

# Zephaniah: The Protected Prophet with a Powerful Warning & Promise

## The Background and Historical Setting:

1. Like many of the prophets of Israel who emphasized the unequivocal "Thus says the LORD," **Zephaniah** unhesitatingly and passionately addresses the evil and idolatry that was rampant in Judah (the Southern Kingdom) in the latter part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the reign of King Josiah, 640-609 BC (see 1:1).
2. Zephaniah predicted the destruction of Nineveh (see 2:13-15), which took place in \_\_\_\_ BC. However, did he prophesy in the early or latter part of Josiah's reign as king (before or after the reforms in 622 BC)? While it could have been either before (Josiah had yet to lead the return to godly worship and Zephaniah aided in that reform) or after (Josiah's reforms did not "take hold" throughout the land and Zephaniah continued to call God's people to repentance), his message powerfully denounces the worship of Baal and the syncretistic worship that mixed idolatry in various forms with the worship of the LORD (see 2 Kings 21-23).
3. Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah, whose call came in Josiah's 13<sup>th</sup> year (627 BC). These 2 prophets were part of "God's last effort" to call His people to repentance and faith in the years before His judgment would come upon them through the expanding Babylonian Empire.
4. Beginning in 626 B.C. Babylonia, Assyria's fellow Akkadian speakers and northern neighbors in Mesopotamia, began to ascend to power and prominence, ultimately replacing Assyrian as the ruler of the "greater Fertile Crescent" region in 612 BC with the overthrow of Nineveh. Their power was confirmed with the defeat of the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC (note that Judah's good king Josiah was killed by the Egyptians at the battle of Megiddo in 609 BC).
5. Under Babylonian rule, there was some general improvement in economic life and agricultural production as well as the flourishing of architectural projects, the arts, and the sciences but their warfare and treatment of conquered peoples were only occasionally "benevolent."

## The Book as a Whole:

1. It is the 9th book in "The Book of the Twelve" in the Hebrew Bible and is perhaps the \_\_\_\_\_ and most \_\_\_\_\_ description of "The Day of the LORD." It will be a day of doom and destruction but one that portends a day of hope and restoration for the humble who call on the name of the LORD.
2. This book, like many other of the prophets, begins with a message of \_\_\_\_\_ judgment (1:2-3) and ends with an \_\_\_\_\_ of salvation in which both the nations (3:9) and the remnant of Israel (3:12-13) are

brought into a joyful saving relationship with the God who loves them (3: 14-20).

## The Prophet Himself:

1. While there are three other men named Zephaniah (a Levite in 1 Chronicles 6:36-38, a priest during the reign of King Zedekiah in 2 Kings 25:18-21 & Jeremiah 52:24-27, and the father of Josiah who was an exile that returned from Babylon in Zechariah 6:10,14), the prophet of this book contains the unusual element of tracing his ancestry back 4 generations, including Hezekiah, most likely the famous king of Judah.
2. His name, Zephaniah, most likely means "The LORD \_\_\_\_\_." The etymological translation "watchman for the LORD" seems less likely.
3. Zephaniah, a descendant of the royal family, seems to link his prophecy to those of earlier prophets both in subject matter and form of expression, e.g., "Be silent..." in 1:7 (see Hab. 2:20), "the day of the LORD is near" in 1:7 (see Joel 1:15), and "the LORD has prepared a sacrifice" in 1:7 (see Isaiah 34:6). Cf. 2:14 and Is. 13:21 and 34:11 as well as 2:15 and Is. 47:8.

## The Outline:

- I. \_\_\_\_\_! God is \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ the Wicked with \_\_\_\_\_. (1:1 – 3:8)
- II. \_\_\_\_\_! God is \_\_\_\_\_ a Sinful People with \_\_\_\_\_. (3:9-20)

**The Prophet's Purpose: To proclaim that the "The Day of the LORD" portends both judgment and restoration upon God's people and God's world.**

**Key Verses:** *"The great day of the LORD is near, ... A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, .... The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing." (1:14-15; 3:17)*

## Walk the Path to Peace with God...

1. Beware of the \_\_\_\_\_ judgment of God against the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_. (1:1 – 3:8)  
(1) Be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (1:7-18)  
(2) \_\_\_\_\_ the LORD and His \_\_\_\_\_. (2:1-3:8)
2. Behold the \_\_\_\_\_ of God's \_\_\_\_\_ for all who \_\_\_\_\_ upon the name of the LORD & receive His \_\_\_\_\_. (3: 9-20)  
(1) \_\_\_\_\_ God in your \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (3:9-13)  
(2) \_\_\_\_\_ in the LORD who is rejoicing over \_\_\_\_ (3:14-20)