

# Zephaniah – An Old Testament Minor Prophet – Part 1

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All references in red are from: Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

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**Overview:** Zephaniah prophesied the future storm of God’s wrath as a day without light. Though the world has witnessed God’s judgment on Judah and its enemies, Zephaniah’s darkest prophecy remains unfulfilled, pointing still forward to earth’s end: the great day of the Lord (1511).

**Date of Writing:** 640 – 609 BC. Zephaniah was a prophet during the reign of King Josiah of Judah; he also prophesied during the time of Jeremiah, who was called to be a prophet in 628 BC (1511).

**Luther on Zephaniah:** Zephaniah lived in the time of the prophet Jeremiah... For that reason he prophesies the very same things as Jeremiah, namely, that Jerusalem and Judah shall be destroyed and the people carried away because of their wicked life, devoid of repentance.

Unlike Jeremiah, however, he does not name the king of Babylon as the one who is to inflict this destruction and captivity. He says simply that God will bring misfortune and affliction upon the people so that they may be moved to repentance. For none of the prophets was ever able even once to persuade this people that God was angry with them. They relied continually on the claim that they were...God’s people; and whoever preached that God was angry with them had to be a false prophet and had to die, for they would not believe that God would leave his people. It was then as it is today [*keep in mind that Luther was writing in 1522*]: all who teach that the church errs and sins, and that God will punish her, are denounced as heretics and killed [*that happened in Luther’s time*].

Now Zephaniah prophesies this disaster not only for Judah, but also for all the surrounding and neighboring lands, such as the Philistines, Moab, the Ethiopians, and Assyria. The king of Babylon is to be God’s rod upon all *lands* [*God used Babylon to punish His people; then He conquered Babylon in 539*].

In the third chapter Zephaniah prophesies gloriously and clearly of the happy and blessed kingdom of Christ, which shall be spread abroad in all the world. Although he is a minor prophet, he speaks more about Christ than many other major prophets, almost more than Jeremiah even. He does so in order to give the people abundant comfort, so that they would not despair of God because of their disastrous captivity in Babylon, as if God had cast them off forever, but rather be sure that after this punishment they would receive grace again and get the promised Savior... (AE 35:328–29)(1511).

**Challenges for Readers:** *Day of the Lord*. The theme of Judgment Day dominates Zephaniah’s prophecy (1:2–3:8). Readers can easily feel overwhelmed by the descriptions of God’s wrath. However, the prophecy ends with sweet emphasis on God’s mercy... (1511).

**Blessings for Readers:** In just three chapters, Zephaniah describes the classic message of OT prophets, illustrating the destructive effects of sin upon all nations and describing the mercy God plans for them. As you read Zephaniah, seriously consider your own sin, and seek the Lord with a repentant heart... (1511).

## Outline:

- I. The Day of the Lord Is a Day of Wrath (1:2–3:8)
  - A. The Lord’s Just Wrath against Judah (1:2–2:3)
    1. The Lord’s universal judgment (1:2–3)
    2. Condemnation of Judah (1:4–6)
    3. The day of the Lord is near (1:7–14)
    4. Description of the day of wrath (1:15–18)
    5. Judah’s last chance to repent (2:1–3)
  - B. The Lord’s Just Wrath against the Nations Surrounding Judah (2:4–15)
    1. West—Philistia (2:4–7)
    2. East—Moab and Ammon (2:8–11)
    3. South—Cush (2:12)
    4. North—Assyria (2:13–15)
  - C. The Lord’s Just Wrath and Concern for Jerusalem (3:1–8)
    1. The evil of “the oppressing city” (3:1–5)
    2. The Lord’s concern for Jerusalem (3:6–8)
- II. The Day of the Lord Is a Day of Restoration (3:9–20)
  - A. The Conversion of the Nations (3:9–10)
  - B. The Remnant of Judah Is Saved and Purified (3:11–13)
  - C. Judah Sings a Song of Victory because of Its Restoration (3:14–20) (1512)

**Introduction (1:1):** <sup>ESV</sup> **Zephaniah 1:1** The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah. “Zephaniah traces back his ancestry four generations to Hezekiah (1513).” That makes him the great, great grandson of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah; then Manasseh; then Amon; then Josiah.

**The Coming Judgment on Judah (1:2-6):** <sup>2</sup> “I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. Now He goes into some detail:

1. <sup>3</sup> “I will sweep away man and beast;
2. I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.
  - a. Fish – greater judgment than the flood in Noah’s day.
  - b. Rubble – “...those things that cause people to turn away from the Lord” (1513).
    - i. What are those things today? \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. What about you? I am being influenced. I am trying to turn from such things.
  - c. Wicked – “The morally corrupt” (1513).

3. <sup>4</sup> “I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place
- a. the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests, – Baal was the main Canaanite god; people thought he made the land fertile.
    - i. What do people wrongly think today? \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. How do you need to change your thinking? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. <sup>5</sup> those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens – star worship.
  - c. those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom – a.k.a. Molech, “the Ammonite idol to whom people sacrificed their children” (1513).
    - i. Do some today express devotion to the LORD but are truly devoted to false gods? Y N
    - ii. How is the Lord calling you to live out your devotion to Him? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - d. <sup>6</sup> those who have turned back from following the LORD – Backsliders.
    - i. Does that actually happen? Y N
    - ii. Consider these passages:
      1. <sup>NAS</sup> [Luke 8:13](#) “And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.”
      2. <sup>NAS</sup> [1 Timothy 1:18-19](#) “This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.”
      3. <sup>NAS</sup> [1 Timothy 6:10](#) “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith...”
  - e. who do not seek the LORD or inquire of him.” Those who do their own thing!

### The Day of the LORD Is Near (1:7-18):

4. The end of Judah: <sup>7</sup> Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice [*the nation of Judah*] and consecrated his guests [*the Babylonians*].
- a. <sup>8</sup> And on the day of the LORD’s sacrifice—“I will punish the officials and the king’s sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire. – All who led the people from the LORD; leaders have a greater responsibility.
  - b. <sup>9</sup> On that day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold [*those who hold to superstitions*], and those who fill their master’s house with violence and fraud.

- c. <sup>10</sup> “On that day,” declares the LORD, “a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter, a loud crash from the hills. – Sounds that bring distress.
- d. <sup>11</sup> Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar [*possibly an area of business*]! For all the traders are no more; all who weigh out silver are cut off.
- i. Imagine if your way of making a living was no more; how would you feel?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ii. Where is your trust for your needs of food, clothing, and shelter? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. <sup>12</sup> At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps [*a very careful search; no one will be missed*], and I will punish the men who are complacent [*self-satisfied, have no need for the LORD*], those who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.’ – We should always take the LORD in a most serious manner; He will keep His promises.
- f. <sup>13</sup> Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.” – Goods and houses are blessings from the LORD; those who forsake Him will eventually be cut off from those blessings.
5. The end of the world: <sup>14</sup> The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. – Even the mighty man.
- a. <sup>15</sup> A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, <sup>16</sup> a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities [*which seem unconquerable*] and against the lofty battlements [*like high and fortified towers*].
- b. <sup>17</sup> I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind [*close your eyes and try to walk; note the reason for their distress*], because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. – Those who continue without repentance will finally be thrown away like garbage.
- c. <sup>18</sup> Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD [*though money can do much now, it will be worthless then*]. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth. – “The Lord is a jealous God (Ex 34:14), who demands the full devotion and worship of His people for Himself alone” (1514).

### Next Week – Zephaniah Chapters 2 – 3:

- Judgment on Judah’s Enemies (2:1-15)
- Judgment on Jerusalem and the Nations (3:1-8)
- The Conversion of the Nations (3:9-13)
- Israel’s Joy and Restoration (3:14-20)