

**Bible Synthesis IV**  
(Bible Survey)

**INTRODUCTION TO  
ZEPHANIAH**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

This book begins with woe and ends with rejoicing. In Zephaniah God is both loving and severe. Zeph. 1:2 shows his severity, while 3:17 shows his love. Robert Lee, of London, wrote: "... and though the first two sections are full of gloom and sadness, *the last section contains the sweetest love song in the Old Testament*" (Emphasis his). "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6).

Zephaniah is almost wholly occupied with the subject of judgment. Its thought is centered upon one theme—the coming of "the day of the LORD." It is full of stern denunciations, and dire threatenings of God's wrath. The "day of the LORD" is named 7 times in this book. It is also referred to indirectly 13 times more. This "day of the LORD" forms one of the keys to an understanding of Zephaniah. That day is *imminent* (1:7–14), *dreadful* (1:15–16), *destructive* (1:17) *unavoidable* (1:18). It is also *universal*, falling upon all creation, man and beast (1:2–3; 2:4–15; 3:8), and *severe*, since only a remnant will survive (2:3; 3:9–13).

Another key phrase is "in the midst." This occurs 5 times (2:14; 3:5, 12, 15, 17) —"out of the midst" occurs 1 time (3:11). The LORD is in the midst of them in judgment (3:5), and in salvation (3:17).

Another term is "jealousy" (1:18; 3:8). It speaks of "the fire of my jealousy." This jealousy is not to be compared with the jealousy of men, for that is selfish, suspicious, and can be vicious. The jealousy of God is the natural outflow of His love. He so loves His people that He cannot abide a rival, but must have their wholehearted devotion.

**2. AUTHOR**

The Prophet Zephaniah ("He whom Jehovah has hidden" or "the LORD hides"). His name may have been in mind when he wrote Zeph. 2:3.

- (1) The only one of the Prophets who traces his ancestry back several generations, in his case, 4 generations:
  - 1. Son of Cushi (Cushi was his father.)
  - 2. Son of Gedaliah (Gedaliah was his grandfather.)
  - 3. Son of Amariah (Amariah was his great-grandfather.)
  - 4. Son of Hezekiah (Zephaniah is the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah.) He was of noble birth, being a descendant of David, though evidently not in the kingly line.
- (2) He lived in the southern kingdom, Judah, probably in Jerusalem (1:4, 10–11). His prophetic ministry may have been instrumental in stirring Josiah to his reforms [See II Chron. 34:1–7.] At least, he prophesied during that time.
- (3) He was a contemporary of Nahum and Jeremiah.

### 3. RECIPIENTS

- (1) Judah and Jerusalem (1:4). The northern kingdom had already been carried captive by Assyria, and their land repopulated with those of pagan nations.
- (2) There are warnings to various Gentile nations around Israel (2:4–15).

### 4. DATE OF WRITING

- (1) During the reign of Josiah (640–609 B.C.) — 1:1  
Three of Hezekiah's descendants had succeeded him (See II Kings 20 – 21). These were as follows:
  - 1. Manasseh (695–642 B.C.) — He was very wicked — Introduced idolatry
  - 2. Amon (642–640 B.C.) — Also wicked and idolatrous
  - 3. Josiah (640–609 B.C.) — He was a good king — Introduced reforms
- (2) From Zephaniah 2:13 it is evident that the destruction of Nineveh is still future. This destruction took place in 612 B.C.
- (3) The idolatrous practices and the moral and religious conditions condemned in 1:3–6, 8–9, 12; 3:1–7 existed before the reform of Josiah in 621 B.C., but these are those which were abolished by that reform.
- (4) 630 B.C. may be set as an appropriate date, although it could have been written at any time during the 19 years between 640, when Josiah became king, and the reform of 621 B.C. If Zephaniah contributed to the reform, the date of writing may have been nearer to 621.

### 5. PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

To warn Judah of the coming judgment and to comfort the faithful remnant.

- (1) Manasseh (695–642 B.C.) had planted the seeds of idolatry, turning the hearts of the people to idols (II Kings 21:9; II Chron. 33:9), he massacred righteous men (II Kings 21:10–16; 23:26). Although he repented at the end of his life (II Chron. 33:11–13), the people still persisted in their perverted religion (II Chron. 33:17).
- (2) Amon (642–640 B.C.) followed in the footsteps of his father Manasseh (II Chron. 33:23–24).
- (3) Josiah (640–609 B.C.) became king when he was only 8 years of age (II Chron. 34:1). When he was 16 he began to seek the LORD (34:3), and when he was 20 years old he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from its idolatrous worship.

### 6. THEME

The day of the LORD as prefigured by the Babylonian invasion.

### 7. KEY PASSAGES

Zeph. 1:7, 12

## **8. KEY TERMS**

“Day of the LORD” (with “that day,” “the day,” etc.) — 20 times

“Desolation” — 7 times

“Remnant” — 4 times

“In the midst” — 5 times (“out of the midst” — 1 time)

“Jealousy” — 2 times

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**OUTLINE OF  
ZEPHANIAH**

- 1. The Judgment of the Day of the LORD** —Zeph. 1 — 2
- (1) The Day of Judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem — 1:1 — 2:3
  - (2) The Day of Judgment upon the Nations — 2:4–15
- 2. The Salvation of the Day of the LORD** —Zeph. 3
- (1) The Sinfulness of Jerusalem and the LORD's Righteousness Contrasted — 3:1–7
  - (2) The Purpose of Judgment — Salvation and Restoration — 3:8–20

**A SECOND OUTLINE:**

- 1. Judah is Searched** —Zeph. 1
- (1) Introduction to Zephaniah — 1:1
  - (2) The LORD's purpose to judge — 1:2–3
  - (3) The rulers denounced (all classes of sinner) — 1:4–6
  - (4) The Day of the LORD described — 1:7–18
    - (1. It is *imminent* — 1:7–14
    - (2. It is *dreadful* — 1:15–16
    - (3. It is *destructive* — 1:17
    - (4. It is *unavoidable* — 1:18
- 2. The Nations are Searched** —Zeph. 2
- (1) Judah called to seek God — 2:1–3
  - (2) Judgment upon Judah's near enemies — 2:4–15
- 3. Israel Restored** —Zeph. 3.
- (1) Jerusalem is destroyed (*denunciation*) — 3:1–7
  - (2) The nations are destroyed (*Armageddon*) — 3:8
  - (3) Restoration of Gentiles and Jews — 3:9–13
  - (5) Zephaniah's song of rejoicing — 3:14–20