

## ZEPHANIAH

In common with other prophets, Zephaniah's prophecy begins with judgment, **Zeph. 1:2** I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD ... but ends with joy, **3:20** At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

The name Zephaniah consists of two Hebrew words, - *tsaphan* which means to treasure something to keep it safe, to guard and protect it ... and *Yah*, Jehovah. Together, they mean 'Jehovah has treasured'.

Zephaniah highlights four generations, going back to his great-great-grandfather ... He began prophesying around 630 BC (when Jeremiah would also have been prophesying). He (Zephaniah) was the son of Cushi [*their blackness*], the son of Gedaliah [*'Jehovah is great'; Gedaliah had been appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to govern Jerusalem after its destruction, Jer. 40:5*], the son of Amariah [*'Jehovah speaks/has promised'*], the son of Hizkiah [*'Jehovah is my strength'*]. ... These were obviously well-known men, and, in particular, commentators identify this *Hizkiah* with King *Hezekiah* [*'Jehovah is my strength'*]. Therefore, it is very probable Zephaniah was of royal lineage.

He prophesied **Zeph. 1:1** in the days of Josiah the son of Amon [640-609 BC], king of Judah ... King Josiah (II Kings 22-23; II Chron. 34-35) was the son of King Amon (reigned for two years) and grandson of King Manasseh (reigned for fifty-five years), - two extremely wicked kings of Judah who flagrantly promoted idolatry (II Kings 21:2-7). However, for his sins, Manasseh was taken in chains to Babylon, where he repented, restored to the throne, and attempted to correct some of the wrong he had introduced (II Chron. 33:11-17). In particular, the evil perpetrated during Amon's reign was carried over into the earlier years of Josiah's reign, as the following passage indicates, **II Kings 23:4** And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel. **5** And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. ... This was sometime between 635-625 BC, because of the idolatry still present in the land, **Zeph. 1:4** I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and

the name of the Chemarims with the priests; <sup>5</sup> And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; <sup>6</sup> And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him ... <sup>3:1</sup> Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city! <sup>2</sup> She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God. <sup>3</sup> Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. <sup>4</sup> Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. <sup>5</sup> The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame. <sup>6</sup> I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. <sup>7</sup> I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings. ... (The law of the Lord had not been discovered until ten years later, - when Josiah was eighteen (II Kings 22:3). It was at that point the nation repented of their sins and turned again to the Lord.)

So, Zephaniah's prophecy begins by being directed primarily towards Judah, - the southern kingdom, particularly relating to the coming "day of the Lord", **Zeph. 1:7** Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. ... <sup>14</sup> The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. This 'day of the Lord' is a theme mentioned nineteen times in the Old Testament (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7,14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi. 4:5) and five times in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10). It is also alluded to in other passages (Revelation 6:17; 16:14). ... It carries with it a foreboding sense of imminence and expectation, a 'day of wrath', and judgment, **Zeph. 1:15** That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, <sup>16</sup> A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. <sup>17</sup> And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. <sup>18</sup> Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

But not only will the judgment come upon God's ancient people [<sup>2:1</sup> O nation not desired, *shameless nation*], it will also rain down upon all the surrounding

nations, <sup>4</sup> For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up. <sup>5</sup> Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, *I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant.* Israel will inhabit these areas ... <sup>6</sup> And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. <sup>7</sup> And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity, <sup>8</sup> I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached *my people, and magnified themselves against their border.* <sup>9</sup> Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts [!], the God of Israel, Surely *Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them.* <sup>10</sup> This shall they have for their pride, because *they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of hosts.* <sup>11</sup> The LORD will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen. <sup>12</sup> Ye *Ethiopians* also, ye shall be slain by my sword. <sup>13</sup> And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy *Assyria*; and will make *Nineveh* a desolation, and dry like a wilderness *[on the outskirts of modern-day Mosul].* <sup>14</sup> And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work. <sup>15</sup> This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.

Following the times of judgment, though, comes the day of deliverance, and this will include the remnant of Israel and *also* from out of the Gentiles, <sup>2:3</sup> Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger. ... <sup>3:8</sup> Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. <sup>9</sup> For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent [*CJB, For then I will change the peoples, so that they will have pure lips, to call on the name of ADONAI, all of them, and serve him with one accord.*] ... <sup>13</sup> The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

And God will honour His covenant to David, **II Sam. 7:10** Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, **11** And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house. ... **16** And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. ... And that is the King Who is coming to reign, - King Jesus, **Zeph. 3:14** Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. **15** The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. **16** In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. **17** The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. **18** I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. **19** Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. **20** At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

## OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

- I. Superscription (1:1)
- II. The Day of the Lord and the Jews (1:2–2:3)
  - A. His wrath ...
    - i. like a flood (1:2-6)
    - ii. like a great sacrifice (1:7-13)
    - iii. like a battle (1:15-18)
  - B. An appeal to seek the Lord (2:1–3)
- II. The Day of the Lord and the Gentiles (2:4–15)
  - A. Judgment on Philistia (2:4-7)
  - B. Judgment on Moab and Ammon (2:8-11)
  - C. Judgment on Cush (2:12-19)
  - D. Judgment on Assyria (2:13-15)
- III. The Day of the Lord and the Kingdom (3:1–20)
  - A. Jerusalem, - God's jealous anger (3:1-8)
  - B. The Gentiles: graciousness and forgiveness (3:9-11)
  - C. The remnant (3:11-20)
    - i. The sinners removed (3:11-13)

- ii. The believers rejoicing (3:14)
- iii. The King reigning (3:15-17)
- iv. The land restored (3:18-20)