

STUDIES IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

ZEPHANIAH

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Title & Inscription, 1:1

I. Judgment upon the whole world - Judah in particular, 1:2-18.

. A world judgment, vv. 2-6.

1. Prelude: judgment on the whole world, vv. 2,3.

2. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem for idolatry, vv. 4-6.

. Judgment on sinners of every rank, vv. 7-13.

1. On princes, vv. 7,8.

2. On thieves (or idolaters), v. 9.

3. On traders, vv. 10,11.

4. On indifferent and wealthy, vv. 12,13.

. The imminence and terrible nature of the judgment, vv. 14-18.

1. Imminent, v. 14.

2. A terribly dark day, vv. 15-17.

3. There will be no deliverance, v. 18.

II. Exhortation to repentance and perseverance, 2:1 - 3:8.

. Call to repentance and to seek the Lord, that they may be hidden in the day of the Lord, 2:1-3.

. Reason: God will judge the nations that are near and far, 2:4-15.

1. Judgement upon the nations that are near, vv. 4-11.

a. Upon Philistia, vv. 4-7.

b. Upon Moab and Ammon, vv. 8-10.

c. Upon all the gods of earth, v. 11.

2. Judgement upon powerful nations afar, vv. 12-15.

a. Upon Ethiopia, v. 12.

b. Upon Assyria and Nineveh, vv. 13-15.

. If God punishes the heathen, He will not spare Judah, 3:1-8.

1. Woe to the polluted city - classes of sinners and sin, vv. 1-7.

- a. Princes, judges, prophets, priests, vv. 1-4.
 - b. Jehovah's constant reminder of His sovereignty, vv. 5-7.
2. God has called; they have refused - therefore, Woe! v.8.
- III. After the judgment, salvation and glorification for the remnant, 3:9-20.
- . From among the heathen will God's remnant come, vv. 9,10.
 - . Israel restored will be cleansed and sanctified, vv. 11-13.
 - . Israel comforted and exalted to honor, vv. 14-20.

INFORMATION ON THE BOOK

DATE WRITTEN

Josiah reigned from about 640 to 609 B.C., and it was during his reign that Zephaniah prophesied (1:1). Biblical historians place the actual writing of the prophecy between 636 and 623 B.C.. Jeremiah and Zephaniah seem to have been prophesying in the same time period. Nahum and Habakkuk also prophesied during the reign of Josiah.

THE MAN

Little is known about Zephaniah except what we read in his book of prophecy. His name means "Jehovah hides," or "Jehovah has hidden." His birth would be about 648 B.C., which as you can see from the chart, would be during the reign of Manasseh. This reign proved to be wicked and bloody (2 Kings 21:16). In worship to Molech, children were forced to pass through the fire (2 Kings 23:10). Some have concluded that his name might be an indication that he had been hidden from the danger presented by the wicked king, and credit given to Jehovah. He traces his ancestry back to Hezekiah, king of Judah. As you will note from the chart for this book, Hezekiah had what is considered a righteous reign. Thus the king who reigned in the days of Isaiah and Micah was the great-great-grandfather of Zephaniah. This makes Zephaniah the only prophet to be of royal blood. We have no information whatsoever about the occupation of the prophet. His reference to Jerusalem as "this place" (1:4) indicates that it was his home.

MAIN THEME

Like Joel before him, Zephaniah emphasizes the "day of the Lord." The purpose was to bring terror to the hearts of the wicked so they might repent. He speaks of the nearness of "the day," and that it would be a day of darkness and terror (1:7,14-16). While the prophet does not specify at whose hand this punishment would come, he assures them that it will come. At the same time, there is a message of hope for the future with the coming of Messiah. While he does not mention the Messiah Himself, he says much about the things which the Lord will accomplish in the last days.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Hezekiah was succeeded by his son Manasseh, a boy, twelve years of age. It is doubtful that Judah ever had a more wicked ruler than Manasseh. He tried to undo all of the good which his father accomplished. He rebuilt the high places for idol worship, built altars to Baal and Ashtoreth, and altars to the heavenly bodies. He practiced human sacrifice, witchcraft, and dealt with familiar spirits. To this he added the shedding of innocent blood in Jerusalem (2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33:1-9). During his reign, the heathens gained control of the government. Latter in life he tried to correct his mistakes, but with little success (2 Chronicles 33:10-20). Amon, who succeeded Manasseh, was just like his father. His reign was also characterized by great wickedness in Judah (2 Chronicles 33:21-25).

Josiah, who came to the throne at the age of eight, was the last good king to reign over Judah. At the age of sixteen, he began to seek after the Lord, the God of his fathers. And at the age of twenty, he started to purge Judah. His reforms were among the most bold every attempted by any king who reigned over the southern kingdom. Altars and images were destroyed, bones of priests who had offered sacrifices to false gods were gathered and burned.

In the process of cleansing the temple, a copy of the law was found and read before the young king. Being alarmed by what he heard, he sent to the prophetess, Huldah, for a word from God concerning what he had learned. Why he sent to Huldah instead of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum or Habakkuk is unknown. The cleansing of the temple was followed by passover observance which surpassed in enthusiasm any known for many years. (2 Kings 22,23; 2 Chronicles 34,35).

OCCASION FOR THE WRITING OF THE BOOK

War loomed to the north of Judah. During the time of Isaiah and Micah, Assyria had been able to maintain supremacy over the world. It seems that Josiah had been loyal to the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, who died in about 633 B.C., and who was the last great king of the empire. After his death, the empire began to crumble.

In 625 B.C., Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, declared independence for Chaldea from Assyria. Thus establishing the independent kingdom of Babylon. This led to war between Babylon and Nineveh. In 614 B.C. the Medes captured Ashur, the chief city of Assyria. Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar and general of his army, led an attack against Nineveh. With the help of the Medes, he was able to destroy the city completely in 612 B.C.. This is an important date. The remnant of the Assyrian army went west where it became entrenched near Haran. Nebuchadnezzar regrouped his forces and followed them to Haran, where he attacked and destroyed what was left of the Assyrians in 609 B.C.. This left the Chaldean nation the undisputed master of the East!

Pharaoh-necho of Egypt decided to help Assyria at Haran by marching north with his army (609 B.C.). Josiah tried to stop him at Megiddo by throwing his forces in the path of Necho. He succeeded in keeping the Egyptian army from reaching Haran, but died in the battle. For four years, Egypt dominated Judah, but in 605 B.C. Necho was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar. He pursued them as far south as Judah, whose people he took under his own wing. Here is one of the ironies of history. Judah, led by Josiah, attempted to help Chaldea by stopping Egypt at Megiddo. The kingdom of Judah gave its king to help the kingdom which later subdued it! Later, Judah was destroyed by Babylon. Learning of the death of his father, Nebuchadnezzar made a quick return to Babylon to claim the throne. As he returned to Babylon, he carried hostages with him. Among them were Daniel and his three friends, all chief characters in the book of Daniel. *It seems that it is altogether possible that it was the rise of the Babylonian empire and their westward threat that gave occasion for Zephaniah's prophecy.*

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CONDITIONS

In spite of Josiah's reforms and his own good life, the people appear to have continued to be corrupt in their personal and religious lives. Social injustice and moral corruption seem to have been widespread. Luxurious living and extravagance are seen on every hand. The baalim were still worshipped, and what worship was offered to Jehovah God was not much more than idolatry. Truly, the time was ripe for judgment.

QUESTIONS ON ZEPHANIAH

Title & Inscription, 1:1

1. What was the source of the prophet's message? 1:1 _____

I. Judgment upon the whole world - Judah in particular, 1:2-18.

. A world judgment, vv. 2-6.

1. Prelude: judgment on the whole world, vv. 2,3.

2. How thorough are the judgments of 1:2,3? _____

2. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem for idolatry, vv. 4-6.

3. The cause of Divine judgment is always sin. Name and define the sins referred to in 1:4-6. _____

. Judgment on sinners of every rank, vv. 7-13.

1. On princes, vv. 7,8.

4. What class of people are spoken of in 1:7,8 and what will happen to them? _____

2. On thieves (or idolaters), v. 9.

5. What kind of people are described in 1:9? _____

3. On traders, vv. 10,11.

6. Explain what the "Fish Gate," "Second Quarter," "the hills," and "Maktesh" are and what their significance is in this context. 1:10,11 _____

7. The American Standard Version of 1901 has the following in 1:11: "Wail, ye inhabitants of Maktesh; **for all the people of Canaan are undone**; all they that were laden with silver are cut off." What is the meaning here and how does it harmonize with the King James Version? _____

4. On indifferent and wealthy, vv. 12,13.

8. How would you describe the people spoken of in 1:12? _____

9. What does God say would happen to them? 1:13 _____

. The imminence and terrible nature of the judgment, vv. 14-18.

1. Imminent, v. 14.

10. What was near and how near was it? 1:14 _____

2. A terribly dark day, vv. 15-17.

11. Two of the characteristics of the Day of the Lord are listed in the last portion of 1:14. The rest are found in 1:15-17. List and explain the significance of each. _____

11. Continued. _____

3. There will be no deliverance, v. 18.

12. From the wording of 1:18, what does it seem that the people thought could save them, and what will be the results of their efforts to be saved? _____

II. Exhortation to repentance and perseverance, 2:1 - 3:8.

. Call to repentance and to seek the Lord, that they may be hidden in the day of the Lord, 2:1-3.

13. How does God see Judah? 2:1 _____

14. What does He tell them to do, and why? 2:1,2 _____

15. Some of the people were not deserving of the devastation coming upon Judah. How does God describe them, and what are they told to do? _____

Reason: God will judge the nations that are near and far, 2:4-15.

1. Judgement upon the nations that are near, vv. 4-11.

a. Upon Philistia, vv. 4-7.

16. Listed in 2:4 are four of the five principle cities of what people? Amos 1:6-8; Zechariah 9:5-7 _____

What is the fifth city, and why isn't it mentioned in this context? _____

17. Who are the Cherethites and what does the Lord say about them? 2:5 _____

18. What would happen to the coasts, and who would they be for? 2:6,7 _____

b. Upon Moab and Ammon, vv. 8-10.

19. Moab and Ammon are compared to what two cities and why? 2:8-10 _____

c. Upon all the gods of earth, v. 11.

20. What does God say He will do to idol gods and what will be the results? 2:11 _____

2. Judgement upon powerful nations afar, vv. 12-15.

a. Upon Ethiopia, v. 12.

21. The type of destruction faced by Ethiopia is specified by the prophet in 2:12. What is it and who else might face the same fate? _____

b. Upon Assyria and Nineveh, vv. 13-15.

22. Discuss what the prophet said would happen to Assyria and her capital, Nineveh, and explain why this was such an unusual prophecy for the time in which it was given. 2:13-15 _____

. If God punishes the heathen, He will not spare Judah, 3:1-8.

1. Woe to the polluted city - classes of sinners and sin, vv. 1-7.

a. Princes, judges, prophets, priests, vv. 1-4.

23. To whom is the prophet speaking in 3:1-8? _____

24. Note each of the types of people mentioned in 3:1-4, and prepare to discuss them in class.

Filthy and polluted _____

The oppressing city _____

Obeyed not the voice _____

Received not correction _____

Trusted not in the Lord _____

Drew not near to her God _____

Her princes within her {are} roaring lions _____

Her judges {are} evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. _____

Her prophets {are} light {and} treacherous persons _____

Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. _____

b. Jehovah's constant reminder of His sovereignty, vv. 5-7.

25. What is the significance of the Lord being in the middle of such people? 3:5 _____

26. Of what is God reminding Judah in 3:6? _____

27. What had God hoped for with regard to His people? 3:7 _____

c. God has called; they have refused - therefore, Woe! v.8.

28. Who is being told to "wait" for God, and what does it mean to "wait" for Him? 3:8 _____

III. After the judgment, salvation and glorification for the remnant, 3:9-20.

. From among the heathen will God's remnant come, vv. 9,10.

29. Explain this "pure language" to which the remnant would be restored and its significance. 3:9 _____

30. Who was to come, and from where would they come? 3:10 _____

- . Israel restored will be cleansed and sanctified, vv. 11-13.
31. Why would they no longer have any cause for shame? 3:11 _____

32. Contrast the characteristics of the remnant here and the way God described the situation in Judah in verse 1-4 of this chapter. 3:11-13 _____

- . Israel comforted and exalted to honor, vv. 14-20.
33. What reason would the remnant have for rejoicing? 3:14,15 _____

34. Why should they take heart and not be discouraged in that day? 3:16,17 _____

35. Two types of people are described in 3:18 - who are they? _____

36. What does God promise to do for the remnant? 3:19,20 _____

