

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

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INTRODUCTION

Zephaniah lived during one of the worst times in the history of Judah, under the evil reign of King Manasseh. The good news is for Judah, it won't be long before Josiah begins his rule as king of the southern kingdom of Judah, and it was during his reformation that Zephaniah began his work as a prophet, [Zephaniah 1:1](#). This would date Zephaniah's book between 639 and 609 B.C.

Josiah, [1 Kings 13:2](#), was only eight years old when he began his reign; he was fifteen years old when he studied the word of God, and he was twenty years old when he started his religious reforms.

HE DID THIS IN FIVE AREAS

1. The temple.

He cleared out all the material used for Baal worship, [2 Kings 23:4-24](#).

2. The high places.

Altars to Baal, the sun, moon, and stars, etc, [2 Kings 23:4-24](#).

3. Jerusalem.

That had altars at all the gates. Molech, human sacrifices, [2 Kings 23:4-20](#) / [2 Chronicles 34](#) / [Zephaniah 1:10](#).

4. In homes.

The people had trephines, mediums, and wizards in their homes, [2 Kings 23:19-20](#).

5. The people themselves.

But he didn't remove the idolatry from their hearts.

Josiah actually led Judah to religious and social reform, [2 Chronicles 34:1-3](#) / [2 Chronicles 34:29-34](#) / [2 Chronicles 35:1-19](#), but Zephaniah announces that these spiritual changes wouldn't last very long. It would only be a matter of time before God's people would turn away from God and His ways once again.

The northern kingdom of Israel was already in captivity, taken by the Assyrians, but God was about to use the mighty Babylonians to punish His own people, Judah. Zephaniah and his contemporaries, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, were some of the prophets God used to pronounce this warning message.

Zephaniah condemns the idolatrous behaviour of the Canaanites and the Assyrians and announces judgment against the nations that surrounded Judah. Zephaniah also announces the destruction of Jerusalem, but gives hope in terms that she will be restored again in the future.

THE PROPHET ZEPHANIAH

Like most of the prophets, we don't know a whole lot about their personal lives, but we do know that the name Zephaniah means, 'hidden by God'; he was probably a member of the royal family of Judah, and as a prophet, he prophesied in the days of Josiah.

We also know that King Hezekiah was his great, great, grandfather, [Zephaniah 1:1](#), hence why some call him ‘the royal prophet’. The theme of his message is simply this: ‘The day of the Lord is at hand’.

OUTLINE

Judgment of the world, and the judgment upon Israel, because of their disobedience, Zephaniah 1:1-6
 The description of the judgment, Zephaniah 1:7-18
 An appeal to seek God while there is still time, Zephaniah 2:1-3
 The announcement of judgment on the unbelievers, Zephaniah 2:4-15
 The hopeless misery of Jerusalem, Zephaniah 3:1-7
 The promise of salvation, Zephaniah 3:8-20

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

‘The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah.’ Zephaniah 1:1

We can read all about Zephaniah’s genealogy and beginnings in the following Scriptures: [1 Chronicles 6:36](#) / [Jeremiah 21:1](#) / [Zechariah 6:10](#) / [Zechariah 6:14](#). As we noted earlier in the introduction, Zephaniah was born during the reign of Manasseh, who was an evil king ruling the southern kingdom of Judah, but began to prophesy during the reign of King Josiah.

He gives us a lot of information in terms of his genealogy, which is unusual for a prophet, and because his genealogy mentions King Hezekiah, I believe he wants us to note that he is of royal blood.

JUDGMENT ON THE WHOLE EARTH IN THE DAY OF THE LORD

‘I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will sweep away both man and beast; I will sweep away the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea—and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble.’
 Zephaniah 1:2-3

As with most of the Old Testament prophets, their messages were like what some would call ‘hellfire sermons’, but the good news is that most of them ended with a promise from God. We could say that Zephaniah’s message falls into this category, as we will see as we go through his message.

God is going to sweep away everything from the face of the earth, and He is going to sweep away both man and beast. He is also going to sweep away the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble, [Zephaniah 1:2-3](#).

The Pulpit Commentary says the following.

‘This is not mere hyperbole to express the utter wasting and destruction that were impending, but points to the mysterious connection between man and the lower creation, how in agreement with the primal curse even material nature suffers for man’s sin, **Genesis 3:17 / Romans 8:22.**’

‘It’s the end of the world’, we can hear the Judeans cry, **2 Peter 3:10-12**. Well, in a sense, it was going to be the end of their world as they knew it. To Judah, it would certainly feel like the world as a whole was coming to an end as God pronounces His judgment upon them.

God is saying everything must go, but we must remember that this is figurative because God did say that He wouldn’t destroy the earth again after the flood, **Genesis 9:11-15**. The earth was the known land at that time, and it’s a picture of judgement on all the wicked, even the kings.

‘When I destroy all mankind on the face of the earth,’ declares the LORD, I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will destroy every remnant of Baal worship in this place, the very names of the idolatrous priests—those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molek, those who turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him.’ **Zephaniah 1:3-6**

When God destroys all mankind on the face of the earth, He will stretch out His hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem, **Zephaniah 1:3-4 / Jeremiah 1:18-19**.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘As before on Egypt, Judah had gone in the ways of Egypt and learned her sins, and sinned worse than Egypt. ‘The mighty Hand and stretched-out Arm’, **Jeremiah 2:10-11**, with which she had been delivered, shall be again ‘stretched out,’ yet, not for her but ‘upon’ her, ‘upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.’

It would be those who have and are committing idolatry who were to be judged; they were the ones who turned their back on God and His ways, **Zephaniah 1:4-6**.

Baal worship was being practised everywhere, **Zephaniah 1:4 / 2 Kings 23:5**. Baal was an ancient Canaanite and Mesopotamian deity associated with agriculture.

He was believed to be the ‘giver of life’, and mankind was dependent upon him for providing what was necessary to sustain the farms, flocks, and herds. He was also called the ‘son of Dagon’, **1 Samuel 5:4-5**, who was in control of the grain, and ‘Hadad’, the storm god who would provide plentiful rains after hearing his voice in the thunder.

‘The starry hosts’, **Zephaniah 1:5**, is a reference to the Assyrian worship of heavenly bodies, **2 Kings 23:5 / 2 Kings 23:12 / Jeremiah 19:13 / Jeremiah 32:29**. The Assyrians were astrologers, **Deuteronomy 4:19 / Deuteronomy 17:3 / 2 Kings 21:3 / Job 31:26-28 / Ezekiel 8:15-18**.

The Pulpit Commentary says the following.

‘It was especially prevalent in the time of Manasseh, **2 Kings 21:3**. On the flat roofs of the houses, which were used as places of meditation, recreation, or conference, **Joshua 2:6 / 1 Samuel 9:25 / 2 Samuel 11:2 / Acts 10:9**, they erected altars for family worship of the heavenly bodies. Here they both burned incense, **Jeremiah 19:13**, and offered animal sacrifices, **2 Kings 23:12.**’

Molech, **Zephaniah 1:5**, was the national god of the Ammonites, **Leviticus 18:21**, he is associated with child sacrifice, **Leviticus 20:2-5 / 2 Kings 23:10 / Jeremiah 32:35**.

Molech represents the most repulsive of acts in God’s eyes: the ritual sacrifice of children to a pagan god, which was condemned by the Lord, including punishment by death.

God’s people had become spiritual adulterers, **Zephaniah 1:6**, and because of all this, there will be judgment. God now needs to punish them in order to cleanse them from this idolatrous filth.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is their misery that they were set in the right way once, but themselves ‘turned themselves back,’ now no longer ‘following’ God, but ‘their own lusts, drawn away and enticed’, **James 1:14**, by them. How much more Christians, before whose eyes Christ Jesus is set forth, not as a Redeemer only but as an Example that they should ‘follow His steps!’ **1 Peter 2:21**.’

‘Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited. ‘On the day of the LORD’s sacrifice, I will punish the officials and the king’s sons and all those clad in foreign clothes. On that day, I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit.’ **Zephaniah 1:7-9**

Here we have a courtroom scene, where God basically says, ‘silence in my courtroom’, **Zephaniah 1:7**. Enough has been heard, enough has been seen, no more time to complain, no more time for debate, God is bringing judgment against all those who aren’t right before Him.

‘The day of the Lord is near’, **Zephaniah 1:7**. This will be the day when those who have been disobedient will be punished, but those who have been obedient will be saved.

God is inviting people to a feast and the guests are going to be the sacrifice, **Zephaniah 1:7-8 / Isaiah 34:6 / Jeremiah 46:10 / Ezekiel 39:17 / Ezekiel 39:19**. God is going to punish the unrighteous, especially those who live in Jerusalem and He will use the Babylonians to deliver His punishment, **Isaiah 13:3 / Jeremiah 22:7 / Jeremiah 51:27 / Jeremiah 51:28 / Micah 3:5**.

As with most of God’s judgments, He begins with His own people, those who are at the top of the leadership chain, **Zephaniah 1:8 / 1 Peter 4:17**. These ‘officials and king’s sons’ **Zephaniah 1:8**, should have known better, they were God’s leaders.

The Pulpit Commentary says the following.

‘The reference may be particularly to the sons of the king reigning when the judgment fell, **2 Kings 25:7**. The king himself is not mentioned as subject to the judgment, inasmuch as he was pious and obedient, **2 Chronicles 34:27**, etc.’ The ‘foreign clothes’, **Zephaniah 1:8**, are a reference to their idolatry and their influence from other nations, **Deuteronomy 22:12**. We can imagine them dressing up like the Assyrians to the point where they not only looked like them but fully embraced their culture and religious practices.

‘The threshold’, **Zephaniah 1:9 / 1 Samuel 5:5**, could be a reference to a place of superstition, or it could mean robbers, with the idea of them coming in through the window.

Although the king himself isn’t mentioned, the judgment would come upon them all because they were all full of ‘violence and deceit’, **Zephaniah 1:9 / Habakkuk 1:2-3 / Jeremiah 5:27**.

One thing is clear, God’s people were trusting in themselves and trusted in other kings to fix their problems, but they refused to listen to God or ask Him for guidance.

‘On that day,’ declares the LORD, ‘a cry will go up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the New Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. Wail, you who live in the market district; all your merchants will be wiped out, and all who trade with silver will be destroyed. At that time, I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.’ Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. Though they build houses, they will not live in them; though they plant vineyards, they will not drink the wine.’ **Zephaniah 1:10-13**

God declares that when His day comes, all the merchants and all the international traders will be cut off. The ‘Fish Gate’, **Zephaniah 1:10**, was one of the entrances into Jerusalem on the north side, **2 Kings 7:1 / Nehemiah 3:1-6 / Nehemiah 13:16 / Nehemiah 13:19**. This is the gate the Babylonians would approach Jerusalem before destroying the city.

The ‘New Quarter’, **Zephaniah 1:10**, is where the wailing will happen, possibly a new part of the city of Jerusalem, built on the north side, **2 Chronicles 33:14 / 2 Kings 22:14**.

The hills, **Zephaniah 1:10**, are probably a reference to Zion, and Mount Moriah on which the temple stood. The ‘market district’, **Zephaniah 1:11 / Judges 15:19**, possibly refers to some kind of resort that the merchants used. Zephaniah mentions four sections of Jerusalem: the ‘Fish Gate’, **Zephaniah 1:10**, the ‘New Quarter’, **Zephaniah 1:10**, the ‘hills’, **Zephaniah 1:10**, and the ‘market district’, **Zephaniah 1:11**.

This tells us that the whole place is going to be affected. God is saying that the judgement coming upon Jerusalem is going to affect not only everyone who trades with Jerusalem, but also all those who live in Jerusalem. God is effectively cutting off Jerusalem’s economic supply, **Zephaniah 1:11**.

Notice that God is going to search Jerusalem with lamps, **Zephaniah 1:12**; there’s no hiding place from God, and all will be judged. God is going to use the Babylonians to expose His own people’s idolatry, **Isaiah 13:3**.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘How much more in that Day when ‘the secrets of all hearts shalt be revealed’ by Him who ‘searches the hearts and reins, and to Whose Eyes’, **Psalms 7:9 / Psalms 26:2 / Jeremiah 11:20 / Jeremiah 17:10 / Jeremiah 20:12 / Revelation 2:23**, ‘which are like flashing Fire, all things are naked and open!’ **Revelation 1:14**. The candles wherewith God searches the heart, are men’s own consciences, **Proverbs 20:27**, His Own revealed word, **Psalms 119:104 / Proverbs 6:23 / 2 Peter 1:19**, the lives of true Christians, **Philippians 2:15**.’

The word ‘dregs’, **Zephaniah 1:12**, is used as a metaphor. The dregs continue to ferment, and it becomes thick and useless, **Isaiah 25:6 / Jeremiah 48:11**. In other words, God’s people had become absolutely useless because of their idolatrous behaviour.

They believed that God was so far away from them that they became totally complacent; they carried on living without thinking about their relationship with God. They thought they didn’t need God anymore, **Zephaniah 1:12**. Though they build houses, they will not live in them, **Leviticus 26:32 / Deuteronomy 28:30 / Deuteronomy 28:39 / Amos 5:11 / Micah 6:15**, and though they plant vineyards, they will not drink the wine, **Zephaniah 1:13**. In other words, everything the wealthy had acquired without God, **Zephaniah 1:13**, would be taken away from them by the Babylonians, **Jeremiah 22:14-15**.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘God will visit those who say that God does not interfere in man’s affairs, and, it shall be seen, **Jeremiah 44:28**, whose words shall stand, God’s or theirs. All which God had threatened in the law shall be fulfilled. God, in the fulfilment of the punishment, which He had foretold in the law, **Leviticus 26:32-33 / Deuteronomy 28:1-10**, would vindicate not only His present Providence, but His continual government of His own world.’

‘The great day of the LORD is near—near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness—a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. ‘I will bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD’s wrath.’ In the fire of his jealousy, the whole earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.’

Zephaniah 1:14-18

Zephaniah says God’s wrath is coming and it will happen within their lifetime, **Zephaniah 1:14**. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter and the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry, **Zephaniah 1:14**. Within nineteen years, it’s going to be a day of wrath, **Zephaniah 1:15 / Isaiah 22:5 / Jeremiah 30:7 / Joel 2:2 / Joel 2:11 / Amos 5:18 / Zephaniah 1:18**. The Judeans got the wrong impression of God’s wrath; they thought that judgment was for other nations, not them. They were wrong. God is going to use the Babylonians to bring judgment upon His own people. It will be a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, **Zephaniah 1:15**.

In other words, it will be a day when their prayers are not answered, **Lamentations 3:44**. It will be a day of trumpet, **1 Thessalonians 4:16**, and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers, **Zephaniah 1:16**.

The Pulpit Commentary says the following concerning the trumpet.

‘Among the Jews, trumpets were used to announce the festivals, **Numbers 29:1**, and to give the signal for battle or of the approach of an enemy, **Jeremiah 4:5 / Jeremiah 4:19 / Ezekiel 33:4**. Here it is the signal of destruction, **Amos 2:2**.’ Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning the towers.

‘This peculiarity describes Jerusalem, whose walls ‘were made artificially standing in a line curved inwards, so that the flanks of assailants might be exposed.’ By this same name, **Judges 20:2 / 1 Samuel 14:38 / Isaiah 19:13 / Zechariah 10:4**, are called the mighty men and chiefs of the people, who, humanly speaking, hold it together and support it; on these chiefs in rebellion against God, whether devils or evil men, shall punishment greatly fall.’ God is going to bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, **Deuteronomy 28:29 / Job 5:14 / Job 12:25**, because they have sinned against the LORD, **Zephaniah 1:17 / Isaiah 59:10**. God says the people are useless and their blood will be poured out like dust, **Zephaniah 1:17 / 1 Samuel 2:30 / Psalms 79:3**. Dust is worthless and the entrails are dung, **Zephaniah 1:17 / Jeremiah 9:22**.

When this day comes, it’s going to be a day of devastation, desolation, darkness, and distress, it’s going to be a day where all the gold and silver of the world won’t deliver them from God’s wrath, **Zephaniah 1:18 / Isaiah 13:17 / Ezekiel 7:19 / Ezekiel 7:19 / Psalms 49:17 / Haggai 2:8**.

In the fire of God’s jealousy the whole earth will be consumed, **Zephaniah 3:8**, for He will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth, **Zephaniah 1:18 / Nahum 1:8 / Isaiah 10:23 / 2 Peter 3:13**.

A few commentators suggest that **Zephaniah 1:18** is speaking of the final judgment day, **Isaiah 24:1-23**, however, we noted earlier, these events were to happen soon, in the lifetime of Judah, **Zephaniah 1:14**. It is possible the prophecy here does spread out in the double fulfilment going to the great day of God’s judgment that is coming yet upon the earth.

APPLICATION

Although God’s people were guilty of idolatry and would be taken into captivity by the Babylonians as a form of punishment. It seems that they learned their lesson; they never committed idolatry again after being freed from captivity. It took seventy years, **Jeremiah 29:10**, for them to learn this lesson, but they learned.

As Christians, we must learn from God’s people of old, **Romans 15:4**. If we don’t learn from them, we will make the same mistakes and end up with the same fate.

Idolatry is still a huge problem today; it just has a different name. Today, it’s called wealth, health, and fame, and we must be on our guard that none of these takes the place of the importance of God in our lives, **Matthew 22:37 / Luke 4:8**.

God never brings judgment upon anyone without first explaining to them why He is about to judge them. When judgment day comes, those who will be condemned will know exactly why they are being condemned, they have no relationship with God, and they refused to obey the Gospel, **2 Thessalonians 1:8**.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

‘Gather together, gather yourselves together, you shameful nation, before the decree takes effect and that day passes like windblown chaff, before the LORD’s fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the LORD’s wrath comes upon you. Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD’s anger.’ Zephaniah 2:1-3

JUDAH SUMMONED TO REPENT

Judah is told to gather together, gather themselves together, and they are called a shameful nation, Zephaniah 2:1.

They are to gather together before the decree takes effect, and that day passes like windblown chaff.

They are to gather together before the LORD’s fierce anger comes upon them. They are to gather together before the day of the LORD’s wrath comes upon them, Zephaniah 2:2. In other words, they need to examine themselves, 1 Corinthians 11:31-32.

Notice they are called upon to seek three things: the Lord, righteousness, and humility, Zephaniah 2:3 / Numbers 6:23-26. The word ‘seek’ in Hebrew is the word ‘baqash’, and it means to search out, to strive after, but it also carries with it the idea of continuous seeking. In other words, they were to continually seek the Lord, they were to continually seek righteousness and continually seek humility.

Judah had gone so far away from God and His ways that they had become almost useless to God as a nation. It was God who made them into a nation, Exodus 19:5-6, but it seems they have forgotten this and forgotten God.

Zephaniah pleads with the righteous few to get their act together so that they can be identified with God. He asks them to look around at what is about to happen to them, indicating that some in Judah have a chance to escape the coming judgment.

Zephaniah says there is no humility in Judah, and so, in order to avoid the coming judgment, they needed to be obedient to the Lord, they needed to repent, Zephaniah 1:3 / 1 Peter 4:17-18. Repentance simply means to ‘reconsider’ your ways, and after reconsidering, change the direction of your life and start living God’s way.

Sadly, Judah failed to repent. When Jerusalem finally fell, and the city was destroyed by the Babylonians, some were taken into captivity, and so, in 586 B.C. Judah stopped being a nation but continued to be a kingdom until AD 7.0 when the Romans totally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

PHILISTIA

‘Gaza will be abandoned, and Ashkelon left in ruins. At midday, Ashdod will be emptied, and Ekron uprooted. Woe to you who live by the sea, you Kerethite people; the word of the LORD is against you, Canaan, land of the Philistines. He says, ‘I will destroy you, and none will be left.’ The land by the sea will become pastures having wells for shepherds and pens for flocks. That land will belong to the remnant of the people of Judah; there they will find pasture. In the evening, they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon. The LORD their God will care for them; he will restore their fortunes.’ Zephaniah 2:4-7

The Philistines ruled the five city-states of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath, Zephaniah 2:4, from the Wadi Gaza in the south to the Yarkon River in the north, but with no fixed border to the east. The word ‘Philistia’ means the land of strangers.

The Philistines first appear in the southern coastal area of Canaan, hence why sometimes they were called Kerethite people, the ‘sea people’, [Zephaniah 2:5](#) / [1 Samuel 30:14](#) / [Amos 9:7](#). This sea coast is in the west of the territories of the tribes of Dan and Simeon, [Psalm 60:8](#) / [Psalm 87:4](#) / [Psalm 108:9](#).

Zephaniah says, the land by the sea will become pastures having wells for shepherds and pens for flocks, [Zephaniah 2:6](#). He continues and says that the land will belong to the remnant of the people of Judah, and there they will find pasture, [Zephaniah 2:7](#) / [Ezra 4:12-16](#) / [Ezra 4:19-22](#).

In the evening, they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon, and the LORD their God will care for them, and He will restore their fortunes, [Zephaniah 2:7](#) / [Isaiah 4:1-6](#) / [Isaiah 4:30](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘They had been greatly harassed by the kings of Egypt, but were completely ruined by Nebuchadnezzar, who took all Phoenicia from the Egyptians; and about the time of his taking Tyre, he devastated all the seignories of the Philistines. This ruin we have seen foretold by the other prophets and have already remarked its exact fulfilment.’

The Philistines knew no shame, and they have no conscience. It was the Assyrians who first conquered them but later, the Babylonians would come and bring them to an end. Because of their location, as a nation, they were always under threat, and so, in the final days of national Israel, they would suffer.

Its cities will be made desolate, and the inhabitants will be destroyed, the land will only be useful for sheep and shepherds, but eventually, the land will be for the remnant of Judah, when God brings them back from Babylonian captivity around 536 B.C.

MOAB AND AMMON

‘I have heard the insults of Moab and the taunts of the Ammonites, who insulted my people and made threats against their land. Therefore, as surely as I live,’ declares the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, ‘surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah—a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them; the survivors of my nation will inherit their land.’ This is what they will get in return for their pride, for insulting and mocking the people of the LORD Almighty. The LORD will be awesome to them when he destroys all the gods of the earth. Distant nations will bow down to him, all of them in their own lands.’ [Zephaniah 2:8-11](#)

God says that He has heard the insults of Moab and the taunts of the Ammonites, who insulted His people, [Psalms 74:10](#) / [Psalms 74:18](#), and made threats against their land, [Zephaniah 2:8](#).

They continually mocked the Israelites, especially when the nations around were attacking them and they took full advantage of this when they moved into the land of Reuben and Gad. Because of this, they would be punished to such an extent that they would cease to be a nation.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In the first fulfilment, because Moab and Ammon aiding Nebuchadnezzar, and all, in various ways wronging God’s people, [Isaiah 16:4](#) / [Amos 1:13-15](#) / [Amos 2:1-3](#) / [Jeremiah 48:27-30](#) / [Jeremiah 48:42](#) / [Jeremiah 49:1](#) / [Ezekiel 20:3](#) / [Ezekiel 20:6](#) / [Ezekiel 20:8](#), trampled on His sanctuary, overthrew His temple and blasphemed the Lord, the prophecy is turned against them. So then, before the captivity came, while Josiah was yet king, and Jerusalem and the temple were, as yet not overthrown, the prophecy is directed against those who mocked at them.’

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘God punished them for the cruel part they had taken in the persecutions of the Jews; for when they lay under the displeasure of God, these nations insulted them in the most provoking manner, [Amos 1:13](#) / [Amos 1:13](#) / [Genesis 19:25](#) / [Deuteronomy 29:23](#) / [Isaiah 13:19](#) / [Isaiah 34:13](#) / [Jeremiah 49:18](#) / [Jeremiah 50:40](#).’

Moab and Ammon will become like Sodom and Gomorrah, [Zephaniah 2:9](#). Moab will become like a place of weeds and salt pits, [Deuteronomy 29:23](#) / [Psalms 107:34](#), a wasteland forever, [Zephaniah 2:9](#) / [Jeremiah 49:18](#).

The remnant of God’s people will plunder them, and the survivors of God’s nation will inherit their land, [Zephaniah 2:9](#). Moab and Ammon, because of their pride, and for the way they treated God’s people, will be punished, [Zephaniah 2:10](#) / [Amos 1:13-15](#) / [Amos 2:1-3](#).

The LORD will be awesome to them when He destroys all the gods of the earth and distant nations will bow down to him, all of them in their own lands, [Zephaniah 2:11](#).

In other words, if you destroy a nation’s gods, you destroy their identity as a nation, [Romans 1:18](#) / [Deuteronomy 32:38](#). The good news is that one day, the One true God will be worshipped by people from all nations.

CUSH

‘You Cushites, too, will be slain by my sword.’ [Zephaniah 2:12](#)

The Cushites were from Ethiopia and the land of Cush, which was situated in the south of Egypt. We know that God’s sword was put in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in order to punish Tyre, [Jeremiah 46:2](#) / [Jeremiah 46:9](#) / [Ezekiel 29:17-20](#) / [Ezekiel 30:4](#) / [Ezekiel 30:10](#) / [Ezekiel 30:24-25](#) / [Amos 9:1-7](#). The king of Assyria was called God’s razor by Isaiah, [Isaiah 7:20](#).

The sword is God’s way of venting His wrath, and if we learn anything from this, it’s knowing that God can use anyone He likes to bring about judgment against any nation He chooses that refuses to repent and follow His ways.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Ethiopians were not in any direct antagonism to God and His people, but allied only to their old oppressor, Egypt. They may have been in Pharaoh Necho’s army, in resisting which, as a subject of Assyria, Josiah was slain; they are mentioned in [Jeremiah 46:9](#), in that army which Nebuchadnezzar smote at Carchemish in the 4th year of Jehoiakim. The prophecy of Ezekiel implies rather that Ethiopia should be involved in the calamities of Egypt than that it should be itself invaded, [Ezekiel 30:4-6](#).’

ASSYRIA

‘He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, leaving Nineveh utterly desolate and dry as the desert. Flocks and herds will lie down there, creatures of every kind. The desert owl and the screech owl will roost on her columns. Their hooting will echo through the windows, rubble will fill the doorways, the beams of cedar will be exposed. This is the city of revelry that lived in safety. She said to herself, ‘I am the one! And there is none besides me.’ What a ruin she has become, a lair for wild beasts! All who pass by her scoff and shake their fists.’ [Zephaniah 2:13-15](#)

During the time of Zephaniah, the Assyrian Empire was coming to an end, [Zephaniah 2:13](#) / [Zephaniah 1:4](#). Because they had already taken the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722/21 B.C., they proved to be a real threat to the southern kingdom of Judah.

Although the capital city of Nineveh was well fortified, [Zephaniah 2:13](#), it eventually fell into the hands of the Babylonians in 612 B.C. The city was destroyed so much by the Babylonians that it would never be built again. Flocks and herds will lie down there and creatures of every kind, [Zephaniah 2:14](#) / [Isaiah 17:2](#). Notice the ‘desert owl’ and the ‘screech owl’, [Zephaniah 2:14](#), are mentioned, [Isaiah 34:11](#) / [Isaiah 34:14](#).

Some other translations use other animals, the KJV uses the word, ‘cormorant’ which is possibly a pelican and the word, ‘bittern’ which is a species of bird. Whatever animals they are, they are used as examples of wild creatures who would take over this once-proud city, [Zephaniah 2:14](#) / [Nahum 3:19](#).

Nineveh claimed to be like God, saying I am the one! And there is none besides me, [Zephaniah 2:15](#) / [1 Thessalonians 5:3](#). Oh, how wrong she was, [Isaiah 47:8](#) / [Revelation 18:7](#). What a ruin she has become, a lair for wild beasts! All who pass by her scoff and shake their fists, [Zephaniah 2:15](#).

APPLICATION

Seeking is something which we do continuously, [Matthew 7:7](#), whether it be seeking the Lord, seeking righteousness, or seeking humility. A person who is truly repentant will do whatever it takes to please the Lord because they know their eternal destiny depends upon it, [2 Corinthians 7:10](#).

Seeking the Lord must be at the forefront of everyone’s mind; we will never know what God wants unless we earnestly seek Him through reading our Bibles and studying them, [Deuteronomy 4:29](#) / [Isaiah 55:6-7](#).

Righteousness basically means being right with God, but this can only come when He is first in our lives and when we trust Him to take care of our daily needs, [Matthew 6:33-34](#). Humility is something that God looks for in all people, especially His own people, [2 Chronicles 7:14](#) / [1 Peter 5:6](#) / [James 4:10](#) / [Philippians 2:3-4](#).

There’s no escaping the fact that God will judge the nations; every nation that rebels against God will be judged. In the New Testament, it’s very clear that every individual will also be judged, [Acts 17:31](#).

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

‘Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled! She obeys no one; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD, she does not draw near to her God. Her officials within her are roaring lions; her rulers are evening wolves, who leave nothing for the morning. Her prophets are unprincipled; they are treacherous people. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law. The LORD within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame.’ [Zephaniah 3:1-5](#)

JERUSALEM

Zephaniah now turns his attention to Jerusalem, especially those who live in the city, who were the evil civil and religious leaders. The city has become defiled, [Zephaniah 3:1](#); it hasn’t obeyed the Lord or drawn near to

Him, [Zephaniah 3:2](#). They just did their own thing and created their own standards, which resulted in the poor being oppressed, [Isaiah 1:23](#) / [Isaiah 3:14](#).

Zephaniah describes the officials as ‘lions’ preying on the poor for financial gain and the rulers were like ‘wolves’, [Zephaniah 3:3](#) / [Ezekiel 22:27](#) / [Habakkuk 1:8](#) / [Proverbs 28:15](#).

The wolf, after killing its prey, will leave enough meat for it to chew on the remains during the next day until nightfall, [Zephaniah 3:3](#), the time for another kill, [Ezekiel 22:27](#).

They are treacherous and do violence to the Law, [Zephaniah 3:4](#), which means the priests couldn’t see the difference between something which was holy and something which was defiled, [Leviticus 10:10-11](#) / [Mark 7:1-9](#).

The priests had two basic functions: serving in the temple and instructing in the law. They were unconcerned about the law, and they didn’t serve as they should have.

The Pulpit Commentary says the following, concerning the priests profaning the sanctuary, [Zephaniah 3:4](#).

‘Not the temple only, but all that has to do with God’s service, worship, rites, sacrifices; they make no distinction between what is sacred and what is profane, [Ezekiel 22:26](#).’

It appears that those who should have known better knew no shame and all they were interested in was themselves and satisfying their own desires, [Jeremiah 7:24](#) / [Jeremiah 9:13](#). The good news was that God is righteous and He was working among them so that He could bring justice to those who were being mistreated, [Hosea 4:6](#).

The LORD within her is righteous, and He does no wrong, [Zephaniah 3:5](#) / [Deuteronomy 32:4](#) / [Jeremiah 23:24](#). God’s laws of nature come to light every morning without fail, [Zephaniah 3:5](#) / [Exodus 16:21](#) / [Psalms 87:5](#), but Jerusalem failed to be obedient to her Creator, and they knew no shame, [Zephaniah 3:5](#) / [Jeremiah 3:3](#) / [Jeremiah 6:15](#).

They had forgotten all about God and His laws. They should have feared the Lord and kept His laws, after all, He’s been working in and through them as a nation for years, reminding them of who He is and what He desires. God gave them chance after chance to repent and turn to Him, but they refused to obey, [2 Kings 18:13-19:37](#).

JERUSALEM REMAINS UNREPENTANT

‘I have destroyed nations; their strongholds are demolished. I have left their streets deserted, with no one passing through. Their cities are laid waste; they are deserted and empty. Of Jerusalem I thought, ‘Surely you will fear me and accept correction!’ Then her place of refuge would not be destroyed, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did. Therefore, wait for me,’ declares the LORD, ‘for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger.’ [Zephaniah 3:6-8](#)

Judah will be punished because they were rebellious, the city was defiled ceremonially, and there was no obedience. She totally ignored God’s judgment upon the other nations, which should have gotten their attention, [Zephaniah 3:6](#) / [Isaiah 36:18](#) / [Isaiah 36:20](#).

God did everything He could to get His message across, [Leviticus 18:24-26](#) / [Leviticus 18:28](#) / [Leviticus 20:23](#). Judah was supposed to learn from the fall of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 721 B.C., but instead, the people went on to become corrupt, [Zephaniah 3:7](#) / [Habakkuk 1:14-16](#) / [Psalms 14:1](#). God asks them to wait for Him, because the day is coming when He will stand up to testify, [Zephaniah 3:8](#).

The Pulpit, Commentary, says the following.

‘The exhortation is addressed to the pious among the Jews, as in [Zephaniah 2:3](#), and is used in a good sense, [Psalms 33:20](#) / [Isaiah 8:17](#), urging them not to despair, but to be patient under the affliction, in the assured hope of salvation. The same expression is used in [Habakkuk 2:3](#).’

God has decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out His wrath on them, all His fierce anger, [Zephaniah 3:8](#). The whole world will be consumed by the fire of His jealous anger, [Zephaniah 3:8](#).

God will at some point in the not too distant future, bring judgment on all those nations who made them suffer, [Isaiah 66:6](#) / [Jeremiah 25:31-33](#) / [Ezekiel 38-39](#) / [Joel 3:11-16](#) / [Micah 7:7-9](#).

RESTORATION OF ISRAEL'S REMNANT

‘Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush, my worshippers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. On that day, you, Jerusalem, will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from you your arrogant boasters. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. But I will leave within you the meek and humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the LORD. They will do no wrong; they will tell no lies. A deceitful tongue will not be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down, and no one will make them afraid.’ [Zephaniah 3:9-13](#)

The day is coming when God’s people will be cleansed in their speech, [Zephaniah 3:9](#), no more speaking about idols in any shape or form, [Isaiah 6:5-7](#) / [Psalms 16:4](#) / [Hosea 2:17](#). When idolatry is driven out of their hearts, they could become pure and be one with the Lord again, fully obeying and trusting Him, [Zephaniah 3:9](#).

Because Zephaniah mentions Cush, [Zephaniah 3:10](#), which is Ethiopia, [Isaiah 18:1](#), some exiles would return to Jerusalem from there. However, Zephaniah seems to be looking further into the future, not just the destruction of Jerusalem, but the return of the exiles after captivity in 536 B.C. Ezra / Nehemiah.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning the offerings, [Zephaniah 3:10](#).

‘The offering is the same as that which Malachi prophesies shall continue under the New Testament, which offering was to be offered to the Name of God, not in Jerusalem, but [Malachi 1:11](#), in every place from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same.’

It’s without any doubt that those who would return from captivity would be very humble, [Zephaniah 3:11](#); they would no longer rely on themselves but on God, [Romans 2:17-20](#) / [Romans 2:23](#).

Any who return and are still filled with themselves will be dealt with by God. The good news is that those who do humble themselves will be blessed as they trust and rest in the Lord, [Zephaniah 3:12-13](#) / [Leviticus 19:2](#) / [1 John 3:9](#).

‘Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your punishment; he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day, they will say to Jerusalem, ‘Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love, he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing.’ ‘I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. At that time, I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honour in every land where they have suffered shame. At that time, I will gather you; at that time, I will bring you home. I will give you honour and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,’ says the LORD.’ [Zephaniah 3:14-20](#)

Here God gives a promise of redemption, and Judah will be given a remnant to show God’s faithfulness. Although Jerusalem was going to be destroyed, God was going to bring back a remnant to the land after their captivity.

Sing, Daughter Zion, [Isaiah 1:8](#) / [Zechariah 2:1-13](#) / [Zechariah 9:9](#), shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! [Zephaniah 3:14](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Here is not only a gracious prophetic promise of their restoration from captivity, but of their conversion to God through Christ.’

Notice God has taken away their punishment and has turned back their enemy, [Zephaniah 3:15](#). God, the King of Israel, is with them and never again will they fear any harm, [Zephaniah 3:15](#) / [Matthew 28:20](#) / [John 4:18](#).

The Pulpit Commentary says the following.

‘Under the judgments which fell upon Israel, Jehovah seemed to have left his people; now he is in the midst of them as their King, [Isaiah 12:6](#) / [Isaiah 52:7](#) / [Hosea 11:9](#). The perpetual presence of Christ in the Church is here adumbrated.’

All those judgments which God proclaimed against all those who were unrighteous in Judah, wouldn’t be held against them in the future. God would cleanse them and forgive them, [Zephaniah 3:15](#) / [Isaiah 40:2](#) / [1 John 1:9](#).

The greatest enemy of God’s people in Old and New Testament times remains the same today, and that is sin, but under this new covenant, God will forget and forgive, [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#).

Their hands wouldn’t hang limp anymore because God is going to be among them, [Zephaniah 3:16](#); this itself would help them to be strong and make God rejoice. God once again reminds them that He would be their God and they will be His people and live among them, [Zephaniah 3:17](#).

God will take great delight in them and in His love, He will no longer rebuke them but will rejoice over them with singing, [Zephaniah 3:17](#) / [Isaiah 65:19](#) / [Romans 8:31](#).

The Pulpit, Commentary, says the following, concerning God’s love, [Zephaniah 3:17](#).

‘This is a human expression, denoting that perfect love which needs no outward demonstration. For the very greatness of his love, God rests, as it were, in quiet enjoyment of it. Some take it to mean that in his love for his people, he is silent about, makes no mention of past sins; but this seems less suitable, as this clause is merely an expansion of the preceding one.’

God will gather those who mourn over the criticism of His people, [Zephaniah 3:18](#) / [Psalms 137:1-9](#), He will deal with those who afflicted His people, [Zephaniah 3:19](#) / [Deuteronomy 26:19](#) / [Micah 4:6](#), and gather those who have been driven out and give them honour and praise, [Zephaniah 3:20](#) / [Romans 1:16](#). All of this will happen before their very eyes, [Zephaniah 3:20](#) / [Deuteronomy 1:30](#) / [Deuteronomy 30:3](#) / [Isaiah 52:8](#) / [Isaiah 52:10](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘First, when the seventy years of the Babylonish captivity shall terminate. ‘I will bring you again’ to your own land; and this restoration shall be a type of their redemption from sin and iniquity; and at this time, and at this only, will they have a name and praise among all the people of the earth, not only among the Jews, but the Gentiles.’

When we take the verses before, along with these verses, we notice seven amazing promises of God concerning His people.

1. They will have pure speech, [Zephaniah 3:9](#).
2. They will serve the Lord everywhere, [Zephaniah 3:10-11](#).
3. They will be a humble people, a trusting people, [Zephaniah 3:12](#).
4. They will be an honest people, [Zephaniah 3:13-14](#).
5. Their enemies will be taken care of, [Zephaniah 3:15](#) / [Zephaniah 3:19](#).
6. God will glory again, [Zephaniah 3:17](#).

7. The remnant will be brought home, Zephaniah 3:20.

APPLICATION

Patience is a lesson we all must learn, especially when it comes to being patient with God. As Christians, we want things sorted now, we want answers to our prayers as soon as possible, but we need to learn that God has His own timetable, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, and we need to trust that He knows what is best for us, Romans 8:28.

If anyone wants to be purified and cleansed of their sins, they must obey the Gospel; the salvation of our souls ought to be at the forefront of all of our minds. There are things that the Bible tells us that we must do in order to be saved.

We must hear God's Word, Romans 10:17; we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, John 3:36; we must confess His name before men, Romans 10:9-10; we must repent of whatever sin is in our lives, Luke 13:3; and we must be baptised for the forgiveness of our sins, Acts 2:38.

CONCLUSION

Zephaniah is basically declaring that judgment is coming, but the good news is that blessings will follow for those who obey God's warning to repent. Today, as Christians, we enjoy God's blessing in His spiritual kingdom, Hebrews 12:22-24, but there are even more blessings to enjoy in the future, Revelation 21:1-22:5.

The question we need to ask ourselves is simply this: Are we willing to remain faithful to God and His Word until He delivers us from this earth to take us to heaven? Revelation 2:10.