

ZEPHANIAH (Teacher's Edition)

- I. 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 Surrounding Judah 2:4-15
 - 1. Judgment against Gaza (West) 2:4-7
 - 2. Judgment against Moab and Ammon (East) 2:8-11
 - 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
- II. 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

AUTHOR & WHEN THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN-

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 related to this beloved ruler, who had led his people back to worship of the one true God. 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.

According to the arrangement of the Hebrew Scriptures, Zephaniah was the **last** of the prophets to write before the captivity. 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 B.C. Most scholars place the writing of the book at about **627 B.C.**

ABOUT THE BOOK-

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. The people were **complacent** in their temporary **peace and prosperity**. 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. Josiah's reforms seemingly were more **external** than **heart changing** for the people.

Into this complacent atmosphere, the devastating message of Zephaniah comes like a searing blast. This book shows God as searching the streets of Jerusalem with lamps to find **the wicked** He will punish (1:12).

Zephaniah continually makes reference to "the day of the Lord" that will hence, this book has meaning for the **end times**. In summing up the teaching he gives regarding the end, we may summarize it as follows: (a) that it is a day of **terror** (1:15), (b) it is imminent (1:14), (c) it is a judgment **for sin** (1:17), (d) it falls upon all creation (1:2, 3; 2:4-15; 3:8), (e) it is accompanied by great convulsions in nature (1:15), (f) a remnant of redeemed Hebrews and foreigners will escape from its terrors (Zeph 2:3; 3:9-13). The terrors of the end days will fall upon all and people from **all nations** will be won to the Lord (Zeph 3:9, 10). These will not be compelled to come to Jerusalem to worship (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1); they may worship Him "every one from his place" (Zeph 2:11), which reminds of Jesus' words in John 4:21.

While this message of doom called the people of God to repentance, the book also picks up on Habakkuk's theme of "in wrath, remember mercy." God does promise in Zephaniah that He will **purify and restore** the faithful remnant (3:9). In fact, God assures them that a humbled people will never again be made afraid by anyone, for He has cast out their enemy. (3:13-15). God then bids them to sing, shout and to rejoice with all their hearts. **And God joins in the celebration!** In jubilation God sings and dances and shouts for joy as He tells them of His love. And the book ends with a tender promise: "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 (3:20).

BASIC THEMES & TRUTHS & APPLICATIONS-

There are so many lessons to learn from this book! Here are several:

God is perfect justice as well as perfect love. If the call to repent is continually ignored, God's judgment must come.

Punishment is not God's choice as evidenced by John 3:16.

To settle into the complacency of **financial prosperity** (1:10-13) and to participate in the ritual of a well-structured religious life without obeying **God's voice**, receiving **correction**, or drawing near to Him (3:2) is always a possibility. Not knowing you have such spiritual emptiness is most tragic.

Even to the rebellious, God offers **last-minute reprieve** (2:1-3). The remnant who humble themselves and seek righteousness **will be hidden** in the day of the Lord's anger, gathered to Him and healed, and will have God dwelling in their midst.

We should always **remain zealous!** We should reject any form of complacency by persevering in seeking God with passion every day. Complacency is the

result of **prideful satisfaction** in past **triumphs or encounters** with the Lord so that **no new pursuits** are made.

Zephaniah also brings out a great lesson to all who would be leaders in 3:2-4. An unteachable attitude is the tip of the iceberg of ungodliness. The clearest evidence that someone does not trust the Lord or really seek Him diligently is a **rebellious, disobedient and unteachable nature**. We should avoid being among those who speak loudly and promise great things, but **produce nothing that lasts** or do not bear fruit in the long run. All leaders should avoid any form of arrogance or pride in our ministries and should not profane the ministry by mishandling the Word of God in any way- especially by teaching **our opinions** as God's Word.

A POSSIBLE KEY WORD-

Considering our discussion above, the key phrase could be: **THE DAY OF THE LORD**. This phrase is continually used!

KEY VERSE(S) & CHAPTER-

Zephaniah brings out the dual nature of God, balancing God's justice and mercy. Hence, my key verse summarizes this: **Zephaniah 2:3**. As to key chapter, I chose **Zephaniah 3** because it records the dual aspects of the day of the Lord, judgment and restoration.

JESUS REVEALED IN THE BOOK-

Ultimately, Jesus is **our shelter** on the day of the Lord, as mentioned in 2:3. Also, the rejoicing over a saved remnant in 3:16-17 is reminiscent of the work of Jesus in saving us- see Luke 15:7. In fact, this picture of a rejoicing Jesus in salvation is also seen in **Hebrews 12:2**.

THE HOLY SPIRIT REVEALED IN THE BOOK-

Besides the office and ministry of the prophetic, the Holy Spirit can be seen working in Zephaniah bringing the conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment (see John 16). Also, the Holy Spirit is the one who **purifies the lips of the people** and brings them together to **work shoulder to shoulder**- a clear reference to the **Day of Pentecost** where the same happened to people from **around the world!**