

## ZEPHANIAH

- Zephaniah (“Treasured of Jehovah” or “The Lord hides”) was a prophet to Judah just as Assyria was falling to the Babylonian-Mede armies.
  - During a time of great corruption, the Lord hid Zephaniah.
  - A key purpose of Zephaniah’s message was to disturb the complacency of God’s people, so that they would return to Him.
  
- The timing of this book was approximately fifty years after Nahum and at the very beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry – around the time that good King Josiah would reign.
  
- The “Day of the Lord” (similar to “the Day of Judgment/Wrath”) is mentioned seven times in this book as a focus of God’s wrath; this “day” is a period from the rapture of the church until the end of the millennium.
  
- Several themes of Zephaniah include:
  - The Dangers of being Indifferent to God
  - The Day of Judgment will become a Day of Joy

24 Zephaniah 1-3

### Read Zephaniah 1:1-6 ... Zephaniah Prophesies God’s Judgment on Judah

1:1 Zephaniah was of royal descent as the great, great grandson of good King Hezekiah and a distant cousin to their current king, Josiah.

- With four ancestors listed, this is the longest recorded ancestry of any prophet.
- King Josiah was attempting to reverse the evil trends that were set by the two previous Kings of Judah (Manasseh & Amon). Josiah was able to extend his influence because there wasn’t an active superpower dominating the world. Assyria was declining rapidly, so the inhabitants of Judah became complacent.

<b>The Word of the Lord came to the Prophets</b>	
Isaiah	1:10; 28:13-14; 37:22; 38:4; 39:5; 66:5
Jeremiah	1:2, 4, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 31; 7:2; 9:20; 10:1; 13:2-3, 8; 14:1; 16:1; 17:20; 18:5; 19:3; 20:8; 21:1, 11; 22:2, 29; 24:4; 25:3; 26:1; 27:1; 28:12; 29:20, 30; 30:2; 31:10; 32:1, 6, 26; 33:13-19, 23; 34:1, 4, 8, 12; 35:1, 12; 36:1, 27; 37:6; 39:15; 40:1; 42:7; 42:15; 43:1, 8; 44:16, 24, 26; 46:1, 13; 49:34; 50:1 (Daniel 5:10)
Ezekiel	1:3; 3:16; 6:1; 7:1; 11:14; 12:1, 8, 17, 21, 21; 13:1; 14:2, 12; 15:1; 16:1; 17:1, 11; 18:1; 20:2, 45; 21:1, 8, 18; 22:1, 17, 23; 23:1; 24:1, 15, 20; 25:1, 3; 26:1; 27:1; 28:1, 11, 20; 29:1, 17; 30:1, 20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:1; 33:23; 34:1; 35:1; 36:16; 37:15; 38:1
Daniel	--
Hosea	4:1
Joel	1:1
Amos	3:1; 7:16
Obadiah	--
Jonah	1:1; 3:1, 3

Micah	1:1
Nahum	--
Habakkuk	--
Zephaniah	1:1; 2:5
Haggai	1:1, 3; 2:1, 10, 20
Zechariah	1:1, 7; 4:6, 8; 6:9; 7:4, 8, 12; 8:1, 18; 9:1; 11:11; 12:1
Malachi	1:1

1:2 This is a powerful opening statement: “*I will utterly sweep away everything.*” This is a judgment on all worldly creation.

1:3 The elimination of life on earth is recorded in reverse order of Genesis 1 (man → animals → birds → fish)

- The Hebrew word for “man” is “adam” (’ādām אָדָם) which is similar to the Hebrew word for “earth/land” is ’ādāmāh (אֲדָמָה). (Romans 8:18-19)

1:4 Judgment begins in the household of God (1 Peter 4:17), and God’s followers had straddled between following Him and this world (1 Kings 18:21; Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13).

- Unlike the lifeless idols who cannot act (Psalm 115:5; 135:16; Deuteronomy 4:28; Revelation 9:20), God can “*stretch out His hand*” which symbolizes His engagement and action.
- Baal (meaning “owner” and “lord”) was symbolized by a raised uncut stone (2 Chronicles 33:3, 7).
- The exact translation of “idolatrous priests” is “black robed” (2 King 23:5; Hosea 10:5); these were regular priests who were now active in idolatry.

1:5 The worship of the heavens had been encouraged by Manasseh (2 Kings 21:3); Sabeans were those who worshipped the stars and followed astrology.

- God’s people had a divided heart between the Lord and Milcom (the false god of the Ammonites – 1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13). The spelling “Milcom” is a corruption of the Hebrew word for “king” which was “melek” (מֶלֶךְ).
- The housetop was the highest and clearest place to see the stars (Jeremiah 19:13; 32:29)
- King Manasseh adopted the Assyrian astral worship (2 Kings 21:3-5) although Scripture clearly forbade astral worship of the heavens (Deuteronomy 4:19; Job 31:26-27). Israel had been judged because of the worship of astral deities (2 Kings 17:16), but Judah did not learn their lesson (2 Kings 21: 3, 5; 23:4-5, 11-12; Jeremiah 7:18; 8:2; 44:17).

1:6 Instead of trusting the one, true and living God, the pagans trusted false gods.

<b>Characteristics of a “Backslider”</b> <i>(Zephaniah 1:6)</i>	
1	They do not FOLLOW the Lord      Pursue their own desires/will
2	They do not SEEK the Lord      No Bible Study/Church
3	They do not INQUIRE of the Lord      No Prayer

### Read Zephaniah 1:7-18 ... The Coming Day of the LORD

1:7 Be silent before God; wait and listen (Hab 2:20; Zech 2:13).

- The “Day of the Lord” is not a day of rest, but a time of devastation (Joel 2:1, 11, 31, 3:14).

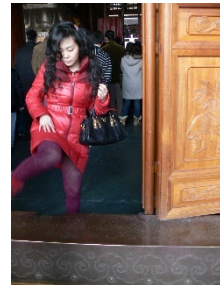
- This slaughter feast (sacrifice) would host the Babylonians as guests (“holy ones” in Isaiah 13:3) in consuming Judah.
- Similar to the Assyrian/Babylonian captivities, this was a foreshadowing of the Tribulation with birds as the guests (Rev 19:17-21)

1:8 King Zedekiah’s sons faced capital “punishment.”

- In Scripture, clothing symbolizes the covering of righteousness; one chooses God’s clothing (righteousness) or something foreign (external to His provision) – 2 Kings 10:22, 25:7.
- The “black robed” priests had turned from the service to the one, true God (Zephaniah 1:4).

1:9 Superstition held that the threshold was a dangerous place because demons dwelt there (1 Samuel 5:5 – worship of Dagan). This is the reason that the bride is carried across the threshold.

- Modern Buddhist temples in China build a step on the threshold to prohibit stepping on or stopping in the threshold of doors or gates.
- Modern superstitions of not stepping on cracks nor walking under ladders nor breaking mirrors – all heighten “coincidence” instead of God’s control (1 Sam 5:5).



1:10 “*On that day*” specifies a day of judgment.

- The Fish Gate was the “Damascus Gate” on the north side of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 33:4; Nehemiah 3:3, 12:39). This was the location of the fish market where fish were cleaned and sold.
  - “Fish” represent God’s people.
  - Thirty years after this (586 BC), Babylon would enter through this gate to “clean” God’s people.
- The second district was the newer section to the northwest of the Temple (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22; Nehemiah 11:9)
- The “hills” refer to the three hills of Jerusalem: Ophel, Moriah, Zion.

1:11 Those in the “Hollow” (marketplace) were to grieve because the silversmiths who formed idols of silver would be destroyed.

- In reality, “silver” (symbolic of redemption) would be cut off.
- “Canaanites” were equated to “merchants” who were more interested in wealth than God (Proverbs 31:24; Zechariah 14:21; Hosea 12:7).

- **Zephaniah 1:12-18 point to the Tribulation.**

1:12 God would search the streets of Jerusalem to find every idolater to judge.

- Men have again felt that God is out of touch with mankind; we are a people of relativism and spiritual indifference.
- Instead of believing that idols were vanity (Isaiah 41:23), these men were considering this about the one true and living God.
- The phrase “stagnant in spirit” is rooted in winemaking where the wine is left for a time to age on its lees (leftover yeast particles) to make it strong and flavorful (Isaiah 25:6); however, if left too long, it becomes unusable for human consumption (Jeremiah 48:11).

- The aging of lees can occur for as little as 3 months to as long as several years. Some producers of white wines may stir the lees (called *bâtonnage* “bat-on-naj” in French) to increase the lee contact’s surface area and thus the extraction of fatty acids (which come from the breakdown of the yeast cell wall) to add aroma and flavor.

1:13 These terms of not living in the houses that they built were conditions of the covenant (Leviticus 26:32-33; Deuteronomy 28:30; Amos 5:11).

- The work that they put into their vineyards would not be enjoyed.

1:14 Zephaniah warns of the imminent “Day of the Lord” with horrific cries of even the mighty men (Isaiah 2:19; Joel 2:11, 31).

<b>Six Descriptions of “The Day of the Lord”</b> <i>(Zephaniah 1:15-16)</i>	
1	A Day of Wrath
2	A Day of Trouble & Distress
3	A Day of Destruction & Desolation
4	A Day of Darkness & Gloom
5	A Day of Clouds & Blackness
6	A Day of Trumpet Blast & Battle Cry (Joel 2:1)

1:17 God Himself will bring distress on mankind.

- While light conveys a state of enlightenment and understanding, blindness conveys a lack of understanding and inability to grasp simple truths (Deuteronomy 28:29).
- “Blood” (representing life) will be poured as “dust” (representing death); their spilled blood will be as common as dust.
- The phrase “flesh as dung” speaks of the corpses lying about on the ground without burial. (Jeremiah 9:22)

1:18 Man’s self-effort (behavior or buying power) will not afford salvation (1 Peter 1:18).

- Although Jerusalem inhabitants attempted to buy their way out of destruction, they would not be able to bribe Babylon not to invade. (2 Kings 15:20; 18:13-15)
- God speaks and acts out of His burning jealousy (Deuteronomy 29:20; Psalm 79:5; Ezekiel 36:5-6; Zephaniah 3:8)

### **Read Zephaniah 2:1-3 ... The Offer to Return to God Before Judgment**

2:1 Hebrew form of “gather” is a verb used for a slave humbly gathering fire wood as Judah is an undesirable nation. (1 Kings 17:10, 12)

- The term “goyim” (that was used to demean Gentile nations) was used for Judah.

2:2 Mankind should repent before fiery judgment. The “decree” may reference the covenant agreement of blessings and curses (Deuteronomy 27-28).

- Babylon will defeat Jerusalem as easily as the wind blows away the chaff.

2:3 The phrase “perhaps you may be hidden” is a play on Zephaniah’s name which means Hidden by God” or “Treasure of God.” The sense of being “hidden” is synonymous with being protected.

<b>To be concealed (saved from) the Lord’s Wrath, He gives three directives</b> <i>(Zephaniah 2:3)</i>	
1	Seek the Lord

- |                      |
|----------------------|
| 2 Seek Righteousness |
| 3 Seek Humility      |

- **The remaining of chapter 2 are judgments against the surrounding nations in various directions:**
  - **Philistines (West)**
  - **Moab/Ammon (East)**
  - **Egypt (South)**
  - **Assyria (North)**

### **Read Zephaniah 2:4-7 ... Judgment Against the Philistines**

2:4 Four of the five primary Philistine cities are listed because Gath was conquered by David (Joshua 13:3; 1 Sam 6:17)

- The city of Gath was also left out of the listing by Amos (Amos 1:6-8), so Zephaniah may be quoting Amos. Zephaniah also quoted Isaiah intermittently.
  - There is some word play as the Hebrew word for “Gaza” (‘azzāh אֶזְרָא) is very close to the Hebrew word for “abandoned/forsaken” (‘āzūbāh אֶזְבָּח).
  - Another word play is that “Ekron” meaning “deep rooted” would be “uprooted.”
- 2:5 The Cherethites (“cutters off”) were from Crete and became a section of the Philistine population (Ezekiel 25:16). This was another play on words in that the “cutters off” would be themselves “cut off.”
- Their idolatrous priesthood wore black robes and were zealous for idolatry. They were indeed enemies of the Word of God.
- 2:6 The industrious sea ports would be abandoned for shepherding with both the sheep (in folds/pens) and shepherds (in caves).
- 2:7 The Lord always saved a remnant of His people to be restored.
  - Ashkelon was one of the five major Philistine cities on the Mediterranean coast (Joshua 13:3; 1 Samuel 6:17) The Babylonians would destroy the Philistines who were never recorded in history again. The Philistine city of Ashkelon would be used to preserve God’s remnant.

### **Read Zephaniah 2:8-11 ... Judgment Against Moab and Ammon**

2:8 This is family taunting between siblings as Moab descended from Lot’s oldest and the Ammonites from Lot’s youngest.

2:9 The concept of a “salt pit” is equivalent to sterility and ruin.

- The term “LORD” is a translation of “Yahweh” which means “to be.”

2:10 Judgment will come because of pride and taunting (Galatians 6:7).

2:11 The third time in the Bible that the Lord speaks of punishing false gods (Ex 18:11; Nu 33:4). All nations will worship him during the millennium.

### **Read Zephaniah 2:12 ... Judgment Against Ethiopia (Egypt)**

2:12 The Cushites (Ethiopians) were the allies of Egypt.

### **Read Zephaniah 2:13-15 ... Judgment Against Assyria**

2:13 Nineveh falls in 612 BC.

- Three hundred years later, Alexander the Great marched his troops directly over the location where Nineveh once stood without even realizing that he had walked over it.
- 2:14 Wild animals often became the inhabitants of the defeated lands (Isaiah 34:11; Psalm 102:6).
- 2:15 Nineveh would be destroyed because of her self-focus and pride.
- Nineveh “*said in her heart, ‘I am, and there is no one else.’*” Just as with many in modern times, she only looked out for “number one” (for herself).
  - Passers-by would treat Nineveh in the same manner that they treated Job (Job 27:23)

**Read Zephaniah 3:1-5 ... Judgment Against Jerusalem**

- **Just as Nineveh was judged, Jerusalem exhibited those same characteristics and would be similarly judged.**

- 3:1 Jerusalem had become as wicked as other nations.
- Jerusalem was personally rebellious against God’s law and His truth.
  - She was defiled by idolatry and polluted because of sin.
  - She oppressed the needy instead of caring for them.
- 3:2 Jerusalem had grown hard-hearted, so that no one could offer advice or correction.
- She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord; she does not draw near to her God.
  - Believers should be willing to listen to God’s Word and change with sensitive spirits and soft hearts.
  - Jerusalem didn’t trust that what God had said was true.
  - Jerusalem didn’t walk near to God with her feelings, thoughts and commitments. Believers should have ongoing, sincere prayers.

<b>Attributes of the Fallen Jerusalem</b> <i>(Zephaniah 3:1-2)</i>	
1	Rebellious
2	Defiled
3	Oppressive
4	Disobedient
5	Undisciplined
6	Does not trust God
7	Has not drawn near God

- 3:3-4 Jerusalem’s leadership who should have shown knowledge in and obedience to God’s Word instead led in the wickedness and idolatry.
- The description is the Hebrew term for “treacherous” (qallōwtā :קָלֹוֹתָא) comes from the same root word (hāqêl :הָקֵל) which means “light.” This is similar to Belshazzar’s judgment that he had been weighed in the balance and found lacking (Daniel 5:27).

<b>Four Hebrew Terms for “Man”</b>	
“Adam”	A Creature
“Ish”	A Conscious Being w/ Relationships
“Enosh”	Weakness

“Gever” Strong & Noble

<b>Each Position of Leadership Had Failed God’s People</b> <i>(Zephaniah 3:3-4)</i>			
1	Princes	Roaring Lions	Powerful Exploiters Nah 2:11-12; Neh 9:34; Is 1:23
2	Judges	Night Wolves	Evil & Insatiable with Wild Greed Micah 3:1-3 & 9-11
3	Prophets	Reckless & Dangerous	Speak Opinion instead of God’s Word Jer 6:13; Lam 2:14; 2 Peter 2:1-3
4	Priests	Profane the Sanctuary	Corrupt, Polluted Leaders Desecrate God’s Sanctuary Hosea 6:9; Jer 2:8; Mal 2:1-3, 8

3:5 Unlike the fallen, unfaithful human leaders of Jerusalem, God (Yahweh) was perfect and faithful every day.

- The LORD (“Yahweh”) was within her (Immanuel – God with us).
- The unjust men who should be ashamed of their sin and unfaithfulness have no shame...only self-centered pride.

**Read Zephaniah 3:6-8 ... Judgment Against the Nations**

3:6 God has judged nations to their end (“cut off” infers no lineage or future), and Judah should have known better. He has shown His justice.

- Believers often eliminate 2/3 of the Bible (the Old Testament and Revelation) because they do not want to witness the just side of God’s character.

3:7 God’s desire of repentance from His rebellious people by corrective discipline went unmet.

3:8 Watch and wait to see what the Lord will do; understand cataclysms truly do come from Him; this seems to point to the Tribulation as well when the nations congregate at Armageddon (Rev 16:16)

**Read Zephaniah 3:9-13 ... The Redemption of the Nations**

3:9 This blessing of pure speech will be the reversal of Babel (Gen 11) which also took place at Pentecost when diverse foreigners understood what was spoken (Acts 2:8-11).

- Scientists tested myriad characteristics of languages and found Hebrew was the one that would be most effective in communicating to extraterrestrial beings (Jer 31:23)
- Outside of “Hebrew”, a dead language has never been “resurrected” for common use. The Jewish tribes stopped using Hebrew when they were taken to Chaldea.
- “All of them” will call on the name of the LORD (“Yahweh”) – Joel 2:32.
- The phrase “to serve Him with one accord” was an allusion to two men carrying an object between their two shoulders – a single burden carried on the shoulders of two men might be a metaphor for Jew and Gentile serving the Lord together.

3:10 The “dispersed ones” may be God’s people who have been exiled by Assyria as well as those who would be dispersed by Babylon.

- This verse could also reference the Gentiles joining the Jews in worship (Ephesians 2-3).
- 3:11 God will not allow prideful people on Mt Zion (Jerusalem); pride is promoted in this day and age, but only those who depend on Jesus will be saved.
- 3:12 Nebuchadnezzar removed all of the prideful into captivity (Jer 39:10; 2 Kings 25:12)
- When God has worked in His people, they will be “*humble and lowly*” who find their refuge in Him. (Psalm 2:12; 118:8)
- 3:13 God’s people would be the “sheep of His pasture” (Psalm 23:2) without fear of anyone. (Micah 4:4)

<b>Things God’s People Will Not Have (Zephaniah 3:13)</b>
No Injustice No Lies or Deceit No Fear

**Read Zephaniah 3:14-20 ... The Joy of Jerusalem’s Restoration**

- 3:14 God’s people who would be redeemed would experience heartfelt joy that would result in singing and rejoicing.
- 3:15-16 God alone can remove mankind’s just punishment, so there is no need to fear.
- God was always the true King of Israel (Judges 8:23; 1 Samuel 8:7).
  - God’s presence has always been a blessing to His people (Zephaniah 3:15, 17). From the communion with Adam in the Garden of Eden to the incarnation of Jesus to His second coming and eternal glory.
  - The hands falling limp is due to paralysis from fear (2 Samuel 4:1; Isaiah 13:7; Jeremiah 6:24; Hebrews 12:12)
- 3:17 The Lord is a Warrior who saves. “*He will bring quietness with His love.*”
- 3:18 In the persecution of Israel, some would be saddened that they could not keep God’s feasts; these individuals would be returned to Jerusalem afterwards to again worship the Lord.
- 3:19 God says that He will save the lame and bring admiration from those scattered around the earth.
- 3:20 God tells His people that He will make them “famous and praiseworthy” while restoring their fortunes – Zerubbabel led Israel’s return in 520 BC.
- God assembles for restoration and worship just as he had gathered His people for exile and judgment.