

Through the Bible Book by Book

Old Testament

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Zephaniah

Theme: The frequent recurrence of the phrase "**the day of the Lord**," will suggest immediately that Zephaniah has a message of judgment. But in common with most of the other prophets, he has also a message of restoration. "It has been said that this prophecy of Zephaniah is peculiarly desert and barren - no life, no flower, no fruit, none of the beauties of nature; nothing but a world swept by a simoom. If this is so, what is the reason of it? Look at the conditions described. Men settled on their lees in luxury denying the interference of GOD. A city that did not obey His voice, received not correction, did not trust in the Lord, did not draw near to GOD. Men and city materialized, self-centered, luxurious; the rulers, princes; judges, prophets, and priests alike, corrupt. The whole condition may be expressed in one word - chaos. What, then, is the story of "**the day of the Lord**"? That of chaos consumed, disorder disorganized evil conditions destroyed, until the city appears before the eye of the astonished prophet as a simoom-swept landscape with never a blade of grass . . .

A modern expositor has said that it is perfectly patent that this last chapter (ch. 3) was not written by Zephaniah, because the contrast is too great between the picture of the awful, sweeping, irrevocable judgment, and that of the restoration. No one can imagine, he declares, that the same man wrote both. All of which is the result of the expositor's blindness. The last picture is that of the enthroned the Lord, the picture of a new order; songs instead of sorrow, service instead of selfishness, solidarity instead of scattering. That is the intent of judgment . . .

The very contrast demonstrates the unity of authorship." - Campbell Morgan.

We shall sum up the theme as follows: The night of judgment on Israel and the nations, followed by the morning of restoration for the former, and conversion for the latter.

Author: Contrary to common usage, Zephaniah carries his descent back to His great-great-grandfather, Hizkiah (Hezekiah).

Some believe that this fact indicates that either he was descended from Hezekiah or that he was of noble descent. He prophesied during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. In the period between the cessation of the prophecies of Isaiah, Micah, and Nahum, and the days of Zephaniah and Jeremiah, there was a period of 55 years, during which the wicked Manasseh reigned (II Chronicles 33:1-20), and during which the spirit of prophecy was dormant. It revived during the

reign of Josiah (II Chronicles Chs. 34, 35) when that monarch began the great reformation, in which Zephaniah probably played an important part (compare II Chronicles 34:4, 5 and Zephaniah 1:4, 5).

CONTENTS:

- I. A Warning of Judgment (Ch. 1).
- II. A Call to Repentance (2:1 to 3:7).
- III. A Promise of Restoration (3:8-20).

I. A Warning of Judgment (Ch. 1)

Note the contents of this chapter:

- 1. A sweeping, destructive judgment announced (vv. 1-3).
- 2. A prophecy of the overthrow of idolatry (vv. 4-6). Fulfilled in Josiah's reign.
- 3. The coming punishment of Judah is set forth under the figure of a sacrifice, the victims representing the people, and the guests, the Chaldean invaders (v. 7).
- 4. The judgment will fall on all classes: on the rulers and their children (v. 8); on their servants who plunder the people (v. 9); on the merchants (vv. 10, 11); on those who live in luxury, indifference and skepticism (vv. 12, 13).
- 5. A description of the day of the Lord, the day of His vengeance on the guilty (vv. 14-18).

II. A Call to Repentance (Chs. 2:1 to 3:7)

- 1. A warning to the wicked to repent in order to escape judgment (2:1, 2).
- 2. An exhortation to the just to persevere in meekness and righteousness in order that they may be hid in that day (2:3).
- 3. This call to repentance enforced by the certainty of judgments on the surrounding nations (2:4-15).
- 4. Jerusalem shall not escape, for she has failed to heed the warning conveyed by the fate of those nations whom the Lord had punished (3:1-7).

III. A Promise of Restoration (Ch. 3:8-20)

The following are the contents of this section:

- 1. The judgment of the nations, in the last days, will be followed by their conversion and the institution of the universal worship of the Lord (vv. 8,9).
- 2. The Lord will purge from Israel those who reposed in a self-righteous pride of their covenant privileges; and purged from these sinners, Israel will be a humble, trustful and holy nation (vv. 12, 13).
- 3. The Lord will lift His chastening hand from Israel will bless the remnant, punish Israel's enemies and will dwell in the midst of a restored and exalted nation (vv. 14-20).