

Zephaniah

Day of the LORD						
Judgment					Salvation	
1:1–3:8					3:9-20	
Day of Punishment					Day of Praise	
D-Day					V-Day	
Destruction					Deliverance	
Ruin					Restoration	
God's Righteousness					God's Faithfulness	
Warning					Encouragement	
Earth 1:1-3	Judah 1:4–2:3	Nations 2:4-15	Jerusalem 3:1-7	Earth 3:8	Remnant Regathered 3:9-10	Redeemed & Restored 3:11-20
Judah, Nations, and Whole Earth						
c. 630 BC						

Key Word: Day

Key Verse: “Gather together...before the day of the LORD’s wrath comes upon you. Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD’s anger” (Zephaniah 2:1-3).

Summary Statement:

The response of Judah to God’s righteous judgment (the day of the LORD) and eventual restoration of a remnant should be to repent with hope.

Application:

If you insist on *living* like a pagan, then you will *die* like a pagan (Huang Sabin, Singapore Bible College)

Zephaniah

Introduction

- I. **Title:** The name Zephaniah (זְפַנְיָה) means "Yahweh hides" or "Yahweh treasures up" (BDB 861b; or "protects," cf. Heater). Zephaniah's name may evoke the suppression of prophetic activity under the wicked King Manasseh, as the prophet may have had to be "hidden of the LORD" to survive the purges of the impious king (LaSor, 431, n. 1).

II. Authorship

- A. External Evidence: We know nothing about Zephaniah except what is in this prophecy.
- B. Internal Evidence: That Zephaniah is the author is indisputable (1:1), but his residence in Jerusalem can only be inferred from his use of the phrase "this place" (1:4) and the familiarity he had with the city (1:9-10). As the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah (1:1), Zephaniah remains the only prophet of royal descent and also the only prophet related to the king under whose reign he prophesied (in this case, Josiah). Perhaps the author states his extensive four-generation genealogy to substantiate his intimate knowledge of the sins of Jerusalem's leaders (1:11-13; 3:3-5; cf. LaSor, 431).

III. Circumstances

- A. Date: Zephaniah ministered during the reign of Josiah (640-609 BC; 1:1b) and since Nineveh had not yet fallen (2:13-15), his prophecy pre-dates the fall of the great city in 612 BC. Additionally, his preaching about the idolatrous practices in Judah and Jerusalem suggests that his prophecy likely preceded Josiah's reforms following the discovery of the Book of the Law (622 BC). Therefore, the likely dates of composition are 640-622 BC. This means that Jeremiah (called in 627 BC) and Zephaniah could have been contemporaries.
- B. Recipients: The northern kingdom had fallen to the Assyrians approximately one hundred years earlier (722 BC). Zephaniah's preaching was directed toward the southern kingdom of Judah about four decades before Judah fell to the Babylonians.
- C. Occasion: Zephaniah ministered at the close of the darkest years of Judah's history after the evil Manasseh occupied the throne—a king from whose infamous 55-year rule the nation never recovered. Manasseh made altars to Ashtoreth (Canaanite), Chemosh (Moabite), Milcom (Ammonite), and Baal (Canaanite) deities. He restored child sacrifice and even sacrificed one of his sons in the Valley of Hinnom (2 Kings 21:6). Astrology, occultism, witchcraft, spiritism, and divination were everyday practices (2 Chron 33:5-6). Manasseh even placed a carved idol in the temple (v. 7). His son, Amon, was named after an Egyptian god.

Although Manasseh later made some token efforts at reforming Yahweh worship (cf. 2 Chron. 33:12-19) under the influence of some unnamed prophets of God (v. 18), the people had gone too far into idolatry (v. 17). After his son Amon assumed the throne briefly (642-640 BC), Josiah became king. The false worship of the earlier part of Josiah's reign continued during the ministry of Zephaniah (1:4-5, 8, 9, 12). Zephaniah was God's spokesman to turn a people of false worship back to the true God.

IV. Characteristics

- A. As noted above, Zephaniah is unique in that it is the only prophecy by a man of royal blood (who prophesied to his relative, who was made king).

- B. Zephaniah's predominant theme is the same as that of Joel—the day of the LORD. This technical term refers to a future time for Israel, still to come, in which the nation will be disciplined, followed by blessings in the kingdom era (see p. 639).

Zephaniah is a short prophecy, yet it uses the phrase “day of the LORD” more than any other prophet. Variations of the NIV term occur 23 times in only three chapters (almost 8 times/chapter):

<u>Term</u>	<u>Chapter 1</u>	<u>Chapter 2</u>	<u>Chapter 3</u>
"day of the LORD"	1:7, 8, 14b		
"great day of the LORD"	1:14a		
"that day"	1:9, 10, 15	2:2a	3:11, 16
"at that time"	1:12		3:19, 20
"a day"	1:15 (5 times), 16		
"day of the LORD's wrath"	1:18	2:2b	
"day of the LORD's anger"		2:3	
"the day"			3:8

Argument

Zephaniah follows the common prophetic judgment and blessing theme closely, emphasizing the former. Most of his prophecy conveys judgment upon Judah for its sins (1:1–3:8 employs a chiasm around the "day of the LORD" theme). This is followed by the hope of ultimate deliverance (3:9–20). He aims to encourage Judah that while God will judge, He will still restore a remnant in faithfulness to His covenants.

Synthesis

Day of the LORD

1:1–3:8	Judgment
1:1	Introduction
1:2–3	Judgment upon the whole earth
1:4–2:3	Judgment upon Judah
2:4–15	Judgment upon nations
3:1–7	Judgment upon Jerusalem
3:8	Judgment upon the whole earth
3:9–20	Salvation
3:9–10	Remnant from the nations
3:11–20	Redeemed and restored Judah

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

The response of Judah to God's righteous judgment (the day of the LORD) and eventual restoration of a remnant should be to repent with hope.

- I. **The response of Judah to God's righteous judgment (the day of the LORD) should be to repent (1:1–3:8).**
 - A. Zephaniah spoke for God between 640 and 609 BC (during Josiah's reign), so the prophecy carries divine authority (1:1).
 - B. God will judge the whole earth for its wickedness, so Judah should see that He is fair to all (1:2–3).

- C. God will judge Judah for its idolatry and social injustice, so the nation should repent to avoid the terrible calamity (1:4–2:3).
1. Judgment will come on various people in Judah for sins of idolatry and social injustice (1:4-13).
 - a) Judgment will come on the pagan priests who have led the people into all forms of idolatrous and false worship (1:4-6).
 - (1) Some people are led into Baal worship (1:4).
 - (2) Some people have gotten involved in astrology (1:5a).
 - (3) Some people have a religious syncretism that mixes Yahweh worship with that of the Ammonite god Milcom/Molech (1:5b).
 - (4) All the people have rejected Yahweh, having turned their backs on Him (1:6).
 - b) Judgment will come on the princes and aristocracy who evidence their disobedience by adopting foreign dress and practices (1:7-8).
 - c) Judgment will come on those who oppress fellow citizens by robbing them to offer objects up for pagan worship (1:9).
 - d) Judgment will come on the people throughout the city and the merchants in the business area who have grown rich by oppressing others (1:10-11).
 - e) Judgment will come on indifferent people who feel that God could keep neither His promises nor His threats (1:12-13).
 2. The day of the LORD will have terrible bloodshed and celestial signs that will ravage the earth (1:14-18).
 3. Judah should gather together in humble and righteous repentance to try to avert the day of the LORD (2:1-3).
- D. God will judge the nations around Judah for prideful mistreatment of Judah, who will inhabit some of their territory (2:4-15).
1. Judgment will come on Philistia in the west so that the devastated land will be inhabited by a remnant of Judah (2:4-7).
 2. Judgment will come on Moab and Ammon in the east for their arrogance against Judah, who will also inhabit their land (2:8-11).
 3. Judgment will come on Ethiopia in the south, who will die from an invading army (2:12).
 4. Judgment will come on the arrogant Assyrians in the north through the Babylonians, who will leave Nineveh inhabited only by wild beasts (2:13-15).
- E. God will judge Jerusalem for arrogantly spurning God's righteous and just warnings against its depraved spiritual condition (3:1-7).
1. Jerusalem is spiritually depraved (3:1-4).
 2. God's judgment of the other nations is fair and just, so He will also be fair and just with Jerusalem (3:5-6).

3. God gave Jerusalem chances to repent, but in vain since the city spurned His warnings (3:7).
 - F. God will judge the whole earth, so Judah should wait upon God (3:8).
- II. The result of Judah knowing God will preserve a remnant and restore them should be hope (3:9-20).**
- A. The day of the LORD includes worship by a remnant from the nations beyond Egypt (3:9).
 - B. The day of the LORD includes the restoration of a redeemed and restored Judah under the protection of the LORD Himself (3:10-20).
 1. The remnant of the nation will be redeemed in humility (3:10-13).
 2. Judah should rejoice since the LORD will protect it from enemies forever (3:14-17).
 3. Judah will be gathered again and restored to the land as preparation for entrance into the Millennial Kingdom (3:18-20).

Judgment and Blessing in the Prophets

The dual themes of judgment and blessing appear in every prophetic book. This is because God always balances His justice with His mercy! If one can grasp these two concepts in the prophets (with their related covenants), then a much better understanding of the OT will result.

	Judgment	Blessing
Explanation	Retribution for Sin	Restoration from Sin
Recipients	Nations and Israel	Nations through Israel
Covenant	Mosaic	Abrahamic
Nature of the Covenant	Conditional	Unconditional
God's Attribute	Justice	Faithfulness
Key Covenant Texts	Exod. 19–20; Deut. 28	Gen. 12:1-3; 15:17-21; 17:8
Isaiah	1–39	40–66
Jeremiah (J-B-J pattern)	1–29, 34–52	30–33
Lamentations	1:1–5:18	5:19-22
Ezekiel	1–32	33–48
Daniel	1–7	8–12
Hosea (pattern twice)	1:1–2:13; chs. 4–13	2:14–3:5; ch. 14
Joel	1:1–2:17	2:18–3:21
Amos	1:1–9:7	9:8-15
Obadiah	1-14 (vv.)	15-21 (vv.)
Jonah	1:1–3:9	3:10–4:10
Micah (pattern thrice)	1:1–2:11; 3:1-12; 6:1–7:6	2:12-13; 4:1–5:15; 7:7-20
Nahum (J-B-J pattern)	1:1-11; chs. 2–3	1:12-15
Habakkuk	1–2	3
Zephaniah	1:1–3:8	3:9-20
Haggai (pattern twice)	1:1-15; 2:10-19	2:1-9; 2:20-23
Zechariah	1:1-6	1:7–14:21
Malachi	1–3	4

The Day of the LORD

I. Usage

- A. The “day of the LORD” concept appears in each prophetic book in the Old Testament, although not always by that exact term.
- B. The judgment aspect receives detailed treatment in Zephaniah, Joel, and Revelation 6–19. Some believe that the “Lord’s day” of Revelation 1:10 also refers to this period (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2-3).

II. Definition

- A. The day of the LORD is “the time of Yahweh’s final intervention in history when He will judge the wicked, deliver the righteous, and establish His kingdom” (Hobart Freeman, *An Introduction to the OT Prophets*, 146).

1. Judgment

- a. It mainly refers to the destruction of Israel’s enemies (Zeph 2–3; Amos 1:3–2:3; Joel 3; Zech 12–14; Isa 13:6, 9; 14:28-32; 17:1ff.; 20:1-6; 31:1-5; Jer 46:10; Ezek 30:3ff.).
- b. However, it also includes punishment of the rebellious and disobedient in the nation of Israel (Jer. 30:7; Amos 5:18-20) for sins (Zeph 1:17) as a day of terror (1:15).
- c. The Great Tribulation of Revelation 6–19 finds so many parallels with descriptions by the OT prophets that the two judgments must undoubtedly be the same period. The day is a time of universal judgment (Zeph. 1:2-3; 2:4-15; 3:8) with great convulsions of nature (Zeph. 1:15).
- d. Ultimately, the day of the LORD will end in the destruction of the world (2 Pet. 3:10).

2. Deliverance

- a. Israel’s salvation from Gentile oppressors will occur through God, who preserves and delivers a remnant of Israel (Joel 2:32; Zech. 14; Zeph. 3:8-20; Isa. 2, 11, 65-66; Amos 9:11-15; Ezek. 20:33-44, etc.).
- b. This salvation is to enable Israel to enter into the kingdom in which God will fulfill all His promises to Abraham (cf. class notes, 336-37).
- c. The deliverance includes many blessings (Deut. 30:3-9) that also apply to Gentiles (Zeph. 3:9). As a result, a remnant will be redeemed (Zeph. 3:16-17).
- d. Final salvation after judgment will be in the new heaven and earth (2 Pet. 3:11-13).

3. Diagram

<i>Judgment</i>	+	<i>Salvation</i>	=	<i>Day of the LORD</i>
Great Tribulation	+	Christ’s Return/ Millennium	=	Day of the LORD

- B. The day of the LORD also had a nearer aspect to the prophets, depicting an imminent (Zeph. 1:14), impending disaster, generally through the Assyrians or Babylonians. Sometimes, even both the near and far aspects appear together in a dual sense. God did not reveal whether a close or distant perspective was intended to encourage repentance.
- C. For further study, see Greg A. King, “The Day of the LORD in Zephaniah,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (January-March 1995): 16-32.