

The Book of Zephaniah

The Title, Author, and Date of Zephaniah

1. Title: Zephaniah – “The word of YHWH which came to Zephaniah”
 - a. Hebrew – זְפַנְיָהּ
 - b. Greek – Σοφονιαν
2. Author: Zephaniah
 - a. The name “Zephaniah” means “Yahweh hides,” “Yahweh has hidden,” or “Yahweh treasured.”
 - b. One of four men by this name in the OT.
 - c. Note *1.1* – A descendant of King Hezekiah (715-686). Great-grandson.
3. Date: c. 635-625 B.C.
 - a. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (640–609 B.C.)
 - b. From statements in the book, this prophecy is probably from the early part of Josiah’s reign.

The Background and Setting of Zephaniah.

1. Assyria is failing.
2. Egypt is failing.
3. Babylon is rising.
4. Judah is a moral and spiritually corrupted mess. *1.4-6; 3.1-7*
 - a. Judah has some level of independence from the world rulers, for the first time in 50 years.
 - b. Judah is in a state of spiritual and moral degradation/corruption, due to 55 years of wicked and idolatrous kings.
 - 1) Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.) was a very good king.
 - 2) Manasseh (697-642 B.C.) was the WORST. KING. EVER. in Judah. Though he fully repented during his captivity, was made king again, and brought about some reformation, it did not succeed past his reign. His son undid it all. (*Note the cost of your sin!)
 - 3) Amon (642-640) was horrible, undoing all the reforms of his father.
 - 4) Josiah (640-609) was the BEST.KING.since David.
 - c. Josiah was a godly king. Note *2 Ch 34-35*.
 - 1) He brought in reformation in 628 B.C.
 - 2) It had a great impact on Judah, but ended up being largely temporary and superficial, ending when the next king took over. cp. *2 Ki 23.26-27*
 - d. This book is before King Josiah brought in spiritual revival.
 - e. His reforms did not last. 55 years of evil were not ultimately overturned. Judgment was certain.
5. The Man
 - a. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.).
 - b. A contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk.
 - c. He was a prophet in Judah.

The Purpose and Message of Zephaniah

1. The **purpose** of the book is to **warn God's covenant people Judah of the coming Day of the Lord, in order that they would repent, and have hope.**
 - a. The Day of the Lord has a two-fold purpose:
 - 1) Punish ungodly sinners by destroying them. *1.14-18*
 - 2) Purify the godly remnant, with ultimate intent of restoring them. *3.14-20*
 - b. Hope is offered by calling for repentance and promising restoration. *2.1-3*
2. The **message** of the book of Zephaniah is: **"The Day of the Lord is near."**
 - a. *1.7a* is the key verse.
 - b. This is a direct message from God to the people, telling them that judgment is coming.
 - 1) on Judah
 - 2) on the nations surrounding Judah
 - 3) on the entire world
 - c. Yet, God also offers *Hope*, through restoration of His people when He fulfills His covenant.
3. Key Verses: *1.7; 1.14-5; 2.11; 3.8, 9, 20*

The Themes of Zephaniah

1. The **Day of the Lord** is the primary theme of the book.
 - a. Divine judgment coming: Now (*1.4-13*) and in the future. (*3.8-11ff* *cp. Daniel's 70th week*)
 - b. He describes the horrifying nature of the Day of the Lord – *1.14-18; 2.11; 3.8-9*
 - c. Zephaniah uses this term 19x in the book; more than any other prophet. *1.7a; 1.8-13; 1.14-18; 2.2-3; 3.8, 20*
 - d. Note the repetition of *"I will punish"* in *1.8, 9, 12, 17, 18*
2. Hope of salvation, restoration and blessing (Covenant)
 - a. *2.3, 7, 9c; 3.8-11; 3.12-20*
 - b. Note the progression of hope in the book:
 - 1) Call to repent in *2.1-3*
 - 2) Promise of a remnant. *2.7*
 - 3) Promise of purification. *3.8-11*
 - 4) Promise of salvation. *3.12-13*
 - 5) Promise of blessing through fulfillment of covenant. *3.14-20*

The Outline of Zephaniah

1. *1.1* – Superscription
2. *1.2-18* – The Day of the Lord is coming in *Judgment* – (the *Nature* of the Day of the Lord).
3. *2.1-3.7* – The Day of the Lord is coming *on All Nations* – (the *Destruction* of the Day of the Lord).
4. *3.8-20* – The Day of the Lord is coming with *Blessing* – (the *Blessing* of the Day of the Lord).

Interpretive challenges – 3.9