

Zephaniah

Authorship: Zephaniah. Descended from King Hezekiah (1:1) and therefore related to Josiah, Zephaniah may have well influenced the young king as he sought the Lord and tried to promote spiritual revival.

Date: Perhaps around 625 B.C. While Zephaniah's ministry is said only to have taken place in the days of Josiah (1:1), it may well have been during the years between the beginning of Josiah's personal awakening (632 B.C.) and the onset of his more public revival efforts in 621 B.C.

Background: After the enlightened reign of Hezekiah (728-686 B.C.), Judah had endured 55 years under two of its worse kings, Manasseh and Amon, before Josiah was made king as age eight in 640 B.C. As he grew into adulthood, Josiah proved to be the most godly of Judah's kings. He experienced a personal spiritual awakening in 632 B.C. at age 16 (2 Chronicles 34:3), and after the law was rediscovered in 621 B.C., he led a nationwide revival (2 Chronicles 34:14-18, 29-33). Despite Josiah's reforms and the initial positive response of the people (2 Kings 23:3), many in Judah remained lukewarm in their faith. Into this situation came Zephaniah, warning of the impending invasion by Babylon and of the "day of the Lord," the final and universal judgment as the end of human history (1:1-3:7). Looking still further into God's plans for his people, he foretold Judah's return from Babylon and the final, triumphant page of human history, the glorious millennial kingdom of God (3:8-20). Nahum and Jeremiah were Zephaniah's contemporaries.

Recipients: The first hearers were the kings and people living in Judah some forty years before the Babylonian captivity.

Location: Apparently Jerusalem, since it is mentioned often (1:4, 10, 12).

Purpose: (1) To warn of the coming "day of the Lord" and correct misconceptions about it. Many Israelite thought it would be a day for rejoicing, but Zephaniah revealed that idolatrous Israelites were considered God's enemies just as the Canaanites had been. It is not nationality but spirituality that counts; (2) To hold out hope for a remnant that will survive God's judgment (3:9-20).

Key Verse

"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing" (Zephaniah 3:17 ESV).

Meaning of Name

Zephaniah, the seventh-century prophet from Judah, has given his name to this book as its composer. His name means "The Lord hides" in Hebrew.

Key Term: "Day of the Lord"

Zephaniah predicted the future day of the Lord as a time of ruin for Jerusalem. The initial coming of the day of the Lord was manifested by Judah's fall to Babylon; its final fulfillment lies in the future in the context of Christ's return.

One Sentence Summary

Although Zephaniah prophesied coming judgment against the nations, his main message was against Judah, whose sins were so serious that they would go into exile on "the day of the Lord," but later they would be restored to righteousness.

Outline:

- I. A Sad Day Coming (1:1-3:8)
 - A. Judah and Jerusalem Judged (1:1-2:3)
 - B. Enemy Nations Judged (2:4-15)
 - C. Judah and Jerusalem Judged (3:1-8)
- II. A Glad Day Coming (3:9-20)

Sources:

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