

Zephaniah

The Book

- A. When? It was written about 549 B.C. during the long reign of the good King Josiah (1:1).
1. Josiah initiated extensive reforms, but they are barely visible in the book (II Chr 34:1-33).
 2. The prophecy refers to Nineveh and Assyria, which were destroyed 545 B.C. (2:13-15).
 3. We assume about the 10th year of Josiah's reign, before He made a covenant to seek God.
 4. If this is correct, and it is very close, it came 25 years before Nebuchadnezzar's invasion.
 5. These 25 years include the following: Josiah (21yr) + Jehoahaz (3mo) + Jehoiakim (4yr).
 6. Zephaniah is one of four prophets who wrote prophecies before the Babylonian captivity.
 - a. Jeremiah began in Josiah's 13th year and continued into the Jew's captivity (Jer 25:3).
 - b. Nahum was a contemporary by prophesying before Nineveh's fall (Nahum 1:1; 3:18).
 - c. Habakkuk was a contemporary by prophesying before Babylon's invasion (Hab 1:6).
- B. Who? The prophet Zephaniah was likely a descendant of the good king Hezekiah (1:1).
1. What other reason would trace his genealogy back the needed generations to Hizkiah.
 2. If you think Hizkiah and Hezekiah are different, try Oshea, Hoshea, Jehoshua, or Joshua.
 3. There are 96 years from the beginning of Hezekiah's reign to the 10th year of Josiah.
- C. Whom? The prophecy is addressed to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judah (1:4,12; 3:14,16).
- D. Why? The nation had sinned greatly, especially under Manasseh, and was facing judgment.
- E. What? By several arguments, he seeks to persuade the people to repent and promises hope.
1. In the first chapter he threatens destruction and misery to move them to fear to repent.
 2. In the second chapter he reveals his judgment of Judah's neighbors to intimidate them.
 3. In the third chapter he lists her sins, promises destruction, and promises future blessings.
- F. Where? The prophecy addresses Judah's tribal territory, the city of Jerusalem, and neighbors.

Chapter 1

- A. Zephaniah warned the land of Canaan, and Jerusalem and Judah in particular, after listing some of their attitudes and sins, of terrible destruction and judgment coming from the presence of the Lord, which they would not be able to avoid, stop, or postpone.
- B. The time is the reign of Josiah, just after the very evil reigns of Manasseh and Amon (1:1).
- C. The Lord intended to totally waste Canaan and surrounding areas of all idolaters (1:2-3).
- D. Though Baal worship left with Israel or was destroyed by Josiah, a remnant remained (1:4).
- E. God was angry at Judah for a compromising mixture of worshipping Him and Molech (1:5).
- F. Note the Lord's connection of those who backslide with those who do not seek or ask (1:6).
- G. The Lord had prepared a feast with the Jews as the entrée for his guests the Chaldeans (1:7).
- H. He would start with the princes and the king's children, which was certainly fulfilled (1:8).
1. Jehoahaz reigned only 3 months before Pharaohnecho came and took him captive to Egypt, where he died (II Kings 23:30-35; II Chron 36:1-4).
 2. Jehoiakim, appointed by Pharaoh, reigned 11 years, but Nebuchadnezzar captured him; he died and was buried like an ass (II Kgs 23:34-37; 24:1-7; II Chr 36:5-8; Jer 22:18-19; 36:29-32; Ezek 19:5-9).
 3. Jehoiachin reigned only 3 months before Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and took him to Babylon, where he was later promoted (II Kgs 24:8-16; 25:27-30; II Chr 36:9-10).
 4. Zedekiah, appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, reigned 11 years, but then Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and put out his eyes (II Kgs 24:17-20; 25:1-30; II Chron 36:11-21).

Chapter 2

- A. Zephaniah condemned Judah as no longer desired, yet exhorted repentance by the nation and held out hope for the righteous, and then foretold the destruction of the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Ethiopians, and the Assyrians as a strong warning of terrible judgment to come.
- B. The purpose of the second chapter is not fully realized until explained in the third (3:6-7).
- C. The nation had a chance to repent before judgment, but they rejected the warning (2:1-2).
- D. The gracious Lord offered comfort and hope to the righteous to seek Him for salvation (2:3).
- E. The Philistines would be destroyed and left desolate for the regathered Jews to use (2:4-7).
- F. The Moabites and Ammonites would be wasted and left for the remnant of the Jews (2:8-11).
- G. The Ethiopians would be slain by the Lord's sword in the hand of His appointed king (2:12).
- H. The Assyrians and their capital of Nineveh would be reduced enough to be a joke (2:13-15).

Chapter 3

- A. Zephaniah brought his condemnation down upon Jerusalem with a list of her sins and incorrigible nature bringing His fierce wrath upon them, but then He promises a regathering of His people that includes both the recovery from Babylon but also the days of the gospel.
- B. The just and holy God of Israel could not abide the great wickedness of His people (3:1-5).
- C. He presumed they would respond properly to His dealings with the nations and them (3:6-7).
- D. He promised to bring on the Jews His indignation, fierce anger, and jealousy for sins (3:8).
- E. He foretold the purifying effect of judgment in the regathered remnant and in Christ (3:9-13). Compare these gospel prophecies with Mal 3:3-4; Ps 22:27; 68:31; Jer 16:19; Zech 8:20-23.
- F. He concluded with glorious praise for the marvelous blessings primarily in Christ (3:14-20). While partially fulfilled by regathering to Jerusalem, the great fulfillment is in the gospel.

The Problem Texts

- A. What is the consuming of all things in 1:2-3? This is figurative language for a widespread and thorough destroying of the land and its inhabitants. See Jeremiah 4:23-29 and Hosea 4:3.
- B. What are the stumblingblocks of 1:3? These are idols. See Ezekiel 14:1-11 and Rev 2:14.
- C. What are the Chemarims of 1:4? The best explanation from a variety of sources is black-robed ascetics or other attendants to the priests of Baal, similar to Roman Catholic monks.
- D. Who is Malcham of 1:5? Another name for Milcom (I Kgs 11:5), Molech (I Kgs 11:7), or Moloch (Amos 5:26), chief god of the Ammonites and a common temptation for the Jews.
- E. What was the strange apparel of 1:8? It was clothing of the pagan nations around Judah, which were worn by the king's children, courtiers, and others as well. See Ezekiel 23:14-15.
- F. What is leaping on the threshold of 1:9? A descriptive way of describing the rage of violence of those who would gladly enter houses and take good by force for wicked masters or rulers.
- G. What or where is Maktesh of 1:11? Apparently a place in Jerusalem, it is believed to be a valley area of the city where merchandising and trading took place, especially that of silver.
- H. What are the lees of 1:12? Lees are the sediment at the bottom of wine long undisturbed, and settled on their lees describes long ease and peace that causes complacency. See Jer 48:11.
- I. Who are the Cherethites of 2:5? Another name for the Philistines or a segment of the Philistine nation, some of whom served David as bodyguards (I Sam 30:14; II Sam 15:18).
- J. What is "gnaw not the bones till the morrow" of 3:3? While lions and wolves slowly gnaw bones through the night to obtain their food, these rapacious predators consume all at once – they do not gnaw on the bones until the next day as is common among these two species.

The Chief Jewels

- A. Consider 1:5. Like the Samaritans, these profane Jews served the LORD and idols (II Kgs 17:24-41). You cannot serve two masters; you cannot be a friend of God and the world; you must serve him with a single, pure heart (Matt 6:24; Jas 4:4; I John 2:15-17; Jas 1:8; 4:8).
- B. Consider 1:6. It is no less of a sin to turn back from the Lord than it is to not seek the Lord at all or even inquire of Him. You cannot comfort yourself that you once served Him (Jn 8:31).
- C. Consider 1:7. Shut your mouth in the presence of the great God. He is not interested at all in your excuses and your complaining. Job shut his mouth when he met the Lord (Job 40:3-5).
- D. Consider 1:8. He condemned their strange apparel. The Lord chose you to be separate from the world, and He does not want us to even touch the unclean things (II Cor 6:14-17).
- E. Consider 1:12. They settled on their lees. Do not get complacent about religion, if things appear to be the same. The Lord will shake things up (Ps 50:21-23; II Pet 3:3-7)! Beware!
- F. Consider 1:15. The Lord is terrible! If you think your life is bad, it can get far worse: wrath, trouble, distress, wasteness, desolation, darkness, gloominess, clouds, and thick darkness.
- G. Consider 2:1. It is one thing to be despised by man, but a much worse thing to be despised by God. When the Lord no longer desires you, it is a fearful time indeed. Run to Him today!
- H. Consider 2:3. America deserves the most severe judgment of God, but He is able and willing to save those within her who will seek the Lord, righteousness, and meekness. Thank you!
- I. Consider 2:7. What discrimination! The Lord loves His people. The Philistines were crushed without remedy, but He would bring His people again. Chastening proves love (I Cor 11:32).
- J. Consider 2:8. You cannot get away with picking on the people of God (2:8-10). When they were nomads, the LORD rebuked kings for their sakes (Ps 105:13-15). Praise the Lord!
- K. Consider 2:11. The Lord starves out His competitors! There is nothing for sacrifice! But the Lord will raise up a people even from the isles of the heathen, which is the day of the gospel!
- L. Consider 2:13-15. Nineveh was capital of Assyria, founded in Nimrod's time, and the nation that took ten tribes captive. God destroyed it so fully that it was only recently discovered!
- M. Consider 3:2. Note four sins of Jerusalem: she did not obey preaching, did not respond to chastening, did not trust the Lord, and did not seek to walk with God. How do you measure?
- N. Consider 3:4. Look at her ministers! They held casual worship with mock healing? They brought things of the world into worship. They twisted the scriptures to suit their goals.
- O. Consider 3:9. The complete fulfillment of this prophecy did not occur until God had raised up a new order of kings and priests through the ministry of Jesus Christ and His apostles.
- P. Consider 3:11. Two great evils of Jerusalem were rejoicing in pride as God's people and putting their trust in the temple of the Lord (Jer 7:1-12). Only righteousness can save you!
- Q. Consider 3:15. The kingdom of God of the New Testament properly viewed fulfills the prophecy of this verse, for the Lord is with us and circumstances of this life do not affect us.
- R. Consider 3:17. Consider the affection the Lord has for His people, but this was not fully realized until the Lord Jesus Christ came and brought in everlasting consolation and hope.
- S. Consider 3:20. There was surely a regathering of Jews under Cyrus, but a greater regathering of His people was through the gospel, just as James interprets Amos (Acts 15:13-18).

Application

- A. God will destroy this nation for its great hypocrisy and wickedness, either at the final Day of the Lord or sooner, yet there is hope for those who will remain faithful (2:3).
- B. Love the word of God. Learn the word of God. Obey the word of God. Trust the word of God. Look for everything you can find in every passage of Scripture ... even Zephaniah!