

## 8. Zephaniah

### I. Background and Context

- A. Little is known about Zephaniah. The genealogy of 1.1 suggests the possibility that he was a descendant of Hezekiah, possibly king of Judah. His name means “Yahweh has hidden/protected.”<sup>1</sup>
- B. The books of Zephaniah and Habbakuk take place during the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.), after the kingdom of Israel has already been exiled (722 B.C.). Thus the references to “Israel” in Zephaniah refer to the southern kingdom of Judah.
- C. Though Israel has already been exiled and Judah is under the reign of the pious Josiah, the nation of Judah “refuses to turn back as a nation to her covenant obligations toward God.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, Judah is also warned of coming judgment, similar to that of Israel, which will eventually come in 586 B.C.
- D. A brief history of King Josiah can be found in 2 Kings 21.26-23.30 and 2 Chron. 33.25-35.27.
  1. He was preceded by the wicked kings Manasseh and Ammon and proceeded by the wicked kings Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, before Jerusalem fell and was captured by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar.
    - a) Matthew Henry remarks what a triumph of grace it is that Josiah “had not received any bad impressions from the example of his father and grandfather.” He had “no good education nor good example given him, and yet the grace of God made him an eminent saint.”<sup>3</sup>
  2. His reign was prophesied in 1 Kings 13.2 by an unnamed man of God.
  3. Though presented in a different order in the two histories, the reign of Josiah included:
    - a) the purging of idol worship (cf. 2 Kings, 2 Chr. 34.3-7)
    - b) the repairing of the temple of the Lord (cf. 2 Kings 22.3-7, 2 Chr. 34.8-13)
    - c) the discovering of the Book of the Law (cf. 2 Kings, 2 Chr. 34.14-21)
    - d) the restoration of feasts, notably the Passover (cf. 2 Kings, 2 Chr. 35.1-19)
  4. The words of the prophetess Huldah, with slight variations in each record, distinguishes the rule of Josiah with that of his forbears because of his penitent or humble heart, the humbling of himself before the Lord, and his mourning over sin (cf. 2 Kings 22.19, 2 Chr. 34.27).

### II. Outline

- A. Heading (1.1)
- B. Judgment Coming Against Judah (1.2-6)
- C. The Day of the Lord (1.7-3.20)
  1. Day of sacrifice and punishment (1.7-9)
  2. The coming wrath (1.10-18)
    - a) Against God’s people (1.10-16)
    - b) Against all humanity (1.17-18)
  3. Repentance is still possible (2.1-3)
  4. Nations warned (2.4-3.8)
    - a) Philistines (2.4-7)
    - b) Moab and Ammon (2.8-11)
    - c) Cush (2.12)

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<sup>1</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1729.

<sup>2</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, 1729.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2014, [www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com).

- d) Assyria (2.13-15)
- e) Jerusalem (3.1-7)
- f) Summary (3.8)
- 5. Anticipation of hope (3.9-20)
  - a) Conversion of the nations (3.9-10)
  - b) Judah's return (3.11-13)
  - c) Joyful song (3.14-17)
  - d) God's promised restoration (3.18-20)

### III. Key Passage: Zephaniah chapter 3

#### A. The basis of God's judgment

##### 1. Against Israel (vv. 1-5)

- a) First, Jerusalem itself as a political entity is judged for her rebellion, defilement, and oppression. It is a city that stubbornly refuses correction and that stubbornly refuses to draw near to God (vv. 1-2).
- b) Secondly, within the city, the leadership has led the people astray. Political and religious leaders alike stand guilty in judgment. Officials and judges take advantage of the people, and the prophets and priests have abandoned that which is holy for that which is profane and violent (vv. 3-4).
- c) Thirdly, to make clear that utter depravity of God's people, despite the fact that a holy and just God has been "within her," the people know no shame (v. 5).
- d) Matthew Henry remarks, "One would wonder that Jerusalem, the holy city, where God was known, and his name was great, should be the city of which this black character is here given, that a place which enjoyed such abundance of the means of grace should become so very corrupt and vicious, and that God should permit it to be so; yet so it is, to show that the law made nothing perfect; but if this be the true character of Jerusalem, as no doubt it is (for God's judgments will make none worse than they are), it is no wonder that the prophet begins with woe to her. For the holy God hates sin in those that are nearest to him, nay, in them he hates it most."

##### 2. Against nations (vv. 6-8)

- a) Surrounding nations likewise lay in ruins and are cut off (vv. 6-7).
- b) Both the nations and Israel are therefore commanded to wait for God (v. 8).

#### B. The promise of God's salvation

##### 1. For nations (vv. 9-13)

- a) God promises that these nations:
  - (1) will have their speech changed to pure speech (v. 9)
  - (2) will serve God and bring offerings (vv. 9-10)
  - (3) will not be haughty, but be humble and lowly (vv. 11-12).

##### 2. For Israel (vv. 14-20)

- a) Likewise, God promises that Zion
  - (1) will be cleared of all judgments (v. 15)
  - (2) will be rejoiced over by God (vv. 16-17)
  - (3) will be gathered together and restored (v. 20)