

# Zephaniah

Zephaniah opens with his identity, and the general time frame of his prophecies, in the days of Josiah. Josiah, as recounted in Kings and Chronicles was a godly man, the last of the good kings of Judah, who reigned from 640-609 B.C. His great grandfather Hezekiah most likely was King Hezekiah, a godly man also described as one of the best kings of Judah in Kings and Chronicles. Zephaniah would have been 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin to King Josiah, and probably was a young man when the word of the LORD came to him. The prophets Jeremiah and Nahum would have been contemporary with Zephaniah.

Zephaniah 1:2-3 sets the tone for his message, God's judgment was coming upon Judah and Jerusalem in a devastating way. The same syncretistic practices deplored in 1:4-5 are also described in Jeremiah, nominally following the LORD but engaging in household pagan rituals and organized idolatry at the same time. Note as in the other prophets that idolatry and abuse of power and injustice all go hand in hand (1:9). As the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah would both decry as well, most of the people were complacent about the evil around them (1:12). The "day of the LORD" (1:7, 14) was a day of reckoning for the wicked, emblematic of God's judgment of all the nations (1:17-18).

Jeremiah wrote that his people had forgotten how to blush (Jer. 6:15), and Zephaniah wrote that they were a "shameless nation" (2:1), but sin is sin and evil is evil whether people embrace it or not. Those who humbly sought the LORD (2:3) had some hope, a theme repeated by most of the prophets, as well as Jesus and his apostles. Again, as in the other prophets, God would preserve a remnant which would be blessed by God and would grow to occupy the places formerly occupied by enemies of the LORD and his people (2:5-7, 9). God's judgement, as long before in Egypt, was against not only the people but against their gods (Exodus 12:12, Zeph 2:11). Zephaniah, like Nahum, foresaw the destruction of that great city, Nineveh (2:13), a desolation to this day.

Unfortunately, the "oppressing city" of 3:1 isn't any of the foreign nations mentioned in chapter 2, it is Jerusalem herself. All her leaders in 3-5 are self-serving consuming the flock they were to guard. God stood in utter contrast to the human who claimed authority in his name. Again, in 3:8 the LORD says that the temporal judgments of the nations are emblematic of his divine retribution for the sins all nations. "All the earth shall be consumed." But there will also be those who turn to the LORD and "serve him in one accord" (3:9) a description Luke used to describe the church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14, 2:46, 4:24, 5:12). The purified people would include those far away (3:10), a humble people (3:12) who seek the LORD. This is cause for celebration in 3:14ff, and 3:17 is one of those beautiful expressions of divine love and care that should not be overlooked or forgotten.