

Outline of Zephaniah

It is our sincere desire that this outline of Zephaniah will help you in your study of God's Word. And we hope that your diligent study will bring you closer to Him and help you discover His true character.

Zephaniah was the first of the writing prophets to prophesy against Judah since the time of Isaiah and Micah. Isaiah prophesied from around 740 B.C. to 686 B.C., Micah from 735-700 B.C. Thereafter, we have no other writing prophet until we come to Nahum, who prophesied against Nineveh around 654 B.C. Following the death of Isaiah at the hands of wicked king Manasseh in 686 B.C., Manasseh himself was taken captive by the Assyrians and after repenting to God he was returned to Judah as king. After his death in 643 B.C., Amon his son reigned two years, until 641 B.C. From the death of Isaiah, we have no recorded prophesy about Judah. Then, in 641 B.C., young king Josiah (8 years of age) became king and he reigned 31 years. In the 18th year of his reign, they rediscovered the book of the law in the temple. In 623-621 B.C., Josiah began sweeping reforms in Judah, destroying Baal worship.

Interestingly, it was during the reign of this good king that God again raised up a prophet to pronounce doom on Judah. Zephaniah prophesied somewhere between 630 and 621 B.C. We reach these dates from the reference to Baal worship, and the identity of the listed sins with the practices later abolished by Josiah in 621 B.C. (2 Kings 23:4-25)

We know Zephaniah as the Prophet of the Day of the LORD. While hope is contained for the righteous, judgment and wrath are the wellspring of the book.

This Zephaniah is not otherwise referenced in Scripture. He apparently was of royal birth, being the great-great grandson of Hezekiah, a third cousin of King Josiah.

Interestingly, his prophesy may have corresponded to the time young Jeremiah began to prophesy, in the 13th year of Josiah (627 B.C.). Yet, neither of these prophets may have been the strongest prophetic voice in the land, for Huldah the prophetess is the one who was sought out when Josiah, in 622 B.C., sought a word from the LORD (2 Kings 22:13-20).

In understanding the "Day of the LORD," it appears that the day had both an immediate and a far context. In the immediate context, it was a reference to the coming destruction brought by Babylon on the land. But the New Testament writers pick up the phrase in 1 Corinthians 1:8; 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10, 12; and Rev. 16:14. It is introduced in Scripture as a time of judgment (Isaiah 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14). Thus, when the New Testament writers use the phrase, it should be understood as a time of judgment and wrath. Nonetheless, there is hope (2:3; Luke 21:36; Isaiah 26:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 3:10).

Date: 630-621 B.C.

The book is divided into three chapters. We may outline it as follows:

I. The Coming Destruction of the Day of the LORD 1:1-18

- A. reversal of creation 2-3
- B. punishment of foreign gods 4-5
- C. punishment of those who have not sought the LORD 6

D. Be silent for the sacrifice 7-8

E. those punished 8-12

1. the officials and king's sons 8

2. the violent 9

3. the merchants 11

4. the complacent 12

F. the day of the LORD

1. bitter 14

2. mighty men shall cry out 14

3. wrath 15

4. trouble 15

5. distress 15

6. devastation 15

7. desolation 15

8. darkness 15

9. gloominess 15

10. clouds 15

11. thick darkness 15

12. warning trumpet (like our civil defense sirens) 16

13. alarm 16

14. like blindness 17

15. blood poured out like dust 17

16. flesh like dung 17

17. devoured 18

18. fire 18

19. speedy riddance 18

II. Interlude of Hope 2:1-3

A. Gather yourselves 1 (see 3:9)

B. Do it before the Day of the LORD 2

C. Seek the LORD, you may be hidden in that day 3

III. Destruction on the Nations 2:4-15

A. on Philistia 4-7

B. on Moab and Ammon 8-11

C. on Ethiopia 12

D. on Assyria 13-15

IV. Destruction on Jerusalem 3:1-7

A. sins of Jerusalem

1. rebellion (woe!) 1
2. pollution 1
3. oppressive 1
4. disobedience 2
5. unbelief 2
6. distance 2
7. pride 2
8. devourers 3
9. rude 4
10. treachery 4
11. violent 4
12. no shame 5
13. no appreciation 7
14. no fear 7

B. God's devastation 6

V. Return of Hope 3:8-20

A. Promises of Hope

1. a pure lip 9
2. serve the LORD with one accord 9
3. from afar 10
4. removal of pride 11
5. meekness 12
6. humility 12
7. trust 12
8. righteousness 13
9. truth 13
10. faithfulness 13
11. no fear 13
12. judgments taken away 15
13. enemy cast out 15
14. The King is in the midst 15
15. no more disaster 15
16. Your God is in the midst 17
17. The Mighty One will save 17

18. He will rejoice over you with gladness 17
 19. He will quiet you in His love 17
 20. He will rejoice over you with cries of joy 17
 21. Lift up the sorrowful 18
 22. Save the lame 19
 23. Gather those who are driven out 20
 24. Appoint them for praise and fame 20
- B. Um, shucks, there's got to be a "B" but I can't think of one!
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Key Idea: The Day of the LORD is a Day of Wrath(1:15)

Key Passage: 2:3

Key Lesson: God's Wrath will bring great destruction, but always His mercy remains to the meek.