

SERVING HIM SHOULDER TO SHOULDER
PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: ZEPHANIAH
Zephaniah 3:8-13

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BRIEF DESCRIPTION

During the seventh century BC, Judah vacillated between idolatry and religious reform. Early in the century it experienced religious revival under Hezekiah before lapsing into idolatry and sin under the long reign (55 years) of his son Manasseh. Though Manasseh repented near the end of his reign and restored worship of Jehovah, his son Amon again led Judah into idolatry. Amon's son, Josiah, reversed this apostasy and promoted religious reforms during his three-decade reign. Josiah's revival restored Jehovah-worship, but many old attitudes and much corruption continued to grow just beneath the surface in the hearts of many leaders and people. Zephaniah prophesied against this cancerous sin, not only in Judah but also among the neighboring nations. If they did not repent, the Day of the Lord would bring God's judgment on them all, even Judah. After the cleansing process, however, God would bless them by sending the Messiah, whose arrival would bring joy and praise.

B. TITLE

1. HEBREW

- **Tsephan-yah** = 'Jahweh hides' or 'Jahweh has hidden'

2. SEPTUAGINT

- **Σοφονιας**

3. LATIN

- **Sophonias**

C. PLACE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

1. PART OF THE LATTER PROPHETS—THE TRULY 'PROPHETIC' BOOKS OF THE OT
2. NINTH OF THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS

D. AUTHOR

1. AUTHORSHIP

- Zephaniah—attributed in **1:1**

2. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

- a. Great-great grandson of Hezekiah—[1:1](#)
 - Son of Cushi
 - Son of Gedaliah
 - Son of Amariah
 - Son of Hezekiah
- b. Why is such a long lineage given?
 - 1. To substantiate his royal lineage—and intimate knowledge of Jerusalem
 - 2. To prove he was a Jew
 - a. ‘Cushi’ was similar to words used to describe Ethiopians—Cush/Cushite
 - b. Possibly—Zephaniah is showing despite that name—his lineage is Jewish
 - c. Note: Jewish law allowed sons of third generation pagan converts to enter the assembly—[Dt 23:7-8](#)
- c. Probably a young man
 - 1. Josiah became king at age eight—*three* generations after Hezekiah
 - 2. Zephaniah—*four* generations after Hezekiah—could not be much older than Josiah
- d. Probably royal lineage—if descended from *King* Hezekiah
 - 1. The only prophet with a biblical genealogy substantiating his royal blood
 - Isaiah was upper class—with access to royal court
 - Daniel was from a noble Judean family
 - 2. Gave him access to and knowledge of royal court
- e. Probably a resident of Jerusalem
 - 1. Refers to ‘this place’ as Jerusalem—[1:4](#)
 - 2. Gives detailed description of sinful problems in Jerusalem—[1:10ff](#)

E. SETTING

1. JUDEAN KINGS OF THE 7TH CENTURY

- **Hezekiah** **715-687**
- **Manasseh** **687-642** [co-regent with Hezekiah—697-687]
- **Amon** **642-640**
- **Josiah** **640-609**
- **Jehoahaz** **609**
- **Jehoiakim** **609-598**

2. GEO-POLITICAL SITUATION

- **Assyria**—was in decline
- **Judah**—previously a vassal of Assyria—was independent under Josiah
- **Babylonia**—defeated Nineveh (612) and Assyria (609)
- **Egypt**—allied with Assyria—Pharaoh Necho killed Josiah in battle—609

3. PROPHETS

a. Zephaniah *followed*

- Isaiah—prophesied to Judah (740-680)
- Nahum—prophesied to Assyria—(664-654)

b. Zephaniah *preceded*

- Habakkuk—prophesied to Judah (609-605)
- Jeremiah—prophesied to Judah and in exile (627-580)

4. JOSIAH'S REFORMS

- a. After long apostasy (almost 60 years) under Manasseh and Amon, Zephaniah and Jeremiah began preaching for reform
- b. Reform began 12th year of Josiah's reign—**628 BC**—opposing idolatry—**II Chr 34:3-7**
- c. Continued in 18th year of his reign—**622 BC**—restoring the Law—**II Chr 34:8-35:19**

F. DATE

1. DURING THE REIGN OF JOSIAH—**1:1**

- Josiah reigned **640-609**

2. BEFORE THE DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH—**612**

- Zephaniah prophesied its destruction—**2:13**
- So—*certainly* the dates can be limited to **640-612**

3. MAYBE—HIS PROPHECY CONTRIBUTED TO JOSIAH’S REFORMS—**628-622**

- So—*possibly* the dates can be limited to **640-622**

G. STYLE

PROPHECIES WARNING OF JUDGMENT, CALLING TO REPENTANCE, AND PROMISING HOPE

H. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- a. Two passages concerning the Day of the Lord—relate to Christ’s Second Coming
 - 1. **Zeph 1:3**—*I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord.*

Mt 13:41—*The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness*

- 2. **Zeph 1:15**—*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.*

Mt 24:29—*But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

I. THEMES

1. THE DAY OF THE LORD—**1:7** and **1:14**

- Will bring both judgment—and hope

2. GOD’S SEVERE JUDGMENT IS COMING

- a. God’s wrath will punish and make all desolate, causing wailing and great distress
- b. Epitomized in **1:14-16**

1:14-16—*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. 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, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the high corner towers.*

3. UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT—WILL COME UPON ALL—**1:2-3:7**

- a. Categories of people

- Officials—[1:4](#)
- Royalty—[1:8](#)
- Common people—[1:12-13](#)
- All the leaders—princes, judges, prophets, priests—[3:3-4](#)

b. Nations

- Judah—[1:4-2:3](#)—particularly Jerusalem—[3:1-7](#)
 - Not even God's covenant people will be spared
- Philistia—[2:4-7](#)
- Moab and Ammon—[2:8-10](#)
- Ethiopia—[2:12](#)
- Assyria—[2:13-15](#)

4. HOPE—A REMNANT WILL EMERGE AFTER GOD'S JUDGMENT—[3:8-20](#)

- It will be international in composition—and will serve Jehovah
- God will bless the remnant—and establish His kingdom through them

5. REVIVAL—DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY EXTEND TO THE NEXT GENERATION

a. Judah experienced several revivals

- Hezekiah—715-687
- Josiah—628-609
- Ezra—457
- Ezra—444
- Malachi—425

b. But the people repeatedly lapsed into sin/idolatry immediately afterward

c. Each generation, for itself, must commit to God and experience revival

6. JEHOVAH—IS LORD OF ALL NATONS—NOT JUST OVER ISRAEL

J. OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION—[1:1](#)

JUDGEMENT IS COMING—THE DAY OF THE LORD—[1:2-3:8](#)

Upon All the Earth—[1:2-3](#)

Upon Judah—[1:4-2:3](#)

Upon Nations Surrounding Judah—**2:4-15**

Upon Jerusalem—**3:1-7**

Upon All the Earth—**3:8**

HOPE AND SALVATION ARE COMING—THE DAY OF THE LORD—**3:9-20**

Promise of Conversion—**3:9-13**

Promise of Restoration—**3:14-20**

II. BIBLICAL TEXT

Zeph 3:8-13—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. 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; for they will feed and lie down with no one to make them tremble.”*

III. EXPOSITION

A. BACKGROUND—CHAPTER 3

1. GOD HAS PATIENTLY TRIED TO CORRECT HIS WAYWARD PEOPLE

- Sending prophets to warn them
- Giving them the Law
- Taking care of them daily
- Defeating their surrounding enemies in battle

2. BUT THEY CONTINUE TO REBEL

- Thinking they are safe
- That God will not punish them

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.*

3. THE WAIT—v 8

- a. The only verse in OT with all letters of alphabet—including five special endings
- b. Here—God performs three roles
 - He rises up as—**witness**
 - He issues His decision as—**judge**
 - He pours out His wrath as—**executioner**
- c. *Therefore wait for Me*—could be addressed to either of two groups
 1. The righteous—who will later become the ‘remnant’
 2. All nations—including Judah—that are awaiting judgment and punishment
- d. If the righteous are waiting
 1. A parenthetic pause—while evil is being destroyed
 2. They wait to receive the blessings promised in vv9-13
 3. Blessed are the righteous who wait patiently on the Lord

Is 30:18—*Therefore the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are those who wait for Him.*

- e. If all the nations—including Judah—awaiting justice
 1. The rest of the verse—and its punishment—applies to them
 2. The fire of God’s wrath—His *burning anger*—will consume all the earth
 3. Reason
 - a. Forensic—for justice to be done
 - b. Metaphysical—to remove evil from the earth—so God can inhabit it
 - c. To prepare for the renewal of all things—the new start
 - d. Parallel—the Day of the Lord in to II Peter

II Pe 3:10-13—*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in*

holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

B. SUMMARY—vv9-13

1. FOCUS

- **vv9-10**—focus on the nations
- **vv11-13**—focus of Israel

2. SHIFT FROM JUDGMENT TO GRACE, FORGIVENESS, AND RESTORATION

3. GOD PERFORMS THREE ACTIONS

❖ Shown by three first-person singular verbs of divine action

- ***“I will purify”*—v9**
- ***“I will remove”*—v11**
- ***“I will leave within you”*—v12**

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.*

C. PURIFICATION AND UNIFICATION—v9—*I will purify*

1. A REVERSAL OF BABEL

- a. At Babel—language was divided and people were scattered—**Gen 11:1-9**
- b. Now—they all have one ‘lip’—Hebrew word is singular
- c. Now—they are unified—they ‘all’ call on the name of the Lord
 - Foretaste of Pentecost—Spirit empowered Apostles able to communicate to all

2. PURIFIED LIP

- a. Previously defiled—by worshiping idols
- b. Now cleansed—made holy for worship
 - Like Isaiah’s lips purged by angel’s fiery coal—**Is 6:6-7**

3. CALLING UPON THE LORD

- a. Worshiping God
- b. Appealing for salvation
 - As in **Ps 18:3**—*I call upon the Lord . . . and I am saved*
 - As in **Acts 2** and **Rom 10:13**—*Call upon the Lord and you will be saved*

4. SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

- a. Meaning
 - 1. Literally = ‘with one back’
 - 2. Metaphor = being yoked together
 - Like the pole carried by two men—bearing grapes in Canaan—**Nu 13:23**
 - Jesus’ call—*Take my yoke upon you . . . for my burden is light*—**Mt 11**
- b. Could mean two things
 - 1. All nations coming together—possibly
 - 2. More likely—other nations yoked with the righteous of Judah (see below)

D. UNITED OFFERING

1. THE ‘DISPERSED’ ONES

- a. *From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*
 - 1. Far distant lands
 - Just as judgment went to the ends of the earth—so now does God’s grace
 - 2. Irony
 - a. Ethiopia = Cush
 - b. Cushi = name of Zephaniah’s father
- b. Who are the ‘dispersed’—three possibilities
 - 1. Gentiles scattered throughout the world by sin—bringing offerings in their native lands
 - 2. Jewish remnant scattered by the Day of the Lord—renewing the sacrificial system
 - a. Possibly the ‘remnant’ of ‘My people’—in **2:7, 9**—and **3:13**

- b. Cush = region of the Tigris and Babylon, where Nimrod, Cush's son (Ge 10:8–12), founded Nineveh and acquired Babylon—where the ten tribes are mentioned as being scattered (1 Pe 1:1; 5:13)
- c. The restoration under Cyrus of the Jews transported under Pharaoh-necho to Egypt and Ethiopia.
- d. The Torah had predicted the Jewish diaspora

Dt 4:27— as punishment for idolatry—*And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you.*

Dt 28:64—curses of Mt Ebal—*And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.*

- 3. Converted Gentiles—bringing dispersed Judeans back to Israel—as thanksgiving offerings (**Is 66**)
- c. In the NT—the Diaspora of the Church—moved outwardly from Jerusalem—**Acts 8:1-3**
- d. Purpose of dispersion coming together
 - 1. Unified worship—bringing offerings to Jehovah
 - 2. Parallel—**Is 66:18-24**
 - **v18**—the time has come to gather all nations and tongues
 - **v19**—From distant coastlands that had not heard of God's glory before
 - **v20**—They will bring their brothers as offerings to the Lord
 - **v22**—Just as the new heavens and new earth I make will endure
 - **v23**—*All mankind will come to bow down before Me, says the Lord.*

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; for they will feed and lie down with no one to make them tremble."*

E. THE REMOVAL—v11—*I will remove*

1. REMOVAL OF SHAME

- The body will be cleansed—by God removing the shame of past rebellion

2. HOW—BY REMOVAL OF THE PROUD

- a. Pride = one of the key sins in rebelling against God—wanting to be independent of Him
- b. Judah—formerly had been shamelessly unrepentant for its sin—**2:1**
- c. ‘Exultant pride’—had been Nineveh’s chief sin—**2:15**

3. TWO POSSIBLE MEANINGS

- a. The righteous in Judah who repent—will not need to feel shame—followed by the haughty being removed from their presence—leaving only the humble
- b. The stigma of shame for past sin will be removed—and the haughty will be removed—leaving only the righteous

4. ON MY HOLY MOUNTAIN

- a. Jerusalem—is the holy mountain—where the nations will bring their offerings—**Is 66:20**
- b. Jerusalem—is where the redemptive work of Christ will be accomplished
- c. Jerusalem—is where the ‘remnant’ (below) will return

F. THE DEPOSIT—vv 12-13—*I will leave within you*

1. JERUSALEM WILL BECOME A PLACE OF REFUGE—**v12**

Rev 21:1-4—the New Jerusalem—**1** *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.* **2** *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.* **3** *And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,* **4** *and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.*

2. THE REMNANT WILL TAKE ON GOD’S CHARACTER

- a. Divine qualities
 - Humility—not arrogance
 - Holiness: no wrong-doing—no lies—no deceit
- b. What causes this transformation

1. Taking refuge in the ‘name of the Lord’

2. They are transformed into the image of God

➤ The NT promise—to be remade into the image of Christ—**II Cor 3:18**

3. Just as all creation is restored—they are renewed

➤ The NT promise—in Christ we are made ‘new creatures’—**II Cor 5:17**

c. A PLACE OF PEACE AND PROTECTION—**v13**

1. They will feed and lie down

➤ Sheep can eat and sleep only when they feel no danger of molestation

Ps 4:8—*I will both lie down and sleep in peace because you alone O Lord make me to dwell in safety.*

2. They will no longer tremble

➤ No fear of surrounding enemy nations—who have joined them in peace

➤ No fear of oppressors [**3:3-4**—the haughty—who have been expelled

IV. INVITATION