



Overview for Zephaniah

Purpose: To describe the Day of the Lord to Judah and the existent world powers, and to urge the people of Judah to turn back to God in light of the coming Babylonian invasion.

Author: Zephaniah the prophet, the great-great-grandson of the good king Hezekiah

To Whom Written: Judah and the surrounding nations

Date Written: Possibly about 640-621 B.C., right before King Josiah's great reform began in 621 B.C.

History: The world power of Assyria was beginning to weaken during this period in history, while that of Egypt was rising, though Egypt would be dislodged by the Babylonians in 605 B.C. Another significant backdrop to Zephaniah's message was the emergence of barbaric tribes in the north known as Scythians who were perceived as a threat to Judah.

On the religious front, the nation had rebelled against God and adopted idolatrous practices during the reign of King Manasseh, and when Zephaniah came on the scene, this influence was still predominant. In 621 B.C., a spiritual reformation took place in Judah under the leadership of King Josiah. Since Zephaniah does not mention this event, it is probable that his preaching happened prior to it and perhaps even prepared the way for that revival.

Setting: Because of the prophet's royal lineage, which would have given him access to the king's court, it is likely that he ministered in the city of Jerusalem. It is possible that he even lived in the palace complex.

Characteristics: The theme of the book is found in the oft-repeated phrase, "the day of the LORD," which occurs eighteen times in these three chapters, and thirteen times in the first chapter alone. Zephaniah describes the "day" with imagery of war and invasion. While earlier prophets saw the Day of the Lord as a specific point in time after which history continues to flow on, Zephaniah saw it as a terminal event. This is the first prophetic book to blend prophecy with apocalypse, or end-time events.

The prophecy of Zephaniah is characterized as a "word" rather than as a "burden," probably because it does not point to the destruction of a particular nation but instead is an authoritative message concerning the Day of the Lord, which will impact both Judah and her enemies.

Summary: In chapter one, the prophet launched immediately into the predictions of judgment in the light of the "day of the LORD." The first application is to Judah, and the prophet warned what Jehovah will do, why He will do it, and upon whom the judgments will fall. Chapter two opens with the announcement that one thing can keep the judgment from falling: repentance. The prophet proceeded to pronounce doom upon the surrounding nations of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria. In chapter 3, he shifted his focus to Jerusalem, enumerating the causes for judgment and issuing warnings. The chapter concludes with verses 8-13, which speak of the restoration of Israel and Judah, and an exhortation for the people to express their gratitude through singing, shouting, and rejoicing.

Timeline

See “The Divided Kingdom” four-page timeline included in this unit.

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. The day of Jehovah's judgment (1:2—3:8)
 - A. Judgment upon all the earth (1:2-3)
 - B. Judgment upon Judah (1:4—2:3)
 - C. Judgment upon the surrounding nations (2:4-15)
 - D. Judgment upon Jerusalem (3:1-7)
 - E. Judgment upon all the earth (3:8)
- III. The day of Jehovah's restoration (3:9-20)
 - A. The restoration of the nations (3:9)
 - B. The restoration of Israel (3:10-20)