites, he will sacrifice whoever comes to his house after that. He clearly thinks he'll be greeted by one of his servants. Surely it won't matter if he has to sacrifice one of them. The folly and wickedness of his vow is illustrated when he sees his beloved daughter instead – a vivid reminder that we're all equal in the sight of God.

PRAYER

**Generous God, help us to give without counting the cost, to serve without seeking reward and to love unconditionally. For that is how your Son revealed your great love for each one of us, and we long to follow him.**



Jephthah's daughter, engraved illustration, Magasin Pittoresque, 1836

## BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

### PART XXXVI – ZEPHANIAH – A BOOK ABOUT DISASTER AND DESTRUCTION

Georgina Byrne continues our book-by-book series about the Bible.

"Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath." Zephaniah 1:18

There is a glimmer of joy in Zephaniah but to reach it the reader must first wade through a torrent of disaster. This is fitting with the great message of the book: that the unremitting horror of divine judgement is, ultimately, something that will purify and refine those who are left. But few, it seems, will be left to rejoice.

The prophet is named in the first verse as a descendent of Hezekiah, the righteous and respected king of Judah (2 Kings 18). He utters his prophecy during the days of Josiah, another respected king of Judah and a noted reformer (verse 22), but his words point to the coming devastation of the fall of Judah to the Babylonian Empire. Josiah's son Eliakim, renamed Jehoiakim we read elsewhere, did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and the kingdom was overrun (2 Kings 23:34 – 24:6).

The coming disasters will be universal. "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth," the Lord declares at the outset, and no one will be exempt. Yet there is detail in the text. The cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter and a loud crash from the hills. Gaza will become deserted and Ashdod's people will be driven out at noon.

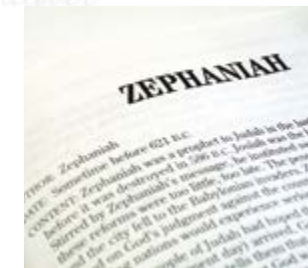
The prophet uses vivid language to describe the devastation. Coastal areas will be pastured, and land possessed by nettles and salt pits. Birds will hoot or croak at windows and the city will become the lair of wild animals.

The reason for such destruction becomes clear in chapter three. The city has not listened to the Lord and officials are corrupt. The people will be humbled, therefore, and those who are left will be those who are faithful and lowly. Only over these will God cast protection, restoring their fortunes, and making them to be praised. When the time of purification is over, the remnant will remain.

LIVE the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by Caroline Hodgson and Heather Smith



Eleventh week after Trinity

Monday 16 August to Saturday 21 August 2021

WEEK