

Zephaniah 1-3

Introduction

Chapter 1

1:1-3 God's judgment on the world

READ 1

- So this gives us the historical setting of the book as well as the most detailed information on the lineage of any of the prophets in the Bible apart from Jesus.
- Zephaniah was an unusual prophet, in that he was of royal lineage, descending from the godly King Hezekiah.
- We're told that he prophesied during the reign of the good king Josiah who sought to bring about reform in the land of Judah after the reigns of two very evil kings, Manasseh and Amon.
- Now since Josiah reigned from about 640 BC to 609 BC and since Assyria was conquered by the Babylonians in 612 BC and since Zephaniah prophesied the destruction of the Assyrians in Chapter 2, verse 13 – and also since Josiah began his religious reforms after he had been king for about 8 years, we can pretty much

pinpoint the prophecies of Zephaniah at around 635 to maybe 615 BC.

- Maybe they came just before the reforms began.
- Some think the prophecy itself might have been instrumental in bringing about the reform as well as the discovery of the book of the law in the temple when Josiah was 16 years old. (2 Kings 22)
- The northern kingdom of Israel had gone into exile about 100 years before this, so Zephaniah's message was directed to the southern kingdom of Judah.
- He probably prophesied during the same time as Jeremiah and probably Habakkuk.
- As I mentioned, Josiah's reform was either getting ready to begin or had just begun, but apparently it was really just a surface reform for most and didn't go to the heart, because as soon as Josiah was gone, it seems the people began to ignore the Lord again.
- Now, Zephaniah's name means "Yahweh has hidden" or "Yahweh protects."
- He was born probably during Manasseh's reign when it was popular to sacrifice sons to Molech.

- He was perhaps saved from this and thus his name - “Yahweh has hidden” or “Yahweh protects.”
- God hid him, He protected him, He saved him.
- Just like the name Moses probably came from the circumstances just after his birth (it means “taken out, drawn forth”
<http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/name/moses>)
- So the name Zephaniah may have come from the circumstances just after his birth.
- But it could also refer to that group of people who Zephaniah refers to in 3:9 and following who will enter into the Kingdom Age, having been protected by God because of their devotion to Him.
- Certainly God hides from His wrath the person who repents!
- We’ll see that when we get there.
- Certainly one of the main themes in Zephaniah is what is called the day of the Lord.
- At least 10 times Zephaniah uses the expression “the Day of the LORD” or something similar in chapters 1 and 2, which we know from other

places refers ultimately to the end of the age when God will judge this wicked world.

- Like most of the Old Testament prophets, Zephaniah's prophecy has both an immediate and a future fulfillment.
- His words speak of the Babylonian invasion - as well as, Jesus' invasion of planet earth when He comes again to bring judgment.
- There's a local and immediate fulfillment.
- There's a global and future fulfillment.
- And remember we see this in many of places of Old Testament prophecy.
- So with that let's read verses 2-3 which I believe give an overview of this whole prophecy of destruction known as the Day of the Lord.

READ 2-3

- Verse 3 speaks of the judgment of God that will one day come upon the whole world.
- "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth..."
- Again - "I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land," says the LORD."

- This is not just a local prophecy – it clearly relates to the whole earth.
- Almost every other translation translates this phrase “face of the land” as “face of the earth.”
- When Jesus returns, the earth will resemble a battlefield.
- The carnage and corpses will be devastating.
- J. Vernon McGee writes these words, “The book of Zephaniah is like a Florida hurricane, a Texas tornado, a Mississippi River flood, a Minnesota snowstorm, and a California earthquake all rolled into one.”
- Talk about an alarm.
- Several years ago in a Maryland suburb a neighbor’s burglar alarm went off accidentally.
- A screeching siren filled the neighborhood.
- Everyone expected the homeowners to arrive home quickly and reset the alarm.
- But all day long the siren blared.
- In fact, it continued through the night and into the next day.
- By now the neighbors were furious.
- They called the police, but the cops refused to break into the house and turn off the alarm without the homeowners’ consent.

- It took a week to contact the neighbors in Europe, and turn off the siren.
- Well, Zephaniah was like a screeching siren.
- His words of warning were intended to wake up a sleepy neighborhood, but rather than take heed to his alarm, they were annoyed.
- They wanted to turn him off.
- But he couldn't.
- After all, it was God speaking through him and no one can shut God off.
-
- That brings us to the cause of Judah's judgment:

1:4-6 The cause of Judah's judgment

READ 4

- He's talking about eliminating permanently all idolatry.
- King Josiah inherited a corrupt nation from his father Amon and grandfather Manasseh, a nation almost wholly given over to idolatry (2 Kings 21:3-7).
- Here God announces judgment against the idol worshippers in Israel.
- Apparently both the leadership and the people heeded this announcement of judgment,

because in the days of Josiah this kind of gross idolatry was put away (2 Kings 23:4-15).

- God's promise to cut off every trace of Baal and destroy the rest of the expressions of idolatry was fulfilled.
- We also see that this prophecy was an invitation, as if God said: "Baal and the idols are going to go. You can get rid of them in righteousness or I will get rid of them in judgment, but rest assured that they are going to go."
- King Josiah directed the war on idolatry and the nation was blessed.
- Folks, certainly if there is any idolatry in our own lives, we need to direct the war against it. We need to be like Josiah.
- Now he begins to speak about three groups God is going to deal with specifically.

READ 5a

- Here's the first group.
- These are those who are totally involved in idolatry.
- They could care less about the Lord.
- We know these folks today.

READ 5b

- This is the second group.

- Those who are essentially walking in hypocrisy.
- They're walking on the fence.
- They have one foot in the world and one foot in the Lord.
- They swear by Yahweh, but they also swear by the god Milcom or Molech, the god of the Ammonites – the one they offered child sacrifices to.
- Honestly, I think that professing Christians who support abortion on demand for anyone who wants it could be considered part of this group.
- What possible reason could anyone support abortion on demand for any reason other than the worship of the god of pleasure or the worship of the god of convenience?
- I really can see no other reason why the killing of innocent human life can be justified unless you think the right to sexual pleasure or the right to live a life that is convenient to me is more important than innocent human life.
- That is idolatry to the max.
- Now the third group:

READ 6

- This is likely the group who had no real commitment to the Lord in the first place –

perhaps like the seed that fell on the rocky ground.

- It sprouted forth but was unable to take root. Mt. 13:5-6
- These are the people who generally say they believe in God but who live as though He didn't exist.
- That's probably worse than the flat out atheist.
- At least the atheist is honest about what he believes and how it guides his life.
- But the one who says he believes in God but lives as though God were not real is completely inconsistent in his position and could be considered more of a blasphemer than the atheist.

1:7-13 The extent of Judah's judgment

READ 7-9

- This may seem a bit harsh as verse 7 opens up by saying, "Be silent, in the presence of the Lord GOD."
- In other words, be quiet, shut up, stop making noise!
- Why was this said?

- Well, probably because enough was enough, no more empty words, no more empty promises, judgment is coming and the Lord doesn't want to hear any more excuses from them.
- Notice, the Day of the Lord is at hand. For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests." 7
- And "in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, " 8
- Revelation 19:17-18 (NIV2011) ¹⁷ And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."
- Very similar concepts, don't you think?
- Zephaniah's sacrifice is God's great supper in Revelation.
- Zephaniah's guests are the birds flying midair coming to eat the flesh of those killed in Revelation.
- Thus the great battle of Armageddon.

- This could be pointing, not just to the judgment coming upon Judah, but to the final judgment of God upon man.
- And so the day of the Lord is coming – it's at hand.
- Verse 8 says he'll punish those in the royal family who are clothed with foreign apparel.
- I think this refers to the compromise and the alliances made with the foreign governments that resulted in their descending into idolatry.
- Many commentators think that in verse 9 the idea of those who leap over the threshold refer to those who break into vulnerable peoples homes and steal their things to enrich their rich masters.
- Others think it was a sort of superstitious thing related to idol worship.
- When entering the temple of an idol, if you stepped on the threshold it would mean bad luck.
- But then why would you enter the temple anyway unless you intended to worship there?

READ 10-11

- Keep in mind that the fish gate was located in the north wall and this is where business deals were made, the fish were brought into the market as well as the other goods being sold.

- And it is to this gate that the prophet says the Babylonians would come from the north and through the fish gate into the city.
- The Maktesh in verse 11 is the market district and it's being judged.
- Why? Because the focus was on ripping people off with their dishonest scales and dishonest business practices.
- They wouldn't trust the Lord to supply their needs.
- Instead they ripped people off.
- There's a lot of that going on today!
- Everywhere you look where people are transacting business honestly, there are those who do so dishonestly.
- And if you're not careful, it is easy to get ripped off.
- God will judge that kind of stuff – those dishonest people will be cut off.

READ 12-13

- Picture what is going on here.
- The Lord said that "...I will search out Jerusalem with lamps..."
- In other words, you are not going to be able to hide from God's judgment.

- And if God needed to, and He doesn't because He is all-knowing and all-seeing, He would get out lamps or candles and search Jerusalem and find the wicked and punish them.
- And keep in mind that God was going to use the Babylonians to bring this judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
- Josephus tells us that in one of the invasions of Jerusalem that the cities aristocracy was literally dragged from the sewer system where they hid for their lives.
- In other words, they were searched for and found.
- And the reason is simple - no concern about the Lord.
- They had become complacent.
- And over time they came to the conclusion that either God has no power to do anything about their actions, or God just does not care.
- That's what it means when it says "The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil." 12
- They were totally complacent and they thought God was too.
- As we can see, God cares very much about this wicked living and He will do something about it!

- And thus, in this judgment they were not going to be able to enjoy the fruit from their labors (13) because they were either going to be killed or taken into captivity by the Babylonians, which happened in 586 B. C.
- "...They shall build houses, but not inhabit *them*; They shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine."

1:14-18 The nearness and horribleness of Judah's judgment

READ 14-18

- Again we need to keep in mind the near-term fulfillment of this prophecy, which was the Babylonian invasion upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah - First in 605 BC, then in 597 BC, and finally the third invasion in 586 BC as they destroyed the city of Jerusalem, the Temple and took most of the Jews back to Babylon as captives!
- And then there is the long-term fulfillment or the completion of what this prophecy is all about, "The great day of the LORD is near . . ."

- This is ultimately looking ahead to the Tribulation Period where God will pour out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world.
- Now God tells them what He really desires for them:

Chapter 2

2:1-3 God's call to repentance

READ 1-3

- Verses 2-3 hold out hope, again.
- If you seek God, seek righteousness, and seek humility, maybe he'll hide you from this coming judgment.
- Every morning when the sun comes up on the African plain, the gazelle knows it will have to run faster than the fastest lion, or be killed.
- And every lion knows it will have to run faster than the slowest gazelle, or it will die of starvation.
- But every animal in Africa knows they'll have to run – either to eat, or to escape from being eaten.
- And every person on earth is on the run.
- You are either running to God, or from God.
- Which direction are you running?

- This is God's plea: "Before this judgment comes, seek the Lord! There's still opportunity. If you would turn to God, God will still save. God will still redeem, before you are blown away like chaff. Before the fierce anger of God is poured out, seek the Lord!"
- Our walk with the Lord has to be one of constantly seeking the Lord – pursuing Him.
- If we don't, we will eventually backslide because of our bent toward sin.
- He says to seek righteousness.
- Again we need to be purposeful in actively considering what is righteous and what isn't, and seek after that which is.
- It's not natural for us to do this.
- It's too easy for us to settle into mediocre Christianity.
- He also says to seek humility. Why do we need to seek humility?
- Because we are not people who are generally full of humility.
- We're full of pride.
- Why do you think we don't generally like to be corrected by others?
- Because we are full of pride instead of humility.

- What will be the result if we seek the Lord, seek righteousness, and seek humility?
- “It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.” 3
- Jesus in Luke 21 was telling His disciples of the great day of God’s judgment that was going to come upon the earth.
- He told them about the things that would transpire during the great tribulation.
- He spoke of these cataclysmic events that would take place in the heavens.
- Then Jesus said to them, “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man”. Luke 21:36
- As the Lord speaks to the churches in the book of Revelation, to His church in Philadelphia, He said, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” Rev. 3:10
- But we should be seeking the Lord, we should be seeking righteous, if so be that God will spare us and hide us from the great wrath of God that is going to be poured out upon the earth.

- It is a comforting thing for me to realize that God has not appointed us to wrath.
- He tells us that once in Romans (5:9), and twice in 1st Thessalonians. (1:10 and 5:9)
- We've not been appointed to wrath, but God has appointed that we should be with Him in His heavenly kingdom.
- That we should be with Him there in heaven, while His judgment is being poured out upon the earth.

2:4-15 God's judgment on Judah's neighbors

- Now from verse 4 through the end of chapter 2, the Lord pronounces judgment on Judah's surrounding neighbors – the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, Assyria.
- This is in the same vein as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and others like Nahum and Habakkuk.
- God is not going to judge His own people and leave a Christ rejecting world unjudged.
- The first judgment is on the Philistines – Israel's enemies to the southwest:

READ 4

- So these cities are all Philistine cities.

READ 5

- The Cherethites were people who had come from the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea and who settled in Philistia.

READ 6-7

- So in the midst of this judgment against the forever enemies of Israel, the Philistines, God pronounces blessing on His own people, the remnant of Judah that followed after Him in the midst of corruption.
- I love that!
- God never forgets His own who are faithful to Him.
-
- Now He speaks of the judgment of Moab and Ammon, the descendants of Lot and Israel's enemies to the east:

READ 8-9

- So not only will these enemies of God's people be conquered, but God's people who are left in the land will be able to go in and take some plunder for themselves along with their houses and territory.
- "The residue of My people shall plunder them, And the remnant of My people shall possess them."

-
- God continues with the Moabites and Ammonites:

READ 10-11a

- Notice the Lord is not going to just defeat their gods; He is going to destroy them.
- And following that:

READ 11b

- Notice now that we have gone from what seems like a local judgment of the Moabites and Ammonites to what seems like a global outcome.
- The nations on the whole earth will be worshipping the Lord in their own lands.
- This takes us in a time machine, so to speak, from Zephaniah's time to the time of the Kingdom Age when this very thing will be happening.
- Next he mentions the Ethiopians or the Cushites depending on your translation:

READ 12

- So short but not sweet.
- The Ethiopians are simply going to be wiped out.
- Nothing more need be said.

- Lastly the Assyrians, which pinpoints this prophecy before 612 BC since that is when this was actually fulfilled.

READ 13-14

- So again, Nineveh was conquered in 612 BC and the destruction was so complete that the Greek armies passed by in 401 BC without even recognizing the city ruins.
- The ruins were eventually lost completely and were not found again until about 1850 AD when two French archeologists found some sculptures and inscriptions in what turned out to be the actual site of the ancient city of Nineveh.
- Most of the ruins that are now uncovered were uncovered in the 20th century.
- Before that the critics insisted that Nineveh never existed.
- Now notice, the Assyrians who live in Nineveh sound a bit like a Coca-Cola ad.

READ 15

- Coca Cola has had a number of slogans through the years.
- Back in 1963 it was “Things go better with Coke.”
- In 1970, “It’s the real thing.”
- In 1975, “Look up America.”

- In 1979, “Have a Coke and smile.”
- And in 1982, “Coke is it.”
- Well before Coke was it, Nineveh thought she was it.
- She was proud.
- How many people today have followed suit.
- They think they’re it!
- This is the philosophy that most people live by today.
- Religion is not important, let alone giving your life to Christ.
- God doesn’t exist for many – we’re in this alone.
- We might as well make the best of it while we can.
- Yet God said of Nineveh in His very next statement, “How has she become a desolation...”
- Guys, the Lord has ways of taking the air out of the arrogant.
- Only God “is it!”
- And we’d best remember that. Amen?
-
- Now God speaks about wicked Jerusalem and what’s in store for His own city:

Chapter 3

3:1-7 God's judgment on wicked Jerusalem

READ 1-2

- So these are the indictments. “She didn't obey the voice, she didn't receive correction, she trusted not in the Lord, and she drew not near to her God.”
- God sent these things for correction.
- God brought them but they did not accept the rebuke, and the reproof of the Lord.
- They continued stubborn and obstinate in their rebellion against God.
- They did not trust in the Lord.
- They did not turn to the Lord.
- They did not draw near to God.
- They refused to be corrected.
- Sometimes we can get this way, can't we?
- It's never a good trajectory to get on.
- It never ends well when we are stubborn and obstinate against the things of God and His will for our lives. Never!

READ 3-5

- God was there to reprove them.
- God was there to rebuke them, but they knew no shame.

- They not only were wicked and vile in their practices, but they were proud of them!
- They boasted of them, they flaunted their wickedness before man.
- They knew no shame.
- And it just gets worse.

READ 6-7

- God gave them victory over their enemies.
- He destroyed and emptied their fortified cities so they would no longer harm His people.
- He thought for sure they would appreciate all He had done for them.
- But instead they got up early with this great eagerness to sin.
- They couldn't wait to get to it!
- Rising up early to get involved in evil.
- "...they rose up early and corrupted all their deeds."
- So sad!
- Jerusalem's greatest enemy was herself!
- God's judgments on the surrounding nations hadn't made a dent in their stubborn spirits!
- Instead of being a good example to other nations, they became just like their pagan neighbors!

- Jerusalem had crumbled internally, long before Babylon came!
- Her rebellion ate away her soul!
- This destroyed their trust in God & undermined worship!
- For this they would be judged.
-
- Now from this point forward I think we move ahead in time to the end of the Tribulation and the second coming of Christ.
- When Jesus returns, one of the first things He will do is judge the peoples and nations who are there at the time and separate the evil from the righteous.
- It's called the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25.
- And then after that, He will begin His thousand year reign by gathering all the remaining believing Jews into the land and ruling over them and the rest of the world.
- First the judgment of the nations:

3:8 The judgment of the nations

READ 8

- This, I believe, is a description of the Lord gathering the nations of the world together at the Battle of Armageddon.
- They'll come together thinking they are fighting against each other, but in reality they'll be fighting against the Lord to know avail.
- It'll be no contest.
- In a matter of milliseconds, Jesus will speak the Word and all His enemies will be defeated.
- And this one verse is describing that.
- By the way, a bit of trivial trivia:
- Charles Feinberg, one of my favorite Old Testament commentators in his commentary on "The Minor Prophets" said that verse 8 is the only verse in the Old Testament in which all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, even the final letters, occur.
- It's like He's saying from A to Z He is going to judge the world and leave nothing undone.
- So Zephaniah 3:8, mark it. You heard it here first!
- Now we come to restoration.
- Zephaniah 3:9 makes another interesting prediction:

3:9-13 God's blessing of a devoted remnant of people

READ 9

- At the tower of Babel God confused the languages to drive men apart.
- But in the Kingdom age He'll reinstitute a global language.
- Won't that be cool?
- A universal language will unite us, and enable us to worship God in a single voice.
- And what language will this global tongue be?
- Well, English, of course, and everyone all over the world will speak with a Washingtonian accent.
- Just kiddin'.
- Some scholars see here a promise to restore ancient Hebrew, and make it the global language of all mankind.
- The restoration of the Hebrew language in Israel today is really nothing less than a modern miracle.
- Prior to the 20th century Hebrew had not been spoken since the 6th century BC, when the Jews were carried off to Babylon.

- When they returned the Jews spoke the Aramaic they picked up in Babylon.
- Only the religious leaders knew Hebrew, and soon it became a dead language.
- Hebrew wasn't spoken again until the 20th century.
- When Jews from all over the globe returned to their homeland they came speaking a zillion languages.
- Communication was difficult.
- A Jerusalem journalist named Eliezer Ben-Yehuda recognized the problem, and made it his personal campaign to revive Hebrew.
- He started with a vocabulary of just 7704 words – all taken from the Bible.
- Today Modern Hebrew contains over 100,000 words.
- Hebrew is the only dead language in history that has been restored to common, everyday usage – really a modern miracle.

READ 10

- Zephaniah 3:10 is another interesting prophecy.
- In the late 1970s and early 1980s the Israeli military launched “Operation Moses” to airlift

black Falasha Jews out of war-torn Ethiopia, and relocate them to Israel.

- The Falasha Jews claim to be descendants of Menilek I, who was thought to be the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.
- They carried on most of the traditions of the Jews right there in Ethiopia until under persecution, most of them immigrated to Israel – some 45,000 of them – black Jews.
- This prophecy could be very well have been fulfilled in that immigration in our own time.

READ 11-13

- The kingdom age.
- There will be just that beautiful work of God's Spirit, and no exalting of one group over another.
- But all of us, just as one, serving the Lord.
- He will be the center of worship and praise.
- He will be the exalted one, and we there, His servants, just loving Him, and serving Him.
- We will live in complete peace.
- No violence, no crime.
- You can lie down in peace and not worry about someone trying to break in.
- Just leave your doors unlocked, your keys in the ignition without a worry.

- It's just going to be a time of glorious rejoicing.

3:14-20 The rejoicing of God and His people

READ 14

- They'll be nothing but rejoicing in Jerusalem in that day.

READ 15

- "He has cast out your enemy."
- Satan, the enemy that Jesus said has come to rob and to destroy - He will be cast out, and the Lord will reign in righteousness, and the disasters are taken away.
- Jesus will be there and nothing bad ever happen again.
- Can you imagine that kind of a day, when you'll not see evil any more?
- It'll be gone, the earth will be rid of all of the evil, all of the crime, all of the cheating, all of the stealing.
- You'll not see evil any more!
- Just God's people, dwelling together in love - dwelling together in peace, in righteousness.
- Ah what a day!

READ 16-17

- Again, Oh what a day!

- No wonder when Jesus said to John, “Behold, I come quickly!”, he said, “Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus.”
- Lord, dwell in the midst of your people!
- Someone made a song out of this verse: “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.”

READ 18-19

- In that day there will be a great restoring.
- There will be no homeless people.
- There will be no struggling to just get by.
- There will be no pressures, like we experience in our society today.
- As the prophet Isaiah described it, Isaiah 55:1 (NKJV) ¹ "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. (another song)
- Psalm 24:1 (NKJV) ¹ The earth *is* the LORD'S, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.
- And it shall produce an abundance for God's people.

- No one will be destitute.
- No one will be without shelter.
- No one will be without love.
- No one will be forsaken, and feel lonely and desolate.
- But there will be a glorious rejoicing through all the earth, because the King reigns.
- He reigns in righteousness and truth.
- The church of Jesus Christ has suffered reproach from the world.
- But as God gathers us together, every place where there's been mocking, and reproach against the church and God's people, God will bring forth praise.

READ 20

- This is the glorious bright future for God's people.
- What a day!
- Oh thank you Zephaniah, for sharing with us that glorious hope of the future!
- In this dark, desperate world, we don't go around hanging our heads.
- The outlook is awfully dark, but the uplift never looked better!

- So, as Jesus said, “Look up and lift up your head, for your redemption is drawing near!” Luke 21:28