

## Zephaniah – Prophet of Global Warning of Judgment

Ian Gibson (May 2016)

Zephaniah prophesied approximately 630 BC (Newberry's date), "*in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah*" (ch1v1), i.e. immediately pre-exilic, contemporary with the prophets Habakkuk and Jeremiah.

The solemn theme of Zephaniah's prophecy is **The Day of the LORD**, giving warning of a coming day of divine visitation in judgment, a day of the LORD's wrath, fierce anger & righteous indignation, extending to involve the whole earth, and all of sinful humanity (see ch1vs7,9,10,14,15-18, ch2v2-3,ch3v8).

These scriptures remind us that because of man's sin (ch1v17), there is the certainty of divine judgment, and all desperately need to know that "*The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly*" (ch1v14).

For believers in the Lord Jesus, we learn about the standards God demands of His people.

All divine judgment has been committed to the Son, the Lord Jesus (see John 5v22), and will be for His glory.

### **Multilayered Fulfillment of the Day of the LORD:**

Imminent fulfillment: The Chaldean invasion (586 BC), taking away Judah in captivity to Babylon.

Further fulfillment: The Roman destruction of Jerusalem & the temple (AD 70), and subsequent dispersion.

Final fulfillment: The tribulation period, "*the time of Jacob's trouble*" (Jer 30v7), and global / universal distress, climaxing in the appearing of the Lord Jesus as the Son of man (see also 1<sup>st</sup> Thess 5v2-3, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3v10).

### **The Days of Scripture:**

**MAN's Day:** This present age of grace, referred to as "*man's judgment*" (1<sup>st</sup> Cor 4v3).

**The Day of the LORD:** Events on earth, God's righteous dealings in judgment with Israel & the world.

**The Day of CHRIST:** Events in heaven connected with the Church (see 1<sup>st</sup> Cor 1v8, Phil 1v6,10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Thess 2v2).

**The Day of GOD:** The eternal state (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3v12).

### **A. Zephaniah 1v1: The Prophet's Identification and Time of Ministry**

The name Zephaniah means '*whom Jehovah hath hid*', or '*hidden / sheltered of Jehovah*' (see ch2v3).

Zephaniah's genealogy indicates his royal ancestry, Hizkiah = Hezekiah, '*the prophet of royal blood*'.

He prophesied in Judah "*in the days of Josiah*", i.e. dark days of spiritual departure (see 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21-23).

The transient revival under Josiah was likely a response to Zephaniah's ministry, among others (Huldah, Jeremiah), but the coming judgment upon Judah would not be averted (see 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23v26-27).

### **B. Zephaniah 1v2 - 3v8: Jehovah is Speaking Concerning Israel's & The Nations' Judgment**

Ch1: The divine judgment & anger is particularly directed upon Judah.

Ch2-3v8: The judgment falls upon Judah's enemies, those nations all around them that God used to judge Israel.

Ch3v8 "*My determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy*".

### **C. Zephaniah 3v9-20: Jehovah is Singing Concerning Israel's & The Nations' Blessing**

The presence of Christ in the midst of His people; ch3v17 "*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*".

### **Ch1v2-4a: The certainty & scope of the judgment**

6x Jehovah says **"I will ..."**, indicating divine sovereign purpose, and that this judgment is certain.

v2-3: A global / universal judgment; v2 **"I will utterly consume all things from off the land (earth)"**, v3 **"I will cut off mankind from off the face of the ground"** (JND).

The language is climactic; an apocalyptic judgment that will engulf the entire habitable world (see Acts 17v31).

The various calamities of the tribulation period outlined in Revelation will have global involvement.

v4a: More imminent judgment upon privileged Judah & Jerusalem, **"I will also stretch out Mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem"**.

### **Ch1v4b-6: The reasons for the judgment**

The principle reason was Judah's idolatry; an evil admixture of the worship of Jehovah with the worship of idols. Manasseh brought the idolatrous worship of Baal into the LORD's house & into His sanctuary (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21v3-5), and thus the LORD says **"I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place"**.

King Josiah accomplished much of this predicted cutting off of Judah's idolatry (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23v4-15).

The consecrated priests of the LORD were admixed with the idolatrous priests (**"the Chemarims"** v4).

Judah was apostate (v6), bringing the worship of the LORD down to the same level as heathen idolatry (v4-5).

Our God is a jealous God (see ch1v18, ch3v8), jealous of the exclusive loyalty & worship of His people.

### **Ch1v7-8a: The warning of the judgment**

The judgment was imminent, **"the day of the LORD is at hand"** (v7), and certain, **"it shall come to pass"** (v8).

The exhortation given is **"Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD (Sovereign Lord Jehovah)"** (v7).

### **Ch1v8b-13: The classes for the judgment**

The responsible ruling royal household, **"the princes, and the king's children (sons)"** (v8) will be punished.

They were more interested in personal aggrandisement, **"all such as are clothed with strange (foreign) apparel"**.

Those associated with behaviour that was marked by oppressive **"violence and deceit"** (v9).

The rich commercial & merchant sectors of Jerusalem (v10-11) will be judged by reason of their greed.

Material gain had become their god, and they were motivated only by their insatiable desire for silver.

Those of Jerusalem who were marked by ease & inactivity, **"settled on their lees"** (v12, see also Jer 48v11).

Those with an attitude of total ambivalence toward God, who **"say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will He do evil"** (v12), will be dispossessed of their possessions (v13) when the LORD intervenes.

### **Ch1v14-18: The character of the judgment**

It was imminent for Judah; it is for this world today; **"The great day of the LORD ... hasteth greatly"** (v14).

Mighty man (in his own eyes) will be abased; man's sin will find him out (v17). It will be the ultimate day of reckoning for sinful humanity, but the abasement of man will be for the exaltation of God & Christ His Anointed.

The judgement will be inescapable & irresistible; it will demonstrate the utter futility & impotence of human strength & human resource, **"Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them ..."** (v18).

## **Zephaniah 2v1 – 15:**

### **Ch2v1-2: The LORD's appeal for national repentance**

In view of the judgment to come upon Judah (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21v12-13), there was the need for urgent national repentance; ***“Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired (without shame, JND)”***.

They were a nation without any contrition as to their failure, unashamedly practicing their idolatry.

The rebellious sinners of Judah were being urged to humble themselves before the LORD (see also Joel 2v12-14).

An attitude of repentance is very relevant to the people of God (see 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor 7v9-10, Revelation 2-3).

4x ***“Before ...”*** (v2), i.e. the opportunity for repentance, but any dealings with God are always urgent.

### **Ch2v3: The LORD's advice to the faithful remnant in Judah**

The remaining godly ones of Judah, who ***“have wrought His judgment”***, were exhorted to continue to actively & consciously ***“seek”*** the LORD, in a spirit of ***“righteousness”***, ***“meekness”*** & humility.

For such faithful ones, ***“it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger”***; in God's purpose a remnant would certainly be preserved in view of future national recovery & repossession of their territory.

Josiah knew the judgment would not be averted, but he responded to this exhortation (see 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 22v13).

It is for us today to be the ***“meek of the earth”***, seeking to be faithful to the Lord until He come.

In the future tribulation period, a godly remnant of Israel will be hidden & preserved (Isaiah 26v20-21, Rev 12).

### **Ch2v4-15: The LORD's announcement of judgment on the enemy nations around Judah**

**v4-7:** The judgment of the LORD will fall upon Philistia to the west of Judah, the land of the Philistines & its cities. Ultimately that Philistine territory ***“shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah ...”*** (v7).

**v8-11:** The judgment will fall severely upon the land of Moab & Ammon, on the east side of Judah.

The reason given is their proud revilings & arrogant self-magnification against God's people.

Jehovah recognises & owns Judah as ***“My people”*** (3x, v8-9), and ***“the people of the LORD of hosts”*** (v10).

His people are precious in His sight; ***“he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye”*** (Zech 2v8).

The divine judgment is in view of a ***“residue / remnant”*** (v9) of His people being recovered from captivity.

They will also be recovered from their idolatry, and both Israel & the Gentiles will ultimately be brought to worship the LORD alone (v11), which will be fulfilled in the millennium (see Hab 2v14).

**v12:** The judgment will be upon Ethiopia to the south, which in OT times was a powerful dynasty including Egypt. Initially fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar was the sword of Jehovah's anger against Egypt (see Jeremiah 46v2).

**v13-15:** Destructive judgment will fall upon Assyria to the north, and its great capital city of Nineveh.

As a result of the desolation, wild beasts & birds will make Nineveh their place of habitation (v14-15).

The reason is that Nineveh, that ***“rejoicing city”***, carelessly & proudly boasted in being superior & invulnerable, she ***“said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me”*** (v15); God hates ***“A proud look”*** (Prov 6v17).

The encompassment of all 4 directions would be in keeping with the universal scope of judgment in the final ultimate fulfilment of the great day of the LORD, when Israel's enemies will be encroaching from N,S,E & W.

***“That men may know that Thou, whose Name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most High over all the earth”*** (Ps 83v18).

## Zephaniah 3v1-20:

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The events connected with the day of the LORD deal not only with God judging & destroying His enemies, but also with God preserving & delivering His earthly people Israel.

Zephaniah 3 brings in the future deliverance & blessing for a restored nation of Israel, but it is all with a view to the glory & exaltation of God Himself, when ***“the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day”*** (Isaiah 2vs11,17).

Zephaniah 3 is notable for the 3-fold reference to the LORD ***“in the midst”*** of His people (vs5,15,17).

**v1-7: The just LORD testifying as Judge in the midst of His polluted people**

**v8-15: The sovereign LORD reigning as King in the midst of His purified people**

**v16-20: The mighty LORD rejoicing as Saviour in the midst of His gathered people**

### **Ch3v1-7: The just LORD testifying as Judge in the midst of His polluted people**

**v1:** Further woe is pronounced upon Jerusalem; the place of the LORD’s Name had become this ***“filthy and polluted ... oppressing city”***, likely influenced by Nineveh ***“the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly”*** (ch2v15).

**v2:** 4-fold indictment upon Judah / Jerusalem, sins of omission Godward.

**1. Disobedience - “She obeyed not the voice”**, i.e. the nation’s disobedience to the voice of the LORD (see Jeremiah 22v21). Are we disobedient to the written Word of God, or the voice of the Spirit of God?

NT Scripture exhorts believers in a pathway of obedience (see John 14vs15,21,23, Rom 6v17, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1vs14,22).

**2. Obstinance - “She received not correction (instruction, Newberry)”**, i.e. Jerusalem was obstinate & incorrigible (see Jeremiah 5v3). Are we willing to be subject to ongoing correction & adjustment in our lives?

NT Scripture exhorts believers to be subject to the correction of God’s Word (see 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim 3v16, James 1v22).

**3. Lack of Faith - “She trusted not in the LORD”**, there was a basic lack of faith in God.

Is our faith wholly in our God, or is it in the idolatrous systems & materialism of this Christ-rejecting world?

NT Scripture exhorts believers to live in the good of our faith, for ***“the just shall live by his faith”*** (Hab 2v4).

**4. Independence of God - “She drew not near to her God”**, there was no nearness / intimacy / communion with their God (see ch1v6). Do we avail ourselves of this privilege to draw near to our God?

NT Scripture exhorts believers to draw near to God in dependence (see Heb 4v16, 10v22, Phil 4v6).

**v3-4:** 4-fold indictment upon the civil & religious leaders of Judah / Jerusalem, their sins of commission.

**1. The Selfish Princes - “Her princes within her are roaring lions”** (see also Micah 3v3).

Leaders among God’s people are to be marked by selfless shepherdly care & protection.

**2. The Ruthless Judges - “Her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow”** (see also Ezekiel 22v27). The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders of such ***“grievous wolves”*** (Acts 20v29).

Leaders among God’s people are to ***“Feed the flock of God which is among you”*** (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5v2).

**3. The Deceitful Prophets - “Her prophets are light and treacherous persons”, i.e. they deliberately deceived the people with false hopes & false teaching.**

Teachers among God’s people are to be like Haggai, the LORD’s messengers in the LORD’s message.

**4. The Defiled Priests - “Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law”.**

Defilement had reached the sanctuary of the LORD, and the most holy things were being defiled (see also Ezekiel 22v26). We are all priests in God’s assembly, “**a holy priesthood**” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2v5), handling the holy things of God.

**“Be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”** (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1v15-16).

For leaders among God’s people, we are reminded of the importance of integrity of character.

**“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock”** (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5v3).

Leaders are to show character that commends them as those who are worthy to be followed.

**v5: “The just LORD is in the midst thereof, He will not do iniquity”**

He is still willing to take His place in the midst of a rebellious & polluted people, and He does so as a righteous Judge, to testify against their sinful condition. The abiding faithfulness of the LORD is emphasised, contrasting with the unfaithfulness & waywardness of Judah’s princes, judges, prophets & priests.

This reminds us of the Lord Jesus walking “**in the midst of the 7 lampstands**” (Rev 1v13), testifying against their failures, “**I know thy works ... I have somewhat against thee**” (Rev 2-3).

He is the “**just LORD ... in the midst thereof**” in every local assembly, and nothing escapes those scrutinizing eyes that are “**as a flame of fire**” (Rev 1v14). We need that reverential awe of the reality of the holy presence of the just / righteous Lord in our midst in every gathering.

The just / righteous LORD is faithful in bringing His Word to bear upon the people; “**every morning doth He bring His judgment to light, He faileth not**”, and yet the people continued to reject His Word to them (see Jer 44v4-6). How receptive are we to the faithful voice of the Lord who speaks repeatedly to us through His Word?

**“But the unjust knoweth no shame”**; the sad commentary on the people of Judah at this time (see also Jer 6v15). They had lost all sense of shame, all sense of the presence of the holy & just LORD in their midst, that they did not even blush with embarrassment as they pursued & practised their heathen idolatry.

We need to always have that consciousness of the reality of His holy presence in our midst in the gatherings.

**v6-7:** The LORD is faithfully testifying further to His people concerning His dealings with the immediate surrounding heathen nations, “**I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant**”.

He had appealed to them, “**I said, Surely thou wilt fear Me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings**”.

Judah & Jerusalem is being warned that, as the just LORD, He will likewise move in judgment against them.

We are reminded that “**judgment must begin at the house of God**” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4v17).

## Zephaniah 3v8-20:

The passage details the nation of Israel's future deliverance, restoration, regathering, blessing & glory. There will need to be a time of national spiritual regeneration & cleansing (see Ezekiel 36v24-25)

**v8-15: The sovereign LORD reigning as King in the midst of His purified people**

**v15 - "the King of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee"**

**v16-20: The mighty LORD rejoicing as Saviour in the midst of His gathered people**

**v17 - "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty".**

**v8: "Therefore wait ye upon Me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey ..."**

The sovereign LORD indicates His purpose & determination to gather rebellious nations & kingdoms for a final judgment, at the time of His sovereign choosing.

God's earthly people must patiently wait upon the LORD, in view of an ultimate global judgment; when "**all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy**" (see Rev 20v9).

**v9: God's sovereign purpose is the recovery of all "peoples (plural)", who with "a pure language (lip) ... may all call upon the Name of the LORD, to serve Him with one consent".**

The unparalleled judgment of God will usher in restoration & salvation for Israel, and a day of unparalleled blessing for this world, i.e. the millennial reign of Christ, with Israel as the head of the nations in that day.

Hab 2v14 "**For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea**".

The "**pure language / lip**" could indicate a reversal of the judgment of Babel, or a purity & sincerity of words, expressing true heartfelt appreciation for the LORD, in contrast to His first coming (see Matt 15v8-9).

All will unanimously "**serve Him with one consent (shoulder, Newberry)**", "**all nations shall serve Him**" (Ps 72v11).

**v10: "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My suppliants, even the daughter of My dispersed, shall bring Mine offering";** a regathering from all corners of the earth, to worship God in Jerusalem (see Zech 14v16, Is 66v20).

**v11: "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me";**

Israel will be in the enjoyment of national forgiveness of their transgressions.

They will then be a humbled people, "**for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of My holy mountain**" (see also Zech 12v10-11).

**v12: They will then be a meek people, "afflicted & poor" in spirit, and marked by faith, "and they shall trust in the Name of the LORD".** Their language will be that of Isaiah 53, and of Nathanael (John 1v49).

**v13: They will be a purified people in their speech, "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth".**

In marked contrast to Israel today, they will in that future day be a fearless people, dwelling in safety and security, "**for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid**".

**v14: There will be national worshipful exultation; a people marked by joyful wholehearted praise.**

**v15:** The presence of *“the King of Israel ... in the midst”* will guarantee the nation’s security; *“The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, He hath cast out thine enemy ... thou shalt not see evil* (i.e. calamity) *any more”*. There will be the enjoyment of the glory of Christ’s presence in their midst (see Ezek 43v2-7, Zech 2v10-12). The millennial city will be called *“The LORD is there”* (Ezek 48v35), i.e. *Jehovah-Shammah*. The risen Christ is today our centre of gathering, He is *“in the midst”* in His assembly.

**v16:** *“In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack* (feeble)*”*. When the nation of Israel is restored & blessed, they will serve with renewed spiritual strength.

**v17:** The basis for all the blessing is His presence; *“The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ...”* He is the mighty Saviour & Deliverer, and *“He will rejoice”* over His redeemed people with great joy. There was a day of rejection when He wept over that city of Jerusalem (see Luke 13v34), but in this coming day *“He will rejoice over thee with joy”*, when they will recognise & acknowledge Him for who He is.

There will be a quiet contentment & satisfaction, *“He will rest (be silent, Newberry) in His love”* as He gazes contentedly upon His redeemed people, with a love too deep & significant to be expressed by words. A similar thought in Isaiah 53v11, *“He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied”*. How much greater will Christ’s feelings be for His eternal bride the Church (see Eph 5v27, Rev 19v8).

He will give expression of His joy in His gathered people, *“He will joy (exult) over thee with singing”*. He will be the Leader of the praise of His restored people in that millennial day; *“I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee”* (Ps 22v22, Heb2v12), *“My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation”* (Ps 22v25).

**v18-20:** The prophecy concludes with another 6 *“I will”* statements of divine purpose (see also ch1v2-4), now expressing the LORD’s sovereign purpose to bless His gathered people with deliverance, salvation & vindication.

**v18:** They are a people longing to be gathered again, and to keep their solemn feasts; *“I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly (appointed season, Newberry)”*. Do we have that desire for the gatherings of the local assembly? *“My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God”* (Ps 84v2).

**v19:** They are a people who will enjoy divine care after such great affliction; *“Behold, at that time I will undo (deal with, Newberry) all that afflict thee: I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out”*. There will be vindication for this gathered people, *“I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame”*; all the saints will be vindicated with Christ (see Col 3v4, Rom 8v17, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim 2v12). *“When He shall come to be glorified in His saints ... admired in all them that believe ... in that day”* (2 Thess 1v10).

**v20:** There will be the bright testimony of this redeemed & gathered people to all the nations, *“I will make you a name and a praise among all people (peoples) of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes”*. We today are called to be that bright testimony for Christ, showing forth His praises (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2v9).