

36 – Zephaniah: The Day of the Lord is at Hand

- “Zephaniah,” (same name as 3 others in scripture) means “Yahweh hides,” “Yahweh has hidden,” or “Yahweh treasured.” Even though God judges and disciplines His people they are still His treasure, and they will be hidden later in time from the enemy (Revelation 12).
- Zephaniah identifies himself better than any other OT prophet. He **traces his genealogy back to King Hezekiah**. Zephaniah was the last of the prophets before captivity of the southern kingdom of Judah.
- His ministry was **during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC)**, when worship of God was reestablished, but idolatry continued. Both Zephaniah and Jeremiah prophesied of coming judgment because the reform was short-lived and unheeded. Zephaniah also mentions the coming destruction of Nineveh, which was in 612 BC, so we know he wrote before that time.
- **“The day of the Lord” is an expression used more frequently in this prophecy than in any other Old Testament book (7 X)**. The dual theme of Zephaniah is the coming judgment on Judah for its disobedience, but also the preservation of a remnant of true believers by a merciful and promise-keeping God. This book’s message of judgment is certain. The phrase “the Day of the Lord” has particular meaning for the end of time, but also referred to this time in Israel’s history (double fulfillment).
- Most people don’t even know this little book of prophecy exists, yet its overall message, other than the coming judgment, is the **same as that in John 3:16**. God loves His people. This is one of the most well-repeated verses in Zephaniah: *“The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”* (3:17) God must punish wickedness and disobedience, but He is still mighty to save, and loves beyond our comprehension. Zephaniah shows what we call “tough love.” The dual nature of God is seen strongly. He is indeed a God of love, but is also a God of justice and judgment. And, the Day of the Lord is also a day of salvation as God provides a way, but the choice is ours.



Highlights

Chapter 1 Day of the Lord Coming	Chapter 2 How to Avoid, On All	Chapter 3 Judgment then Restoration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prophet’s identification ▪ Day of the Lord (judgment) soon (1:2-3:8) ▪ Judgment on all earth (1:2-3) ▪ Judgment on Judah/Jerusalem (1:4-2:3) ▪ Targets (idolaters, princes, oppressors, merchants, indifferent) (1:4-13) ▪ Description of judgment (1:14-18) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoid judgment, repent, seek God, addressed to nation, humble (2:1-3) ▪ Judgment on surrounding nations (2:4-15) (Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, Assyria, Nineveh) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reasons for judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-7) ▪ Judgment on all earth (3:8) ▪ Restoration of Israel, the faithful remnant (3:9-20) ▪ Redemption, rejoicing, the Ruler, Reward

- God will intervene by bringing **universal judgment to the entire world, as well as Judah and Jerusalem**. He will remove everything, including animals and people (1:2-3). Some think this may be a “DE-creation” of the world. Order presented by Zephaniah is exact opposite of that in the creation account in Genesis.
- God will eliminate idolaters and the fallen away in Judah, and will judge both Judah and Jerusalem. He specifically targets the false priests, idol worshippers, and those who have turned away from Him.
- The people are told to **be silent (no defense) before the Lord because the Day of Judgment is near**. He has “prepared a sacrifice” (the evil people) and “invited my guests.” The result of this judgment will bring great mourning, terror, warfare, distress and death. All of this is certain. God even describes the actual route the Babylonians would take as they came through Jerusalem in the invasion (1:10).
- The nation of Judah is **exhorted to seek the Lord, to gather itself together, repent, take on righteousness and humility** so that God’s anger would pass over them. Like the Angel of Death at Passover, God Himself would actually enter and search the city for evil to destroy. This exhortation came just a few years before Judah was finally conquered and taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. Apparently they did not turn from their wickedness.

- **The “Day of the Lord” is not a good day!** Anyone who doubts that needs to read the minor prophets, especially Zephaniah: *“That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness,”* (1:15) God says he will make “speedy riddance” of all who dwell in the land.
- God is not limiting His judgment on Judah. It will also fall on her wicked neighbors Philistia (west), Moab and Ammon (east), Ethiopia (south, probably includes Egypt), and Assyria (north). He also foretells the destruction of Nineveh and the Assyrian empire. This is **intended to include ALL peoples** (the four points of the compass are often used in scripture to indicate the entire earth). Cities and people will be destroyed. God clearly states that this judgment is because the nations persecuted His people, desired their land (it is the same today!) and would not follow Him. Zephaniah makes it clear that God is angry with everyone, including His people, and will in His just power clean the land of evil.
- God also mentions that the land of her neighbors will be given to Judah, and all will worship God. This has not happened in history yet. These verses speak of a later fulfillment, when God completes His plan for Israel in the Millennium. Part of a verse in chapter 2 makes this clear: *“For the LORD their God will intervene for them, And return their captives.”* (2:7b) God is speaking of His people. After judgment, He will again intervene, this time to return them to their land. This is just one verse that references the return. This refers to a time that began in the late 1800s, and continues today, with Israel a nation again (1948), fulfilling many other Biblical prophecies to return “the captives” (Judah, and all Israel) to her land.
- The beginning of chapter 3 reads like a **list of crimes against Judah**: abhorrent spiritual condition, rebellion, defilement, tyranny, unlearning, untrusting, abusive, wayward religious leaders, no justice, no shame, insolence, treachery, violence. God even relates how he has cut off and destroyed the enemies of Israel/Judah, thinking they would turn back to Him, but NO, they continued in their own wickedness.
- So now God **tells them to “wait” for Him.** This means to wait and watch and see what He does, and it will be exactly what He has just said: *“Therefore wait for Me,” says the LORD, “Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All My fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.”* (3:8) This is one of those prophecies that has a “near and far” fulfillment. This gathering of nations, plunder and fierce anger was fulfilled in local time, when Nebuchadnezzar began the 70-year captivity in 606 BC and later destroyed the city and Temple in 586 BC. However, this also speaks of a far fulfillment, against all nations, when God gathers them in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel) for the ultimate final battle.
- Beginning in 3:9, **God details his restoration of Israel.** These verses speak of the restoration to the land in several ways in several time frames. First, they will be returned from the Babylonian captivity. Then they will be returned after the Great Diaspora (scattering of Jews after the 2nd Temple’s destruction in 70 AD), happening now. But final fulfillment of these restoration verses will be in the Millennium, when Israel’s King is on His throne in Jerusalem: *“Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more.* (3:14-15)
- Some **interesting notes in these restoration verses.** God says He will restore a **“pure language”** (3:9) to the people. Hebrew was pretty much a dead language until the formation of the Jewish nation again in 1948. When Jews poured into the land (and still do) they spoke a variety of languages from their host countries. Israel as a restored nation needed ONE language to communicate with one another. Hebrew was revived, which is now the formal language of the nation of Israel. One more prophecy fulfilled.
- Another little “tidbit”: *“From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my worshipers, The daughter of My dispersed ones, Shall bring My offering.”* (3:10) Who are these “daughters” of His scattered people? These are what we call **Falasha Jews** (although they don’t like that term, and prefer to be known as “Beta Israel” – the house of Israel). Most of these people (over 100,000) have returned to live in Israel today. Why would there be so many black Jews? Where did they come from? Most believe it has something to do with the Queen of Sheba’s visit to King Solomon. He may have fathered a son with her, Menelik, who carried his father’s faith back to Ethiopia. No matter their origins, they have literally fulfilled this little verse, a powerful prophecy and testimony of the awesome promises of God, and his ability to meet them fully.

In these restoration verses God tells His people to rejoice. Interesting way to follow such a strong message of judgment. With God there is always certain hope of restoration. Without Him, complete destruction with no hope of restoration.