

Zephaniah

“The Royal Prophet”

I. Introduction to Zephaniah

Zephaniah is the thirty-sixth book of the Old Testament and ninth among the Minor Prophets. Zephaniah is not mentioned in Scripture outside of the book he authored. All we know about him personally is recorded in Zephaniah 1:1.

Zephaniah's name means “God Protects”. This is an apt name for a man who will call his generation to repentance. According to his record he is a descendant of Hezekiah. It is believed this refers to King Hezekiah and there is no reliable reason to think otherwise. This would make him of royal blood or a “Royal Prophet”. This would also make him a cousin of King Josiah who reigned during Zephaniah's ministry. Being of royal blood and cousin to King Josiah afforded him certain privileges and opportunities. It is possible he was trained by the same teaches who educated King Josiah. Rather than wasting opportunity or squandering privilege Zephaniah used these as a springboard for ministry.

In The Days of Josiah

Josiah was the last godly king before the nation collapsed. His reign is recorded in 2 Chronicles 34 -35. He was a godly king who reigned for 31 years. His reign was marked by commitment to the Lord; his commitment increased as time went on.

At age 8	He began to reign.
At age 16	He began to seek the Lord.
At age 20	He purged Jerusalem of idols.
At age 26	He repaired the Temple and found the Word of God

Much can be learned by the discovery of God's Word. During the remodel of the Temple, Hilkiah found a copy of the Word of God. He delivered it to Shaphan, the scribe, who in turn brought it to the King.

King Josiah's reaction is worth noting.

2 Chronicles 34:18-19 “Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it before the king. Thus it happened, when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes”.

(Tearing clothes was a sign of personal repentance).

2 Chronicles 34:31”Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book.”

King Josiah made a covenant with the Lord. The highest authority in the nation put himself under a higher authority.

He is not the only King who reacted to the Word of God. When Jehudi read the Word to King Jehoiakim, the king tore it up.

Same Word, same sin, same conviction; but Jehoiakim responded by trying to silence the Word instead of turning to God.

Zephaniah

“The Royal Prophet”

Jeremiah 36:23 “And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe’s knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.”

Once Josiah had made a commitment to the Lord, he called the people to further commit. The nation responded with an outward act of reform. Thousands gathered at the Feast of Passover and celebrated like never before.

Reformation vs. Revival

Reform – Recognize some things are wrong and seek to make changes.

Revival – Surrender all to God and live under authority to His Word

The nation came close to revival but stopped short by only making a few outward changes.

II. Outline of Zephaniah

Zephaniah is divided into three chapters. We will use the chapter divisions to form our outline.

Section 1	Chapter 1	The Day of the Lord
Section 2	Chapter 2	Judgment upon the Nations
Section 3	Chapter 3	Future Promises

Section 1 Chapter 1 The Day of the Lord

In Chapter 1 we find the theme of Zephaniah, ‘The day of the Lord.’

‘Day’ is used fourteen times in Zephaniah.

‘Day of the Lord’ described in Zephaniah 1:14-16

‘Day of the Lord’ speaks of judgment coming on Judah, and of the final judgment coming on all who refuse Christ.

We learn about the future day of the Lord by examining the judgment that befell Judah.

Zephaniah 1:2-3 “I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land,” says the LORD; I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land,” says the LORD.

Zephaniah 1:14-18 Warning about the Day of the Lord

Warned concerning how near

Warned concerning how bad

Warned of no escape

Judgment is averted only through Christ.

Zephaniah

“The Royal Prophet”

In Chapter 1 we focus on the Cause of the Coming Judgment.

Zephaniah 1:5 *Worshipping the hosts of heavens on their rooftops.* Rooftops were like a patio or living room. It was a place for family gatherings. There are a few examples of the use of the rooftop in Scripture.

Bathsheba bathed on the rooftop.

Peter rested on the rooftop.

Husbands flee contentious wives on the rooftop.

Traces of Baal

Josiah had brought about national reform. Idols and priests were removed from public life. Many, however, were still idol worshipping in private. Judgment came because public reform was not affecting private living.

“Three categories of idolatry are specifically mentioned in the text. The first is the worship of Baal. Baal is the false god of the Canaanites. The second is the worship of the sun, moon and stars (“the host of the heavens”) (2 Kings 23:5, 12). And the third is the worship of Milcom. Milcom was the national false god of the Ammonites. The name is spelled various ways in Scripture, the root of the word related to 'king,' Molech and Milcom are the most common ways we find the name in English (in Zeph 1:5 it is actually spelled Malcham). Molech worship is often associated in Scripture with child-sacrifice.” Justin Lee Marple

They were turning worship into syncretism, defined as an amalgamation of different religious practices. They were blending the worship of the true God with false idols. Today it is a common practice to pick and choose verses we like and ignore others. The concept of “co-exist” is derived from this idea.

Turning Back from Following the Lord

Zephaniah 1:6 “Those who have turned back from *following* the LORD, and have not sought the LORD, nor inquired of Him.”

They started out with a public commitment to God, but failed to do what was necessary in private in order to establish roots and continue on with the Lord. Soon they turned back. This too, is very prevalent.

Hebrews 10:39 “But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.” This should describe us. What will you do to ensure you are not one who will turn back?

Complacency

Zephaniah 1:6 and “Those who have turned back from *following* the LORD, and have not sought the LORD, nor inquired of Him.”

Zephaniah 1:12 “And it shall come to pass at that time *that* I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, “The LORD will not do good, nor will He do evil.””

Zephaniah

“The Royal Prophet”

Complacency is an uncritical satisfaction with self. “I’m happy the way I am.” Judah had developed a complacent attitude that whatever they had given up to follow YHWH was adequate or enough.

The disciples could have been in danger of this as well as seen in Luke 18:23-29. The cure is to look at the sacrifice of Christ.

Foreign Apparel

Zephaniah 1:8 “And it shall be, In the day of the LORD’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel.”

Judah had lost sight of their responsibility to influence the world and began to conform to it. Jesus instructed the servants to remove the grave clothes from Lazarus. They were not fitly apparel for the living.

Paul instructed believers to put off worldly behaviors and put on Christ.

Romans 13:13-14 “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill *its* lusts”.

Leaping the Threshold

Zephaniah 1:9 “In the same day I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit.”

This is a picture of trespassing; going where we shouldn’t be. The Word of God sets standards and guidelines for us to live by. Living outside those lines is a trespass beyond God’s boundaries.

Zephaniah Also Provides the Solution

Be Silent

Zephaniah 1:7 “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.”

Judah must stop making excuses and accept responsibility for their own sin.

Ezekiel 18:3-4 “As I live,” says the Lord GOD, “you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.”

Wail

Zephaniah 1:11 “Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh! For all the merchant people are cut down; all those who handle money are cut off.”

Zephaniah

“The Royal Prophet”

Wailing was a prolonged high-pitched cry of pain; usually associated with mourning. They were to mourn over their current condition; to cry out to God for pardon. “Blessed are those who mourn.” Matthew 5:4

Gather Together

Zephaniah 2:1 “Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation,”

Their repentance began with a public commitment and will continue through public gatherings.

Sabbath and annual feasts were designed as times of rededication, growth, and further commitment. The church serves that purpose today.

Section 2 Chapter 2 Judgment upon the Nations

Chapter 2 focuses predominantly upon the Day of the Lord and what will befall the nations surrounding Judah. The fact that these nations were met with judgment should solidify the warning of the Coming Day of the Lord.

Section 3 Chapter 3 Future Promises

Chapter 3 gives further reasons for judgment. Zephaniah 3:1-7

This is followed by a promise to the faithful. Zephaniah 3:8-13

And finally, a call to repent. Zephaniah 3:14-20

III. Why Study Zephaniah

Precious Promise

He will take away judgment and cast out our enemy; He sings over us!

Zephaniah 3:14-15 “Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all *your* heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 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.”

Colossians 2:15 “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”

Zephaniah 3:17 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.”

Zephaniah

“The Royal Prophet”

The subject of our love songs - the Lord
The subject of His love song - us!

An Illustration of the Rapture

Rapture – a generation of believers will be taken to heaven without passing through the doorway of death. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

While not saying so directly, Scripture supports the notion that the rapture will precede the Tribulation or Day of the Lord that Zephaniah is describing.

Zephaniah 2:3 “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.”

Also expressed in Luke 21:36 and revelation 3:10

Sanctification

Sanctification is a Biblical word that means to be set apart from worldly living in order to become more like Christ. It is the process that takes us from decision to discipleship.

It is illustrated in the command Israel received to remove the Canaanites from the land. Those that remained in the land were a constant struggle to God’s people. Saul’s refusal to deal with Amalekites almost cost the nation. Haman was an Amalekite who sought to annihilate the Jews.

Sanctification involves dedicating ourselves completely to the Lord. Zephaniah 1:4 makes reference to removing every trace of Baal.

Sanctification means to be set apart or dedicated to as in Leviticus 27:14 (dedicating your house), Leviticus 27:16 (dedicating your fields)

Every Christian has been set apart to glorify God with his life.

Purge from Defilement.

“It is like a connoisseur of fine brass who was searching through a pile of junk on the outskirts of an eastern city, when he suddenly spied an old, battered brass pot. It was dirty, stained and beaten up, but his practiced eye recognized a thing of value. He makes his way through the junk and picked up the old pot and set it apart by itself. In so doing, he sanctified that vessel. This is Sanctification in its initial application. Of course, he must spend many hours cleansing, straightening out the dents and polishing the old pot, until it becomes a thing of beauty to grace his living room table. This process is Sanctification in its second application.”

Finally, to Become Like Jesus

We must remember we are not considered holy only for what we do not do.

Zephaniah

“The Royal Prophet”

We are sanctified by faith in Christ and obedience to the Word, yielding to the Spirit, and personal commitment.

“But there comes a time in the life of every sincere follower of the Lord Jesus Christ when he, by an act of deep personal commitment, sets, himself apart for whatever service God would have him fulfill. At which time he separates himself from the things of the world and the flesh, and dedicates himself to God’s perfect will for his life. The individual has recognized and received Jesus Christ as his Savior, but now he crowns Him as King and Lord over his live.”