



The Minor Prophets

ZEPHANIAH: *"The Royal Prophet"* 635—626 B.C.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The prophetic book is named after its prophetic author Zephaniah (1:1). The book was apparently written around 630 B.C. during the early years of good King Josiah's reign (640-609 B.C.) prior to the reform of 622 B.C. Thus Zephaniah overlaps with the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry. Not surprisingly, much of the language of Zephaniah is very similar to Jeremiah's.

PURPOSE OF ZEPHANIAH

Within the Book of the Twelve, Zephaniah closes out the subunit of Nahum-Habakkuk-Zephaniah, which focuses on judgment. Zephaniah was raised up by God to assist the godly King Josiah in his attempt to bring Judah back to God. The message of Zephaniah revealed, however, that it was too late for the nation of Judah. Zephaniah's message of judgment, like Jeremiah's, appears directed at disobedient Jerusalem—there is no mention of Josiah's short-lived reforms in Zephaniah. Judgment was coming, though some individuals could still be saved.

IMPORTANT DATA ABOUT ZEPHANIAH

- Key word: The day of the Lord
- Key chapter: 1 - The judgment on Judah
- Key verses: 1:7-9; 2:3
- Key character: The people of Judah
- Geography of Zephaniah: Judah

BACKGROUND

❖ Historical occasion

- During this time period, Judah suffered from social injustice, immorality and idolatry (3:1-7) which fostered under wicked Kings Manasseh and Amon (II Kgs. 21 - 23).
- These messages occurred before and during the reign of good King Josiah who started a 6 year reformation in 622 B.C. He was later killed in battle (609 B.C.) thereby leaving Judah without any good leaders.

❖ Zephaniah's background

- A descendant (perhaps great-grandson) of King Hezekiah, therefore having access to the royal court (1:1).
- He ministered in wicked Judah during the early years of Josiah.
- Because of the invasion of wandering nomads into Judah, the prophet spoke to citizens of Jerusalem of a coming greater judgment.

❖ Content of the message

- Zephaniah's prophecy is concerned totally with the future "Day of the Lord" in which God's judgment will be upon Israel and Gentile nations (2:4-15). Zephaniah emphasizes the day of Yahweh—a central theme in the Book of the Twelve—more than any of the other prophets.
- He portrays this period to be horrible judgment followed by a time of great blessing upon the remnant of faithful Jews (3:8-20). Zephaniah clearly ties the day of Yahweh to two quite different aspects. This coming day will be a time of judgment on rebellious Judah as well as on the surrounding haughty nations that defy Yahweh. Yet it will also be a time of blessing on the faithful remnant of Judah along with those Gentiles from among the nations who come to worship Yahweh. Thus the day of the Lord is linked to judgment as to restoration, both for Judah and for the nations.
- He looks at this future judgment as a means of preparing a people for His name.

OUTLINE

- I. The judgment of the “Day of the Lord” (1 - 2) - Tribulation.
 - A. Upon whole earth (1:1-3). _____
 - B. Upon Judah (1:4-2:3). _____
 - C. Upon Gentile nations (2:4-15). _____
 - D. Upon Jerusalem (3:1-7). _____
- II. The salvation of the “Day of the Lord” (3:8-20) - Millennial Kingdom.
 - A. Salvation of Gentiles (3:8-10). _____
 - B. Salvation of Israel (3:11-20). _____

SUMMARY

Zephaniah foretells of the coming “Day of the Lord,” with its judgment upon all men. Several things are said about the Day of the Lord—it is imminent, it will be a time of terror, it is coming as a judgment for sin, it will be accompanied by great convulsions in nature, it will fall upon all creation, and only a remnant will survive. He uses this theme to call his fellow citizens to take heed and turn from their sin lest they fall into God’s judgment.

ZEPHANIAH’S MESSAGE FOR TODAY: “REVIVE US AGAIN”

LESSON: TURN BACK TO THE LORD—REPENT (OR FACE JUDGEMENT, WRATH OF GOD)

Imagine a young king hearing this challenge. What happened? Notice the impact of facing the future upon Josiah. This is the response God’s Word is meant to have upon our lives.

I. Individually: He Sought the Lord (II Chron. 34:1-3a).

This required a tremendous amount of personal dedication and a desire for purity.

Why? Two reasons:

- A. Josiah sought the Lord in spite of a shameful heritage before him.

What was his background? What did he come out of?

- 1. Influence of a wicked grandfather: Manasseh.

- 2. Influence of a wicked father: Amon (II Chron. 33:21-24).

- B. Josiah sought the Lord in spite of the sinful circumstances around him.

- 1. He was surrounded (advised, and influenced) by sinful people and sinful influences.

- 2. He sought the Lord of his own accord.

II. Corporately: The Nation Sought the Lord (II Chron. 34:2b ff.).

Josiah influenced Judah. As a teen, he feared the wrath of God on his people. Therefore he set out to influence those around him.

The results were threefold:

- A. Reformation of the nation (34:3b-7).

- B. Revival of the religion (34:8f).

- C. Recovery of the Word of God (34:14 f).
