

ZEPHANIAH

1) Who is Zephaniah?

Zephaniah is a prophet who was raised in wealth and privilege. He was very possibly from the royal lineage of King Hezekiah. If he grew up in the royal system, he probably had a good knowledge of what was going on in the religious, civil, and political circles.

Zephaniah 1:1

The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

2) What is the historical context of Zephaniah's ministry?

Zephaniah prophesied during the time of King Josiah's reform (640BC). Before Josiah, King Manasseh worshiped pagan gods, sacrificed his sons to these gods, promoted fortune-telling, sorcery, dealt with mediums and necromancers (2 Chron 33). The wickedness of the people of Judah is still present even as Josiah is calling for godly reform. Zephaniah comes in with a message of judgment to Judah and the surrounding nations - to those who have turned away. But there is also hope for a remnant of people.

3) Why is Judah under judgment?

The Kingdom of Judah is being called out and warned of impending judgment for their disobedience, unfaithfulness, and complacency.

Zephaniah 1:2-6 (unfaithfulness)

- [2] "I will utterly sweep away everything
from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.
- [3] "I will sweep away man and beast;
I will sweep away the birds of the heavens
and the fish of the sea,
and the rubble with the wicked.
I will cut off mankind
from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.
- [4] "I will stretch out my hand against Judah
and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;
and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal
and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests,
[5] those who bow down on the roofs
to the host of the heavens,
those who bow down and swear to the LORD

Zephaniah 1:7-9, 12 (pagan worship, complacency)

- [7] Be silent before the Lord GOD!
For the day of the LORD is near;
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice
and consecrated his guests.
- [8] And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice—
"I will punish the officials and the king's sons
and all who array themselves in foreign attire."
- [9] On that day I will punish
everyone who leaps over the threshold,
and those who fill their master's house
with violence and fraud.
- [12] At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamp
and I will punish the men
who are complacent,
those who say in their hearts,
'The LORD will not do good,
nor will he do ill.'

1:14-18 (the day of the Lord is near)

[14] The great day of the LORD is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter;
the mighty man cries aloud there.
[15] A day of wrath is that day,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
[16] a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.
[17] I will bring distress on mankind,
so that they shall walk like the blind,
because they have sinned against the LORD;
their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.
[18] Neither their silver nor their gold
shall be able to deliver them
on the day of the wrath of the LORD.
In the fire of his jealousy,
all the earth shall be consumed;
for a full and sudden end
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Zephaniah 3:1-8 (judgment on Jerusalem)

[1] Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,
the oppressing city!
[2] She listens to no voice;
she accepts no correction.
**She does not trust in the LORD;
she does not draw near to her God.**
[3] Her officials within her
are roaring lions;
her judges are evening wolves
that leave nothing till the morning.
[4] Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men;
her priests profane what is holy;
they do violence to the law.
[5] The LORD within her is righteous;
he does no injustice;
every morning he shows forth his justice;
each dawn he does not fail;
but the unjust knows no shame.
[6] "I have cut off nations;
their battlements are in ruins;
I have laid waste their streets
so that no one walks in them;
their cities have been made desolate,
without a man, without an inhabitant.
[7] **I said, 'Surely you will fear me;
you will accept correction.
Then your dwelling would not be cut off
according to all that I have appointed against you.'**
**But all the more they were eager
to make all their deeds corrupt.**
[8] "Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD,
"for the day when I rise up to seize the prey.
For my decision is to gather nations,
to assemble kingdoms,
to pour out upon them my indignation,
all my burning anger;
for in the fire of my jealousy
all the earth shall be consumed.

God is gracious and long-suffering. He urges Judah to repent and turn away from their wickedness before it's too late.

Zephaniah 2:1-3 (a call to repentance)

[2:1] Gather together, yes, gather,
O shameless nation,
[2] before the decree takes effect
—before the day passes away like chaff—
before there comes upon you
the burning anger of the LORD,
before there comes upon you
the day of the anger of the LORD.
[3] Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land,
who do his just commands;
seek righteousness; seek humility;
perhaps you may be hidden
on the day of the anger of the LORD.

4) What is the hope for Judah?

Judgment is coming for Jerusalem and the surrounding nations. Utter destruction of the wicked people and their lands is what God is calling for. But a remnant will survive and be hidden from God's righteous wrath. This people will be restored in land and fortune (a picture of salvation and our final home - new heavens, new earth, and resurrected bodies). There will be no more injustice, pride, lies, fear, deceit, shame. There will be glorious communion with God for eternity.

Zephaniah 2:7, 9 (restoration)

[7] **The seacoast shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah,**
on which they shall graze,
and in the houses of Ashkelon
they shall lie down at evening.
**For the LORD their God will be mindful of them
and restore their fortunes.**

[9] Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts,
the God of Israel,
"Moab shall become like Sodom,
and the Ammonites like Gomorrah,
a land possessed by nettles and salt pits,
and a waste forever.
**The remnant of my people shall plunder them,
and the survivors of my nation shall possess them."**

Zephaniah 3:20 (restoration)

[20] **At that time I will bring you in,
at the time when I gather you together;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes," says the LORD.**

Zephaniah 3:9-20 (hope and restoration)

Romans 8:18-23

[18] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.