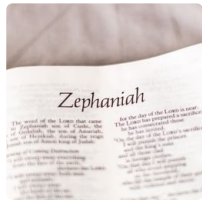


# OpenTheo

## Zephaniah (Full Book)



### Zephaniah - Steve Gregg

The book of Zephaniah, written in 612 B.C., provides a prophetic glimpse into the future. The author addresses the rampant idolatry and the worship of pagan gods among the people of Jerusalem. The text speaks of impending judgement and destruction, yet offers hope for a remnant who seek righteousness and humility. Through vivid imagery, Zephaniah depicts a time when lions will become shepherds, and justice and peace will prevail.

## Transcript

Let me just give you some introductory information about Zephaniah. Zephaniah was apparently a descendant of King Hezekiah, and he lived in the days of Josiah. Zephaniah is the only prophet whose lineage back four generations is given.

We have a more deep root of his ancestry given than for any other prophet in the Bible. In verse 1 it says that he is the son of Cushi, the son of Gedoliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah. Now, it goes back four generations, and apparently does so in order to show his relationship to Hezekiah.

And since he was related distantly from the King Hezekiah, he had some little bit of royal blood in him, and that may have given him access to the king, Josiah. It's hard to say. Josiah's reign was thirty-something years long, I think thirty-one years long, and therefore it doesn't pinpoint the date of Zephaniah's writing, but there are other indicators that do suggest a particular date.

For example, in chapter 2, verse 13, he predicts the destruction of Assyria and Nineveh. Well, that happened in 612 B.C. So obviously, since he predicts it as future, this was written before 612 B.C. Also, there is, in chapter 2, verse 5, reference to judgment coming on the land of the Philistines. Most scholars believe this was fulfilled when the Scythians invaded that area and plundered the Philistine cities in 630 B.C. So that sets it back even further.

Assyria fell in 612 B.C., but these Philistine cities were attacked in 630 B.C., so it puts it before 630. Now, the reforms of Josiah were in 627 B.C. Remember, when you're going

B.C., the numbers go the opposite way of what you think. 630 was before 627.

So, if the reforms of Josiah began in 627 B.C., but this was written before 630 B.C., then this was written before Josiah's reforms. I believe Josiah's reforms started in the twelfth year of his reign. He became king at age eight, and I think he was twenty when he began his reforms.

So, the fall of the Philistine cities happened when Josiah was about seventeen years old, and this happened before that, and this prophecy was given before that. So it's in the early days of Josiah, before the reforms, that this was written. And that is why we see complaints about idolatry so much.

Josiah basically eliminated overt idolatry when he reformed things, but he hadn't done so yet. And it's very possible, but we don't have any way of knowing for sure, that Zephaniah's prophecy may have had something to do with influencing Josiah. Now, of course, Jeremiah was around then, too.

But Zephaniah apparently had been earlier. And let me just give you an outline of the book, and then we'll go through and look at some of the things in it. Chapter one is essentially a prophecy that the day of the Lord is coming upon Judah.

God's going to basically wipe them out for their idolatry. Now, this probably was fulfilled by the Babylonians, although it was predicted something like forty years before the Babylonian captivity. But then Jesus spoke of the Romans destroying Jerusalem forty years in advance of it, and he spoke of it as something that would happen relatively soon.

So the time frame is not unusual. In that generation, basically, Zephaniah was writing within forty years of the time that it actually happened. And therefore, although he talked about something being at hand, it was at hand in the sense that that generation would not pass before it was fulfilled.

And God talked about utterly consuming. Verse two, I will utterly consume all things from the face of the land, says the Lord. I will consume man and beast.

I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks, along with the wicked. Verse four, I'll stretch my hand against Judah, against the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And he tells why in verse four and following, because they're idolatry.

I'll cut off every trace of bale from this place. The names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests, those who worship the host of heaven, they're worshipping the stars, apparently, on the housetops, and those who worship and swear oaths by the Lord, but they also swear by Milcom. So these people had not given up using the name of Jehovah, but they also swore by Milcom, who was the Canaanite god, Molech, another name for

Molech, Milcom.

So they had Jehovah and Molech that they worshipped. He says in verse six, those who have turned back from following the Lord. In verse seven, he says in the middle of that, for the day of the Lord is at hand.

Now, the day of the Lord is an expression found in many of the prophets and in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the day of the Lord generally, most often, at least in the epistles, I think, is looking forward to the second coming of Christ. But in the Old Testament, every nation had its own day of the Lord.

That is, every wicked nation experienced judgment at some point, and when it did, that was the day of the Lord for them. Joel used the term, in speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem by locust plague, he called it the day of the Lord. Amos used the term the day of the Lord for the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians.

And Isaiah used the term day of the Lord to speak of the fall of Babylon in Isaiah chapter 13. Here, Zephaniah is talking about it as the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. So, I mean, you've got a variety of ways in which the day of the Lord is used by different prophets in their context.

But the day of the Lord was a generic term that meant the day when God has his day, as it were, in court, where he gets his way. He seems to be insulted daily by these people, and he doesn't ever seem to be vindicated. Well, the day of God's vindication through his bringing wrath upon those who insult him, that is what the day of the Lord is.

And, of course, for us, we anticipate the day of the Lord, which will affect the whole world at his second coming, the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, as Paul refers to it in his writings. Well, verse 7 here says the day of the Lord is at hand. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice.

He has invited his guests. Probably the sacrifice victim is Judah. And the guests who are coming to eat it are the Babylonians.

And it shall be in the day of the Lord's sacrifice that it will punish the princes and the king's children, and all such as are clothed in foreign apparel. Apparently they had adopted the culture of the pagans. One indication of people accepting pagan cultures were in the same kind of clothes, the styles that the pagans wear.

Of course, in our day, styles are kind of international. But each nation had its own cultural dress in ancient times. And there's a sense in which Christian dress probably does need to be distinguished from that of some pagan forms of dress, depending on which ones.

I mean, certainly the pagans don't have the same governing philosophies of modesty as

Christians ought to, and we are told to be modest. I guess the worldly compromise on the part of a Christian can sometimes be deduced by some of the clothing that some Christians wear. Modest clothing in particular, or gaudy, attention-getting clothing or whatever.

But in those days, the fact that they'd started wearing foreign clothing means that they'd adopted foreign ways in general. They had syncretized their religious culture with that of other nations. In verses 10 and 11, it names several districts in Jerusalem, the Fishgate, the Second Quarter, the Maktesh, which was really the market district in Jerusalem as regions that God will judge.

He must be upset with them because of their putting their trust in their commercial ventures instead of in Him. Verse 12 says, It shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, The Lord will not do good nor will he do evil. They just didn't expect the Lord to intervene at all.

Like the deists who didn't believe that God, well, I mean, they believed in God, but they didn't believe that God did anything. They believed that God made the earth and then went off to do something else and didn't intervene much. Apparently there were similar people in Jerusalem who said, Well, sure, Jehovah's a real God, but he's not going to do anything.

He doesn't intervene. And God says, I'm going to search Jerusalem with lamps and punish them. In other words, they can hide in any dark crevice they want to, but God will bring them to light and expose them and catch them.

It's interesting that when the Babylonians did later conquer Jerusalem, they dragged people out of every hiding place, including sewers and tombs and dark places where they'd hid themselves, possibly using lamps to find them, but the lamps is not necessarily literal. It says in verse 14, The great day of the Lord is near. And then it gives a poetic description of it being a day of devastation and darkness and desolation and so forth.

We don't need to go into detail there. It wouldn't hurt if we had more time to do so. I don't think it's the most important thing for us to focus on.

It says in verse 18, Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath, that the whole land should be devoured by the fire of his jealousy. That their silver and gold won't be able to deliver them is a reference to the fact that sometimes in war, a nation could buy off their attacker. And there had been some of the kings of Judah who had done just that.

They'd taken the gold out of the temple and sent it to Assyria to keep them from

attacking them and stuff. But in this case, there won't be anything they can do to buy off their attackers. This is a judgment from God.

And the attackers won't be placated by gifts and so forth. Chapter 2, Gather yourselves together. Yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, before the decree is issued, before the day passes like chaff, before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you.

Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld his justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.

Interestingly, Zephaniah, the name Zephaniah means the Lord hides. Or it can mean the man whom the Lord hides. He says that the meek and the humble who have upheld justice will be hidden by the Lord.

The Lord will hide them like, you know, in a protective place. He's going to search Jerusalem with lamps. And the wicked will not be able to hide anywhere.

They'll be exposed, but God has a hiding place for his remnant. God has a way of preserving in general disaster those who have put their trust in him. And so we have the remnant alluded to here.

Now, verses 4 and following talk about nations on all sides. In verses 4 through 8 it gives different Philistine cities. They were attacked and destroyed by the Scythians in 630 B.C. Verses 4 through 8 names some of them.

They were, of course, on the west boundary of Jerusalem. Then it turns in verses 9 through 11 to consideration of those on the east. From west we shift to east, Moab and Ammon.

Now, they were basically received their due at the hands of the Babylonians at a later time than the Philistines. So we have him considering those on the west, the Philistines in verses 4 through 8, and those who are on the east in verses 9 through 11, which are the Moabites and the Ammonites. Then he looks to the south in verse 12 and talks about the Ethiopians.

Now, Egypt was ruled at that time in history by Ethiopia, and therefore he may have Egypt in mind here. He could call them Ethiopians because they were ruled over by Ethiopia. But to the south of Israel, the nearest nation to the south was Egypt, and it eventually was conquered by Babylon also, though later than Jerusalem was.

And then in verses 13 through 15, he looks to the north at Assyria and says they will be judged. So he talks about those on the west, the Philistines, those on the east, which are Moab and Ammon, those to the south, probably Egypt or Ethiopia, and those to the

north, the Assyrians and Nineveh. And he predicts their destruction.

Now, these all were fulfilled at different times. Assyria fell in 612, the Philistines in 630. The Egyptians fell to the Babylonians in 568 B.C. So, although they're all mentioned together, they are mentioned not necessarily as all experiencing judgment at the same time, but the day of the Lord comes on them all in its own time.

And we're going to skip on down now to chapter 3. This is the wickedness of Jerusalem. Verses 1 through 7 talk about the judgment on Jerusalem, and then verses 8 through 20 have sort of a messianic kingdom prophecy about how the remnant will be glorified. So, the destruction of the wicked in Jerusalem is here brought up in the first seven verses.

Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city. This is Jerusalem. She has not obeyed his voice.

She has not received correction. She has not trusted in the Lord. She has not drawn near to her God.

Now, the oppressing city we could think to be Babylon, except it refers to Jehovah as her God, and therefore Jerusalem is obviously the city in mind. Her princes in her midst are roaring lions. They're supposed to be shepherds of sheep, but they're more like lions.

Her judges are evening wolves that leave no bone till morning. They eat up the people and leave nothing behind. Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people.

Her priests have polluted the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law. That's something Habakkuk also complained about, that the law was powerless, and justice was never done in Jerusalem at that time, about the same period that Habakkuk was writing about.

The Lord is righteous. He is in her midst. He will do no unrighteousness.

Every morning he brings his justice to light. He never fails, but the unjust knows no shame. I have cut off nations.

Their fortresses are devastated. I have made their streets desolate, with none passing by. Their cities are destroyed.

There is no one, no inhabitant. I said, surely you will fear me. You will receive instruction, so that her dwelling would not be cut off, despite everything for which I punished her.

But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds. God says, I figured you'd certainly turn around if I judged you in this way. I mean, how could you be so stupid as not to? But it turned out you are more stupid than I counted on, and you corrupted yourself anyway, and did not receive correction.

Now we have, in the closing verses of the book, a kingdom passage about God's glory upon his remnant ultimately, which, as you know, of course, some would interpret to be fulfilled in a future millennium. Others take it to be figuratively referring to the church age under the Messiah, those who are the people of Christ, the people of the Messiah. Therefore, wait for me, says the Lord, until the day I rise up for plunder.

My determination is to gather the nations, which of course is done through the preaching of the gospel, to my assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them my indignation. Well, this is done actually. Them would be, I think, Jerusalem in 70 AD, but this is, I don't have time to give all the reasons for it, you know my inclinations.

All my fierce anger, all the earth shall be devoured with fire of my jealousy. For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language. I wonder if giving the gift of tongues on Pentecost was sort of an emblem of this, a God changing their languages.

That all may call on the name of the Lord to serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my worshippers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering. That is, people from Gentile lands even further away than the rivers of Ethiopia.

Well, you know, the first Gentile convert in the book of Acts was an Ethiopian. In Acts chapter 8, it might be an emblem of this being fulfilled. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, God has Gentiles who become worshippers of his.

In that day you shall not be ashamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against me. For then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. I will leave in your midst a meek and a humble people.

That's the remnant who survived the Holocaust in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Blessers you meek, Jesus said. Blessers the poor in spirit. They inherit the earth.

Jesus said the meek will inherit the land. The meek survive and obtain the inheritance, where the rest of the Jews are wiped out and lose their inheritance. And they shall trust in the name of the Lord.

The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth. Jesus said of Nathanael that he was an Israelite indeed, because there was no guile in his mouth. And whom is no guile, Jesus said in John 1, 47.

They don't have any guile or deceitful tongue in their mouth. For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid. Sing, O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel, be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

The Lord has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemy. In John 12, 31, Jesus said, Now is the judgment of this world.

Now shall the princes be cast out. Our enemy was cast out at the cross, according to John 12, 31. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.

You shall see disaster no more. Actually, the word disaster, literally in the Vulgate, in the Latin, is fear. You shall see fear no more.

And Christians certainly have seen disaster in an earthly sense, but we don't have to fear ever again. We're told not to fear. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Do not fear.

Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in the midst of you is a mighty one. He will save.

He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you in his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

God will give him peace. He will rejoice over the remnants, which are now referred to as Zion. Of course, in the book of Hebrews, we're told that the Zion that we have come to is the church of the firstborn, the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn, in Hebrews 12.

Also in Hebrews 12, it says, Therefore strengthen the feeble knees and let not the hands hang down. There's a reference perhaps back to here too. Verse 16, Zion, let your hands not be weak.

In other words, be encouraged. Weakening the hands is to discourage. Verse 18, I will gather those whose sorrow over the appointed assembly.

Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn. In Matthew 5.4. In Ezekiel chapter 9, those who were spared the Holocaust of 586 B.C. were those who mourned and sighed, cried and sighed over the sins of Jerusalem. Jesus said, Blessed are you who mourn.

You should be comforted. He says, I will gather those whose sorrow over the appointed assembly, who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden. There were that remnant who were burdened with the same burden of the Lord, that they were upset and mourned, burdened in their heart over the reproach that was brought on God's name and the worship of God by the Jews in general who had defiled the sanctuary.

Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you. I will save the lame and gather those who are driven out. I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame.

At that time I will bring you back. Even at that time I will gather you, for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I return your captives before your eyes, says the Lord. Now, when I return your captives, this of course, he has predicted the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, this was fulfilled.



The remnant, a remnant was brought back from Babylon. God did gather them back and give them their temple back and give them their religious system back. But of course that's only a type and a shadow, I believe, of in general God saving his people in the Messianic age as well.

The Exodus and the return of the exiles from Babylon both being a frequent type and shadow of that. So I personally think that this last section, though it has language that resembles the return of the exiles from Babylon right there at the end, and probably does refer to that, it refers even beyond that to the time when all the nations will have a pure language, and God will restore a pure language to people that they may all serve the Lord, and people from beyond Ethiopia and so forth.