

ZEPHANIAH

Author:

Zephaniah was descended from King Hezekiah, but we know almost nothing about him.

Date:

He prophesied during the days of King Josiah who reigned 640-609 BC.

Themes:

The Day of the LORD; warning that unless the people of Judah repented of their detestable behavior God's punishment would come on them; promise that in the last days God would pour out His blessings on them.

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

² “I will completely make an end of all *things* from the land”, says the LORD.

³ “I will make an end of man and beast; I will make an end of the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. And I will cut man off from the land”, says the LORD.

⁴ “I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and I will cut off what is left of Baal from this place, and the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests,

⁵ And those who worship the *starry* host of heaven on the housetops, and those who worship *and* swear by the LORD, and who swear by Malcam,

⁶ And those who have turned back

from the LORD, and *those* who have not sought the LORD or inquired of him.

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.

⁸ And this will take place on the day of the LORD’s sacrifice: I will punish the princes, and the king’s children, and all those dressed in foreign clothes.

⁹ On the same day I will also punish all those who leap over the *temple* threshold, who fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit.

¹⁰ “And on that day”, says the LORD, “this will take place: *there will be* the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate, and a wailing from the Second *Quarter*,

and a loud crash from the hills.

¹¹ Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people will be cut down, all those who carry silver will be cut off.

1:1 “*Word...came*”– Jer 1:4; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1.

“*Hezekiah*”– 2 Kings 18:1.

“*Josiah*”– 2 Kings 22:1.

“*Amon*”– 2 Kings 21:19.

1:2-3 Judging from the language of this verse, v 18 and 3:8, God is speaking through Zephaniah of a time in the distant future which still has not come. Compare Gen 6:7. God promised Noah that He would never again destroy everything with a flood – Gen 9:15-16. Through Zephaniah He speaks of destruction by other means. Compare also 2 Pet 3:10-13.

1:2 “*The land*”– or “the earth” – the Hebrew word means either.

1:4-13 Having announced the far-off event, God now speaks of the punishment of Judah and Jerusalem. There seems to be a mingling of events to come in the near future and in the distant future (v 7). They were partly fulfilled in 586 BC – 2 Kings chapter 25.

1:4 “*I will*”– compare Isa 10:5; Jer 51:20.

“*Baal*”– note at Jud 2:11.

“*Idolatrous priests*”– in Hebrew “*Kemarim*”.

1:5 “*Starry host*”– 2 Kings 21:3; Jer 8:2; 19:13; Acts 7:42; Deut 4:19; 17:3-5.

“*Malcam*”– the god Molech – note at Lev 18:21. Trying to combine the name of the one true God with the worship of the false gods of the nations – this revealed much spiritual blindness and depravity.

1:6 This was their great sin and the root cause of other sins.

1:7 “*Silent*”– Hab 2:20.

“*Day of the LORD*”– v 14; see Isa 13:6-13; Joel 1:15; 2:2,11; 3:13; Amos 5:18; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10.

“*A sacrifice*”– Jer 46:10. Here the word speaks of a slaughter. Judah’s enemies were set apart for this work of destroying Judah.

1:8 “*Foreign clothes*”– God saw that His people’s adopting foreign dress was a sign of their adopting foreign ways of life contrary to the ways a holy people should live.

1:9 “*Leap over the temple threshold*”– 1 Sam 5:5. This was one of the foreign ways Judah had adopted. They were careful to observe that, but thought nothing of lying and killing – another example of how some people think that a little religious superstition can win God’s favor even if their lives are full of sin.

1:10-11 Neh 3:3; 11:9; 1 Kings 20:34.

- ¹² And it will happen at that time
that I will search Jerusalem
with lamps,
and punish the men who are settled
complacently like wine on its dregs,
who say in their heart,
‘The LORD will not do good,
nor will he do evil.’
- ¹³ Therefore their goods will
become booty,
and their houses a desolation.
And they will build houses
but not live *in them*,
and they will plant vineyards
but not drink their wine.
- ¹⁴ “The great day of the LORD *is* near.
It is near, and coming speedily.
The sound of the day of the LORD!
The mighty man there will cry
out bitterly.
- ¹⁵ That day *is* a day of wrath,
a day of trouble and distress,
a day of devastation and
desolation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and dense darkness,
- ¹⁶ A day of the trumpet and alarm
against the fortified cities,
and against the high towers.
- ¹⁷ I will bring distress on men,
so that they walk like blind men,
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 save them in the day
of the LORD’s wrath;

and the whole land will be devoured
by the fire of his jealousy.
For quickly he will rid the land
of all those who live in it”.

- 2** Gather yourselves together;
yes, gather together,
O nation not desirable,
- ² Before the decree is carried out,
before the day takes away the chaff,
before the fierce anger of the LORD
comes on you,
before the day of the LORD’s anger
comes on you.
- ³ Seek the LORD, all you meek
of the earth,
who have behaved in accordance
with his justice.
Seek righteousness, seek meekness.
Perhaps you will be hidden
in the day of the LORD’s anger.
- ⁴ For Gaza will be abandoned,
and Ashkelon *will become*
a desolation.
At midday they will drive out
the people of Ashdod,
and Ekron will be uprooted.
- ⁵ Woe to the inhabitants
of the seacoast,
the nation of the Kerethites!
The word of the LORD *is*
against you,
O Canaan, the land of the Philistines:
“I will destroy you, so that no one
will live *there*”.
- ⁶ And the seacoast will become
pastures,
and caves for shepherds,
and folds for flocks.

1:12 “*Complacently*”— Amos 6:1.

“*Dregs*”— Jer 48:11.

“*The LORD will not do*”— they felt secure in
their sin and unbelief, thinking that God was
inactive. Compare Ps 10:11; 73:11-12.

1:13 “*Booty*”— Jer 15:13; 2 Kings 24:13.

1:14 Verse 7.

“*Near*”— Joel 1:15.

1:15 Amos 5:18-20.

1:16 Joel 2:2.

1:17 “*Blind men*”— Deut 28:28-29; Isa 59:10.

1:18 “*Wrath*”— notes at Num 25:3; Ps 90:7-11;
John 3:36; Rom 1:18. The wealthy sometimes
think their riches give them security. But they
will learn that there is no security when God
rises in anger against them.

“*Devoured*”— vs 2,3; 3:8.

2:1 “*Nation not desirable*”— Judah (Jer 3:3,25; 6:15).
Their behavior was shameful but they were not
ashamed of it.

2:2-3 A call to repentance before punishment falls.

2:3 “*Seek*”— Hos 14:1-3; Joel 2:12-14; Amos 5:4,6;
Isa 55:6-7; Jer 29:13.

“*Meek*”— only the humble would be willing to
listen to the prophet and seek God.

“*Righteousness*”— Isa 1:17; Matt 6:33.

“*Meekness*”— Isa 57:15; 66:2; Jam 4:6-10.

“*Perhaps*”— Joel 2:14; Amos 5:15.

2:4-7 A prophecy of God’s judgment on the
Philistines. See also Amos 1:6-8; Ezek 25:15-17.
Note on Philistines at Gen 10:14. Gaza, Ashkelon,
Ashdod and Ekron were important cities in
their land.

2:5 “*Kerethites*”— 1 Sam 30:14; 2 Sam 8:18.

- ⁷ And the coast will be for the remnant of the house of Judah.
They will feed *their flocks* there.
In the evening they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon;
for the LORD their God will visit them,
and turn away their captivity.
- ⁸ “I have heard the insults of Moab, and the taunts of the children of Ammon, with which they have insulted my people, and exalted *themselves* against their borders.
- ⁹ Therefore, as I live”, says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “surely Moab will become like Sodom, and the *land of the children of Ammon* like Gomorrah, a place of weeds and salt pits, and a permanent desolation. Those who are left of my people will plunder them, and the remnant of my people will possess them.
- ¹⁰ This they will have for their pride, because they have insulted and exalted *themselves* against the people of the LORD of hosts”.
- ¹¹ The LORD *will be* terrifying to them, for he will famish all the gods of the earth. And each *people* will worship him from their own place,

- all the islands of the nations.
- ¹² “You Ethiopians also *will be* slain by my sword”.
- ¹³ And he will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation *and* as dry as a desert.
- ¹⁴ And flocks will lie down in the middle of her, *and* all the beasts of the country. Both the cormorant and the bittern will lodge on the tops of its pillars; *their* voice will sing through the windows. Desolation *will be* on the threshold; for he will lay bare the cedar work.
- ¹⁵ This *is* the rejoicing city that lived without a care, that said in her heart, “I *am*, and *there is* no one beside me”.
- What a desolation she has become!
A place for beasts to lie down!
Everyone who passes by her will hiss, *and* shake his fist.

- 3** Woe to her who is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!
- ² She has not obeyed *God's* voice; she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the LORD; she has not drawn near to her God.
- ³ Her princes within her *are* roaring lions;

2:7 “Remnant”— Isa 11:11,16; 28:5; 37:32; Jer 23:3. “Turn away their captivity”— or “restore their well-being” — the Hebrew means either. Deut 30:3; Jer 32:44; Hos 14:4-9; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:13-15.

2:8-9 God pronounces judgment on the people of Moab and the Ammonites together. They were descended from the same man (Gen 19:36-38), and lived in the same general area. For other prophecies about them see Isa 11:14; 15:1—16:14; Jer 9:26; chapter 48; 49:1-6; Ezek 21:28-32; 25:1-11; Amos 2:1-3. Both nations were continual enemies of Israel.

2:9 “LORD of hosts”— note at 1 Sam 1:3.

“Sodom”, “Gomorrah”— Gen 19:23-29.

“Will possess them”— this will be fulfilled in the future, since it has not been fulfilled up to the present time.

2:10 “Pride”— Isa 16:6; Jer 49:16; Obad 3. See how God loathes pride — Prov 6:16-17; Isa 2:12-18.

2:11 “Each people will worship Him”— 3:9; Ps 86:9;

Hab 2:14; Zech 14:9,16. A time is coming when there will not be idols and gods in any country and all peoples everywhere will worship only the true God.

2:12 Again God speaks. Note on “Ethiopia”— or “Cush”— at Isa 18:1.

“My sword”— an enemy nation. Compare Isa 10:5.

2:13-15 For other prophecies against Assyria and its capital Nineveh, see Isa 10:12-19; 19:23-25; Nahum 1—3 chapters. Note on Assyria at 2 Kings 15:19.

2:14 “Cormorant and the bittern”— it is unclear exactly what birds are indicated by the Hebrew.

2:15 “I am”— compare Isa 47:10.

3:1-8 The prophet now speaks of Jerusalem — this is the only city of which it could be said that the LORD (Jehovah God) was in it — v 5.

3:1 “Oppressing city”— Jer 6:6; 22:3.

3:2 Jer 7:28; 22:21; Matt 7:21; Luke 6:46.

3:3 The weak and helpless were their prey.

- her judges *are* evening wolves;
they leave no bone to gnaw
to the morning.
- ⁴ Her prophets *are* light,
treacherous persons.
Her priests have defiled
the sanctuary,
they have done violence to the law.
- ⁵ The just LORD *is* in her midst.
He will do no evil.
Each morning he brings his justice
to light; he does not fail.
But the unjust know no shame.
- ⁶ "I have cut off nations.
Their towers are in ruins.
I made their streets desolate
so that no one passes through
them.
Their cities are destroyed,
so that there is no man,
no inhabitant.
- ⁷ I said, 'If only you would fear me
and receive instruction',
so that their dwelling place
would not be cut off,
in all that I laid on them.
But they rose early *and* corrupted
all their deeds.
- ⁸ Therefore wait for me,
says the LORD,
until the day that I rise up for plunder.
For my decision *is* to gather
the nations,
to assemble the kingdoms,
to pour out on them my
indignation,
- all my fierce anger.
For the whole earth will be devoured
by the fire of my jealousy.
- ⁹ For then I will restore to the people
a pure language,
that they may all call on the name
of the LORD,
to serve him with one consent.
- ¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
my worshippers,
the daughter of my dispersed,
will bring my offering.
- ¹¹ In that day you will not be put
to shame for any of your deeds,
by which you have transgressed
against me,
for then I will take away from your
midst those who rejoice
in your pride,
and you will no longer be haughty
on my holy mountain.
- ¹² I will also leave a humble
and lowly people in your midst,
and they will trust in the name
of the LORD.
- ¹³ The remnant of Israel will do
no evil or speak lies,
nor will a deceitful tongue be found
in their mouth.
They will feed *their flocks*
and lie down,
and no one will make *them* afraid".
- ¹⁴ Sing, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with
all *your* heart,

3:4 These prophets were false prophets. Compare Jer 5:31; 14:14; 23:16,32. The work of the priests was to teach God's law and see that the people practiced it – Deut 31:9-13; 2 Chron 17:8-9; Jer 2:8; 23:11.

3:5 "Just" – or "righteous" – Ps 11:7; 89:14; Deut 32:4.

"*In her midst*" – God's glory, His presence was in His temple in Jerusalem. From there He worked justice in the earth, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked.

"*Know no shame*" – 2:1.

3:6 God speaks and gives an illustration of the justice He works in the earth.

3:7 "*Dwelling place*" – Jerusalem. God wished to spare His city – Ps 132:13; Matt 23:37-39. But He could not overlook the wickedness of the people.

"*Rose early*" – they were eager to get to their corrupted work. Verse 7 in Hebrew is obscure and difficult to translate.

3:8 "*Wait for me*" – God would deal with them as they deserved.

"*Anger*" – Num 25:3; Ps 90:7-11.

"*Devoured*" – 1:2-3,18; Isa 24:1-13.

3:9 Though God will cause great calamities and devastations on the earth there will be nations left for Him to purify. And He will do so and the world will be united in worship of the true God – 2:11; Zech 14:9.

3:10 "*My dispersed*" – Deut 4:27; 28:64; Jer 9:16.

"*Offering*" – Isa 11:11-12; 60:7.

3:11 "*You*" – God speaks to Jerusalem. This condition of the people of Israel has not appeared from that day to this. So its fulfilment awaits the future.

3:13 "*Remnant*" – 2:7.

3:14-15 Compare Isa 12:1,6; 40:1-2; 51:11. God speaks of something still in the future as if it had already taken place. See Isa 46:10.

3:14 "*Daughter of Zion*" – note at Ps 9:14.

O daughter of Jerusalem!
 15 The LORD has taken away
 judgments on you,
 he has cast out your enemy.
 The king of Israel, the LORD,
 is in your midst.
 You will see no more disaster.
 16 In that day it will be said
 to Jerusalem, "Do not fear",
 and to Zion, "Do not
 let your hands hang limply".
 17 The LORD your God in
 your midst is mighty.
 He will save you,
 he will rejoice over you with joy,
 he will rest in his love,
 he will rejoice over you
 with singing.
 18 "I will gather *those* among you

who grieve for the appointed
 assembly,
 to *whom* the scorning of
 it was a burden.
 19 See, at that time I will deal
 with all who trouble you,
 and I will save the lame,
 and gather those who were
 driven out;
 and I will see that they get praise
 and fame in every land where
 they have been put to shame.
 20 At that time I will bring you *back*,
 at the time that I gather you.
 For I will give you a name and
 praise among all the peoples
 of the earth,
 when I restore you from captivity
 before your eyes, says the LORD.

3:15 "*The king of Israel*"—Ezek 37:26-28; Zech 14:16; Isa 44:6. Notice the words "no more" – words as yet unfulfilled.

3:16 "*In that day*"— vs 9,11.

"*Limpily*"— Isa 35:3-4; Heb 12:12.

3:17 A great verse showing the joy and satisfaction God has in His people. This will be true in the future of Jerusalem and its people. It is true now of believers in Christ.

"*He will save*"— Isa 46:13; 51:5; 63:1; Rom 1:16;

Heb 7:25.

"*Rejoice*"— Ps 147:11; Isa 62:4; Eph 1:3-6.

"*Love*"— Isa 40:1; Hos 14:4; Rom 5:5; 1 John 4:16-18.

"*Singing*"— God sings over His redeemed people as parents sing to an infant safe in their arms.

3:18 God speaks and comforts His people.

3:19 "*All who trouble you*"— enemy nations.

3:20 Jer 29:14; Ezek 37:12,21-28; Amos 9:14-15.

"*You from captivity*"— or "your well-being".

