

Zephaniah Notes

Studies completed with Joe Focht, Chuck Smith, Damian Kyle, Jon Courson, Warren Wiersbe, Matthew Henry, NIV Study Bible, David Guzik, Matthew Poole, and Keil & Delitzsch.

Introduction:

Zephaniah means “Jehovah hides” and implies “protects, treasures.”

“The day of the Lord” (used 7 times) is a theme of Zephaniah.

- Also “the day” and “that day” are phrases used 19 times in this book.

Zephaniah is prophesying in the time of King Josiah before the fall of Nineveh (Zeph. 2:13) and before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians (586 BC).

Zephaniah is the last of the pre-exilic prophets.

Chapter 1:

1:1 – “son of Hezekiah” – This would make Zephaniah a descendent of King David.

- “in the days of Josiah” – A time of great reform in Judah.
 - We do not know when in Josiah’s reign these prophecies were given. They could come before Josiah’s reforms, making Zephaniah a helper in Josiah’s reform. Or these prophecies could have come after Josiah’s reforms, making them a critic of the limited extent of genuine change in the lives of the people.
 - Zephaniah would be a contemporary with Jeremiah and Nahum.

1:2 – “utterly consume everything” – God knew the reform of Judah was more outward than inward; it was more social, than spiritual.

- Teach for salvation (the heart), and not just for social reform (external actions).

1:4 – “against Judah” – At the hands of the Babylonians (though Babylon is never mentioned by name in these prophecies).

- Zephaniah sees through the Babylonians to get a glimpse of the judgment to come at the end of the age; the near and the far aspects of these prophecies.
- “Baal” – The Canaanite god of prosperity in harvest and fertility.
- “idoltrous priests” – (Heb. “chemarim”) Lit. “black robes.”
- “the pagan priests” – The corrupted Levitical priests.

1:5 – “the host of heaven” – Babylon practiced astrology.

- “who also swear by Milcom” – They are worshipping both.
 - The reform of the nation didn’t remove sin...it only added God.
- “Milcom” – also “Molech.” The god of prosperity worshipped through child sacrifice.

1:7 – “His guests” – Speaking of Babylon.

1:8 – “the princes” – The government leaders.

- “clothed with foreign apparel” – The Law dictated how those were to be dressed that served before the Lord. Israel has exchanged that for the clothing styles of the idol worshipping people around them.

- 1:9 – “avoid stepping on the threshold” – A superstitious practice of avoiding the place of Dagon’s fall in 1 Samuel 5:4-5.
- 1:10 – “Fish Gate...Second Quarter” – Zephaniah is outlining the path of Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Jerusalem.
- 1:11 – “Maktesh” – The cheese-maker’s quarter; the market district of Jerusalem.
- 1:12 – “settled in complacency” – Lit. “settled on their lees.” The lees was the grape pulp from the wine and if the wine wasn’t poured off the lees in time, the wine would go bad.
- When the enemy cannot take away the things we know to be true, he will attempt to take away the sense of urgency to act on them.
- 1:14 – “The great day of the Lord” – Looking down to the final destruction.
- 1:15 – “darkness” – As the sun and moon refuse to shine.
- 1:17 – “flesh like refuse” – So many people will be killed by the Babylonians that they will not have enough people to bury them.
- 1:18 – “Neither their silver nor their gold” – There comes a point when money becomes of no use. You cannot eat silver or gold.

Chapter 2:

- 2:1- “undesirable” – or “shameless.”
- 2:2 – “Before” – A remarkable word of God’s grace. He is given them a chance to repent.
- 2:3 – “you will be hidden” – Possibly referring to the 144,000 preserved through the Tribulation while hiding out in Petra. (Luke 21:36)
- “hidden” – A play on words from Zephaniah’s name.
- 2:4-9 – Judgment begins at the house of God...but it doesn’t end there.
- 2:4 – “Gaza...Ashkelon...Ashdod...Ekron” – 4 of the 5 cities of the Philistines.
- These areas were ultimately destroyed by the Babylonians.
- 2:5 – “Cherethites” – From Crete. (Most scholars believe the Philistines and Canaanites came from Phoenicia and Crete.)
- 2:7 – “the remnant of the house of Judah” – Speaking of the remnant after the Babylonian captivity.
- “return their captives” – The Jews have been settling this area since 1948. (The Gaza Strip)
- 2:9 – “Moab...Ammon” – Modern-day Jordan.
- Moab and Ammon took advantage of Israel by following Nebuchadnezzar’s army in to Jerusalem and plundering the Jews.
 - “weeds and salt pits” – Fitting description of the modern-day areas of Moab and Ammon.

2:11 – “People shall worship Him” – Zephaniah is looking past Armageddon to the Kingdom Age.

2:12 – “Ethiopians” – They were not completely destroyed.

2:13 – “make Nineveh a desolation” – Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC.

2:14 – “pelican and bittern” – Unclean birds.

Chapter 3:

3:1 – “her” – The city of Jerusalem.

- “obeyed His voice...received correction...trusted in the Lord...drawn near to her God” – This is a good checklist for any of us.

3:3 – “princes” – Political leaders.

3:4 – “prophets are insolent” – They are saying, “Peace, peace” to the people.

- “insolent” – or “light.” There is no depth to them.
- “insolent, treacherous people” – The NLT translates this, “arrogant liars seeking their own gain.”

3:5 – “morning” – Typically, in the morning at the city gates was when city business was performed.

- “the unjust knows no shame” – It is not that they don’t know the Word, they just have no fear of God.

3:7 – “fear Me...receive instruction” – This is why God is disciplining them.

- “rose early and corrupted” – They get up early to sin.

3:8 – “the day” – The day of the Lord; the day of His judgment.

3:9 – “For then” – After the fierce expression of God’s anger.

- “pure language” – It will come from a pure heart.

3:10 – “of Ethiopia...bring My offering” – Some say this is referring to the Ark of the Covenant which is currently hid in Ethiopia.

- “Ethiopia My worshippers” – In the 1980’s, large numbers of Ethiopian Jews immigrated back to Israel in Project Exodus.

3:11 – “you shall not be shamed” – This corruption shall put on incorruption.

3:12 – “meek” – Jesus said, “the meek shall inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5)

3:13 – “no one shall make them afraid” – Because the right King will be ruling from the right throne.

3:14 – “Sing” – This is a proper response.

3:17 – “God in your midst” – Jesus on His throne in Jerusalem.

- This is for blessing and stands in contrast to His being in your midst for destruction in v. 5.
- “quiet you with His love” – We rest in His love for us...not our love for Him.
- “quiet you” – Lit. “be quiet.” God goes from singing to silence in love.

3:18-20 – “I” – 8 times.

3:18 – “those who sorrow” – Like Jeremiah, “the weeping prophet.”

- “reproach” – The Jews are the reproach of the nations.

3:20 – “Among all the peoples” – There will be no Anti-Semitism in that economy.