

The Prophecy of Zephaniah

Zephaniah 1:1-3:20

Introduction

Zephaniah 1:¹ The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah:

The prophecy in Zephaniah is like that of Obadiah and Joel; it focuses on the events that will happen on the Day of the Lord.¹ Fortunately, Zephaniah tells his ancestry. He is a descendant of Hezekiah through Amariah, Gedaliah, and Cushi. Was Hezekiah the Southern king who reigned from 726 BC to 697 BC? Although he could have been, the Bible does not give enough information to confirm him as Zephaniah's great-great-grandfather. We know that Hezekiah had sons. Manasseh took his place at age 12 and reigned for 55 years as an evil king. The rest of his sons were sent to Assyria and made into eunuchs. Was Amariah the son of Hezekiah? Was he sent to Assyria and made into a eunuch after he had sons of his own? The Bible simply does not give enough information to confirm that Zephaniah is a descendant of King Hezekiah.

Nebuchadnezzar made Gedaliah governor in the Southern Kingdom after he removed Zedekiah as king, but he was killed after seven months in office in 586 BC which means he probably could not have been Zephaniah's grandfather. However, we do know that Zephaniah ministered during the days of Josiah who ruled from 640 – 608 BC in the Southern Kingdom.² The chart below shows the last kings of the two kingdoms.

The Last Kings of the Southern and Northern Kingdoms
From 760 BC to 586 BC

Southern King	# Years Reigned	Begin s	Ends	Scripture	Northern King	# Years Reigned	Begins	Ends
				2 Kings 15:26-27	Peka	20	760	740
Jotham	16	758	742	2 Kings 15:33				
				2 Kings 17:1	Elah	9	740	731
Ahaz	16	742	726	2 Kings 16:1-2				
				2 Kings 17:1	Hoshea	9	731	722
Hezekiah	29	726	697	2 Kings 16:19-20				
Manasseh	55	697	642	2 Kings 21:1-3				
Amon	2	642	640	2 Kings 21:17-19				
Josiah	32	640	608	2 Kings 22:1-2				
Jehoahaz	3m	608	608	2 Kings 23:31				
Jehoakim	11	608	597	2 Kings 23:34-37				
Jehoachin	3m	597	597	2 Kings 24:5				
Zedekiah	11	597	586	2 Kings 24:17				

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¹ The Day of the Lord includes the return of the Lord with His bride, the destruction of Esau's descendants, the Battle of Armageddon and the splitting of the Mount of Olives.

² The Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC.

Removal of All Zephaniah 1:2-3

Zephaniah 1:² "I will completely remove all *things* from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. ³ "I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea, and the ruins along with the wicked; and I will cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the Lord.

In the future, the Lord plans to remove all wickedness from the earth which will include all animals they used for food. Tragically some translations insert the word "things" in the sentence for clarity, but its addition changes the meaning of the prophecy. He will not remove the righteous; in fact, the context of this prophecy is directed at Israel. The Revelation speaks of the death of one-third of the sea creatures, cattle and fowl during the tribulation.³ Joel also speaks of the struggle for life in man and beast because Israel has no food.⁴ The Lord intends to remove the wicked man from the face of the earth but not the righteous one. Zephaniah draws aim on his intended target group next.

Judah and Jerusalem

Zephaniah 1: 4-6

Zephaniah 1:⁴ "So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, *and* the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests. ⁵ "And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven, and those who bow down *and* swear to the Lord and *yet* swear by Milcom, ⁶ And those who have turned back from following the Lord, And those who have not sought the Lord or inquired of Him."

The Lord's target is Israel which has continuously sought other gods since the early days of the Exodus.⁵ With the kingdom divided after the death of Solomon, the north rarely worshipped the Lord, seeking out Baal instead.⁶ Elijah killed 850 false priests in the Kidron valley and Jehu eradicated the religion in the north, yet the next generations revived their faith in Baal, Asherah and Milcom.⁷ Even today, Israel continues to turn to these false religions for spiritual help.

Day of the Lord Near

Zephaniah 1:7-13

Zephaniah 1:⁷ Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the Lord is near, For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests. ⁸ "Then it will come about on the day of the Lord's sacrifice That I will punish the princes, the king's sons and all who clothe themselves with foreign garments. ⁹ "And I will punish on that day all who leap on the *temple* threshold, who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit. ¹⁰ "On that day," declares the Lord, "There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate, A wail from the Second Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. ¹¹ "Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar, for all the people of Canaan will be silenced; all who weigh out silver will be cut off. ¹² "It will come about at that time That I will

³ Revelation 8:7-12

⁴ Joel 1:4-13; 2:12-14

⁵ Exodus 32:1-6

⁶ 1 Kings 12:28

⁷ 2 Kings 10:19-28; 2 Kings 23:13 - Ashtoreth is the god of Sidonites, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom is the god of the Ammonites.

search Jerusalem with lamps, And I will punish the men Who are stagnant in spirit, Who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good or evil!' ¹³ "Moreover, their wealth will become plunder and their houses desolate; Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit *them*, And plant vineyards but not drink their wine."

Zephaniah does not tell who the consecrated guests are, but the Revelation does. They are the birds that the Lord will call to come feast on all those He will sacrifice on that day called the Supper of the Lamb.⁸ The birds will dine on the flesh of those who will come to war against Him as well as the stagnant in spirit. The Revelation calls them the "lukewarm."⁹ The beast which sets his throne in the temple will die while destruction is heard throughout the hills of Israel. The enemies of Israel, the Canaanites will not escape the Lord's wrath that day.

The Day's Events

Zephaniah 1:14-18

Zephaniah 1:¹⁴ Near is the great day of the Lord, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶ A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers. ¹⁷ I will bring distress on men So that they will walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; and their blood will be poured out like dust And their flesh like dung. ¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord's wrath; and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth.

The events of the Lord's Day do not linger; His sacrifice occurs swiftly. When the Lord cries, "It is done" as He breaks the eastern skies with His bride behind Him, the slaughter will begin. The enemies will be blinded by His presence. Their blood will begin to flow. Their flesh will pile up in the valley like animal dung. All the wealth in the world will not be able to buy a pardon from this execution. He will completely eradicate His enemies from all the earth.

Gathering of His Righteous

Zephaniah 2: 1-3

Zephaniah 2:¹ Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame, ² Before the decree takes effect — the day passes like the chaff — before the burning anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you. ³ Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.

The Lord calls for the nation of Israel to come to believe in Him before His day occurs. It will be too late if they wait; the burning anger of the Lord will destroy them rather than protect them.

⁸ Revelation 19:17-18

⁹ Revelation 3:16

Gaza Strip

Zephaniah 2: 4-7

Zephaniah 2:⁴ For Gaza will be abandoned And Ashkelon a desolation; Ashdod will be driven out at noon And Ekron will be uprooted. ⁵ Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you so that there will be no inhabitant. ⁶ So the seacoast will be pastures, *with* caves for shepherds and folds for flocks. ⁷ And the coast will be for the remnant of the house of Judah, they will pasture on it. In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening; for the Lord their God will care for them and restore their fortune.

Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdad and Ekron are major cities of the Gaza strip, also called the Philistine Plain. Before Israel conquered the Promised Land it was called Canaan Land because the Canaanites were the primary inhabitants. The Gaza strip is just a portion of that land. When their people join the battle ranks to fight against the Lord, they will all be destroyed and, according to Obadiah, the Jews of Jerusalem will inhabit those cities at the close of the day as their new homes, leaving Jerusalem which will become a high plain 50 miles square and higher than any mountain on earth.¹⁰ During the 1,000 Year Kingdom, the Jews in these cities will prosper.

Moab and Ammon

Zephaniah 2: 8-9

Zephaniah 2:⁸ "I have heard the taunting of Moab and the revilings of the sons of Ammon, with which they have taunted My people and become arrogant against their territory. ⁹ "Therefore, as I live," declares the Lord of hosts, The God of Israel, "Surely Moab will be like Sodom And the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah— A place possessed by nettles and salt pits, And a perpetual desolation. The remnant of My people will plunder them And the remainder of My nation will inherit them."

Moab and Ammon are on the east side of the lower Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Near the end of the 40 year wilderness experience for Israel, Moses conquered much of their land and settled Reuben and Gad there who wanted the land because it was lush and green. ¹¹ Lot chose the same land for the same reason when he separated from Abraham. During the days of Jehu, king of the northern kingdom, all the land east of the Jordan, the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea were lost to the Aramonites, never to be controlled again by the Israelite's until the Day of the Lord.¹² On that day, they will be utterly destroyed and left desolate forever, like Sodom and Gomorrah. The world will be void of Moabites and Ammorites on that day, because they are all killed at Armageddon, but their wealth will remain in their homes. Once again, Obadiah tells us that Israel will plunder their spoils and inherit the land and houses as gifts from the Lord.¹³

Why Gaza, Moab and Ammon?

Zephaniah 2: 10-11

Zephaniah 2:¹⁰ This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the Lord of hosts. ¹¹ The Lord will

¹⁰ Obadiah 1:19-20

¹¹ Numbers 32

¹² 2 Kings 10:32-33

¹³ Obadiah 1:19-20

be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his *own* place. ¹² "You also, O Ethiopians, will be slain by My sword."

These three countries contain descendants of Abraham, cousins of Israel. Since they left Egypt and until the battle at Armageddon, these cousins have been perpetual pests, hindrances, and enemies of Israel and will continue to be so. In addition, they will never worship the Lord. One purpose of the Day of the Lord is to rid the earth of such people.

Ethiopia and Assyria

Zephaniah 2: 12 – 3: 7

Zephaniah 2: and ¹³ And He will stretch out His hand against the north And destroy Assyria, And He will make Nineveh a desolation, Parched like the wilderness. ¹⁴ Flocks will lie down in her midst, all beasts which range in herds; both the pelican and the hedgehog Will lodge in the tops of her pillars; birds will sing in the window, desolation *will be* on the threshold; for He has laid bare the cedar work. ¹⁵ This is the exultant city which dwells securely, Who says in her heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me." How she has become a desolation, a resting place for beasts! Everyone who passes by her will hiss *and* wave his hand *in contempt*. ^{3:1} Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the tyrannical city! ² She heeded no voice, she accepted no instruction. She did not trust in the Lord, She did not draw near to her God. ³ Her princes within her are roaring lions, Her judges are wolves at evening; They leave nothing for the morning. ⁴ Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law. ⁵ The Lord is righteous within her; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail. But the unjust knows no shame. ⁶ "I have cut off nations; their corner towers are in ruins. I have made their streets desolate, with no one passing by; their cities are laid waste, without a man, without an inhabitant. ⁷ "I said, 'Surely you will revere Me, Accept instruction.' So her dwelling will not be cut off *According to* all that I have appointed concerning her. But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.

One sentence addresses Ethiopia which will be killed by the Lord's personal sword – His Word. Her nearest border to Jerusalem is 1,000 miles away and her farthest is 1,800 miles. Why will she be destroyed? She is a descendant of Noah's son, Ham, through his son, Canaan. She is a Canaanite tribe and although she has, at times, revered the Lord, by His day, she will have chosen another god.

Assyria and her capital city of Nineveh will be destroyed also. In 612 BC, Nineveh was totally destroyed and left uninhabited. In the 1800's great archeological finds at Nineveh brought new light and affirmation to the accuracy of Bible history and its record. When Zephaniah was writing this prophecy during the days of Josiah, Nineveh was still the power house capital city of the Assyrian Empire which was the major ruler of the world at that time. But since the context of this passage deals with the Day of the Lord, Zephaniah cannot be prophesying against its fall in 612 BC; it has to be pointing to her destruction after the seven years of tribulation. Where is Nineveh? It is on the Tigris River in the country of Iraq. It is 250 miles north of Bagdad on the east side of the river. Nineveh must be rebuilt and it is well on its way today. Mosul overlooks Nineveh on the west bank of the Tigris. It is the capital of the Ninawa Government of Iraq. Its suburbs are spilling across the river and beginning to encompass the land around the old city. Soon Nineveh will be part of the grand city of Mosul which worships Allah instead of Jehovah, so it will be destroyed and the wild animals will overtake the city.

What does this prophecy mean for Nineveh? It means that some time in the future, it will become a powerful city of the world which will reject the Lord completely. When He destroys her people, they will deserve it because of their sins against the Lord committed without shame by her priests, people, faith and deeds.

Wait for Me

Zephaniah 3: 8-11

Zephaniah 3:⁸ "Therefore wait for Me," declares the Lord, "For the day when I rise up as a witness. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning anger; for all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal. ⁹ "For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder. ¹⁰ "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones, will bring My offerings. ¹¹ "In that day you will feel no shame because of all your deeds By which you have rebelled against Me; for then I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and you will never again be haughty on My holy mountain.

The Lord has not broken His promise with Israel and He never will. If she will just patiently wait for Him, He will not disappoint her. Close to the end of the tribulation, one third of Israel will turn her faith to the Lord as a nation, and as individuals.¹⁴ But they will still have to endure the last days of that terrible time until the Lord returns. They will hear the call to all the nations to come fight Him and He will pour out His indignation with zeal. If she will wait, if she will stay true, when the Day of the Lord is over, He will gather all of Israel who believe in Him from all over the world and bless them.¹⁵ They have run from the Promised Land in times of persecution starting with Saul of Tarsus and ending with the Beast in the time of great tribulation.¹⁶ They are all guilty of rejecting Him but He has already promised that He will accept them back. They should be ashamed of their deeds but neither their shame nor deeds will cause the Lord to reject them if they will call upon His name.

A Remnant of Israel

Zephaniah 3: 12-13

Zephaniah 3:¹² "But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, and they will take refuge in the name of the Lord. ¹³ "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies, nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths; for they will feed and lie down with no one to make them tremble."

The one-third of Israel's population who enter the 1,000 Year Kingdom, will be a special people with a special character and a special place in the world scene. They will be the nation above every nation and no one will seek to remove them from their place. Yet they will be humble, truthful and peaceful people.

The Lord on Earth

Zephaniah 3: 14-20

Zephaniah 3:¹⁴ Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all *your* heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The Lord has taken

¹⁴ Zechariah 8:13

¹⁵ Ezekiel 11:17; 28:25; 34:13; 37:21; 38:8; Hosea 1:11; Micah 2:12; Isaiah 11:12; 27:12; Psalms 147:2

¹⁶ Acts 8:1; Zechariah 1: 19-21; 10:9; Revelation 12:6

away *His* judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more. ¹⁶ In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: "Do not be afraid, O Zion; do not let your hands fall limp. ¹⁷ "The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. ¹⁸ "I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts— they came from you, *O Zion; the reproach of exile* is a burden on them. ¹⁹ "Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown In all the earth. ²⁰ "At that time I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; Indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, When I restore your fortunes before your eyes," Says the Lord.

As the smoke clears in the valley of Armageddon, Israel will shout for joy. Their Messiah and Savior are with them on earth and He has eliminated all of their enemies. A new system of law will prevail in the 1,000 years; Ezekiel describes it and the feasts that will be included in the new plan. Finally, Israel will inhabit the entire Promised Land given to them from the Euphrates River to the Nile.¹⁷ Every other nation will praise them and look to them. They will be humble but wealthy people.

Zephaniah' Message

Year 2011	<p>Sometime in the Future:</p> <p>Nineveh will be rebuilt as a great and mighty tyrannical capital of the east.</p>	The Lord snatches the church away.	<p>The Church is in heaven with the Lord at their marriage ceremony and He gives the church wonderful gifts as His bride.</p> <p>People of the Gaza strip, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Syria treat Israel horribly during their time of tribulation.</p>		The Lord and the Church leave the bridal chamber and fly to earth on white horses at noon.	<p>1,000 Year Kingdom of the Lord</p> <p>Israel is the renowned nation – humble yet rich.</p> <p>The Lord will rule by Ezekiel's description of the new law.</p>
	<p>The Church is still on earth.</p>		3 ½ Years of Tribulation for Israel	3 ½ Years of Great Tribulation for Israel		
		<p>1/3 of Israel accepts the Messiah Israel scatters as they flee from the beast</p> <p>The Lord causes the false prophet to gather all the people to fight against Him.</p>		<p>Armageddon starts at noon.</p> <p>The inhabitants of Gaza, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, Assyria, and Nineveh's people, priests and animals will be destroyed.</p> <p>All is calm by 6 PM as the sun begins to set. The Jews of Jerusalem start moving to the cities of Gaza while the Jews of southern Israel begin to collect the spoils of Moab and Ammon.</p>		

¹⁷ Genesis 17:1-9; Deuteronomy 11:24