

Minor Prophets...

THE MINOR PROPHETS

The Book of Zephaniah

Zeph. 1:1-6

...Major Message

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Zeph. 1:1 The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

2 I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.

3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

4 I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;

5 And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham;

6 And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.

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TITLE AND WRITER

The title of the book comes from the name of its writer. "Zephaniah" means "Jehovah Hides [or Has Hidden]," "Hidden in Jehovah," "Jehovah's Watchman," or "Jehovah Treasured."

Zephaniah was the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah (1:1), evidently King Hezekiah of Judah.

UNITY

Criticism of the unity of Zephaniah has not had great influence. Zephaniah's prediction of Nineveh's fall (2:15; 612 B.C.) led critics—who do not believe that the prophets could predict the future—to date the book after that event.

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DATE

Zephaniah ministered during the reign of King Josiah of Judah (640-609 B.C.; 1:1).

Zephaniah's reference to the future destruction of Nineveh (2:13) definitely fixed his writing before that event in 612 B.C. So the prophet ministered between 640 and 612 B.C.

His contemporaries were Nahum, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah, though Jeremiah's ministry continued beyond the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 586 B.C.

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PLACE OF COMPOSITION

References to Jerusalem in 1:10-11 seem to indicate that Zephaniah knew Jerusalem well. Since he ministered to the Southern Kingdom, it is likely that he lived in Judah and probably in Jerusalem.

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

The fact that Jehovah's word came to Zephaniah during Josiah's reign (640-609 B.C.), means that he could not have ministered to the Northern Kingdom, because it fell in 722 B.C. Thus, Zephaniah's audience consisted of the people of Judah: the surviving Southern Kingdom.

(cf. 2 Chron. 35:20-27)

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In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (622 B.C.), Hilkiah the priest discovered the Law of Moses in the temple, and after Josiah read it, he instituted major reforms throughout Judah. Josiah's reforms were good because they were official. He eliminated much of the display of idolatry in the land and revived the celebration of the Passover, among other things. See 2 Kings 22:4-25 and 2 Chronicles 34:3—35:19 for lists of his extensive reforms.

Unfortunately his reforms did not change the hearts of most of the people, as Jeremiah revealed in his earlier prophecies. So the people to whom Zephaniah ministered had a long history of formal religion without much real commitment to Jehovah.

Zech. 1:7 **Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand:** for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. **...Major Message**

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LITERARY FORM

He had an imperative message to deliver and proceeded in the most direct and forceful way to discharge his responsibility. What he lacked in grace and charm, he in some measure atoned for by the vigor and clarity of his speech.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

The Book of Zephaniah has been called "a compendium of the oracles of the prophets." This is true for two reasons. First, Zephaniah's general message is similar to that of most of the other writing prophets. Second, he used the same terms as several of the other prophets (cf. 1:7 and Hab. 2:20; 1:7 and Joel 1:15; 1:7 and Isa. 34:6; 2:14 and Isa. 13:21; 34:11; 2:15 and Isa. 47:8).

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Zephaniah contains more references to "the day of the LORD" than any other Old Testament book.

Theologically, Zephaniah stressed the sovereign justice of Jehovah (1:2-3, 7, 14-18; 3:8) and His willingness to receive the repentant (2:3). He also emphasized the wickedness of man (1:3-6, 17; 3:1, 4). The theme of Jehovah's relationship to Jerusalem is prominent in Zephaniah as well (1:4-13; 3:1-7, 11-17).

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The key to the Book of Zephaniah is the phrase "the day of the Lord."

There are three things that this book reveals about this coming day of the Lord:

- its content
- its extent
- its intent.

The content of the day of the Lord is clear from 1:2-3. God will visit earth with direct and positive retribution, not in the general administrative sense of bringing people to account eventually, but in the narrower sense of executing vengeance on humanity in cataclysmic judgment (1:14-16).

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2 Pet. 3:1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

2 That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour:

3 Knowing this first, that **there shall come in the last days scoffers**, walking after their own lusts,

4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

5 For this **they willingly are ignorant of**, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

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6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

10 But **the day of the Lord** will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

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What will be **the extent** of this judgment? Zephaniah reveals that it will be discriminating. His people Israel will be the special target of this judgment, though all humanity will also suffer (1:12).

What is **the intent** of this terrible activity? It is the creation of a new order, with God Himself enthroned among His creatures (3:17).

2 Pet. 3:11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

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We could state the message of the book as follows:

- God will intervene in history, catastrophically,
- to judge humanity's complacency and indifference, and
- to restore His people to the conditions of blessing that He originally intended for them to enjoy.

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Conclusion

2 Pet. 3:17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, **beware** lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.
18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

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