

Zephaniah's Prophecy to Judah – The Day of the Lord (c. 635–630 BC)**Zephaniah 1–3****Superscription**

1:1 The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah:

Judgment on the Entire Earth

- 2 “I will completely remove all *things*
From the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.
- 3 “I will remove man and beast;
I will remove the birds of the sky
And the fish of the sea,
And the ruins along with the wicked;
And I will cut off man from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.

Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem

- 4 “So I will stretch out My hand against Judah
And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place,
And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests.
- 5 “And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven,
And those who bow down *and* swear to the LORD and *yet* swear by Milcom,
- 6 And those who have turned back from following the LORD,
And those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him.”
- 7 Be silent before the Lord GOD!
For the day of the LORD is near,
For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,
He has consecrated His guests.
- 8 “Then it will come about on the day of the LORD’s sacrifice
That I will punish the princes, the king’s sons
And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.
- 9 “And I will punish on that day all who leap on the *temple* threshold,
Who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit.
- 10 “On that day,” declares the LORD,
“There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate,
A wail from the Second Quarter,
And a loud crash from the hills.
- 11 “Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar,
For all the people of Canaan will be silenced;
All who weigh out silver will be cut off.
- 12 “It will come about at that time
That I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
And I will punish the men
Who are stagnant in spirit,
Who say in their hearts,
‘The LORD will not do good or evil!’
- 13 “Moreover, their wealth will become plunder
And their houses desolate;

Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit *them*,
And plant vineyards but not drink their wine.”

Judgment at the Great Day of the Lord

- 14 Near is the great day of the LORD,
Near and coming very quickly;
Listen, the day of the LORD!
In it the warrior cries out bitterly.
- 15 A day of wrath is that day,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of destruction and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloom,
A day of clouds and thick darkness, [[Joel 2:1–2](#)]
- 16 A day of trumpet and battle cry
Against the fortified cities
And the high corner towers.
- 17 I will bring distress on men
So that they will walk like the blind,
Because they have sinned against the LORD;
And their blood will be poured out like dust
And their flesh like dung.
- 18 Neither their silver nor their gold
Will be able to deliver them
On the day of the LORD’s wrath;
And all the earth will be devoured
In the fire of His jealousy,
For He will make a complete end,
Indeed a terrifying one,
Of all the inhabitants of the earth.

A Call to Repentance

- 2:1 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather,
O nation without shame,
- 2 Before the decree takes effect—
The day passes like the chaff—
Before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you,
Before the day of the LORD’s anger comes upon you.
- 3 Seek the LORD,
All you humble of the earth
Who have carried out His ordinances;
Seek righteousness, seek humility.
Perhaps you will be hidden
In the day of the LORD’s anger.

Judgment on Philistia

- 4 For Gaza will be abandoned
And Ashkelon a desolation;
Ashdod will be driven out at noon
And Ekron will be uprooted.

- 5 Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast,
The nation of the Cherethites!
The word of the LORD is against you,
O Canaan, land of the Philistines;
And I will destroy you
So that there will be no inhabitant.
- 6 So the seacoast will be pastures,
With caves for shepherds and folds for flocks.
- 7 And the coast will be
For the remnant of the house of Judah,
They will pasture on it.
In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening;
For the LORD their God will care for them
And restore their fortune.

Judgment on Moab and Ammon

- 8 “I have heard the taunting of Moab
And the revilings of the sons of Ammon,
With which they have taunted My people
And become arrogant against their territory.
- 9 “Therefore, as I live,” declares the LORD of hosts,
The God of Israel,
“Surely Moab will be like Sodom
And the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah—
A place possessed by nettles and salt pits,
And a perpetual desolation.
The remnant of My people will plunder them
And the remainder of My nation will inherit them.”

10 This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the LORD of hosts.

11 The LORD will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his *own* place.

Judgment on Cush

- 12 “You also, O Ethiopians, will be slain by My sword.”

Judgment on Assyria and Nineveh

- 13 And He will stretch out His hand against the north
And destroy Assyria,
And He will make Nineveh a desolation,
Parched like the wilderness.
- 14 Flocks will lie down in her midst,
All beasts which range in herds;
Both the pelican and the hedgehog
Will lodge in the tops of her pillars;
Birds will sing in the window,
Desolation *will be* on the threshold;
For He has laid bare the cedar work.

15 This is the exultant city
 Which dwells securely,
 Who says in her heart,
 "I am, and there is no one besides me."
 How she has become a desolation,
 A resting place for beasts!
 Everyone who passes by her will hiss
 And wave his hand *in contempt*.

Jerusalem's Future—Destruction of the Rebellious

3:1 Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,
 The tyrannical city!

2 She heeded no voice,
 She accepted no instruction.
 She did not trust in the LORD,
 She did not draw near to her God.

3 Her princes within her are roaring lions,
 Her judges are wolves at evening;
 They leave nothing for the morning.

4 Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men;
 Her priests have profaned the sanctuary.
 They have done violence to the law.

5 The LORD is righteous within her;
 He will do no injustice.
 Every morning He brings His justice to light;
 He does not fail.
 But the unjust knows no shame.

6 "I have cut off nations;
 Their corner towers are in ruins.
 I have made their streets desolate,
 With no one passing by;
 Their cities are laid waste,
 Without a man, without an inhabitant.

7 "I said, 'Surely you will revere Me,
 Accept instruction.'
 So her dwelling will not be cut off
According to all that I have appointed concerning her.
 But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.

8 "Therefore wait for Me," declares the LORD,
 "For the day when I rise up as a witness.
 Indeed, My decision is to gather nations,
 To assemble kingdoms,
 To pour out on them My indignation,
 All My burning anger;
 For all the earth will be devoured
 By the fire of My zeal.

Jerusalem's Future—Deliverance of the Righteous

9 "For then I will give to the peoples purified lips,

- That all of them may call on the name of the LORD,
To serve Him shoulder to shoulder.
- 10 “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
My worshipers, My dispersed ones,
Will bring My offerings.
- 11 “In that day you will feel no shame
Because of all your deeds
By which you have rebelled against Me;
For then I will remove from your midst
Your proud, exulting ones,
And you will never again be haughty
On My holy mountain.
- 12 “But I will leave among you
A humble and lowly people,
And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.
- 13 “The remnant of Israel will do no wrong
And tell no lies,
Nor will a deceitful tongue
Be found in their mouths; [\[Rev 14:5\]](#)
For they will feed and lie down
With no one to make them tremble.”

Jerusalem’s Future—Millennial Joy

- 14 Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!
Shout *in triumph*, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all *your* heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
- 15 The LORD has taken away *His* judgments against you,
He has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
You will fear disaster no more.
- 16 In that day it will be said to Jerusalem:
“Do not be afraid, O Zion;
Do not let your hands fall limp.
- 17 “The LORD your God is in your midst,
A victorious warrior.
He will exult over you with joy,
He will be quiet in His love,
He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.
- 18 “I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts—
They came from you, *O Zion*;
The reproach of exile is a burden on them.
- 19 “Behold, I am going to deal at that time
With all your oppressors,
I will save the lame
And gather the outcast,
And I will turn their shame into praise and renown
In all the earth.
- 20 “At that time I will bring you in,

Even at the time when I gather you together;
Indeed, I will give you renown and praise
Among all the peoples of the earth,
When I restore your fortunes before your eyes,”
Says the LORD.

Josiah Begins to Seek After God (633t BC)

2 Chronicles 34:3a

3a For in the eighth year of his reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David;

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Chronological Notes

1) Zephaniah.¹

A) The superscription of Zephaniah specifies that the prophecy was given during the reign of Josiah (641t–610t) and there has been little debate to the contrary. Rather, discussion concerning the date and background of the book has centered chiefly on the specific period within Josiah’s reign.

(1) The moral and spiritual conditions mentioned by Zephaniah have been taken by many to refer to Judah’s persistent apostasy and immorality despite the Josianic reform that began in earnest after the finding of the Book of the Law (2 Kgs 22:8) in 621 B.C. (e.g., Fausset, Feinberg, Hannah, Keil, Reid, and Walker).

(2) Others, however, believe that such matters as Zephaniah denounces could only be true of the earlier portion of Josiah’s reign, either when the boy king was yet unable to deal with the longstanding effects of the wickedness of Judah’s two previous kings, Manasseh and Amon, or when his reformation had only recently got underway (e.g., Bewer, Bullock, Craigie, Eiselen, Eissfeldt, Freeman, Hailey, Harrison, Hummel, Kapelrud, Laetsch, Larue, Pusey, Robinson, Smith, and von Orelli).²

B) With capable scholars on both sides of the question, one is tempted to conclude with D. A. Schneider that “the evidence is insufficient to decide this debate.”³ In examining the internal data, however, several items seem to favor the earlier period in Josiah’s reign: (1) religious practices in Judah were still plagued with Canaanite syncretistic rites such as characterized the era of Manasseh (1:4–5, 9); (2) many failed to worship Yahweh at all (1:6); (3) royalty were enamored with wearing the clothing of foreign merchants (1:8) who had extensive business enterprises in Jerusalem (1:10–11); and (4) Judahite society was beset by socio-economic ills (1:12–13, 18) and political and religious corruption (3:1–4, 7, 11). Moreover, several of the specific sins (e.g., 1:4–5, 9; 3:4) would likely have been corrected in Josiah’s reforms. “Accordingly, I am inclined to side with those who prefer a date before

¹ Richard D. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 249–250. Note that Patterson favors a date for Habakkuk of sometime in Manasseh’s reign.

² A good discussion of the setting of the book is given by F. C. Fensham, “Book of Zephaniah,” *IDBSup*, pp. 983–84. Fensham also favors a date for Zephaniah early in Josiah’s reign.

³ D. A. Schneider, “Book of Zephaniah,” *ISBE* 4:1189.

621 BC.”⁴

- C) But how much before? Some have suggested that the political situation brought about by a Scythian raid (c. 630 BC) occasioned both Zephaniah’s response to God’s call and his urgent message concerning God’s impending judgment of the world. However, because the evidence of such an invasion is now considered to be tenuous at best, “the Scythian hypothesis has now been almost universally abandoned.”⁵ Thus the search for a precise date for Zephaniah cannot be pressed too far. Nevertheless, when one considers that Josiah was only eight years old when he ascended the throne in 641t and was dependent upon royal officials of questionable integrity (cf. 3:3), the cause for Zephaniah’s alarm is apparent. Further, that Josiah’s reforms were not instituted until the twelfth year of his reign (629t), a few years after his initial spiritual awakening (2 Chr 34:3), suggests that Zephaniah’s prophetic activities may have had a salutary effect in the reformation of that era. Thus a date of 635–630 BC is not unlikely.

⁴ Patterson, 250.

⁵ Fensham, “Zephaniah,” p. 983. For a defense of the Scythian hypothesis, see CAH 3:295 where the somewhat fantastic elements of Herodotus’s account are duly recognized as well as the probability that the supposed Scythian sack of Ashdod was as much an Egyptian enterprise as Scythian. See also R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 940.