

Zephaniah

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? A prophet predicts the coming "day of the Lord," proclaiming judgment on Judah and other nations. But he also promises that God's people will be restored.

WHO WROTE IT? Zephaniah.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? Probably between 640 and 630 B.C.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? Near the end of the divided kingdom.

THE BREAKDOWN

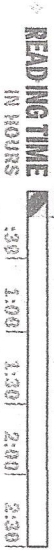
- Chapter 1: The day of the Lord is coming
- Chapter 2: Judgment on the nations
- Chapter 3: Judah will be judged, then restored

KEY CONCEPTS

"The day of the Lord"

SCORECARD

- Zephaniah:** A prophet related to royalty, probably living in Jerusalem
- Hezekiah:** Zephaniah's ancestor, one of the good kings of Judah
- Josiah:** Another reforming king of Judah; Zephaniah prophesied during his reign



WORTH MEMORIZING

• 3:17

"For the Lord your God is living among you.

He is a mighty savior.

He will take delight in you with gladness.

With his love, he will calm all your

fears.

He will rejoice over you with joyful

songs."

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

• **GOD'S JUSTICE.** Don't assume that God will let us off the hook for sinful behavior. He sees, he takes notice, and he will crack down.

In It For Me?

TO BE SAFE WHEN GOD JUDGES . . .

THAT GOD WILL ACT.

, NOT PROUD.

WHAT IS RIGHT, THE LORD? GOD YOU.

Timeline



640 B.C.
ZEPHANIAH BECOMES A PROPHET; JOSIAH BECOMES KING OF JUDAH

627
JEREMIAH BECOMES A PROPHET

622
BOOK OF THE LAW FOUND IN THE TEMPLE

621
ZEPHANIAH'S MINISTRY ENDS

609
JOSIAH DIES IN BATTLE

605
FIRST CAPTIVES TAKEN TO BABYLON

597
BABYLON'S SECOND ATTACK ON JUDAH

586
JUDAH (THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM) FALLS

WHAT'S THE POINT OF Zephaniah?

+++
Actions lead to consequences.

Headlines

GOODBYE, CRUEL WORLD
Zephaniah 1, page 1288

GOD DOES NO WRONG
Zephaniah 3:5, page 1291

WHO LIVES IN NINEVEH NOW?
SEE ZEPHANIAH 2:13-15.

Zephaniah wrote during the reign of the good king Josiah. During this time, many prophets had warned the people of approaching judgment. But the people thought, *God won't do anything.* Zephaniah's message for these doubters was "God will act!" When the time is right, God will judge all the nations of the world.



Some time ago, a popular book entitled *The Self-Destructive Habits of Good Companies* made the rounds in leadership circles. It warned about complacency—the sense of security deriving from the belief that our past successes will continue indefinitely.

The prophet Zephaniah wrote a similar book to the nation of Judah about the risk of spiritual complacency. He warned, “It shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.’” (Zephaniah 1:12) In Zephaniah’s day, complacency had settled over Jerusalem like an invisible fog. People in the once-devout City of David had convinced themselves that the Lord would not intervene, regardless of how they acted. Yet only a generation later, disaster overtook them.

Zephaniah is called the Prophet of the Day of the Lord. He announced the coming of the day of the Lord against Judah, predicted judgments on five other nations, then consoled God’s people with a promise of a future restoration in Jerusalem. His central theme is this imminent day of reckoning for Judah and the nations. But his prophetic warnings also point to a future day of judgment for the entire complacent world.

Always guard against complacency. Ask God to show you where your security truly lies and to move you into the only true shelter in the world—a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.



KEY THOUGHT:

The Day of the Lord will come with a whirlwind of inevitable destruction on the complacent and ungodly, but will also bring the fulfillment of the ages to God’s people.



KEY VERSE:

“The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet *you* with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”

Zephaniah 3:17



KEY ACTION:

Rejoice in the love of a God who rejoices over you in song.



KEY PRAYER:

Lord, help me to be meek and humble, and to trust in Your Name.

BASIC SURVEY

ZEPHANIAH

AUTHOR: Zephaniah (1:1).

DATE: Approximately 640–620 BC, during the reign of King Josiah (1:1).

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

A coming “day of the Lord” promises heavy judgment.

DETAILS, PLEASE

Zephaniah begins with a jarring prophecy: “I will utterly consume all things from off the land,” God declares in the book’s second verse (1:1). People, animals, birds, and fish will all perish, victims of God’s wrath over Judah’s idolatry. Other nearby nations will be punished as well in “the fire of my jealousy” (3:8 KJV), but there is hope: in His mercy, God will someday restore a remnant of Israel that “shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies” (3:13 KJV).

QUOTEABLE

> The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly (1:14 NKJV).

> The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy (3:17 KJV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Zephaniah gives more detail about himself than most of the minor prophets, identifying himself as a great-great-grandson of Hezekiah (1:1), probably the popular, godly king of Judah (2 Chronicles 29).

SO WHAT?

God gave the people of Judah fair warning of His judgment, just as He has done with us. For Christians, the coming “day of the Lord” carries no fear.

READ ZEPHANIAH 1 AND PSALMS 39–40.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 167. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 167. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 167. →

HIDDEN TREASURE

GOD SHAKES THE COMPLACENT

“I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will He do evil!’” (Zephaniah 1:12 NKJV). Many people in Zephaniah’s day were complacent and self-satisfied. They didn’t deny that God existed, but secretly figured that He was either distant or uninvolved in their activities and had left them to their own devices. They didn’t believe He would bless them for doing good, nor punish them for doing evil. He was, in a word, irrelevant. But God is not mocked, and not powerless. He promised to shake up the lives of the self-sufficient and complacent.



Zephaniah spoke to those who did not believe that God would punish them for being too complacent.

READ ZEPHANIAH 2 AND PSALMS 6–7.

HIDDEN TREASURE

GOD PROMISES RELIEF

Zephaniah is a short book with great news: “The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17 NIV). Many people have seen a great deal of trouble in their lives and are used to seeing God’s love expressed *this way*: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19 KJV). It’s comforting to know that “He will not always chide” (Psalm 103:9 KJV). God promises relief: “For I will not contend forever. . . for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made” (Isaiah 57:16 NKJV).

READ ZEPHANIAH 3 AND PSALMS 43–44.

Zephaniah

Do you know a supposedly Christian teen who dabbles in Wicca? Or do you know one who sometimes participates in another kind of religious worship, such as that at a Bahai temple or one who has met with a medium to try to communicate with the dead?

Maybe it's not some other teen. Maybe it's *you*.

It seems like the menu of religious options in our country is longer than it has ever been. And more people than ever are ordering the combo plate.

Is a religion of "Christianity and . . ." okay? In other words, is it okay to be a Christian *and* a neopagan? A Christian *and* a Muslim? A Christian *and* a Hindu?

While it may not be popular to say so in our tolerance-above-all culture, God frowns on it when people try to put following Him on a par with indulging in other religious beliefs and practices. And be sure about this: you don't want God frowning!

Religious syncretism (the technical term for mixing faiths together) is nothing new. It was a big problem in ancient Israel, where God's chosen people seemed perpetually tempted to mix worship of the real God with worship of other gods from the nations around them.

In Israel, this kind of spiritual unfaithfulness to God went hand in hand with moral compromise of various sorts. (That's nothing new either!)

God's response to religious syncretism and moral compromise among His people was to give them warnings. If they did not heed those warnings, He would let them suffer through a time of judgment so they would know how serious He was about receiving exclusive worship.

Like the loving Father He is, God disciplined His children many times over the years for their own good.

That was the situation once again in the seventh century B.C. when God chose a man named

Zephaniah to give His messages to the people of Judah. According to Zephaniah, God was going to judge the nation of Judah (because of her disloyalty to Him) as well as Judah's neighbors (because of their opposition to God's people).

As with all of God's promises, this one came true. The Assyrian capital of Nineveh was destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 B.C.; the city of Jerusalem was destroyed—also by the Babylonians—in 586 B.C. But God's words through Zephaniah were not only of judgment. They were also of hope, for God would restore His people after their time of judgment. And as history shows, after a time of exile in Babylon, the nation of Judah was reestablished in their ancient homeland (see the book of Ezra).

For us, this is a picture of the blessing available to people in Jesus Christ. God will forgive and bless us as we learn to confess—and live like we believe—that He is the one true God in the universe.

Author: Zephaniah

Date: During the reign of Josiah (around 625 B.C.)

What in the world is going on?

663 B.C.

Ashurbanipal becomes king of Assyria, succeeding his father Esar-haddon

663 B.C.

Thebes, the capital of Egypt, is destroyed

ca 660 B.C.

Nahum becomes a prophet to Judah

642–640 B.C.

Amon reigns in Judah

640–609 B.C.

Josiah reigns in Judah

628 B.C.

Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism, is born in Rhages, Iran

627 B.C.

Jeremiah reluctantly becomes a prophet

626 B.C.

Nabopolassar revolts against Assyria and founds the Neo-Babylonian Empire

625 B.C.

Zephaniah becomes a prophet to Judah

621 B.C.

Harsh laws to punish crime are instituted by Draco, the first lawgiver in Athens; the term *draconian* is coined from his name

616–578 B.C.

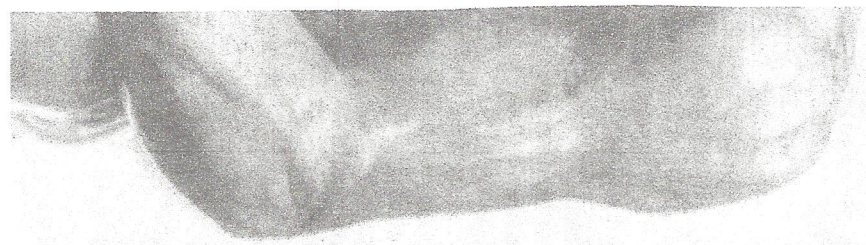
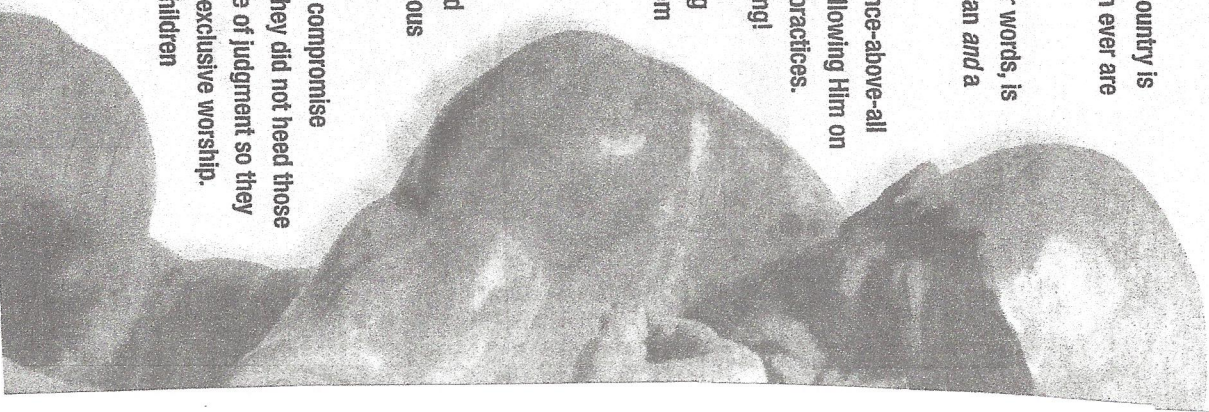
Tarquin (Lucius Tarquinius Priscus), an Etruscan, is king of Rome

612 B.C.

Although God spared Nineveh during Jonah's day, the city is destroyed at this time

612–609 B.C.

The Assyrian Empire crumbles, thanks to the conquering Scythians, Medes, and Babylonians



How to Practice Silence

Read: Zephaniah 1:7 | Habit: Silence and Solitude

In preparation for Israel to hear the instruction of God, the prophet Zephaniah admonished the people to “be silent before the Sovereign Lord” (Zep 1:7).

Usually when we come before God, we are being noisy, offering prayers or songs of praise. Such worshipful noise comes easily; being silent is much more difficult. The practice of silence—withdrawing from noise, words and activities for a time to become more attuned to the voice of God—takes effort, but it can be easier if we keep the following in mind:

Silence requires a lot of discipline.

▶ *Silence takes practice*—The first few times you engage in the discipline of silence you’re likely to discover it’s much harder than you expected. Silence requires a lot of discipline. Don’t be discouraged when your initial efforts fail; just be persistent in your practice. Start with small increments of time (such as one to two minutes) and slowly increase each day until you find it easier to sit for longer periods of time in silence before the Sovereign Lord.

▶ *Silence requires solitude*—Silence and solitude are complementary disciplines that aid our communion with God. While solitude does not always require silence, silence almost always requires solitude. Humans are, by nature, social creatures and are designed to be aware of the presence of other people. When we are with others it’s more difficult to focus and hear the “gentle whisper” of our Lord (see 1Ki 19:12). While some aspects of communion with God can be enhanced by being with other believers, the discipline of silence benefits from our being alone with the Lord.

▶ *Too much silence is distracting*—While the lack of distracting noise is a necessity, too much silence can also be distracting. When a room is exceedingly quiet, we can begin to focus on the noises of our own bodies, such as our breathing or heartbeats, rather than focusing on the voice of God. Some “white noise”—a mixture of many different sound waves that forms a background noise, such as the hum of an air conditioner—can actually be better than total silence for helping us to achieve the necessary focus.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY: Spending periods of time in complete silence isn’t an easy discipline, but with practice we can develop the ability to be quiet and wait on the Lord.

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

DURING JUDAH’S HECTIC POLITICAL AND religious history, reform comes from time to time. Zephaniah’s forceful prophecy may be a factor in the reform that occurs during Josiah’s reign—a “revival” that produces outward change but does not fully remove the inward heart of corruption which characterizes the nation. Zephaniah hammers home his message repeatedly that the day of the Lord, Judgment Day, is coming when the malignancy of sin will be dealt with. Israel and her gentile neighbors will soon experience the crushing hand of God’s wrath. But after the chastening process is complete, blessing will come in the person of the Messiah, who will be the cause for praise and singing.

Zephan-yah means “Yahweh Hides” or “Yahweh Has Hidden.” Zephaniah was evidently born during the latter part of the reign of King Manasseh. His name may mean that he was “hidden” from Manasseh’s atrocities. The Greek and Latin title is *Sophonias*.

WATCH WORD

▪ **trust** (confident dependence on God’s faithfulness)—3:12

ON SCRIPTURE

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

God was an artist and every time He finished a painting, He shook His head and said, “That’s good!” God loved it; He was pleased with what He was doing. And that’s the kind of God I preach—not a faraway, dehydrated, sour, sulky God, hiding in some imperial palace. I preach a friendly God, who is happy in His work. It is only sin that has brought the curse, the pain, and the grief—and He has sent His Son to deal with that sin business, too.

God makes delightful reference to His works and to everything that He has made. It says in Psalm 104:31, “the Lord shall rejoice in his works.” And in Zephaniah . . . it says, “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.”

God Almighty is in the midst of us! He will save and rejoice over us with joy! God is happy if nobody else is and He will rest in His love. “He will joy over thee with singing”—the eternal God is singing! That’s why I want our congregations to sing. I don’t require that they sing on pitch—just that they sing with joy and enthusiasm.

—*The Attributes of God*

ZEPHANIAH

THE BIG PICTURE

"If only . . ." is a haunting phrase. It implies that we have failed—that we wish we could go back in time and do things differently. As we see the truth and accept responsibility for our lives, we may be saddened and ashamed when we reflect on our past. We may regret our irresponsible and destructive behaviors and wish we could erase past mistakes. This must have been how the people of Judah felt when they heard the prophetic words of Zephaniah. *If only* they had obeyed and trusted God!

God called Zephaniah to be his prophet during the days of King Josiah, the last of Judah's good kings. The prophet's condemnation of Judah's idol worship and self-centered living echoed the young king's disdain for these sinful practices. Zephaniah's prophetic words would have bolstered support to Josiah's purges against idolatry during the early years of his reign. However, the apostasy of Judah's previous kings, Manasseh and Amon, had left deep spiritual wounds in the land of Judah. Despite Zephaniah's ministry and Josiah's noble reforms, these scars remained visible in Judah throughout his reign.

The people of Judah needed to make some major changes. They had seen the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel, but they falsely assumed that the presence of God in the Jerusalem temple would protect them from foreign invaders. Their spiritual indifference blinded them to their true situation. Zephaniah warned the people that Judah would be destroyed if they didn't repent right away. He also informed them that spiritual renewal was still possible. Spiritual awakening could still occur if they would admit their sins and trust in God. Josiah and the people listened to Zephaniah, responded and experienced revival.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

THE CONSEQUENCES OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

Many of our troubles come as direct consequences of our irresponsibility. Judah was irresponsible in her covenant relationship with God. Judah worshiped false gods and ignored God's laws—laws that were intended for her own good. Zephaniah clearly stated that the nation's irresponsibility would carry heavy consequences. Encouraged by Zephaniah and led by Josiah, the people of Judah confessed their sins, took responsibility for their lives and turned back to God. As a result, they received substantial healing and restoration. When we are

Essential Facts

A. PROPHECIES OF JUDGMENT AGAINST JUDAH (1:1—2:3)

1. Judah's Moral and Spiritual Irresponsibility (1:1—1:3)
2. Judah's Accountability Before God (1:14—1:18)
3. Judah's Opportunity for Restoration (2:1—3)

B. PROPHECIES OF JUDGMENT AGAINST THE NATIONS (2:4—1:5)

C. PROPHECIES OF JUDGMENT AGAINST JERUSALEM (3:1—8)

D. PROMISES OF BLESSING TO THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD (3:9—20)

PURPOSE:

To shake the people of Judah out of their complacency and get them back on the path of spiritual renewal.

AUTHOR:

The prophet Zephaniah.

AUDIENCE:

The people of the southern kingdom of Judah.

DATE WRITTEN:

Sometime between 640 and 621 BC, just prior to King Josiah's great reformation.

SETTING:

The kingdom of Judah during the years of King Josiah; Zephaniah's ministry may have helped to motivate the young king's reforms.

KEY VERSE:

"On that day you, Jerusalem, will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from you your arrogant boasters. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill" (3:1).

KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Zephaniah and the people of Judah.

KEY PLACE:

Jerusalem.

irresponsible in our relationships with God and others, our situations will grow progressively worse. But as we learn to live responsible lives, we will begin to experience the blessings of God.

COMPLACENCY LEADS TO A DOWNFALL

Prosperity and success often lead to complacency. Josiah's great-grandfather Hezekiah had been one of Judah's greatest kings. Hezekiah had led his people back to God, and God had greatly blessed them. However, Judah's next two kings, Manasseh and Amon, led their people into a period of spiritual complacency and sin. And with time, those sins brought about grievous consequences. Josiah followed in the footsteps of Hezekiah and helped lead the people back to God. Sometimes our greatest failures will follow our greatest victories. In order to prevent a downfall, we need to continually seek God and honestly reflect on our spiritual condition. Our hearts must always be vulnerable and dependent on God, regardless of how far we have progressed spiritually.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL LEADS TO JOY

The process of spiritual renewal may contain some painful steps. When we confess the truth about ourselves, it can hurt. But as we begin to speak the truth and accept responsibility for our own lives, we can discover the great relief and hope that God offers. As we release our hold on our lives and begin to follow God's will for us, we find joy. Then we can truly celebrate God's goodness as it filters into every area of our lives, bringing joy where there was once only sorrow and pain.

Zephaniah

Timeline	722 BC	716-687 BC	695-640 BC	640-609 BC
World Events	Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, falls to the Assyrians.	Hezekiah is king of Judah and ancestor of Zephaniah.	Judah experiences years of great apostasy during the reign of Manasseh and his son Amon.	Prophecy of Zephaniah is probably influential on the young King Josiah.
Biblical Events				

“Yahweh your God is among you, a warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will bring you quietness with His love. He will delight in you with shouts of joy” (3:17).

Who wrote Zephaniah?
The prophet Zephaniah (1:1)

Who were the recipients?
The immediate recipients of Zephaniah’s message were the people of Judah.

When was Zephaniah written?
640–609 B.C.

Where did it happen?
Zephaniah takes place in Judah, after a long, dark period of spiritual decline. Josiah’s reign and reforms were most likely concurrent with Zephaniah’s ministry.

What is Zephaniah about?

The edify of the Law. This expression is used more often than in other prophetic books, but as the others, it refers to the Lord’s providential intervention in the affairs of His people and the pagan nations.

Purification from sin and the preparation of a remnant. Though Judah’s sin and spiritual decay were offensive to the Lord, in His grace He still desired to cleanse them and even save a remnant of the faithful (3:9).

Why should women read Zephaniah?
As with all the Lord’s true prophets, Zephaniah was not a tickler

of ears. His unminced words of future destruction were meant to bring restoration, though to those in Judah they would have been unwelcome. Zephaniah was giving the people one last chance to return to the Lord and be faithful to Him. Just as the Lord desired Judah’s loyalty, so He is calling for ladies to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

How do you read Zephaniah?
Though almost entirely poetic in form, the book is a prophetic declaration.

Zephaniah’s recipients were in Judah, which along with some of the early discourses by Jeremiah and the history recorded in 2Kings 21–23, depicts the social, moral, and religious condition in Judah at that time. It is important to understand that the moral condition of Judah was in decline for more than 50 years. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, had fallen to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. because of her own wickedness. During this time Josiah launched his massive reforms. He even moved into the territory of the northern kingdom in an attempt to take back some of the land lost to Assyria.

The first chapter focuses on God’s judgment upon Judah; in the second chapter, after imploring the people to repent, judgments are pronounced against some of Judah’s neighbors, including Philistia, Moab, Ammon, and Assyria; the last chapter continues themes of judgment specifically upon Jerusalem, while also promising her future glory.

640 BC	629 BC	621 BC	621 BC
At the death of Amon, his son Josiah becomes king of Judah at the age of eight.	Josiah leads a spiritual reformation in Judah.	Judah’s spiritual reformation intensifies; when the book of the law is found in the temple.	Hezekiah the prophetic brought from Yahweh that he would bring on Judah after the reign of Josiah.

INTRODUCTION TO ZEPHANIAH

BACKGROUND

The first verse of the book of Zephaniah attributes the book to the prophet and also boasts an ancestry to the fourth generation. Zephaniah’s great-grandfather Hizkiah is King Hezekiah of Judah, making Zephaniah the only prophet with royal ancestry.

The Hebrew name for Zephaniah means “Yahweh hides” or “Yahweh has hidden.” Born during the reign of the evil king Manasseh, young Zephaniah may have been hidden from him.

MESSAGE

During the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, the people of Judah worship other gods and defile God’s holy places. Zephaniah speaks about the coming day of the Lord (1:7, 14) when the

wrath of God will come upon Judah (1:3–2:3; 3:1–7) and all the nations of the earth (2:4–15). Afterward, God will rejoice over a purified remnant that he will return to the land (3:9–20).

Under the leadership of King Josiah, the nation turns toward God; it seems that Judah listens to Zephaniah’s call. Their repentance is short-lived, however, as the people forget Zephaniah’s message and experience the reality of the judgment about which he spoke when Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 B.C.

TIME

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah (640–609 B.C.), probably before Josiah’s great reform of 621 B.C. Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah.

OUTLINE

- I. Judgment Day
 - A. Judgment upon the earth
 - B. Judgment of nations
- II. Day of Hope
 - A. All nations will worship God
 - B. God reigns

>WORD|study

1:2-3 Zephaniah’s language is reminiscent of the language used by Moses with regard to the great flood during Noah’s time (Gen 6:7, 7:23) and by Isaiah (Is 24) when he described the devastation that would be coming upon the whole earth (Zph 1:2). Three times Zephaniah speaks of the Lord’s purpose to **SWEEP AWAY** (חָסַף) (the sign, “consume”), emphasizing the extensive and all-encompassing aspect of the wrath of the Lord. By using the language of **create** (בָּרָא) and enumerating the different species of life, the Lord emphasizes that no created being will escape judgment.

I. The Day of Judgment (1:1–2:15)

- A. The Universal Nature of the Judgment (1:1–3)
- B. The Judgment of Judah (1:4–2:3)
- C. The Judgment on Neighboring Nations (2:4–15)

II. The Sins of Jerusalem (3:1–8)

- A. The Sins of the Leaders (3:1–5)

B. The Sins of Unrepentant Hearts (3:6–8)

- III. The Promise of Restoration (3:9–20)
 - A. The Worshiping Nations (3:9–10)
 - B. The Faithful Remnant (3:11–20)

3:8–13
3:14–20