

STUDIES IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

The Book of *Zephaniah*

Prepared by:
Joel D. Hestand, D.Min.

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ZEPHANIAH
THE PROPHET OF PROMISE

ZEPHANIAH "Jehovah Hides" ("Has Hidden") ^{→ Ps 17:8}. Three other men in the Bible carry the same name. Zephaniah is a descendant of Hezekiah. His prophecy falls between that of Micah and Nahum. He is a contemporary with Jeremiah. Often said to be the most "uncompromising of all the prophets."

GREAT, GREAT - great
father

HOME: Probably Jerusalem (1:4)

OCCUPATION:
Unknown

DATE: 630 - 625 BC

BACKGROUND:
2 Kings 22,23; 2 Chronicles 34-37

THEME: "The Coming of the Day of Jehovah" *Repentance has come too late - now comes the wrath of God -
a challenge to awaken from spiritual slumber*

KEY WORDS:
Visitation; Restoration

CHARACTERISTICS:
Hot, fiery, burning; Zephaniah is called the "Puritan." The fieriest of the prophets; The Day of Jehovah is mentioned 14 times in the book. The book is simple and austere; somber in tone; filled with threatening and denunciations; one of the seldom studied books of the Old Testament. The closing section is described as the "Sweetest Love Song In The Old Testament." *Runs from fierce denunciation of evil to passages of exquisite beauty and tenderness.*

OUTLINE: Look Within (1:1-2:3) [Wrath Coming On Judah]
Look Around (2:4-3:8) [Wrath On All Nations]
Look Beyond (3:9-20) [After Wrath, Healing]

LESSONS: Man's belief about God largely determines his conduct
The wrath of God is a terrible thing when turned upon sin
The necessity of warning people - Zephaniah 1:14-16
God gives assurance that the humble ones will be safe in His presence
God's purpose is not to wreck vengeance, but to cleanse and refine
The spiritual natures of God's kingdom (3:14-20)
Lack of trust in God leads to one form or another of false worship
Greater blessings mean greater responsibility (Luk 12)
Consider Psalm 17:8

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ZEPHANIAH: A Teaching Outline

- The Judgment In the Day of the Lord** 1:1—3:8
 - A. The Judgment on the Whole Earth** 1:1-3
 - B. The Judgment on the Nation of Judah** 1:4—2:3
 - 1. Causes of the Judgment 1:4-13
 - 2. Description of the Judgment 1:14-18
 - 3. Call to Repentance 2:1-3
 - C. The Judgment on the Nations** 2:4-15
 - Surrounding Judah
 - 1. Judgment against Gaza (West) 2:4-7
 - 2. Judgment against Moab and Ammon 2:8-11 (East)
 - 3. Judgment against Ethiopia (South) 2:12
 - 4. Judgment against Assyria (North) 2:13-15
 - D. The Judgment on Jerusalem** 3:1-7
 - 1. Jerusalem's Wickedness 3:1-4
 - 2. The Lord's Justice 3:5-7
 - E. The Judgment on the Whole Earth** 3:8
- I. The Salvation in the Day of the Lord** 3:9-20
 - A. The Promise of Conversion** 3:9-13
 - B. The Promise of Restoration** 3:14-20

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ZEPHANIAH, BOOK OF

A brief prophetic book of the Old Testament that emphasizes the certainty of God's judgment and the preservation of a remnant, a small group of people who will continue to serve as God's faithful servants in the world. The book takes its title from its author, the prophet Zephaniah, whose name means "the Lord has hidden."

For an outline of the book see Zephaniah

Structure of the Book. Zephaniah contains only three short chapters, but these chapters are filled with some of the most vivid pictures of God's judgment to be found in the Bible. After a brief introduction of himself as God's spokesman, the prophet launches immediately into a description of God's approaching wrath. He portrays this great "day of the Lord" as a time of "trouble and distress," "darkness and gloominess," "trumpet and alarm" (1:14-15).

Zephaniah's prophecy makes it clear that the nation of Judah, as well as surrounding countries, will feel the sting of God's wrath. Judah's capital city, Jerusalem, is soundly condemned for its wickedness, rebellion, and injustice. The prophet even portrays God with searchlamps as He exposes the corruption of the city and marks it for His certain judgment (1:12).

In spite of its underlying theme of judgment and punishment, the Book of Zephaniah closes on a positive note. After God judges the wayward nations, the prophet announces He will raise up a remnant of the faithful who will continue to serve as His Covenant People in the world. The book ends with a glorious promise for the future, a time when God will "quiet you in His love" and "rejoice over you with singing" (3:17).

Authorship and Date. Scholars are in general agreement that Zephaniah the prophet wrote this book that bears his name. In his introduction (1:1), the author traces his ancestry back four generations to Hezekiah, a former king of Judah noted for his faithfulness to God. Zephaniah must have been proud that he was the great-great-grandson of this beloved ruler, who had led his people back to worship of the one true God.

The book also tells how Zephaniah the prophet ministered during the days of Josiah, a godly king who reigned over the nation of Judah from about 641 to about 609 BC. Most scholars place the writing of the book at about 627 BC.

Historical Setting. This book belongs to a dark period in Judah's history. About 100 years before Zephaniah's time, Judah's sister nation, the northern kingdom of Israel, had fallen to a foreign power because of its sin and idolatry. Zephaniah sensed that the same thing was about to happen to the southern kingdom of Judah—and for precisely the same reason.

Under the leadership of two successive evil kings, Manasseh and Amon, the people of Judah had fallen into worship of false gods. Zephaniah delivered his prophecy and wrote this book to warn the people of God's approaching wrath and judgment. As Zephaniah predicted, God punished His people and the surrounding pagan nations through a superior foreign power. Not even a brief religious renewal under the good king Josiah was enough to turn the tide of paganism and false worship that carried Judah toward certain destruction. Judgment came to the nation in 587 BC, when the invading Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem and carried its leading citizens into CAPTIVITY in Babylon.

Theological Contribution. The judgment of the Lord portrayed by the prophet Zephaniah springs from His nature as a God of holiness. Because God demands holiness and righteousness in His people, He will judge those who continue to sin and rebel (1:17). But the Lord also is merciful and faithful to His promise. To the committed remnant He offers encouragement and protection from the approaching dark day (2:1-3). And to the righteous He promises the final realization of the covenant which He sealed with Abraham hundreds of years earlier. People of all nations will gather to worship the Lord (2:11; 3:9). His own people

will be renewed in righteousness (3:11-13). And the King of Kings Himself will rule in their midst (3:15).

Special Considerations. The prophet Zephaniah shows keen familiarity with the city of Jerusalem (1:10-11). Since he was a member of the royal line, he was probably a resident of Jerusalem. It must have troubled him deeply to pronounce God's prophecies of judgment against his beloved city.

One of the most beautiful passages in the book is the description of the joy of the Lord (3:8-20). His song of joy will join the happy singing of His people. The dark day of doom will not last. A happy day is coming for those who, like Zephaniah, are "hidden in the day of the Lord's anger" (2:3).

Also see ZEPHANIAH.

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Zep 1:1

"The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah:"

OF ROYAL BLOOD - WOULD HAVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COURT
"TSEPHAN-YAH"

Zep 1:2

""I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the LORD."

Zep 1:3

""I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the LORD."

THE OBJECT OF GOD'S WRATH

Zep 1:4

""I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests--"

Zep 1:5

"those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molech,"

FORBIDDEN BY MOSES (DT 4:19)
DIVIDED LOYALTY

2 CLASSES OF IDOLATRY

Zep 1:6

"those who turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him."

"COULD CARE LESS"

ANOTHER CLASS OF WORSHIPPER

Zep 1:7

"Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited."

IRREVERENCE

ALL ARE TO FALL UNDER GOD'S JUDGMENT-
Princes
King's Sons
Thieves
Traders
WEALTHY

Zep 1:8

"On the day of the Lord's sacrifice I will punish the princes and the king's sons and all those clad in foreign clothes."

Zep 1:9

"On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit."

VIOLENT BURGLARY
AND THIEVERY

Zep 1:10

""On that day," declares the LORD, "a cry will go up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the New Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills."

→ NORTHERN WALL, TOWARD THE EAST (DIRECTION FROM WHICH THE DESTROYERS WOULD COME)

Zep 1:11

"Wail, you who live in the market district; all your merchants will be wiped out, all who trade with silver will be ruined."

Zep 1:12

"At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.'"

Zep 1:13

"Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. They will build houses but not live in them; they will plant vineyards but not drink the wine."

Zep 1:14

"The great day of the LORD is near-- near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there."

Zep 1:15

"That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness,"

VIVID AND ELECTRIFYING DESCRIPTION

Zep 1:16

"a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers."

Feels Like you are present!

Zep 1:17

"I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth."

Zep 1:18

"Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth."

Zep 2:1

"Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation," WITHOUT LONGING FOR SOMETHING BETTER
HAVE SUNK TO THE LEVEL OF THE HEATHEN

Zep 2:2

"before the appointed time arrives and that day sweeps on like chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you."

Zep 2:3

"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."

CALL FOR ACTION

LET REPENTANCE BE DEMONSTRATED

NO NATION IS TO ESCAPE
(4-7)

Zep 2:4 → STRONG

MARKET-PLACE

MIGHT

CITIES OF PHILISTIA AND THEIR JUDGMENT
(TO THE WEST)

"Gaza will be abandoned and Ashkelon left in ruins. At midday Ashdod will be emptied and Ekron uprooted."

DEEP ROOTED

↳ WHEN LEAST EXPECTED; SHORTNESS OF THE SIEGE (½ day)

Zep 2:5

Philistines

"Woe to you who live by the sea, O Kerethite people; the word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines. "I will destroy you, and none will be left.""

Zep 2:6

"The land by the sea, where the Kerethites dwell, will be a place for shepherds and sheep pens."

ONCE HEAVILY POPULATED; STRONG NATION OF PEOPLE

Zep 2:7

"It will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah; there they will find pasture. In the evening they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon. The LORD their God will care for them; he will restore their fortunes."

FULFILLED WHEN JUDAH RETURNED FROM CAPTIVITY

Zep 2:8

""I have heard the insults of Moab and the taunts of the Ammonites, who insulted my people and made threats against their land."

VERSES 8-11

CITIES TO THE EAST HAVE JUDGMENT
DECLARED

Zep 2:9

"Therefore, as surely as I live," declares the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, "surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah-- a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them; the survivors of my nation will inherit their land.""

PERPETUAL DESOLATION

SWEARS BY HIMSELF - NO ONE HIGHER

Zep 2:10

OBADIAH 3, 4

"This is what they will get in return for their pride, for insulting and mocking the people of the LORD Almighty."

Zep 2:11

"The LORD will be awesome to them when he destroys all the gods of the land. The nations on every shore will worship him, every one in its own land."

GOD WILL MAKE CLEAR WHO IS SUPREME!

Zep 2:12

""You too, O Cushites, will be slain by my sword.""

ETHIOPIA, MOST REMOTE KNOWN TO THE JEWS

VERSES 12-15

ETHIOPIA TO THE SOUTH
ASSYRIA TO THE NORTH

JUDGMENT IS BROUGHT

Zep 2:13

"He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, leaving Nineveh utterly desolate and dry as the desert."

MOST POWERFUL NATION ON THE EARTH

Zep 2:14

"Flocks and herds will lie down there, creatures of every kind. The desert owl and the screech owl will roost on her columns. Their calls will echo through the windows, rubble will be in the doorways, the beams of cedar will be exposed."

Zep 2:15

"This is the carefree city that lived in safety. She said to herself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.' What a ruin she has become, a lair for wild beasts! All who pass by her scoff and shake their fists."

HOW THE MIGHTY ARE BROUGHT LOW WHEN
GOD STRETCHES FORTH HIS HAND AGAINST
THEM!

Zep 3:1

"Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled!"

VERSES 1-7

JERUSALEM IS WARNED. THEY
CAN BE HELPED IF THEY WILL
FEAR GOD

Zep 3:2

"She obeys no one, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD, she does not draw near to her God."

Zep 3:3

1. "Her officials are roaring lions, her rulers are evening wolves, who leave nothing for the morning."

FOUR DRASTIC MISTAKES -

1. DID NOT OBEY
2. DID NOT RECEIVE INSTRUCTIONS
3. DID NOT TRUST IN GOD
4. DID NOT DRAW NEAR TO GOD

Zep 3:4

3. "Her prophets are arrogant; they are treacherous men. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law."

Zep 3:5

"The LORD within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame."

GOD ACTS CONSISTENTLY WITH HIS NATURE AND
CHARACTER

Zep 3:6

"I have cut off nations; their strongholds are demolished. I have left their streets deserted, with no one passing through. Their cities are destroyed; no one will be left--no one at all."

Zep 3:7

"I said to the city, 'Surely you will fear me and accept correction!' Then her dwelling would not be cut off, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did."

Zep 3:8

→ TO PUT ONE'S TRUST IN
"Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them-- all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger."

THE PIOUS ARE URGED TO WAIT PATIENTLY
FOR THE LORD

Zep 3:9

"Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder." YOKED - STRIVING TOGETHER

HB 13:15,16

Zep 3:10

"From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings."

VERSES 9-13

PURIFIED LIPS FOR GOD'S
PEOPLE

Zep 3:11

"On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill."

VERSES 11-13

REPENTANCE
REFORMATION
RESTITUTION

Zep 3:12

"But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD."

Zep 3:13

"The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid."

PICTURE AND PROMISE OF HOPE

Zep 3:14

"Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!"

VERSES 14-17

THE PEOPLE WILL REJOICE

Zep 3:15

"The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm."

Zep 3:16

"On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp."

SYMBOL OF DESPAIR

Zep 3:17

"The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

Zep 3:18

"The sorrows for the appointed feasts I will remove from you; they are a burden and a reproach to you."

VERSES 18-20

RENEWAL OF THE PROMISE TO

GATHER WHAT WAS DRIVEN
AWAY

Zep 3:19

"At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame."

Zep 3:20

"At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the LORD."

THE DAY OF JEHOVAH

IS AT HAND - 1⁷

IS NEAR - 1¹⁴

A DAY OF DARKNESS & TERROR - 1^{15, 16}

A DAY OF JUDGMENT AGAINST SIN - 1¹⁷

A DAY OF GREAT CONVULSIONS OF
NATURE - 1¹⁵

IS UPON ALL CREATION

1^{2, 3} 2¹⁻¹⁵ 3⁸

ZEPHANIAH

The Prophet of Promise

The name "Zehpaniah," which is borne by three other men mentioned in the Old Testament, means "Jehovah hides," or "Jehovah has hidden" or "treasured."¹ Zephaniah was a descendant of Hezekiah, king of Judah. In point of time his prophecy falls between that of Micah and Nahum. It was delivered about the time of the beginning of the labors of Jeremiah (626 B. C.), in the first part of the reign of Josiah. Since the death of Micah the kingdom of Judah seems to have enjoyed a state of peace and quiet, a sort of lull before the storm that was soon to break over Western Asia including Palestine.²

This prophet, unlike Micah, was of aristocratic lineage. Some scholars hold that he was related to Josiah, who at the time was king of Judah. If so this background enabled him to speak effectively on the sins of his time.³

Zephaniah, who from the subscription of his prophecy was a great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah, was one of the earliest to urge a return to the prophetic principles of Isaiah and Micah after the long period of national apostacy brought about by Manasseh's policy.⁴

HIS TIME

Zephaniah lived at a crucial time in international affairs. The Assyrian rulers, who for more than a century had dominated southwest Asia, were now declining in power. Babylonia, under Nabopolassar, was soon to gain the supremacy in this area of the world. Although Nineveh did not fall until 612 B. C., Babylonia was the dominant influence as early as 625 B. C., the date of

Zephaniah.⁵ Only the earlier part of Josiah's reign furnishes a suitable occasion for the prophecy. Evidently at the time of its delivery an enemy was threatening the borders of Judah and of the surrounding nations. But the only foes of Judah during the latter part of the 7th century meeting all the conditions are the Scythians, who swept over Western Asia about 625 B. C. At the time the prophecy was delivered their advance against Egypt seems to have been still in the future, but imminent (1:14); hence the prophet's activity may be placed between 630 and 625, perhaps in 626. If this date is correct, Zephaniah and Jeremiah began their ministries in the same year.⁶

It will be recalled that the chief event in the reign of Josiah, king of Judah, was his reformation. This was a nationwide movement (backed^{✓ or}) by the deepest conviction of the young king. It is likely that Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and even Habakkuk and Nahum, supported the reforms of Josiah. The discovery of the book of law in the repairing of the temple and the deep religious enthusiasm that followed must have furnished an inspiring situation for the work of a young man like Zephaniah. The young prophet had accurate knowledge of conditions in the city of Jerusalem where he probably lived all his life. His stern denunciations of the sins of the people and his impassioned cries for repentance have given him the name "puritan."⁷

HIS BOOK

The key phrase of the book mentioned fourteen times in the first chapter is The Day of Jehovah. The great and only theme of Zephaniah is the coming "day of Jehovah." when the Lord would

reveal himself in his fulness to the whole world, judging evil doers and fulfilling his great purposes of redemption among men. But judgment is not regarded by Zephaniah as an end in itself; it is rather a means of making Jehovah known to the world and the ushering in of his kingdom of salvation. His theme, accordingly, is little less than "the consummation of the world's history."⁸

This is the simplest and most typical example of the "Doom Form" of prophecy, presenting the familiar topic, The Day of the Lord, in a Divine word of denunciation and threatening (here presented as prose) interrupted at intervals by lyric passages seconding, celebrating, or otherwise dwelling upon successive points in the speech of Deity.⁹

The book is exceedingly somber in its tone, and is filled with threatenings and denunciations; but the sun breaks through the clouds in the last chapter, and the prophet foretells the coming of a glad day, when the Hebrews shall become a praise among all the people of the earth. The following synopsis briefly expresses the contents of the book:

- (1) The announcement of coming judgments upon Judah, ch. 1.
- (2) The call to repentance, ch. 2:1-3.
- (3) Judgments threatened upon surrounding nations, ch. 2:4-15.
- (4) A woe pronounced upon the sinners of Jerusalem because of their corruption and spiritual blindness in continuing in wickedness, in spite of all the judgments meted out to the heathen nations, ch. 3:1-8.
- (5) A universal judgment foretold which only a godly remnant should escape, ch. 3:9-13.
- (6) The future glory of Israel, when Jehovah shall deliver his people, and cause them to become famous throughout the earth, ch. 3:14-20.¹⁰

The continuous movement of the book is notable. It begins with an impending day of wrath for Judah: It is called the Great Day of God, a day of terror, about to break on Judah and the surrounding nations, ch. 1:1-2:3; then continues with a day of wrath for the nations, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria, ch. 2:4-3:8; then closes with the Promise; the coming of a "Pure Language." The calm after the storm.¹¹

His book is a short one, having only three chapters with a total of fifty-three verses, it is made up largely of dark pictures but expresses the conviction that there is always hope and even joy for those who fully trust Jchovah.¹²

Note the ascending scale in the crowning passage of restoration, cleansing, victory and joy. No wonder the closing section has been described as the sweetest love song in the Old Testament ...What revelation of the heart of God is more exquisite than this? There is nothing comparable to the picture of God singing for joy over His people. Yes, we have a God who sobs over sin but sings over those who forsake their sin. The careful reader will note the "He wills"--He will save, rejoice, rest and joy. See too, the "I wills"--I will undo, set, bring and make. The book ends showing the place of defeat to be the place of victory (vs. 19); also the unlimited influence of those who are fully yielded to the God who loves and cares (vs. 20).¹³

HIS PERMANENT TEACHINGS

The book of Zephaniah, though small, is nevertheless, valuable. By many it is undervalued, and by most passed by as comparatively barren of pulpit texts. On the contrary, it is of

abiding value, and as a book should not be estimated by its size.

Here are some of its permanent teachings:

1. The constant necessity of warning (1:14-16).
Zephaniah sets all modern teachers an example of how men should be confronted with the stern realities of the moral world.
2. The profoundly earnest moral tone which pervades the entire book. Zephaniah is deeply sensitive of the sins of his people, and of the moral need which impels Jehovah to visit them with discipline and judgment.
3. The spiritual natures of God's kingdom (3:14-20).
While there is no explicit reference to a personal Messiah in Zephaniah's prophecies, yet we may well believe that whatever the prophet himself saw in this apocalyptic vision, his words look forward to the Great Deliverance wrought by Christ. Most remarkable is the fact that his conception of the heavenly kingdom includes all mankind.¹⁴

ZEPHANIAH -- "JEHOVAH HIDES"¹⁵

Memory verses: Zephaniah 1:12; 3:17

I. General Observation:

1. Ancestry--Unique, Hezekiah, the prophet's great-great-grandfather.
2. Home--evidently Jerusalem, "This place" (1:4).
3. Occupation--unknown.
4. Characterization--The fires of hell--repentance too late, now comes wrath.
5. Date--during Josiah's reign, 639-608 B. C.
6. Teachings and Lessons--Jehovah is the God of the universe; Day of Jehovah; Universalism, terror upon all.

II. Outline:

1. Judgment upon all the world, Judah in particular, 1:2-18.
2. Exhortation to repentance and perseverance, 2:1-3:8.
3. Promise of the happiness of God's people from among all the world, 3:9-20.

Tips for Teachers

LEONARD MULLENS

Johnny Ramsey, of Garland, Texas, writes on the message of the prophet Zephaniah this week. Great lessons for contemporary living can be found in these Old Testament prophets, and we thank Brother Ramsey for his contribution to this rather neglected field.—Leonard Mullens, 3535 So. Westmoreland, Dallas, Texas 75233.

Zephaniah

JOHNNY RAMSEY

There are so many glittering treasures in the small, but exceptional, Old Testament book of Zephaniah. The name of that prophet meant "Jehovah shall protect" or "hidden by the Lord." Like Jeremiah this unsung spokesman was a contemporary of Josiah, the valiant king of Judah (2 Kings 23). Evidently all three of these godly men were quite young and tremendously loyal to the cause of heaven. The people with whom they labored were on the verge of Babylonian bondage because their sinfulness had gone beyond the longsuffering of God (Jer. 7:23-28). Indeed, the Jews (2 Kings 16:6) "rose up early to corrupt all their doings" (Zeph. 3:7). Such a head-start on sin landed them in the snare of Nebuchadnezzar for seven decades.

Several scholars agree that "Zephaniah was the most uncompromising of all the prophets" and *his message simple and austere*. Dummelow captures the pace of the young preacher in these words: "Youthful courage and undaunted zeal for righteousness ring through his brief prophecy." Others, like Laetsch and Ellison, admit that "the death knell of irrevocable doom pulsates through all his utterances." Zephaniah was a very serious young man!

One runs the gamut of emotions—from fierce denunciation of evil to passages of exquisite beauty and tenderness in this seldom-studied section of Holy Scripture. There are abundant principles "written beforehand for our learning" (Rom. 15:4) in the book of Zephaniah. Let us give careful attention now to the three chapters and 53 verses that comprise this tiny but potent book.

Did you know that the most often printed hymn was based upon Zephaniah's reference to *The Day of the Lord*? This spiritual song of the thirteenth century—"O Day of Wrath, O Day of Mourning"—captured the graphic warning of Zephaniah 1:15:

A Day of

WRATH—Trouble—Distress—Waste—Desolation
DARKNESS—GLOOM—CLOUDS—Thick Darkness
The Trumpet—(Judgment) and ALARM!

Amos and Obadiah and Joel also refer to *the day of the Lord*. It is possible that Revelation 1:10 alludes to the same occasion instead of the first day of the week!

To avoid such calamity Zephaniah mentions in 3:11-13 a golden moment of repentance, reformation and restitution in the hallowed presence of the Creator. Because of the transformation such attitudes provide, the people of God would no longer be haughty and their trust in the Maker would deepen. A faithful remnant would "feed and lie down and none would make them afraid." The tranquil joy and peaceful satisfaction of godliness would be Judah's portion once more! This exact premise is captured for us today by E. V. Kelley in a gospel song:

From the mire of sin's dark way cleanse my soul of every stain

Fold me Jesus now I pray beneath the shadow of thy wing.

Sadly, however, the longsuffering of God produced the idea of weak hearts that heaven was unconcerned with the wickedness of sinful men. The tragic mixture of Assyrian star worship, Philistine superstition and silly paganism drove the people far afield from the Lord. They had been weighed

in the balance and had been far short of God's standard. *No star of hope is to be seen—only clouds and thick darkness from which flash the lightning bolts of the Lord's fierce wrath* is a statement from Laetsch that cogently sums up the problem of Zephaniah's audience.

One of the most interesting points of background is the searching Zephaniah, as artists have captured the scene, looking diligently for one righteous man even as Jeremiah 5:1 states: "If ye find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it."

On the brink of captivity Zephaniah powerfully told the people that silver and gold could never deliver them. Whether he referred to their idols made of precious metal or the covetousness of wayward hearts, the lesson is the same. Lack of trust in God leads to one form or another of false worship!

T. O. Chisolm furnishes devotees of Jehovah with the proper emphasis:

Just to know that he is with me,
Just to have his promise true;
That he never will forsake me,
All my earthly journey through.

This well-paced book of prophecy reveals the oracle of the Ruler of the universe in a cadence of shocking abruptness and impartial judgment. Revealed within this brief treatise is the absolute overthrow of Nineveh and the similar decline of Jerusalem for horrendous crimes and flippant sins. Zephaniah is a summons to repentance and a challenge to awaken from spiritual stupor in view of the great day of the Lord that soon will press down upon them. Where sin abounds God will manifest himself in retribution. As Paul would later state—God's goodness should lead them to repentance—but Zephaniah's "ardent vehemence of moral passion" contributed to a humbled remnant also! As Jack P. Lewis summarized in his excellent book on *The Minor Prophets*: "The concept of correction also plays a vital role in the book of Jeremiah." Sadly, Zephaniah's fellows made four drastic mistakes according to chapter 3: (1) they obeyed not; (2) they received not correction; (3) they trusted not in the Lord; (4) they drew not near to their God!

As 3:4 vividly summarizes: "They have done violence to the law. 'O day of wrath, O day of mourning, see fulfilled the prophet's warning, heaven and earth in ashes burning!'"

A few may escape this hour of reckoning but doom awaits the masses is Zephaniah's wailing cry. The heavenly Father desires to be the real King of Judah and when his subjects obey sincerely a *pure language* will be given them with which to praise their Maker (3:9-15). E. J. Young brilliantly captures this context in Zephaniah: "The sovereign disposition of the destinies of nations lies in the hands of the Lord and he will surely punish those who have ill-treated His chosen people."

It would be difficult to disagree with Young's three point outline of the book of Zephaniah: (a) the day of the Lord; (b) rebuke of the heathen; (c) Jerusalem's sin and future hope.

In the restoration of the Jews as poignantly told by Nehemiah, Ezra, Haggai and Malachi we see the fruition of these hopes. Not one thing Jehovah promised failed to come to pass. And ultimately, the Messiah came, *in due time* (Rom. 5:6), to bless all nations!

One of Zephaniah's themes reiterated by Christ in Luke 12 is the divine maxim: "Greater blessings mean greater responsibility."

There is a passage in Psalm 17:8 that beautifully sums up the meaning in the name of Zephaniah and also the richness of the contents of his message: "Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

Men like Zephaniah and messages like the burden of his courageous heart have enriched the history of the world!

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THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

Winston C. Temple

INTRODUCTION:

1. The Man.

- (1) Name. Zephaniah, "Tsephan-yah" a name which is borne by three other individuals in the Old Testament. (See 1 Chron. 6:36-38; Jer. 21:1; Zech. 6:10). In the LXX and the Vulgate, it appears as "Sophonias." It means "Jehovah Hides" or "hidden of Jehovah."¹
- (2) Ancestry. His lineage is traced by him back to "Hezekiah" (RSV). "...Amariah and King Manasseh were brothers, Gedaliah and King Amon were cousins, Cushi and King Josiah were second cousins, and Zephaniah was third cousin of the three kings Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zechariah; thus putting the prophet into familiar relationship with the court, to which his message seems to be specially directed (e.g. 1:8)...."² Hezekiah would have been the great-great-grandfather of Zephaniah. This would make the prophet of royal blood.

2. Place of Author's Home.

- (1) "This place" (1:4) suggests that Jerusalem was his home.
- (2) His knowledge of the topography of the city (1:10,11) also points to Jerusalem as his home.

3. Time of Writing.

- (1) Somewhere within the reign of Josiah, 639-608 B.C. (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chron. 34:3ff).
- (2) Josiah's reign can be divided into two parts, separated by the great reform of 621.
- (3) Arguments in favor of Zephaniah's prophecy falling in the latter part of Josiah's reign.
 - A. Deut. 28:29,30, is quoted in Zeph. 1:13,15,17 in a manner which shows that the former book was well known, but according to the modern view, the Deuteronomic Code was not known until 621, because it was lost (2 Kings 22:8).
 - B. The "remnant of Baal" (1:4) points to a period when much of the Baal-worship had been removed, which means subsequent to 621.
 - C. The condemnation of the "King's sons" (1:8) presupposes that at the time of the utterance they had reached the age of moral responsibility: this again points to the later period.
- (4) Arguments in favor of Zephaniah's prophecy falling in the early part of Josiah's reign.
 - A. The youth of the king would make

3. (4) A. Continued.

it easy for the royal princes to go to the excesses condemned by Zephaniah (1:8-9).

- B. The idoltrous practices condemned by Zephaniah (1:3-5) are precisely those abolished in 621.

- C. The temper described in 1:12 is explicable before 621 and after the death of Josiah in 608, but not between 621 and 608, when religious enthusiasm was widespread.

- D. Only the earlier part of Josiah's reign furnishes a suitable occasion for the prophecy. Evidently at the time of its delivery an enemy was threatening the borders of Judah and of the surrounding nations. But, the only foes of Judah during the latter part of the 7th century meeting all conditions are the Scythians, who swept over Western Asia about 625 B.C. At the time the prophecy was delivered their advance against Egypt seems to have been still in the future but eminent (1:14); hence the prophet's activity may be placed between 630 and 625, perhaps in 626. If this date is correct, Zephaniah and Jeremiah began their ministries in the same year?

4. Political Background.

(1) In Judah.

- A. Read 2 Kings 22, 23; 2 Chron. 34,35. Note especially 2 Kings 22:15-20.
- B. Hezekiah (reformer); Manasseh (rebel); Ammon (rebel); Josiah (reformer).
- C. Josiah came to the throne at the age of eight. At the age of sixteen he began to seek after Jehovah and at the age of twenty he began to purge Judah.
- D. Josiah's reforms.
 - (A) Josiah's reforms were indicative of his character. As proof of this statement we offer the following passages: 2 Kings 22:19 and 2 Kings 23:25, respectively. "...because thy heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before Jehovah, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith

4. (1) D. (A) Continued.

Jehovah. And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him."

(B) The reforms listed:

- a. The preliminary abolition of idolatry.
- b. The repair of the temple.
- c. The discovery in it of the Book of the Law.
- d. The consequent national reformation by the king; and lastly,
- e. The national observance of the Passover.⁴ (See 2 Kgs. 22,23 and 2 Chron. 34).

(2) In the East.

- A. Josiah evidently remained loyal to the Assyrian King, Ashurbanipal, who died c.a. 633 B.C.
- B. After Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian Empire began to disintegrate.
- C. 625 B. C. Nabopolassar, King of Babylon declared the independence of Chaldea from her Assyrian Lords.
- D. War between Babylon and Nineveh.
- E. Cyaxeres, the King of the Medes, took Asshur, the old Assyrian capitol in 614 B.C.
- F. Nabopolassar, assisted by Cyaxeres, took Nineveh in 612 B.C. In 610 B.C. the Babylonians and their allies took Haran. The Assyrians attempted to retake Haran in 609 B. C., but failed; thus ending Assyria's power.⁵
- G. Pharaoh - Necho of Egypt tried to help Assyria by marching north with his army (609 B. C.). Josiah attempted to stop him but was killed in the battle. For four years Egypt dominated Judah, but in 605 B. C. Necho was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchomish, west of Haran. This was in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer.46:2).
- H. Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk prophesied during Josiah's reign.
- I. Shallum succeeded Josiah. He was placed on the throne by popular demand. His name was changed to Jehoahaz. Pharaoh - Necho put him in chains and sent him to Egypt as a prisoner.
- J. Necho then placed Eliakim, the oldest brother of Jehoahaz, on Judah's throne. His name was changed to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim came under the control of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon after Necho's defeat in 605 B. C. Jehoia-

4. (2) J. Continued.

kim now transferred his loyalty to the new ruler, but later on failed to pay tribute and had to be punished (2 Chron. 36:6; 2 Kings 23:35 - 36; 24:1; c.f. Dan. 1:1-3). At this time most likely, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego were carried captive to Babylon (Dan.1:1-7).

- K. The next king was Coniah or Jehoia-chin. He proved disloyal to Nebuchadnezzar and again the Babylonian army came to Jerusalem. 10,000 Israelites were taken to Babylon in 597 B. C. Among them was Ezekiel, the prophet.

- L. Zedekiah, Judah's last king joined a coalition with Tyre, Sidon, Ammon, Edom and Moab against Babylon. Zedekiah begged for clemency and Nebuchadnezzar evidently gave it, but this was short-lived.

- (A) In 588 B. C. another ambitious Pharaoh (Hophra-Apries) sought Judah's help against Babylonia.

- (B) Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, took Zedekiah; killed his sons and seventy others in Zedekiah's presence; with this horrid picture on his mind, his eyes were put out.

- (C) Jerusalem was utterly destroyed (2 Kgs. 25:9).

- (D) Three different groups taken to Babylon 605, 597, and 587-86 B. C. End of the Kingdom of Judah.

M. Remnant of Judah.

- (A) Poor, discouraged and leaderless.

- (B) Nebuchadnezzar appointed a man named Gedaliah as governor.

- (C) Jeremiah was allowed to remain in Judah.

- (D) Gedaliah was murdered by Ishmael. Civil war resulted. The leaders fled to Egypt and took Jeremiah with them.⁶

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

THROUGH JUDGMENT TO BLESSING

I. LOOK WITHIN!--Wrath coming on Judah (1:1-2:3).

1. The Purpose of Jehovah to Judge (1-6).
2. The "Day" of Jehovah "At Hand" (7-18).
3. And so -- Plea to Jerusalem (2:1-3).

II. LOOK AROUND!--Wrath on all nations (2:4-3:8).

1. West, East--Philistia, Moab, Ammon (4-11).
2. South, North--Ethiopia and Assyria (12-15).
3. And So--"Woe" to Jerusalem (3:1-8).

III. LOOK BEYOND!--After Wrath, Healing (3:9-20).

1. Conversion of Gentile Peoples (9).
2. Restoring of Covenant People (10-15).
3. And So--The new Jerusalem (16-20).⁷

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

NOTE: The book may be properly divided into three main sections as follows --

I. LOOK WITHIN--Wrath Coming On Judah (1:1-2:3).

1. The purpose of Jehovah to judge. (1-6).
 - (1) Mankind had degraded himself to the point where God would not turn away His wrath (Gen. 6:5-8; 7:21-23).
 - (2) Key word (1-6) "EVERYTHING".

A. 1:2 - Everything that has sinned or that will suffer as a consequence of sin. The animal creation will suffer as a result of man's transgressions.

B. The Apostle Paul said in Rom. 8:20-22, "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope...For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

- (3) The judgment is on Judah, no one else is mentioned.

A. Mt. 3:12 - "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees."

B. The words and phrases such as:

(A) Utterly sweep away; overthrow the wicked; cut off from this place the remnant of Baal.

(B) Shows that Jehovah will be thorough in His judgment and that He is no respecter of persons.

(C) 2 Cor. 5:10; c.f. v.12 - "At that time I will search Jerusalem with Lamps..."

2. The "DAY" of Jehovah "At Hand" (7-18).

(1) "Be silent before the Lord God!" Irreverence of people indicated.

(2) Key word (7-18) "SACRIFICE".

A. Who is the sacrifice?

B. The wicked, selfish and debauched, inhabitants of Jerusalem.

(3) The prophet's message falls on hard hearts and heads. "The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill" (12).

(4) They were "...thickening upon their lees..."

A. They were living on their wealth in idleness and indifference (12).

B. Shocking reality was that they were not going to enjoy this wealth (Mt. 6:19-22).

(5) The day of the Lord is: Near, Hastening fast; its sound is bitter; it is a day of wrath, anguish, ruin, devastation, darkness, gloom,

1. 2. (5) Continued.

clouds, and a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities.

(6) The reason for this terrible day is "...Because they have sinned against the Lord!!" (17).

3. A plea to Jerusalem (2:1-3).

(1) A call to repentance.

(2) Why should they repent?

A. "...before you are driven away like the drifting chaff;

B. ...Before there comes upon you the fierce anger of the Lord;

C. ...before there comes upon you the day of the wrath of the Lord."

(3) Those that could repent (the humble) should seek the Lord.

A. WHY? "...perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the wrath of the Lord.

B. The blood bought church of Christ is the humble's hiding place today (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5).

(4) Zephaniah unlike Amos (Ch. 1:2-4) brings his denunciation first to Judah and then to her enemies.

II. LOOK AROUND -- Wrath on All Nations (2:4-3:8).

1. Philistines (2:4-7) - East.

(1) Gaza (strong) (Azzah) shall be Azobah (forsaken...)

(2) Ashkelon (the busy market place) shall be a desolation...

(3) Ashdod (might) will be driven out in the noon day (easily).

(4) Ekron (deep rooting) shall be uprooted.

(5) Cherothites (certain) the word of the Lord is against you.

2. Moab and Ammon shall become as --

3. Sodom and Gomorrah, 2:8-11.

4. Ethiopia shall be slain by (Jehovah's word, 2:12).

5. Assyria shall be destroyed...Nineveh, a desolation, (13-15).

6. The wicked Gentiles will suffer with the wicked children of God! Just payment for unjust transgressions. (Rom. 6:23).

7. Why woe to Jerusalem? (3:1-2).

(1) She listens to no voice.

(2) She accepts no correction.

(3) She does not trust in the Lord.

(4) She does not draw near to her God.

NOTE: Neither did she heed the fall of her sister, Israel in 722 B.C. (c.f. 1 Cor. 10:12).

(5) Judah's officials, judges, prophets and priests were corrupt. What a description of America today!

(6) The Lord in her midst sees and knows her sin..He constantly shows mercy and justice to her.

(7) Yet, they know no shame (5).

III. LOOK BEYOND -- After Wrath Healing (3:9-

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D

111. Continued.
30).

1. Conversion of Gentile peoples (9).
2. Restoring of covenant people (10-15).
3. The new Jerusalem (16-20).
 - (1) The Gospel age (Jno. 10:10).
 - (2) All one in Christ's church. (Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:12-16; Heb. 12:22; 23.

PRACTICAL LESSONS OF PERMANENT VALUE

1. There are two sides to the personality of God; Mercy and Goodness and strict justice and terrible judgment against those who rebel against him.
2. A man's belief about God largely determines his conduct.
3. It is universally true that one tends to become like the God he worships.
4. The wrath of God is a terrible thing when turned against the sinful people.
5. Earnest warning is sorely daily needed to draw us back to the paths of God.
6. The Day of Jehovah is inevitable for all men of every rank and station.
7. God's eternal plan has been the salvation of every nation on earth.
8. Those who scoff and boast and fight against God's people shall suffer the wrath of God.
9. God's ministers should put strong emphasis upon the spiritual nature of God's kingdom.
10. God gives assurance that the humble ones who seek Him will be safe in His presence in the day of doom.
11. The promise that joy will displace mourning and tranquility will follow the storm, should bring encouragement to the righteous.
12. The wicked cannot hide or escape the Day of Jehovah.
13. Riches, wealth or honor will not save one in that day.
14. God's purpose is not to break out with vengeance and destroy, but to cleanse and refine and save those who will allow Him to save them.
15. You should flee to the place of refuge now before the Great and Terrible Day of Jehovah comes! Flee to the arms of Jesus, He will save...you need never fear.⁸

Footnotes

1. Young, Edward J., *An Introduction To The Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970) p.273.

2. *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p.910.
3. Eiselen, F. G., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1939) p. 3144.
4. Edersheim, Alfred, *Old Testament Bible History* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972) p.178.
5. Pfeiffer, Charles F., *The Divided Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967) p.91.
6. Hester, H. I., *The Heart of Hebrew History*, (Liberty: The Quality Press, Inc., 1962)p. 243-245.
7. Baxter, J. Sidlow, *Explore the Book*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969) p.220.
8. Waddey, J. H., *The Prophets* (Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 1980) p.3.

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program and he saw no need to create a conflict there. HOW about that! Then the White's Ferry Road School of Preaching had Chuck Lucas to speak for them and they adopted some of the Crossroads methods. They put out a general statement to the brotherhood supposedly denying any affiliation with Crossroads but they never once said so. HOW about that! Wouldn't it have been easy to say, "We in no way endorse Chuck Lucas, the Crossroads church nor the Total Commitment Movement." As the old country boy said, "Thems my sentiments exactly."

1980 has seen the growth of error in the Lord's church, but it has also seen an awakening to that error. For this we can be thankful. Perhaps there is going to be a turning back to conservatism in religion and in political government. To this end we shall continue to hope, pray and labor.

Those interested in some excellent material on the Total Commitment Movement may order five lessons on tape from FARLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST, 12113 S. Memorial Parkway, Huntsville, AL 35803. Price \$5.00. Or, you may order printed material from Walter Wagner, Box 152, Slater, S. C. 29683. Price: \$1.95 each; 2-10 copies \$1.75 each; 11-up, \$1.50 each. We, personally, do know the W.E. Wardlaw tapes to be exceptionally good material.

Background and Survey of Zephaniah

ZEPHANIAH WAS ONE OF JUDAH'S LAST

PROPHETS BEFORE THE NATION

FELL TO THE BABYLONIAN INVADERS.

Josiah, who reigned over Judah during Zephaniah's ministry, was the last of the righteous kings of this Southern Kingdom. How sobering it is to think of the people's accountability to God, for being ruled by such a righteous king and instructed by such faithful prophets as Zephaniah. In this lesson we will be studying more about this setting, and then we will survey Zephaniah's book as a whole.

I. BACKGROUND

Before going any further in your study, read the three chapters of Zephaniah in a scanning way. This will take the book out of the "stranger" category for the studies that follow.

Now look at the setting of Zephaniah's writing by following its antecedents in a chronological order. Chart P shows this historical background as well as Zephaniah's vision into the future.

Note on the chart the eight significant points, numbered consecutively. Refer to the chart as you study carefully each of the following eight descriptions:¹

1. *King Hezekiah.* He was one of Judah's righteous kings. He may have been the Hizkiah of Zephaniah 1:1. If so, he was the great-great-grandfather of Zephaniah, the only prophet with royal blood.

2. *Birth of Zephaniah.* If the prophet was about Josiah's age, he was born around 648 B.C. (cf. 2 Ki 22:1). This was during the wicked reign of Manasseh. The name Zephaniah means "hidden, or protected, by Jehovah." Could it be that

1. Review Chart A to see Zephaniah's place among all the Old Testament prophets.

his parents gave him this name in gratitude for his life being spared during the atrocities of King Manasseh (2 Ki 2:16; cf. Heb 11:37)? It is interesting to note that an important part of Zephaniah's message concerned the protection of Judah from harm in the day of God's judgment. (See 2:3.)

Zephaniah's home may have been in Jerusalem. Suggested dates for the term of his public ministry are 636 B.C. to 623 B.C.

3. *King Josiah*. Josiah was a great-grandson of Hezekiah (2 Ch 32:33; 33:20, 25). How then was Zephaniah possibly related to Josiah? Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign over Judah (2 Ch 34:1). At age sixteen he "began to seek after the God of David his father" (2 Ch 34:3). It may very well be that Zephaniah's access to the royal court gave the prophet ample opportunities of witness to the king. In fact he may have been the key spiritual influence in Josiah's early life.

4. *The book of Zephaniah* (c. 627 B.C.). It was during the early reign of Josiah that the prophet probably wrote his book, since there is no reference in the book to Josiah's reform program of 622 B.C. (For example, the idolatrous practices condemned in 1:3-6 were dealt with in the reforms.)

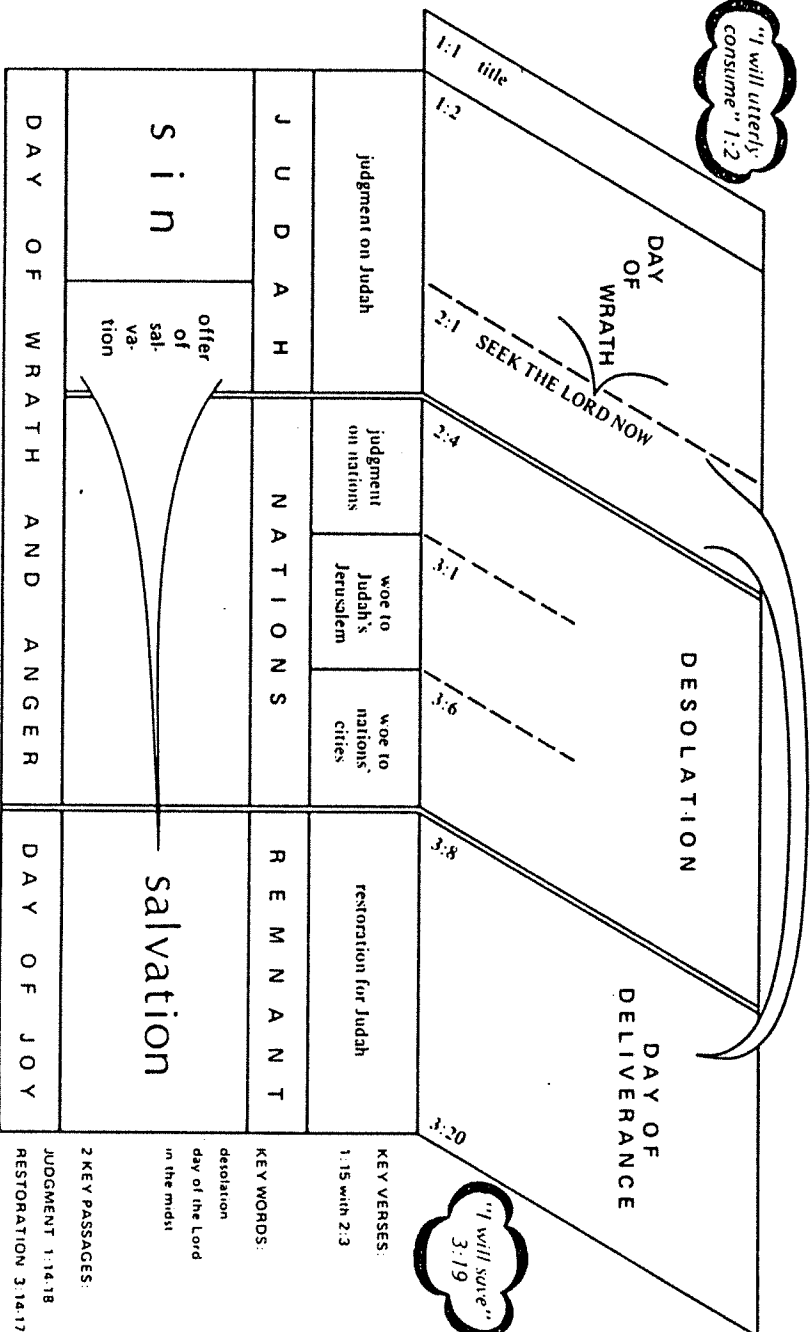
5. *Josiah's reforms*. At age twenty Josiah began a six-year program of national reform (2 Ch 34:3), which was completed in 622 B.C. (2 Ch 34:8). Read 2 Chronicles 34-35 or 2 Kings 22-23. The sins which Zephaniah condemns in his book were the sins over which Josiah lamented.

6. *Fall of Jerusalem* (586 B.C.) Zephaniah also prophesied judgments for Jerusalem, the first destruction coming about a half century later. His prophecies also referred to judgments of succeeding centuries up to the last days. (This is an example of multiple prophecy, commonly found in the Old Testament.)

7. *Restoration* (536 B.C. ff.). Zephaniah also prophesied restoration of the chosen nation of God's people. This was fulfilled, at least in token measure, when God led His people back to the land at the end of the Babylonian captivity. But the full measure of restoration is yet to be. (This is another example of multiple prophecy.)

ZEPHANIAH DAY OF DESOLATION and DELIVERANCE

"I will utterly
consume" 1:2



"I will save"
3:19

8. *Final "Day of the Lord."* The end-times judgments of the Day of the Lord will usher in the Messianic kingdom (millennium), when Zephaniah's prophecies of restoration will be fulfilled on a grand and total scale. Review Chart F and the discussion of Lesson 3 about the Day of the Lord. Recall that this day was a prominent subject of Joel's prophecy.

Be sure you are well acquainted with the eight points just discussed before moving on to the survey of the Bible text.

II. SURVEY

First, mark the following paragraph divisions in your Bible at verses 1:1, 2, 7, 14; 2:1, 4, 8, 12; 3:1, 8, 14.

Earlier in the lesson you scanned the three chapters of Zephaniah. Now, with pencil in hand, read the book once or twice more, underlining key words and phrases as you read. What repeated phrases strike you as very prominent in this book?

What is Zephaniah's message mainly about? Compare the opening verses (1:2-6) with the closing ones (3:14-20).

Chart Q is a survey of the structure of this book. Learn it well before moving on to the next lesson.

1. What is the function of the opening verse (1:1)?
2. How many main divisions in the book does the chart show? Mark your Bible to show the new divisions beginning at 2:4 and 3:8.
3. The title of the chart reflects the keynote of Zephaniah. Read the two key verses cited on the chart. What two outlines develop the subject of the Day of the Lord? What does this tell you about the day? (The word "day" in the phrase "day of the Lord" does not refer to a 24-hour solar day. Rather, it is an extended period of time, whether weeks, months, or even years.)
4. How much of the prophecy deals with Judah? How much deals with Gentile nations?
5. What makes possible a day of deliverance in Zephaniah's prophecy? Observe the function of 2:1-3, as shown on the chart.

6. Compare your answer of question 5 with the conditions which a sinner today must fulfill to appropriate the blessings of the gospel.
7. Read the Bible text to account for the two short sections beginning at 3:1 and 3:6.
8. Note the chart's contrasting phrases taken from the opening and closing of the book. Also, read in your Bible contrasting messages of the text: JUDGMENT: 1:14-18 and RESTORATION: 3:14-17.
9. Note the key words listed on the chart. Add to this list as you continue your study in the book.

* * *

Review Questions

1. What does the Hebrew name "Zephaniah" mean literally?
 2. How was Zephaniah related to kings Hezekiah and Josiah, if at all?
 3. Where was Zephaniah's home?
 4. What kind of a king was Josiah?
 5. About how old was Zephaniah when Josiah's reform program was completed in 622 B.C.?
 6. Did Zephaniah write his book before or after Josiah's reforms?² Support your answer.
 7. What are the two main prophecies of the book of Zephaniah? To what extent have they been fulfilled already? When will they be totally fulfilled?
 8. What spiritual lessons can people today learn from Zephaniah? Do you think it is possible that God can raise up a modern "prophet" today to influence the course of a nation even as He used Zephaniah to influence Josiah and Judah?³
2. A project for further study is to inquire into how effective and enduring was Josiah's reform program.
 3. Such a prophet would not be another "writing" prophet, of course.

ZEPHANIAH

In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing

3:16, 17

What a glorious affirmation this is! The One who is in the midst of His people is mighty and it is the Lord who dwells within the heart of every one of His children. Jesus who is our Saviour and indwelling Lord is the Mighty One. He is mighty to save, that is, He will keep day by day and moment by moment. He will rejoice over His own for He sees of the travail of His soul in them and is satisfied. In His love, He will silently plan for the eternal well-being and good of His own. The Lord's joy over the redeemed is such that it speaks here of the Lord bursting forth into song! This is almost too wonderful to comprehend, but in view of all this, should not we take heed to the call to be courageous? — Fear thou not! Courage that is born of faith in the mighty Lord will issue in true activity. Let not thy hands be slack! We are called to labor in the fullness of God's might, knowing that all such labor in the Lord will bring its due reward. We need never grow faint, for He who is in us is mighty and He is silently planning in love for His own.

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

You are advised to read through the short book of the prophet Zephaniah more than once during the course of your study. The historic background will be found on reference to II Kings 22:1–24:7 and II Chronicles 34:1–37:8. In Zephaniah 1:1 the prophet states that he prophesied in the days of Josiah, king of Judah. The date would, therefore, be approximately 640-610 B.C.

THE PROPHET AND HIS MINISTRY

Zephaniah gives also in 1:1 his genealogy, and Hizkiah is usually taken as referring to the King Hezekiah, so that the prophet would appear by descent to be a prince of the royal house of Judah. The name of Zephaniah means "he who Jehovah hides" or "hidden

of Jehovah." (See 2:3 where the prophet uses a play on his name to enforce his message.)

As has been stated above, Zephaniah prophesied in the reign of King Josiah. There can be little doubt that it was primarily due to Zephaniah's ministry that revival took place during King Josiah's reign. Contemporary prophets would have been Nahum just immediately prior to Zephaniah, and later Jeremiah. Zephaniah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah prior to the captivity in Babylon, that is, Pre-Exilic.

Although Zephaniah's prophecy lacks something of the majesty and rhythm to be found in certain other prophetic books, nevertheless it pronounces judgment and foretells restoration in no uncertain way. In particular, the following two passages should be compared and contrasted.

1:14-18 The Certainty of Judgment

3:14-17 The Joy and Blessedness of Salvation

MEMORIZE

<i>Key Words</i>	"visitation" and "restoration"
<i>Key Verses</i>	1:14 and 3:20
<i>Number of Chapters</i>	3
<i>Period in Hebrew History</i>	Prior to the Exile

OUTLINE

A simple, two-fold outline is as follows:

- I. *The Lord Is in the Midst for Judgment* (1:1-3:8)
 - (A) Judgment Upon Judah (1:1-18)
 - (B) Judgment Upon Gentile Nations (2:4-3:8)
- II. *The Lord Is in the Midst for Salvation* (3:9-20)

The following outline will also be found to be helpful.

- I. *The Day of Wrath Is at Hand* (1:1-3:8a)
 - (A) Retribution — from the Lord (1:1-18)
 - (B) Repentance — "seek ye the Lord" (3:1-3)
 - (C) Desolation of the Nations by the Lord (2:4-15)
 - (D) The Sin of Jerusalem — in the sight of the Lord (3:1-8a)
- II. *The Day of Blessing Foretold* (3:9-20)
 - (A) Salvation of the Nations (3:9, 10)
 - (B) Restoration of Israel (3:11-13)
 - (C) Jubilation of the Redeemed (3:14-17)
 - (D) Re-establishment and Consummation of Original Purpose (3:18-20)

OUTSTANDING SCRIPTURES AND PHRASES

One of the phrases used most frequently in the book is "the day of the Lord" — it is used seven times referring to judgment. No more vivid description of the Day of the Lord (which is mentioned by most of the prophets) is to be found than that in this book (1:14-18).

Notice the use of the phrase "the LORD is in the midst" (3:5, 12, 15, 17, especially this last Scripture). Also in 2:14 and 3:12, the phrase "in the midst" is to be found.

Also note the use of the word "jealousy" in 1:18 and 3:8. The jealousy of the Lord is declared! God so loves His own people that He seeks their wholehearted devotion and cannot be satisfied with anything less than this. This book has a pertinent message to the people of God today. God loves with an everlasting love and seeks that His own love Him in full and glad surrender. This implies a readiness to obey and a willingness to do His will.

POINTS TO PONDER

Thus it will be seen that the book commences with the pronouncement of judgment and woe but ends with a song of joy and triumph (3:14-17). Indeed, the last section of the book has been called "the sweetest lovesong in the Old Testament." It tells of full salvation for those who are the Lord's. Sing! Shout! Be glad! Rejoice!

Suggestions for Additional Reading

See list following chapter on Hosea.

“ ZEPHANIAH ”

THE PROPHETS REPRESENTED GOD AS BOTH SEVERE AND tender. His nature expresses itself in contrasting ways. Severity and tenderness are constantly manifesting themselves as we watch the divine dealings with men. This contrast is especially clear in the message of Zephaniah. He presents the terror and the tenderness of divine love.

In 1:2 God says:

I will utterly consume all things from off the face of the ground.

In 1:2 and 3:17 he says:

The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty One who will save; he will rest in His love, he will joy over thee with singing.

THE BACKGROUND

Zephaniah lived in an hour of decay and dissolution in the midst of a rapidly changing world order. The savage horde of Scythians pouring down from the plains of South Russia threw fear and consternation into the hearts of the peoples of Palestine. They were cruel, bloodthirsty, fearless, ruthless ruffians who drove relentlessly on as far as Egypt. Their merciless behavior created a panic in the hearts of men. The great Assyrian power that had held absolute sway since the rise of Tiglath Pileser in 745 B.C. was fast losing its hold in the world. When Assurbanipal died in 626 B.C. the death knell of Assyria was sounded. The powerful Babylonian kingdom under Nabopolassar, was now in position to take over the supremacy of the East. Nineveh was not destroyed until 612 B.C. but from 626 B.C. Babylon was really the mistress of the nations. The union of the armies of the

Medes, the Scythians and the Babylonians caused a mighty upheaval in the world. It is not a small thing to watch the death of one world empire and the coming into life of another. As a young man Zephaniah witnessed these epoch-making happenings.

Josiah came to the throne in Jerusalem following the death of Manasseh and Amon. It would be difficult to describe the tragic effects of the long reign of Manasseh. The nation was converted into heathenism, with foreign fashions, practices, worship and behavior the order of the day. The pure worship of Yahweh was banished. The effect of the lower ethical standards showed up in the behavior of the people. The princes of Judah had become so corrupt that justice was impossible. Injustice, oppression and violence were the natural results of the sort of court life that Josiah found. He could not hope to do much as a lad in the midst of a group that had thrown off restraints and turned pagan. Two generations had grown up since the good days of Isaiah and Hezekiah. No prophets had been allowed to speak of the deep things of God. The entire life of the court was opposed to the sort of preaching that God's chosen prophet would bring. The people had been stimulated by so many false things that they had become callous to any stimulus. They were "settled on their lees." In Zephaniah's indictment of Jerusalem he pictures the people as unteachable, the rulers as predatory, the courts as merciless, the prophets as traitors, and the priests as profane. It was a dark day for God's land.

Josiah set out to clean up the Temple and to turn the people back to Yahweh worship. In the course of the repairs on the Temple a book was found that made a profound impression on king and people. The book was a part of the Pentateuch that gave directions for the behavior of God's people in the chosen land. The youthful king realized at once something of the significance of the book. Huldah, the prophetess, was consulted and God's word was brought

to the king. As a result of the reading of the Law a definite effort at reform was undertaken. Idols, images, groves, high places, pagan altars and other abominations were broken down. An effort was made to force upon the people a nationwide reform. It was a great undertaking and did much for the kingdom. It failed only in that the reforms could not go deep enough to transform individual hearts and lives. Outwardly it was a great success. Too much credit cannot be given to the zealous young king.

We cannot be sure what part Zephaniah and Jeremiah played in the reform movement. They were both vitally interested in cleaning up the land and in a genuine turning to God. Jeremiah was quite young and probably lacked the sort of leadership that would give him much influence with the people. We may be sure that Zephaniah and Jeremiah encouraged Josiah in his worthy ambitions and that they helped as far as possible in stirring up the people to carry out the king's orders. It is perhaps best to date the activities of Zephaniah from 625 B.C.

THE MAN

The Hebrew prophets were usually in sympathy with the poor so that their messages became strong indictments of the nobles who possessed wealth and lands. Zephaniah was an aristocrat who did not pose as a spokesman of the peasant. With justifiable pride he traced his lineage back to Hezekiah. It must have given him standing with princes and rulers as he stepped out to proclaim his stern denunciations. He was probably the same age as Josiah and Jeremiah.

His book reveals an exceptionally accurate knowledge of Jerusalem itself. He must have spent all his days in that city. His grim, austere, sober nature has gained for him the name "puritan" or "protestant." He seemed obsessed with a terrible conception of the doom that was coming upon the wicked world about him. No hope was in sight, for the cer-

tain doom was richly deserved and must come on friend and foe alike.

He had a comprehensive view of history. One is tempted to speculate on the type of educational institutions that prepared young men in the way so many of the prophets were educated. Zephaniah reminds us of Isaiah in his broad understanding of the guilt and needs of other nations. He thought of his civilization as incurably corrupt. All the surrounding nations were equally enmeshed in sin and guilt. His own beloved land was involved and must suffer the cruel tortures of a just God who could do no other thing in the light of men's behavior. Yahweh was to sweep away, as with a devastating flood, all the nations; and Judah must suffer the full severity of the onslaught. A new era of peace, plenty and happiness was to follow in the wake of the destruction.

Zephaniah was not a poet. He was deeply impressed with the fact that God had laid His hand on him and that he must warn his beloved people of the impending calamity. He was sensitive to the faintest whisper of God. Imagination and emotion play a large place in his preaching. He was a flaming evangelist who spoke with fury and effectiveness a burning message of rebuke to a people who were rapidly losing all power to respond to such serious challenges. Being violently opposed to world conditions he left the impression that he was pitiless and harsh and unsympathetic. Some have called him fanatical. However this may be, he was vitally concerned with the proclamation of the divine denunciation.

THE BOOK

Zephaniah's book is made up of several brief oracles delivered during the early days of Josiah's preparation for the reformation. In scathing language he announces the coming day of wrath and destruction for all who have sinned against the holy God of hosts.

In the opening paragraph he pronounces certain doom on all those who are worshipping idols. Heathenism and idolatry

must be purged from the land. Yahweh cannot allow such abominations to live. In 1:7-13 the rulers are denounced along with every class of sinner. 1:14-18 pictures God's wrath bringing a blast of fire upon the whole earth but striking with peculiar fury upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The *Day of Yahweh* is a dread day of retribution. Let all the peoples tremble in the presence of the God of Israel.

In chapter two the prophet begins with an urgent call to repentance (2:1-3) that they may be *hid in the day of the Lord's anger*. Nothing can avert the doom on the nation, but genuine repentance may save the praying remnant. He then (2:4-15) turns upon the heathen nations, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria with dire threats of destruction. In the day of His wrath Yahweh will leave no nation unpunished.

In chapter three the prophet returns to his native city with a stinging threat. Judah has been obstinate and rebellious. He sets her sins out in the light of Yahweh's righteousness and holiness. The appeal to his neighbors to repent seems to fall on dull ears. He then assures them that a hidden remnant will survive the overflowing scourge and be safe in the protection of their God. These saved ones are to be the friends of God after the purging that will fit them for His presence. The promise of salvation to the world through this divinely preserved remnant is a characteristic doctrine of the spiritual prophets. Zephaniah pleads for patience until a double-edged consequence can be found. The heathen are to be judged and destroyed while Judah is to have a holy remnant that will remain to enjoy the rich blessings of their God. The redeemed remnant will return with their offerings to Zion, and be planted there to the undoing of transgression. When they are fully established in the land with Yahweh in their midst, Zion shall be a praise in the earth and a delight among the nations. These songs of deliverance and rejoicing bring a fitting close to the book.

The most beautiful part of the book is 3:11-13. The most

valuable part is probably 1:2-2:3 and 3:1-13. The prophecies against foreign nations in 2:4-15 reveal a narrow nationalistic spirit that fails to measure up to the best.

Some one has given the following brief outline of the book:

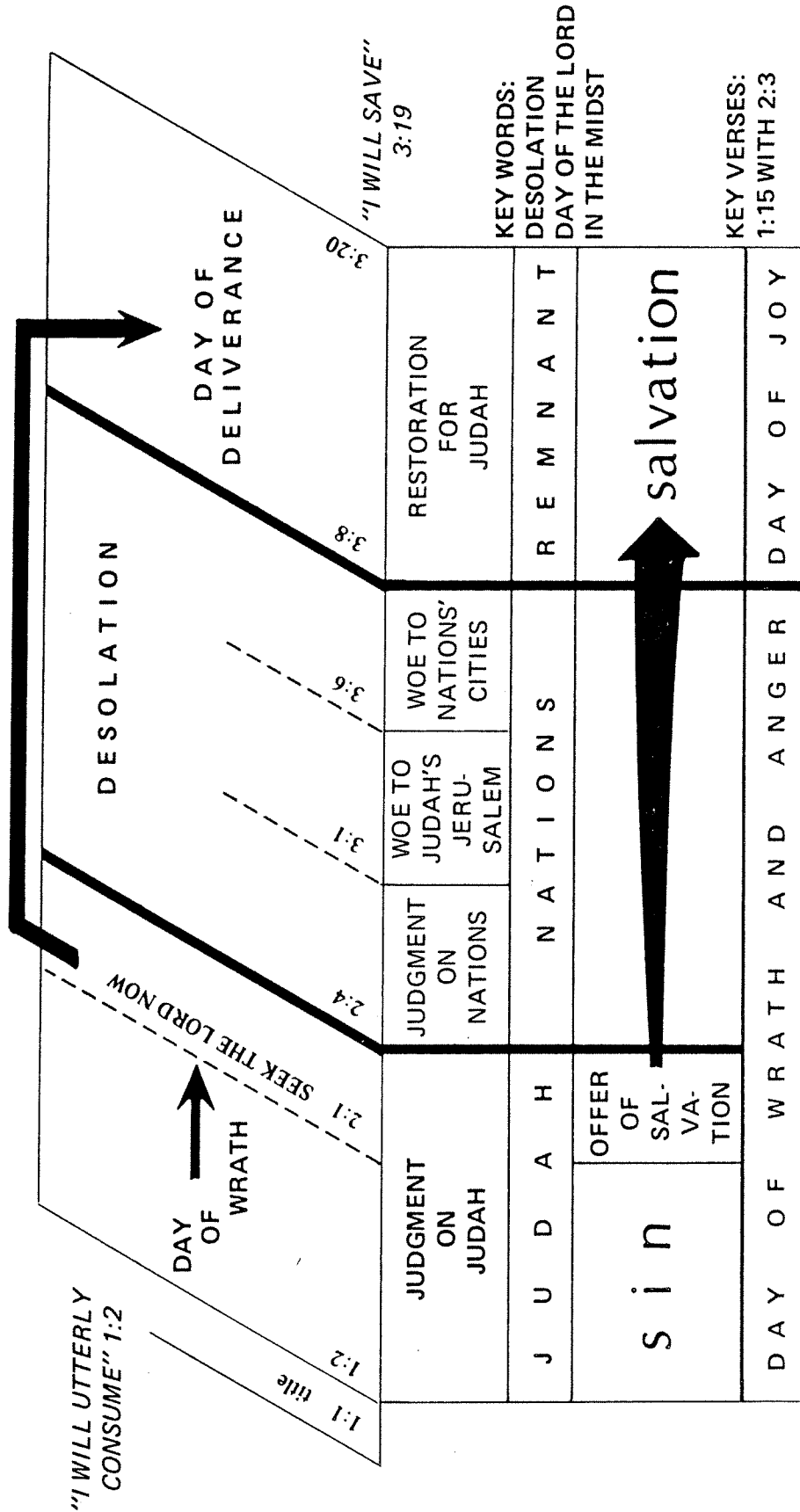
- 1:1-18 A declaration of retribution.
- 2:1-3:8 An exhortation to repentance.
- 3:8-20 A promise of redemption.

PRACTICAL LESSONS OF PERMANENT VALUE

1. A man's belief about God largely determines his conduct.
2. It is universally true that one tends to become like the God he worships.
3. Living a life is serious business and should call out the best and most serious endeavor.
4. The wrath of God is a terrible thing when turned upon human sin.
5. Earnest warning is sorely needed to draw us back to the presence of God.
6. The Day of Yahweh is inevitable for all men of every race.
7. God gives assurance that the humble ones who seek Him will be safe in His presence in the day of destruction.
8. God's ministers should put strong emphasis upon the spiritual nature of God's kingdom.
9. The promise that joy will displace mourning and tranquillity will follow the storm, should bring joy to sorrowing hearts.
10. God's purpose is not to wreak vengeance but to cleanse and refine and save those who will allow Him to save them.

ZEPHANIAH

DAY of DESOLATION and DELIVERANCE



OUTLINE: ZEPHANIAH

SUPERSSCRIPTION: The prophet and his time (1:1).

I. THE DAY OF GOD'S WRATH UPON JUDAH (1:2-18).

- A. All of Judah is to be included (1:2-6).
- B. A solemn warning and announcement (1:7).
- C. Every rank is to be judged (1:8-13); princes (1:8), thieves (1:9), merchants (1:10,11), the indifferent (1:12,13).
- D. The Great Day of the Lord (1:14-18).
 - 1. It was near (1:14).
 - 2. It was a day of wrath, distress...(1:15-17).
 - 3. It was a day that could not be escaped (1:18).

II. THE CALL OF GOD'S WORD THROUGH ZEPHANIAH: REPENT (2:1-3:7).

- A. The call: Seek the Lord (2:1-3).
- B. The reason: God will judge (2:4-15).
 - 1. He will judge our neighbors (2:4-10).
 - 2. He will judge their "gods" (2:11).
 - 3. He will judge those afar off (2:12-15).
- C. The application: God is no respecter of persons -- Judah must be judged also (3:1-7).

III. THE FAITHFULNESS OF JEHOVAH TO HIS REMNANT (3:8-20).

- A. Out of His wrath shall arise a faithful remnant (3:8-13).
- B. The remnant would rejoice in the Mighty One (3:14-20).

QUESTIONS:

1. Whom does Zephaniah say were in his family (1:1)?
2. Review the kingship of Josiah (1:1).
3. What was God going to "cut off" (1:4)?
4. What does the first part of 1:5 mean?
5. Discuss the awesome warning of 1:7.
6. List the various groups who were not to escape (1:8-13).
7. Give some characteristics of this "day of Jehovah" (1:14-18).
8. Why are they called a "nation not desired" (2:1)?
9. What other peoples would be judged (2:4-15)?
10. How wicked was Jerusalem (3:1-5)?
11. What is the Lord God saying in 3:6,7 about His efforts?
12. What (whom) would God have left for Himself after this outpouring of wrath (3:8-13)?
13. List some things that God could and would do in 3:14-20.

OUTLINE: NAHUM

Superscription: The Burden and the Prophet (1:1).

- I. THE JEALOUS JEHOVAH IS NINEVAH'S JUDGE (1:2-15).
 - A. The anger of God against sin (1:2-6).
 - B. The goodness of God (1:7).
 - C. The overthrow of Ninevah is to be complete (1:8-15).
- II. JEHOVAH'S DECREE AGAINST HER IN POETIC DETAIL (2:1-13).
 - A. Prepare for the battle: God will restore His Own (2:1,2).
 - B. The assault on Ninevah will empty her (2:3-10).
 1. The furious attack by Ninevah's enemies (2:3-6).
 2. Their captivity (2:7).
 3. The plundering of the city while the inhabitants flee (2:8-10).
 - C. This thorough punishment occurred because Jehovah was against Ninevah (2:11-13).
- III. SIN IS THE CAUSE OF THIS BURDEN ON NINEVAH (3:1-19).
 - A. She will reap as she had sown (3:1-7).
 - B. Her fate was sealed (3:8-19).
 1. Ninevah would be as No-Amon (3:8-11).
 2. No defense would prevent this (3:12-17).
 3. Her epitaph: "The fall of Ninevah caused joy" (3:18,19).

QUESTIONS:

1. Where was Ninevah? What had they done to Israel?
2. What does the Bible mean when it calls God "jealous"? Find other verses that say this.
3. What is God "slow to"? Why is this so?
4. Why is it good for God's people to know the truths of Nahum 1:7?
5. How would 1:8-15 be a comfort to Judah?
6. What is 2:1 saying to Ninevah (the Assyrians)?
7. Describe the attack (2:3-6).
8. What is happening in 2:8-10 (see the outline)?
9. Do you think that 2:11-13 is saying that the strength of Ninevah is gone?
10. Discuss the sins of Ninevah (3:1-7).
11. How does Nahum compare her to No-Amon (3:8-11)?
12. Could the destruction be prevented (3:12-17)?
13. What does the last part of 3:19 mean?



