

## Zephaniah • Chapter Study

### INTRO

Zephaniah is the *last* of the *Pre*-exilic prophets.

Meaning, he lived *before* & prophesied *of* the Babylonian destruction & exile of Judah,

Zephaniah was a great-great grandson of **King Hezekiah** one of Judah's better kings.

Sadly Hezekiah's son **Manasseh** was one of, if not THE worst; a most wicked ruler whose 55 year long reign the kingdom never really recovered from.

Zephaniah was born during Manasseh's reign, but grew up during the reign of his grandson, the last good King **Josiah**.

Zephaniah's ministry, along with that of his contemporaries, **Jeremiah & Habakkuk**, helped Josiah stay on track & lead the reforms that gave Judah one last chance before judgment came.

The HS revealed to Zephaniah that though King Josiah worked at institutional reform

Going throughout the land tearing down idols and pagan altars & shrines,

The hearts of the people weren't really with it.

Outwardly, it looked like reform because as King, Josiah made the rules.

But the people only complied because they had to.

Their hearts were far from God.

So Zephaniah spoke against this spiritual coldness toward God that manifested itself in the fact that people were still given over to immorality.

He warned the people of Judah that if they didn't genuinely repent and return to the Lord, the Babylonians would come and do to them what Assyria had done to their northern neighbors – Israel 150 yrs before.

Then Zephaniah looked out into the future & showed how Judah's judgment was a foreshock of the great Day of The Lord when ALL nations will be judged.

He ends with a glimpse of Israel's glorious restoration in the Return of the Messiah in the end times.

### Ch. 1

<sup>1</sup> The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

Here's the msg God gave him . . .

<sup>2</sup> "I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land," says the Lord; <sup>3</sup> "I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, & the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land," says the Lord. <sup>4</sup> "I will stretch out My hand against Judah, & against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests with the *pagan* priests— <sup>5</sup> Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops; Those who worship and swear *oaths* by the Lord, but who *also* swear by Milcom; [AKA Molech] <sup>6</sup> Those who have turned back from *following* the Lord, & have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of Him."

Dire words of impending doom for the great city of Jerusalem.

To get in touch with just how shocking these words were, imagine standing in the center of City Walk at Universal City in the heart of LA.

Picture the thousands of people who stream thru there on a Friday night.

You look up and see all those tall buildings with their offices & apartments.

The LA metropolitan area is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest in the US;

The 13<sup>th</sup> largest in the World = 13 Million people.

Now, imagine your lone little voice as you lift it up and shout – "This is all going to be an utter wasteland!"

"These buildings will all lie in ruins & not a soul will live here."

That's what Zephaniah is saying to the people of Jerusalem.

No – there weren't 13 million living there; not even close.

But it was a major urban center w/a densely packed population.

There were buildings all around and hundreds of people streaming by.

Zephaniah's words would have seemed no less wild & far-fetched as they would to someone standing in the City Walk saying the same today.

Now Zephaniah says . . .

<sup>7</sup> 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.

Then he again becomes the mouthpiece for the Word of God . . .

<sup>8</sup> “And it shall be, in the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes & the king’s children, & all such as are clothed w/foreign apparel.

The coming judgment won’t just be on the poor, usually the first to suffer.

The rich nobility & royal house are often able to avoid the discomfort of hard times because their wealth provides a cushion.

The guys God marks out here are so wealthy they’ve purchased Armani suits in Rome & Ralph Lauren dresses in Paris.

God says their wealth will do nothing for them in the judgment He’s bringing on them.

<sup>9</sup> In the same day [that is, in this coming judgment] I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their masters’ houses with violence & deceit.

God gives several quick digs here on people who’ve turned from Him.

Remember, King Josiah was tearing down idols and their altars all over the land.

He was calling the people back to God.

He cleaned out & repaired God’s Temple in Jerusalem.

He called the nation to celebrate the Passover for the first time in many decades.

But here in v9, we find people who “leap of thresholds” & fill their master’s house w/violence & deceit.

The Philistines had a superstition that demons lived under the threshold of a house.

It you stepped on it, it would squeeze them out and into the house.

So when they entered or left a house, they jumped over the threshold!

It was a stupid superstition that had crept into Judah.

Today this would be like people being afraid to walk under a ladder, break a mirror, spill salt, have a cat walk across their path.

Or putting little warding devices up around your house to ward off evil spirits.

The people who fill their master’s house w/violence & deceit were royal officials who used extortion to rip people off.

All these people are going down when judgment comes.

<sup>10</sup> “And there shall be on that day,” says the Lord, “The sound of a mournful cry from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter [a district of Jerusalem], & a loud crashing from the hills. <sup>11</sup> Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh! [another district; like we’d say Lemonwood, or College Park]

For all the merchant people are cut down; All those who handle money are cut off. <sup>12</sup> “And it shall come to pass at that time *that* I will search Jerusalem w/lamps, & punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.’

These guys God’s going to do a thorough search for, disregard God.

They consider Him not at all. As far as they’re concerned, He’s out of the picture.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore their goods shall become booty, & their houses a desolation; They shall build houses, but not inhabit *them*; They shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine.” <sup>14</sup> The great day of the Lord *is* near; *It is* near & hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. <sup>15</sup> That day *is* a day of wrath, a day of trouble & distress, a day of devastation & desolation, a day of darkness & gloominess, a day of clouds & thick darkness, <sup>16</sup> A day of trumpet & alarm against the fortified cities & against the high towers.

Yeah – It’s *not* going to be a **GOOD day** for those who’ve rejected God & are left behind to see it.

<sup>17</sup> “I will bring distress upon men, & they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; Their blood shall be poured out like dust, & their flesh like refuse.” <sup>18</sup> Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.

God wants people to understand the coming judgment isn’t going to be some long, slow process of decline.

It won’t be glacial It’ll be swift & definitive.

It won't be spread out over several generations.

It's going to fall on a specific generation like a storm breaking on their heads.

And all of this "day of the Lord" (small 'd') that's coming for Judah when the Babylonians arrive,

Is a foreshock, a glimpse of The great Day of the Lord (capital 'D') that's coming in the end times.

This is one of the reason why we can't go with what's called **Amillennialism**.

Amillennialism believes there *isn't* going to be a definitive end times Day of the Lord.

History rolls on as it always has, w/the Kingdom of God & the rebellious kingdoms of man running side by side.

Then, after a really long time, from thousands to even millions of yrs, Jesus just comes back.

That's it Game Over.

Post-Millennialism says the Church slowly but surely takes over the world.

The Gospel permeates all levels of society; economics, politics, everything.

And when the Church has finally done its job & won the entire world to Christ, Jesus comes back & gives us a pat on the back for the fine job we've done.

What's disconcerting about both Amil & Post-Mil is that neither one gives room for the Bible's many prophecies for the end times Day of the Lord that is set to come and try the WHOLE WORLD and that so many of the prophets said Judah's judgment by Babylon was a picture of.

Only the Pre-millennial position squares with the plain, straight-forward reading of Scripture.

And that's why we're pre-millennial here at Calvary.

Ch. 2

<sup>1</sup> Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, [Judah] <sup>2</sup> Before the decree is issued, *or* 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! <sup>3</sup> 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.

While the bulk of the people had turned their back on God & would be taken in the coming judgment, Zephaniah calls those whose hearts are still true to the Lord to seek Him still.

God would carve out a place of refuge for them.

Now Zephaniah is going to make a circuit of the kingdoms around Judah.

All these people had made themselves enemies of God by opposing His people.

So Zeph speaks first about the Philistines on the Western coast.

Then He looks to the East, then South & finally North.

<sup>4</sup> For Gaza shall be forsaken, & Ashkelon desolate; They shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, & Ekron shall be uprooted.

The judgment would reach all the way to the western coast.

<sup>5</sup> Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites! [AKA Philistines] The word of the Lord *is* against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: "I will destroy you; So there shall be no inhabitant." <sup>6</sup> The seacoast shall be pastures [instead of bustling, populous cities], with shelters for shepherds & folds for flocks. <sup>7</sup> The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; They shall feed *their* flocks there; In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the Lord their God will intervene for them, & return their captives. That remnant of the faithful Zephaniah spoke to in vs1-3 will take refuge on the coast in what used to be the region of the Philistines.

They won't be there because they'll be wiped out.

<sup>8</sup> "I have heard the reproach of Moab, & the insults of the people of Ammon, w/which they have reproached My people, & made arrogant threats against their borders. <sup>9</sup> Therefore, as I live," says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "Surely Moab shall be like Sodom, & the people of Ammon like Gomorrah— Overrun w/weeds & saltpits, & a perpetual desolation. The residue of My people shall plunder them, & the remnant of My people shall possess them."

Moab & Ammon were Judah's **eastern** neighbors & perennial enemies.

When they saw Babylon advancing on Judah, they delighted at the prospect of the kingdom's doom.

God says they'll suffer the same fate.

<sup>10</sup> This they shall have for their pride, because they have reproached and made arrogant threats against the people

of the Lord of hosts. <sup>11</sup> The Lord *will be* awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth; *People* shall worship Him, each 1 from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations.

Now God looks to the South

<sup>12</sup> “You Ethiopians also, you shall be slain by My sword.”

Zephaniah gives no REASON why God will judge the Ethiopians, or in the next vs, the Assyrians.

Likely because he figures his readers are familiar with the prophecies of Isaiah, Amos & Nahum.

<sup>13</sup> & He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria, & make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness. <sup>14</sup> The herds shall lie down in her midst, every beast of the nation. Both the pelican and the bittern [a sea bird] shall lodge on the capitals *of her pillars*; Their voice shall sing in the windows; Desolation *shall be* at the threshold; For He will lay bare the cedar work. <sup>15</sup> This is the rejoicing city that dwelt securely, that said in her heart, “*I am it, and there is none besides me.*” How has she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down! Everyone who passes by her shall hiss and shake his fist.

These once densely populated places will become the habitation of wildlife that avoids contact with humans.

It’s a picture of just how **total** the destruction will be.

Ch. 3

Now Zephaniah laments the sorry spiritual condition of Jerusalem.

There’s so much here I’d like to drill down on.

But what we’re going to do instead is just read his words slowly & carefully – allowing the weight of the prophet’s burden to come rest on us.

I’ll forego MY comments, & instead simply read HIS words, trusting the HS to stir our hearts with the message of God.

Zephaniah speaks of Jerusalem as a Woman; God’s unfaithful companion.

<sup>1</sup> Woe to her who is rebellious & polluted, to the oppressing city!

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Her princes in her midst *are* roaring lions;  
Her judges *are* evening wolves that leave not a bone till morning.

<sup>4</sup> Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people;  
Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.

<sup>5</sup> The Lord *is* righteous 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.

<sup>6</sup> “I have cut off nations, their fortresses are devastated;  
I have made their streets desolate, w/none passing by.  
Their cities are destroyed; *There is* no 1, no inhabitant.

<sup>7</sup> 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 & corrupted all their deeds.

Zephaniah ably conveys the broken heart of God.

He’s so good & has made things so utterly clear, but people go on to act like complete imbeciles.

And all because though the truth stares them in the face, they pretend they do not see it.

God now speaks a word of counsel & comfort to the **Remnant of the Faithful**.

<sup>8</sup> “Therefore wait for Me,” says the Lord, “Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination *is* to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured w/the fire of My jealousy. <sup>9</sup> “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 w/1 accord. <sup>10</sup> From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering. <sup>11</sup> In that day you shall not be shamed 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, & you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain. <sup>12</sup> I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, & they shall trust in the name of the Lord. <sup>13</sup> The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness & speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; For they shall feed *their* flocks & lie down, & no one shall make *them* afraid.”

A time of judgment is coming to eradicate evil; not just from Israel or the larger Middle East, but from the whole world.

It'll be followed by a restoration that will see God's Kingdom established on Earth in truth & justice. Zephaniah closes with a song of praise to God for His faithfulness.

<sup>14</sup> Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad & rejoice with all *your* heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! <sup>15</sup> The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, *is* in your midst; You shall see disaster no more. <sup>16</sup> In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. <sup>17</sup> 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.” <sup>18</sup> “I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, who are among you, *to whom* its reproach *is* a burden. <sup>19</sup> Behold, at that time I will deal w/all who afflict you; I will save the lame, & gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise & fame in every land where they were put to shame. <sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; For I will give you fame & praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes,” says the Lord.

Wow – there is so much there! // Let me just speak to 2 things . . .

1) Vs. 19&20 speak to the longtime problem of anti-Semitism.

**Racism** has always been a problem; as ethnic groups vie with each other for resources, power & prestige. But anti-Semitism is a **different kind of hatred**.

It's also one of history's consistent minor themes; as it goes all the way back to the ancient world.

We see it in Egypt's treatment of Abraham's descendants as slaves.

We see it in the Persian Empire with Haman.

The Greeks saw some rounds of fierce anti-Semitism.

It was a significant factor of the Roman Era.

When Islam exploded on the scene, it included anti-Semitism as one of its values.

The Middle Ages **institutionalized** anti-Semitism in the laws & customs of Europe.

And it reached a climax in the Nazi's Final Solution.

Today, we see anti-Semitism once again on the rise in the Middle East & in the supposedly enlightened nations of modern Europe.

Jews living across Europe are experiencing a fresh wave of hostility from their neighbors.

Synagogues are being vandalized & Graffiti increasingly demonizes Jews.

This growing anti-Jewish hostility has moved more and more Jews to immigrate to Israel.

They say it looks eerily similar to what occurred prior to WWII.

God says when Messiah comes, anti-Semitism will be forever put down & the world will regard the Jewish people with respect.

2) V17 ought to put a smile on the face of every believer here.

<sup>17</sup> The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save;

[Preach]

He will rejoice over you with gladness,

[Preach]

He will quiet *you* with His love,

[Preach]

He will rejoice over you with singing.”

[Preach]