

## LESSON 1 ~ ZEPHANIAH

The book of Zephaniah repeatedly hammers home the message that the day of the Lord, judgment day, is coming when the malignancy of sin will be dealt with. Israel and her gentile neighbors will soon experience the crushing hand of God's wrath. But after the chastening process is complete, blessing will come in the person of the Messiah.

### Author

Normally the genealogy of a prophet is traced no further than his father. Zephaniah, however, traces his ancestry back four generations in order to demonstrate his royal lineage as the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah (1:1). Thus, he was a distant relative of King Josiah and those to whom he addresses his prophecy.

Apparently Zephaniah lived in the city of Jerusalem because he refers to the city as "this place" (1:4), and he also describes the topography with intimate familiarity.

### Date

Zephaniah fixes the time of his prophecy "in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah" (1:1). Josiah reigned from 640 to 609 B.C., and 2:13 indicates that the destruction of Nineveh (612 B.C.) was still in the future. Thus, the book of Zephaniah can be dated between 640 and 612 B.C.

Because Josiah's religious reforms began c. 628 B.C., and because Zephaniah catalogs lists of sins prevalent prior to the reforms (1:3–13; 3:1–7), the time of Zephaniah may be dated more precisely as occurring c. 635 to 625 B.C. Zephaniah's forceful prophecy may even have been a factor in the reforms that took place.

### Themes and Literary Structure

On the whole, Zephaniah is a fierce and grim book of warning about the coming day of the Lord. Desolation, darkness, and ruin will strike Judah and the nations because of the wrath of God upon sin. Zephaniah moves three times from the general to the specific: (1) from universal judgment to judgment upon Judah (1:1–2:3); from judgment upon surrounding nations to judgment upon Jerusalem (2:4–3:7); and from judgment and cleansing of all nations to the restoration of Israel (3:8–20). The two broad divisions of the book are the judgment in the day of the Lord (1:1–3:8), and the salvation in the day of the Lord (3:9–20).

As with Amos some one hundred years earlier, the theme of the coming day of the Lord is central for Zephaniah. This day of the Lord is seen as having two components: judgment that results in the destruction of Judah by foreign armies, but also restoration and hope for the people of God. Zephaniah sees this second aspect of the day of the Lord as a terminal event, bringing history to a close. Thus the message shares some characteristics with apocalyptic literature that portrays the end times.

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<sup>1</sup>*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts : Old and New Testaments.* electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996.

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## OUTLINE OF Zephaniah

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- I. The Judgment in the Day of the Lord 1:1–3:8**
  - A. The Judgment on the Whole Earth 1:1–3
  - B. The Judgment on the Nation of Judah 1:4–2:3
  - C. The Judgment on the Nations Surrounding Judah 2:4–15
  - D. The Judgment on the City of Jerusalem 3:1–7
  - E. The Judgment on the Whole Earth 3:8
  
- II. The Salvation in the Day of the Lord 3:9–20**
  - A. The Promise of Conversion 3:9–13
  - B. The Promise of Restoration 3:14–20 <sup>2</sup>

### Understand The Background

1. Read the background for this period. 2Kings 21-23; 2Chron 33 - 35.

### Study Questions For Zephaniah Chapter 1

1. How is Zephaniah related to Josiah according to 1:1? Who was his great-great grandfather?
  
2. Name four things God would consume from the land.
  
3. What did those who were settled in complacency say about the LORD?
  
4. What does Zephaniah say about the “great day of the LORD”?
  
5. What was the whole land going to be devoured by?

**Application:** In Zeph 1:5 we have a description of dual loyalties, to the LORD and Milcom. Does this problem exist today? If so, describe an example?

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<sup>2</sup>Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts : Old and New Testaments. electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996.

## LESSON 2 ~ ZEPHANIAH

### Study Questions For Zephaniah Chapters 2 - 3

1. What did Zephaniah tell the people to seek? Why?
2. Who are the inhabitants of the seacoast (2:5)?
3. The children of Moab and Ammon are going to be like who?
4. What would happen to the Ethiopians?
5. What will happen to the capitol city of the Assyrians?
6. What did Ninevah once say about itself?
7. Why was Jerusalem going to be destroyed?
8. How does Zephaniah describe:
  - a. Princes
  - b. Judges
  - c. Prophets
  - d. Priests
9. What were the people supposed to do?
10. How would the remnant of Israel going to behave?
11. Who is the King of Israel?
12. Where is the LORD when He gathers His remnant in His holy Mountain, Zion?