

Major Messages from the Minor Prophets

Studies in the Minor Prophets

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

Jersey Shore Baptist Church

Pastor Phil Erickson

Began December 20, 2017

Message Seven – Zephaniah

Memory Verse

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17)

Introduction (1:1)

In spite of the love spoken of in the memory verse written above, judgment is the main theme throughout this little prophecy of Zephaniah. God declares that judgment is coming, not only to His own people for their rebellion; but also for the surrounding nations that have afflicted Israel. The very first verse, after Zephaniah's introduction, declares that "[God] will utterly consume all things from off the land..." (1:2). Nearly 75% of this Book pronounces judgment. In the middle of the prophecy (2:1 – 3), however, Zephaniah makes a plea for the people to repent, and turn back to the Lord. History records that they did repent for a time during the reign of Josiah. But, unfortunately, after his death, the people reverted back to their backsliding. The Book does end on a positive note, however, with most of the final chapter declaring God's future blessing upon His people in the Millennial Kingdom. God has to bring His people through the pain of judgment in order to get them to the place of blessing. It is important to remember, however, that whether God is judging us or showering us with blessings, he always loves us. J. Vernon McGee called God's judgment "the dark side of love", and he paints a wonderful illustration of it in his commentary on Zephaniah:

The Dark Side of Love

It was late at night in a suburban area of one of our great cities in America. A child lay restless in her bed. A man, with a very severe and stern look, stealthily entered her bedroom and softly approached her bed. The moment the little girl saw him, a terrified look came over her face, and she began to scream. Her mother rushed into the room and went over to her. The trembling child threw her arms about her mother.

The man withdrew to the telephone, called someone, who was evidently an accomplice, and in a very soft voice made some sort of an arrangement. Hastily the man reentered the room, tore

the child from the mother's arms, and rushed out to a waiting car. The child was sobbing, and he attempted to stifle her cries. He drove madly down street after street until he finally pulled up before a large, sinister, and foreboding-looking building. All was quiet, the building was partially dark, but there was one room upstairs ablaze with light.

The child was hurriedly taken inside, up to the lighted room, and put into the hands of the man with whom the conversation had been held over the telephone in the hallway. In turn, the child was handed over to another accomplice—this time a woman—and these two took her into an inner room. The man who had brought her was left outside in the hallway. Inside the room, the man plunged a gleaming, sharp knife into the vitals of that little child, and she lay as if she were dead.

Your reaction at this point may be, "I certainly hope they will catch the criminal who abducted the little girl and is responsible for such an awful crime!"

However, I have not described to you the depraved and degraded action of a debased mind. I have not taken a chapter out of the life of the man in Cell 2455, Death Row. I have not related to you the sordid and sadistic crime of a psychopathic criminal. On the contrary, I have described to you a tender act of love. In fact, I can think of no more sincere demonstration of love than that which I have described to you. I am sure you are amazed when I say that. Let me fill in some of the details, and then you will understand.

You see, that little girl had awakened in the night with severe abdominal pain. She had been subject to such attacks before, and the doctor had told her parents to watch her very carefully. It was her father who had hurried into the room. When he saw the suffering of his little girl, he went to the telephone, called the family physician, and arranged to meet him at the hospital. He then rushed the little girl down to the hospital and handed her over to the family physician who took her to the operating room and performed emergency surgery.

Through it all, every move and every act of that father was of tender love, anxious care, and wise decision. I have described to you the dark side of love—but *love*, nevertheless. The father loved the child just as much on that dark night when he took her to the hospital and delivered her to the surgeon's knife as he did the next week when he brought her flowers and candy. It was just as much a demonstration of deep affection when he delivered her into the hands of the surgeon as it was the next week when he brought her home and delivered her into the arms of her mother. My friend, love places the eternal security and permanent welfare of the object of love above any transitory or temporary comfort or present pleasure down here upon this earth. Love seeks the best interests of the beloved. That is what this little Book of Zephaniah is all about—the dark side of love.¹

¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 3, pp. 860–861). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God loves us even when He is chastening us:

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." (Hebrews 12:6-8)

God had to chasten His son, Israel. This is what Zephaniah is all about, but He will also bless them greatly when they have learned what their loving Father had to teach them. Zephaniah 3:17 is a verse that is just as beautiful and comforting for Israel as John 3:16 is for the Christian:

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17)

Zephaniah, whose name means "Jehovah hides" or "Jehovah protects" (see 2:3), tells us a little bit more about his lineage (v. 1) than many of the other prophets. Zephaniah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah during the reign of King Josiah. (Josiah was king between 640 and 609 BC) He was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah, which means that he was also somehow related to King Josiah, and would also permit him an audience with the king. He is sometimes referred to as the royal prophet. It is also likely that he was from Jerusalem, or at the very least, very familiar with it. He was contemporary with Jeremiah, probably slightly after Nahum, and probably slightly before Habakkuk.

Phillips states:

Zephaniah and Habakkuk prophesied around the same time, although Zephaniah seems to have come first. Habakkuk's prophecy was subjective; he had a problem to ponder. Zephaniah's prophecy was objective; he had a punishment to proclaim. Habakkuk and Nahum were occupied with the great international event that overshadowed the period: Nahum concentrated on the impending fall of Nineveh, and Habakkuk concentrated on the next major power that Judah must fear after the Assyrians were defeated (that is, Chaldea). Zephaniah had a larger view, and perhaps this is why his book was placed after Nahum and Habakkuk in the Old Testament. Zephaniah picked up Joel's "day of the Lord" and invested that day with apocalyptic values.²

Zephaniah may have been written early in the reign of Josiah, before Josiah implemented all of his reforms. Prior to Josiah, Israel had gone spiritually backwards during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. In 632 BC when Josiah was just 16, he made a number of important changes. (2 Chronicles 34:3 – 7) And, later, when he was 26, in 622 BC, he found a copy of the Bible, and made even more reforms. (2 Chronicles 34:8 – 35:19) Though Josiah's national reforms did

² Phillips, J. (2009). Exploring the Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary (Zep 1:1–3:20). Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp.

spark a national revival, it was short-lived for two reasons: The first reason was the premature demise of Josiah who was killed in a battle while fighting Egypt. The second reason is that revival cannot be legislated through government action; it has to come from God and through the hearts of His people. Mature people who are forced to do right, will likely not do it for long. The Bible Knowledge Commentary takes a different position on the timing of the writing, believing that Zephaniah wrote after the national revival in Josiah's day:

Scholars differ on whether the prophet ministered before or after the recovery of the Law by Hilkiah and the subsequent religious revival in 622 b.c. (2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chron. 34). Probably Zephaniah's prophecy was given after Josiah's revival, for these reasons: (1) Cutting off the remnant of Baal worship (Zeph. 1:4) implied that a religious awakening was in progress. (2) Jeremiah, who prophesied long after 622 (as well as before), described Judah's religious and moral condition much as did Zephaniah (cf. Jer. 8:2; 19:13 with Zeph. 1:5; cf. Jer. 5:2, 7 with Zeph. 1:5b; and cf. Jer. 8:8–9 with Zeph. 3:4). (3) The fact that the king's sons wore foreign apparel (1:8) suggests that they were old enough to make their own choices. (4) Zephaniah's frequent quotations of the Law suggest that he was using the sources discovered by Hilkiah (cf. v. 13 with Deut. 28:30, 39; cf. Zeph. 1:15 with Deut. 4:11; cf. Zeph. 1:17 with Deut. 28:29; and cf. Zeph. 2:2 with Deut. 28:15–62). (5) Zephaniah's message of impending judgment would be appropriate for those who spurned the religious revival under Josiah. Thus his prophecy was given sometime after the time of Josiah's revival in 622, but before the destruction of Nineveh in 612—which Zephaniah indicated was still in existence then (Zeph. 2:13) as the capital of the Assyrian Empire.³

Zephaniah also speaks prophetically regarding the fall of Nineveh, which took place in 612 BC:

"And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness." (Zephaniah 2:13)

Zephaniah was the one of the last of the "pre-exilic" prophets, which prophesied to Judah before the Babylonian captivity. In the Bible order, Zephaniah is the last.

Though many are unfamiliar with this little Book, it is a very important part of the Scripture. One of the key phrases that will be discussed and developed in Zephaniah is "the day of the Lord", which had an immediate implication for the Nation of Judah in Josiah's day; but would also have a far-reaching fulfillment in the Great Tribulation Period.

I The Pronouncement of Judgment (1:2 – 18; 2:4 – 3:8)

A On the Whole Earth (1:2 – 3)

³ Hannah, J. D. (1985). Zephaniah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, p. 1523). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Vs. 2 – 3 set the tone for the entire Prophecy. God says that He is going to consume all living things from off of the land, including animals, birds, fish, and man. The word “consume” is used three times in these verses and means “to bring to an end” or “to wipe away”. (See also Isaiah 24:1 – 6; 19 – 23) The judgment spoken of here is reminiscent of the flood in Noah’s day. Later in the prophecy, God promises that a remnant would be spared, so this judgment, though geographically universal, will be limited to the wicked. (See also Jeremiah 25:31 – 33) These judgments will come during the Great Tribulation Period, culminating in the Battle of Armageddon.

The impending Babylonian invasion and subsequent captivity would be a shadow of the final judgments that will come in the Last Day.

The “stumblingblocks” mentioned in this Prophecy are most-likely a reference to the idols that were being worshipped by the people. Idolatry is certainly a stumblingblock as it caused people to be unfaithful to their God.

B On Judah (vs. 4 – 18)

“I will stretch out mine hand upon Judah”

When God stretches out his hand, it means that He is punishing:

*"The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, **but his hand is stretched out still.** ... Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows: for every one is an hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, **but his hand is stretched out still.** ... Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: and they together shall be against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, **but his hand is stretched out still.**" (Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21)*

Notice the Cause for the Judgment (vs. 4 – 6) – idol worship (see also Ezekiel 14:1 – 8)

- 1 Baal – this idolatrous worship was predominant in the northern kingdom first, and was then promoted in the south by King Manasseh. Immorality was a big part of Baal worship. (The Chemarins (literally – “black ones” were the black robed priests of Baal. This same word (Hebrew - *kamar*) is used for priests in 2 Kings 23:5)

- 2 The host of heaven - astrology

"And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them,

which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven." (Deuteronomy 4:19)

3 Molech (Malchum) – this idolatrous worship involved human sacrifice. (1 Kings 11:33)

God specifically mentions, in v. 6, those that have turned back from the Lord and those that have not sought after Him, which would be inexcusable for Israelites who were exposed to God and taught about Him. Regarding those who turn back:

"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." (Hebrews 10:38)

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." (2 Peter 3:17)

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62)

Notice the Conclusion of the Judgment - "the day of the Lord" in chapter 1. (1:7,8,14, 15 – also 2:3) The day immediately referred to here would be the destruction of Jerusalem through the nation of Babylon, which would begin in 605 BC, and be complete by 586 BC. The "day" described here foreshadows the future, great "day of the Lord" which will begin during the Tribulation Period, and will end with the return of the Lord Jesus and subsequent Millennial Kingdom. Remember, the Jewish day begins with darkness and ends with light. Joel and Obadiah also wrote about the coming "day of the Lord". (See also Matthew 24; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10 – 12; Revelation 6:5 – 8)

Notice in v. 8 - the king's sons were clothed in strange apparel, meaning that they were dressed like the heathen people from godless nations. This is possibly an indication that Zephaniah wrote later in the reign of Josiah as his children were older and being held responsible for their decisions. God's people are His ambassadors and He does care about how we dress. According to Ryrie:

Jews' clothing with its blue ribbon had spiritual significance (cf. Num. 15:38–39). Outward clothing can reflect one's inner values.⁴

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all

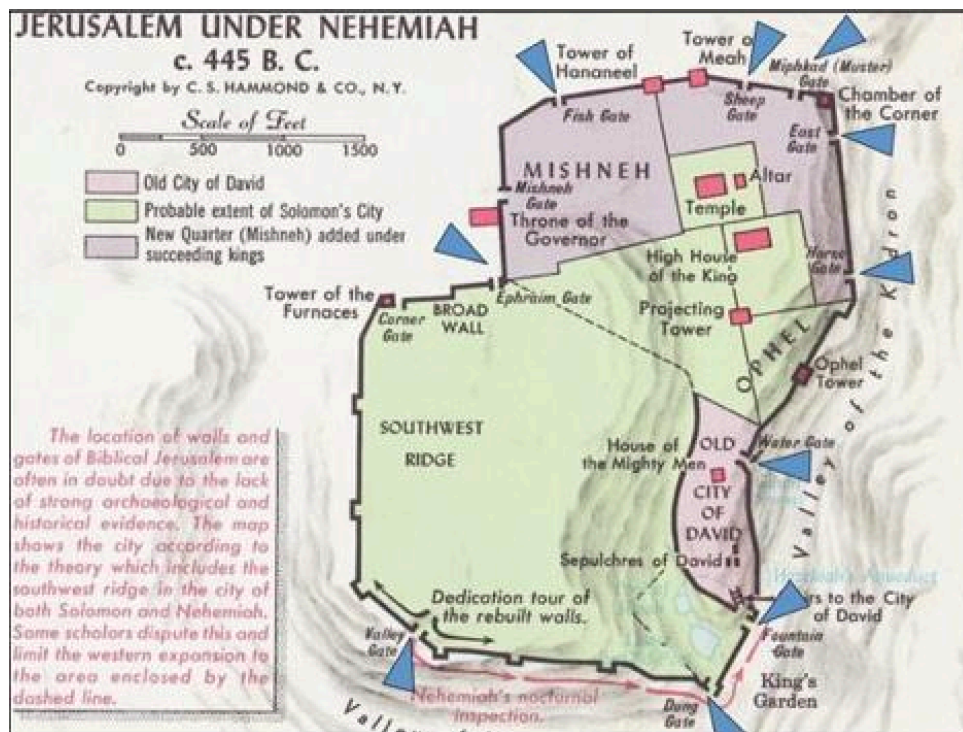
⁴ Ryrie, C. C. (1994). Ryrie study Bible: King James Version (Expanded ed., p. 1355). Chicago: Moody Press.

the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring:" (Numbers 15:38-39)

In v. 9, the reference to those that “leap on the threshold” is likely a reference to entering into somebody’s home to steal.

Notice in v. 10 – the fish gate – known today as the Damascus Gate. The Fish Gate was where fish from the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River were brought into the city and sold. “The Second” refers to the Second Quarter or New Quarter, which was a place where the wealthy lived in their expensive homes.⁵

The map below shows the city of Jerusalem with its gates in the time of Nehemiah, which was approximately 160 years after Zephaniah’s time; and, after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.



Notice in v. 11 – Maktesh – means “mortar” or “deep hollow” – unknown location in or near Jerusalem. It was apparently a market area. Some say it was synonymous with the Siloam Valley, others that it the Phoenician Quarter, and still others, that it was in the Kidron Valley. In recent days, many scholars have concluded that it is the Tyropoeon Valley, which is located within the city walls. On the map above, it is the shaded area running north to south just to the west of the Old City.

Notice in v. 12 – “candles” – meaning God is not going to miss anybody.

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). Be concerned (p. 124). Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor.

"The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly."

(Proverbs 20:27)

Notice in v. 12, "settled on their lees" – this expression is regarding wine that had sediments (lees or dregs) still in it. The lees were usually allowed to stay in the wine long enough to give it its color and body, but if left in too long, it would make the wine syrupy and would even form a crust. The meaning behind this expression illustrates the complacency of the people.

"The severest sin of a Christian is a numbing lack of concern, and anesthetized attitude of 'I don't care. I'm in the fold. Why should I concern myself? I have a fire insurance policy against hell'" (C. Stanley – Confronting Casual Christianity)

These people were under the false assumption, that God, like them, didn't care, and wasn't going to do anything.

Practical Point: This is one of the main problems with the generation of Christians living today. We are settled on our lees as well. The world is on its way to Hell; most Christians are living just like the rest of the world does, and nobody cares. We need to care! We need to be separated from the wickedness of the world, as well as the apostasy and complacency within the church.

Notice the Consequences of the Judgment

Verse 13 reveals that in the immediate future, the people of Judah who were robbing and oppressing the poor would lose their homes and their vineyards to the Babylonians. This is exactly the opposite of what God did for them when He gave them the land. (See Deuteronomy 6:10 – 15)

Practical Point – When we honor God, obey Him, and seek Him first, He blesses us and gives us good things; but, when we forget about God, we lose the blessings.

Vs. 14 – 17 give a dual description of the impending immediate judgment of Babylonian invasion, as well as the future Tribulation Period.

Notice, according to v. 18, their wealth would not be able to help them.

Notice also, the word "jealousy" in v. 18 (also in 3:8). God is jealous over the people He loves.

"For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:"
(Exodus 34:14)

"God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies." (Nahum 1:2)

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury." (Zechariah 8:2)

C On Surrounding Nations (2:4 – 15)

God speaks first of the judgment of Judah because judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17), but now the prophecy will turn to the Gentile nations that surrounded Israel.

Note – All of these nations were destroyed by the Babylonians around the same time as Jerusalem (586 BC). These nations represented neighbors to the west, east, south, and north of Judah. This section reminds us that God is not just the local god of Israel; He is the God of all the Earth.

1 Philistia (4 – 7)

The Philistines were bitter enemies of Israel for most of their history. Four of the five major Philistine cities are specifically mentioned in this prophecy. Gath is the only city omitted. (See also Amos 1:6 – 8 where Gath is also not mentioned)

The Cherethites (v. 5) occupied the southern coast of Philistia, but are believed to have originated in Crete. At one time, these people along with the Pelethites and Gittites were soldiers responsible for guarding King David. (see 2 Samuel 15:18; 1 Kings 1:38 – 46)

"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will stretch out mine hand upon the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethims, and destroy the remnant of the sea coast." (Ezekiel 25:16)

2 Moab and Ammon (8 – 11)

The Moabites and Ammonites were both descendants of Lot through his immoral relationship with his daughters. (Genesis 19:31 – 38)

3 Ethiopia (12)

4 Assyria (13 – 15)

Assyria was the first of these nations to be destroyed, in 612 BC.

D On Jerusalem in Particular (3:1 – 5)

See Jeremiah 19:1 - 5

E On All Nations at Armageddon (3:6 – 8)

See Revelation 14:18 – 20; 19:11 – 21

II A Plea for Repentance (2:1 – 3)

This is a wonderful little portion of the Book. Notice that God gives hope to His people even in the midst of the coming judgment. God did postpone the judgment that was due to Judah, at least for a short while, during the reign of Josiah. (See 2 Kings 22:13 - 20; 2 Chronicles 34:23 - 28) The revival that took place during the reign of Josiah was the last revival for the people of God before they would be taken into captivity.

"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:" (Isaiah 55:6)

V. 1 – “nation not desired” – Israel was in trouble with both God and the nations that she was desperately trying to be like. Now when the world was caving in on them, God is offering them a chance to get right with Him.

Practical Point – The world is not your friend. When it takes from you whatever you have to give, it will discard you as refuse. Just ask the Prodigal Son. But, God will always take back the penitent sinner.

V. 3 - Notice that God will “hide” those that are His, even in the Day of Judgment.

III A Prophecy of Future Blessing (3:9 – 20)

This portion of the prophecy deals with the millennial reign of Christ upon the Earth.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

(Revelation 20:4)

A For the Gentiles (3:9 – 10)

See Isaiah 56:1 - 8

B For Israel (3:11 – 20)

See Isaiah 11:1 – 10; 60; 65:17 – 25

**PALESTINE AFTER THE FALL
OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM**

- City
- Political boundary
- Assyrian provinces
- Semi-independent realm
- Heartland of Judah by 722 BC

0 10 20 Miles
0 10 20 Kilometers

