

# THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH – AN INTRODUCTION

*“Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near...” Zephaniah 1:7*

**AUTHOR:** the prophet Zephaniah (1:1)

- Zephaniah was the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah, King of Judah (1:1).
- His name means “YHWH hides” which may highlight God’s desire to protect His people during the coming destruction.

**DATE:** certainly between 640-609<sub>BC</sub> and likely between 622-612<sub>BC</sub>.

- Zephaniah ministered during the reign of King Josiah of Judah (640-609<sub>BC</sub>; 1:1).
- It is unclear whether his prophecy was given before or after Josiah’s reforms began (622<sub>BC</sub>; 2 Kgs. 22-23; 2 Chron. 34).
- His allusions to the Law may imply that he was referring to the recently discovered scrolls (1:13, 1:15, 1:17 with Deut. 4:11, 28:15-62). The prophecy certainly came before the destruction of Nineveh in 612<sub>BC</sub> (cf. 2:13).
- Nahum, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah were Zephaniah’s contemporaries, though Jeremiah’s ministry continued much longer.

**AUDIENCE:** the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah

- Zephaniah called the people of Judah to repent of the idolatry and immorality that had become prevalent in the nation.
- Jerusalem was the capital city of Judah and the two were often used synonymously for the people of the S. Kingdom.

**BACKGROUND:**

- In 722<sub>BC</sub> Assyria sieged and invaded Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They starved, raped, pillaged, murdered, and took into captivity the ten northern tribes of Israel (2 Kings 17:3-23).
- Rather than see the destruction of the N. Kingdom and repent, the S. Kingdom continued to sin against God. King Manasseh (695-642<sub>BC</sub>) and his son King Amon (642-640<sub>BC</sub>) were wicked rulers who led Israel to worship the sun, moon, and stars as well as set up idols in the Lord’s temple and sacrifice their children to false gods (2 Kgs. 21:4-7, 23:10-11).
- In 640<sub>BC</sub> Josiah succeeded Amon at the age of 8. In the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, Hiliiah the high priest discovered a copy of the Law (622<sub>BC</sub>; 2 Kgs. 22:3-8). This began a short-lived revival that ultimately failed due to Judah’s unwillingness to repent of her beloved idolatry. Babylon would later take Judah into captivity in three waves spanning 605-586<sub>BC</sub>.

**PURPOSE:** To warn Judah of impending judgment through Babylon and encourage them with God’s unfailing love.

- “The day of the LORD” (x20) is referenced more frequently in this prophecy than in any other place in Scripture. Its repetition was to serve as a drumbeat of warning to Judah to repent of her idolatry or expect God’s judgment.
- The judgment and restoration promised in Zephaniah foreshadow God’s final world-wide judgment and ultimate restoration of His people in the new heavens and new earth through Jesus (1:2-3, 3:20; cf. Rev. 19-22).

# AN OUTLINE OF ZEPHANIAH

## *HIDDEN FROM WRATH & HOPEFUL FOR RESTORATION*

The Day of Destruction (1:1-3:8)

*Judgment on all the earth (1:1-3)*

*Judgment on Jerusalem (1:4-2:3)*

*Judgment on the nations (2:4-15)*

*Judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-8)*

The Day of Restoration (3:9-20)

*Restoration of the nations (3:9-10)*

*Restoration of Jerusalem (3:11-20)*

### The Near East at the Time of Zephaniah (620BC)



# AN OUTLINE OF ZEPHANIAH

## *HIDDEN FROM WRATH & HOPEFUL FOR RESTORATION*

(The more detailed edition)

- **1:2-3:8 The Day of Destruction**
- Judgment on the earth (1:1-3)
- Judgment on Jerusalem (1:4-2:3)
  - The people under judgment (1:4-13)
    - *Idolaters* (1:4-7)
    - *Princes* (1:8)
    - *Oppressors* (1:9)
    - *Merchants* (1:10-11)
    - *The indifferent* (1:12-13)
  - The portrayal of judgment (1:14-18)
    - *Timing of the Judgment* (1:14a)
    - *Terror of the Judgment* (1:14b-18)
  - The prevention of judgment (2:1-3)
    - *Summons to the nation*: Repent (2:1-2)
    - *Summons to the humble*: Seek God (2:3)
- Judgment on the nations (2:4-15)
  - *On Philistia* (2:4-7)
  - *On Moab and Ammon* (2:8-11)
  - *On Ethiopia* (2:12)
  - *On Assyria* (2:13-15)
- Judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-8)
  - *The prophet's indictment* (3:1-5)
  - *The Lord's judgment* (3:6-8)
- **3:9-20 The Day of Restoration**
- Restoration of the nations (3:9-10)
- Restoration of Jerusalem (3:11-20)
  - *Redemption of the nation* (3:11-13)
  - *Rejoicing of the nation* (3:14)
  - *Ruler of the nation* (3:15-17)
  - *Reward of the nation* (3:18-20)