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THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

OLD TESTAMENT

BOOK 36

ZEPHANIAH



The Prophet Zephaniah

SUMMARY

The author of the Book of Zephaniah is the Prophet Zephaniah. The name Zephaniah means defended by God. The book of Zephaniah was written during the reign of King Josiah, likely in the early part of his reign, between 635 and 625 BC.

Zephaniah's message of judgment and encouragement contains three major doctrines: 1) God is sovereign over all nations. 2) The wicked will be punished and the righteous will be vindicated on the day of judgment. 3) God blesses those who repent and trust in Him.

Zephaniah pronounces the Lord's judgment on the whole earth, on Judah, on the surrounding nations, on Jerusalem and on all nations. This is followed by proclamations of the Lord's blessing on all nations and especially on the faithful remnant of His people in Judah.

Zephaniah had the courage to speak bluntly because he knew he was proclaiming the Word of the Lord. His book begins with The word of the Lord and ends with says the Lord. He knew that neither the many gods the people worshiped nor even the might of the Assyrian army could save them.

God is gracious and compassionate, but when all His warnings are ignored, judgment is to be expected. God's day of judgment is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures. The prophets called it the Day of the Lord. They referred to various events such as the fall of Jerusalem as manifestations of God's Day, each of which pointed toward the ultimate Day of the Lord.

The final blessings on Zion pronounced in 3:14-20 are largely unfulfilled, leading us to conclude that these are messianic prophecies that await the Second Coming of Christ to be completed.

The Lord has taken away our punishment only through Christ who came to die for the sins of His people. But Israel has not yet recognized her true Savior. This is yet to happen.

The promise of peace and safety for Israel, a time when their King is in their midst, will be fulfilled when Christ returns to judge the world and redeem it for Himself. Just as He ascended to heaven after His resurrection, so will He return and set up a new Jerusalem on earth. At that time, all God's promises to Israel will be fulfilled.

With a few adjustments in names and situations, this prophet of 7th century B.C. could stand in our pulpits today and deliver the same message of judgment of the wicked and hope for the faithful.

Zephaniah reminds us that God is offended by the moral and religious sins of His people. God's people will not escape punishment when they sin willfully. Punishment may be painful, but its purpose may be redemptive rather than punitive.

The inevitability of the punishment of wickedness gives comfort in a time when it seems that evil is unbridled and victorious. We have the freedom to disobey God but not the freedom to escape the consequences of that disobedience. Those who are faithful to God may be relatively few, but He does not forget them.

SUMMARY Continued

Chapter 1: Zephaniah was the great-great grandson of Hezekiah. He prophesied in the days of Josiah. The Lord says He will utterly consume everything from the face of the land. Judgment is promised to idolaters.

The day of the Lord is at hand; in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, He will punish the princes and the king's children, those who wear foreign apparel, and those who practice violence and deceit.

The merchants will be cut down, as will be complacent. The day of the Lord will be characterized by darkness, gloominess, cloud, trumpet and alarm. The Lord will make a speedy riddance.

Chapter 2: Gather yourselves. Seek righteousness and humility while there is still time – you may be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger. God promises to destroy the cities of the Philistines and give their land as pasture for the remnant of the house of Judah.

Moab shall be like Sodom, and Ammon like the people of Gomorrah. The Lord will reduce all the gods of the earth to nothing; people from all shores shall worship Him. Ethiopians will be slain by the sword, and the Assyrians will be destroyed due to their pride.

Chapter 3: Jerusalem is rebellious and polluted. The Lord is righteous in Jerusalem's midst. Having poured his indignation on nations, the Lord will give the world a common language, with which it will worship Him.

Israel will no longer be haughty on God's holy mountain. Sing, O daughter of Zion! The outcast and needy will be marginalized no more, and Jerusalem will be given fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when the captives are restored.

NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 1:7** Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; For the day of the Lord is at hand, For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests.
- 3:9** For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the Lord, To serve Him with one accord.
- 3:12** I will leave in your midst A meek and humble people, And they shall trust in the name of the Lord.
- 3:13** The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness And speak no lies, Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, And no one shall make them afraid.
- 3:17** The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.

BIBLE TIMELINE

CHARACTER Definitions

ZEPHANIAH - In Zephaniah 1:1, the author introduces himself as Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah. Among the prophets, this is a unique introduction with its long list of fathers back to Zephaniah's great-great grandfather, Hezekiah.

So why stop with Hezekiah? Most likely, the prophet wanted to highlight his royal lineage as a descendant of one of Judah's good kings. The reference to "this place" in Zephaniah 1:4 indicates that he prophesied in Jerusalem, while his many references to temple worship display a strong familiarity with Israel's religious culture.

All these factors paint the picture of a man who was at the center of Judah's political and religious world, a man whose close proximity to those in power would have given his shocking message an even greater impact.

The book tells us that Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, the king of Judah from 640 to 609 BC. We can begin to pinpoint exactly when Zephaniah prophesied by accounting for a few details in the text.

First, in 2:13 the prophet predicted the fall of Nineveh, an event which occurred in 612 BC. Further, Zephaniah made frequent quotations from the Law, a document that remained lost in Judah for much of Josiah's reign. Therefore, Zephaniah more than likely prophesied in the latter part of Josiah's rule, after the king discovered the scrolls of the Law in 622 BC.

This all means that Zephaniah grew up under the reign of Josiah's predecessors: Josiah's grandfather, the evil king Manasseh, and Manasseh's son, the young and evil Amon.

As a young man, the prophet-to-be would have been surrounded by the trappings of idolatry, child sacrifice, and unjust killings—strong influences on a young mind. But Zephaniah grew into a man of God, able to stand before the people and proclaim God's message of judgment and hope to a people that had gone astray.

This book mentions the day of the Lord more than does any other book in the Old Testament, clarifying the picture of Judah's fall to Babylon and the eventual judgment and restoration of all humanity in the future.

In this case, it refers primarily to God's impending time of judgment on the nation of Judah. Zephaniah saw in the day of the Lord the destruction of his country, his neighbors, and eventually the whole earth.

Zephaniah wrote that the day of the Lord was near, that it would be a time of wrath, that it would come as judgment on sin, and that ultimately it would result in the blessing of God's presence among His people.

Like the writings of many of the prophets, the book of Zephaniah follows a pattern of judgment on all people for their sin followed by the restoration of God's chosen people. Zephaniah's primary target for God's message of judgment, the nation of Judah, had fallen into grievous sin under the reign of their king, Manasseh.

Zephaniah's prophecy shouted out for godliness and purity in a nation sinful to its core. The people of Judah had long since turned their backs on God, not only in their personal lives but also in their worship. This reflected the depth of their sin and the deep need for God's people to be purged on their path to restoration.

Those living in Judah had turned the worship of God into a fiasco. Not only had they built their own places of worship to revere other gods (called "high places" in the Old Testament), but they had begun to desecrate the temple, which at that time was the dwelling place of God.

As modern-day believers in Christ, we, too, make a mockery of worship when we live in open sin. Do you come before the Lord with a false face, week in and week out, looking the part without acting it?

Allow Zephaniah to remind you how seriously God takes your life and your relationship with Him. And if you have failed, remember the message of Zephaniah 3, God is always a God of restoration and hope.

MAP REFERENCES

