

## The Book of Zephaniah

<b>Who Is Zephaniah?</b>	Zephaniah means “hidden by God.” It’s a name symbolic of his protection. In 1:1, he introduces himself as “the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, <u>son of Hezekiah.</u> ” Hezekiah was one of Judah’s good kings and Zephaniah wants to highlight his royal lineage to him.
<b>When and Where He Prophesied</b>	Since Zephaniah descended from Hezekiah, he’s a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He also tells us in v1 that he prophesied during the reign of Josiah (who lived during the last decades of Judah). Josiah, the last of the good kings of Judah, had attempted to bring about change in the land. He actively removed idols, found the Book of Deuteronomy in the temple, and called people to renew their faith and solidarity to the Lord. Judah, however, was just too far gone. Worshipping other Gods was just too entrenched in the life of the people. As a result, like Habakkuk, Zephaniah sees Judah on a collision course with destruction at the hands of the Babylonians.
<b>What He Saw in His Life</b>	As a prophet who descended from royalty, Zephaniah didn’t just witness Josiah’s attempt to bring revival up close and personal, he also personally witnessed the evil of Josiah’s grandfather (Manasseh) and his father (Ammon). Both of them openly called the people of Judah to commit idolatry, child sacrifice, and unjust killings. They were the worst of <u>all</u> the kings of the Bible. And Zephaniah witnessed their evil personally. As a result, no one is better qualified to prophesy in the final decades of Judah than Zephaniah.
<b>What He Saw in the Future</b>	The best feature of Zephaniah is how the prophet presents his material. Though he saw Babylon rising to destroy Judah and other nations, he doesn’t even mention them by name. He sees everything orchestrated by God, the good and the bad.
<b>How He Frames What He Sees</b>	Zephaniah perfectly balances the justice and love of God in his prophesy. Zephaniah portrays God’s justice as his rescue of the world from the horror of evil and violence. In essence, God won’t tolerate the horrible things that human beings do to each other. On the other hand, God brings his justice <u>in order to</u> create an environment where people can flourish in safety and peace.
<b>Main Theme</b>	Purging must happen for restoration to take place. Therefore, the fire of God is good because it leads to purification and restoration, not destruction (as is so commonly thought of when we talk about God’s judgment).
<b>Key Verses</b>	<i>“At that time, I will gather you; at that time, I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before you very eyes,” says the Lord. (3:20)</i>

### The Day of the Lord’s Judgment (Purging) on Jerusalem (1:1-2:3)

1. Begins with a reversal of Genesis 1. God’s “good” world descends back into disorder, darkness and chaos and becomes uninhabitable once again.  
  
*<sup>2</sup> “I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the Lord. <sup>3</sup> “I will sweep away both man and beast; I will sweep away the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea— and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble.” (1:1-2)*
2. Zephaniah started this way to tell the people how Jerusalem was going to end. All of the city who worshipped false idols will be gone. All of the crooked leaders who perpetrated injustice will be gone. All of the lenders who lent money at exorbitant interest rates will be gone. The place will be uninhabitable.  
  
*<sup>4</sup> “I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will destroy every remnant of Baal worship in this place, the very names of the idolatrous priests—<sup>5</sup> those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the Lord and who also swear by Molek, <sup>6</sup> those who turn back from following the Lord and neither seek the Lord nor inquire of him.” (1:4-5)*
3. Zephaniah doesn’t say who is going to destroy Jerusalem (it’s Babylon) because he wants his people to know God’s role in doing it.  
  
*<sup>12</sup> At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.’ <sup>13</sup> Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. Though they build houses, they will not live in them; though they plant vineyards, they will not drink the wine.”*

4. It's God's role in destroying the city that gives Zephaniah his hope. He calls on the inhabitants to seek the Lord, not to thwart judgment, but to identify the faithful remnant who could be spared if they repent.

*Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger. (2:3)*

### **The Day of the Lord's Judgment (Purging) on the Nations and Jerusalem Again (2:4-3:8)**

1. All of the nations that surround Judah – the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Cushites, and the Assyrians – will also fall to Babylon. What is interesting is they fall to Babylon for the evil they committed against God's people. And in God's judgment on those nations, he reveals his plans for the remnant.

*<sup>9</sup> Therefore, as surely as I live," declares the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, "surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah—a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them; the survivors of my nation will inherit their land." (2:9)*

2. This section ends with God redirecting his judgment on Jerusalem (Judah) again. Why? Their leaders who so evil that God didn't even recognize them as his people anymore. As a result, God's judgment becomes a consuming fire, though with a surprise. The consuming fire is not meant to totally destroy. It's meant to purge evil so that their world can be inhabitable once again.

*Therefore, wait for me," declares the Lord, "for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger (2:8).*

### **The Hope for All Nations and Jerusalem / The Other Side of God's Judgment and Purging (3:9-20)**

**\*\*This section is really something special in terms of what Zephaniah predicts about the future people of God\*\***

1. God will transform the nations into a unified family. It fulfills the promise God made to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through you. We are a fulfillment of that promise, just as Zephaniah prophesied.

*<sup>9</sup> "Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder (3:9).*

2. God will restore Jerusalem the first time. After Babylonian's destroyed Jerusalem, Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed them to return in 539 BC. They eventually constructed the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple: Herod the Great's in 37 BC.

*<sup>10</sup> From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. (3:10)*

3. We know that the Romans destroyed Herod's Temple in 70 AD. And for thousands of years, Israel had no land to call home until 1947, after the evils of the Holocaust. Zephaniah saw that regathering as well, predicting a remnant will return.

*<sup>19</sup> At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame. <sup>20</sup> At that time I will gather you; at that time, I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the Lord. (3:19-20).*

### **Very Significant for Setting the Scene for Events Yet to Happen**

The purging of Jerusalem and the nations made it possible for the Gentiles to believe. And the purging made it possible for Israel to return back to their land not once, but twice. God has restored their favor and extended favor to the nations who believe. That's where we are now in the present: Israel is back in their land, and we believe. Consequently, for any "End Times" discussion to take place, there had to be a regathering of God's people and an extension of mercy to the nations. There has. Now the stage is set. And we wait with eagerness and anticipation.