

# Zephaniah — The Prophet of the Day of the LORD

Series: 30 Prophets of the Bible - Dr. Randy White

## I. Identity of Zephaniah

### Name and Meaning

- “Zephaniah” (Hebrew: זְפַנְיָהוּ, *Tsephanyah*) means “The LORD has hidden” or “The LORD has treasured/protected.”

### Genealogy

- Zephaniah 1:1 gives an unusually long genealogy: “The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah...”
- Many identify “Hizkiah” with King Hezekiah; if correct, Zephaniah was of royal lineage and spoke from within Judah’s leadership world.
- The identification is probable, but not certain

### Prophetic Context

- Zephaniah ministered in Judah
- His prophecy is directed first toward Jerusalem and Judah
- He is one of the clearest prophets of “the day of the LORD”

## II. Historical Setting

### Timeframe

- Zephaniah 1:1 places him in the days of Josiah king of Judah
- Josiah reigned c. 640–609 BC
- Zephaniah is usually dated before Josiah’s major reform of c. 622 BC, since the book describes entrenched idolatry and complacency.

### Religious Condition in Judah

- Baal worship remained present (1:4)
- Priests and worshipers practiced syncretism (1:5)
- Some claimed covenant identity while living in practical indifference to God (1:12)
- Jerusalem’s leadership was corrupt (3:3–4)

### International Context

- Assyria was still a major power, but weakening
- Nineveh is specifically named for judgment (2:13–15)
- The prophecy likely comes during the declining years of Assyrian dominance

## III. Nature of Zephaniah’s Ministry

### Primary Message

- Imminent judgment on Judah
- Judgment on the surrounding nations
- Future purification, restoration, and preservation of a remnant

### Distinctive Theme

- The dominant theme is **the day of the LORD**
- Zephaniah presents that day as near (1:14), terrifying (1:15–18), universal in scope (1:2–3; 2:4–15), and ultimately restorative for the faithful remnant (3:9–20).

### Tone and Style

- Direct and severe
- Strong use of judgment language

- Moves from wrath and exposure of sin to restoration and hope

## IV. Major Themes in the Book

### The Day of the LORD

- This day includes wrath (1:15, 1:18), distress and anguish (1:15, 1:17), devastation and desolation (1:15), darkness and gloominess (1:15), and trumpet blast and military alarm (1:16).

### Judgment on Complacency

- Zephaniah 1:12 describes those “settled on their lees”
- “Lees” = the dregs or sediment left at the bottom of wine when it sits undisturbed; the image suggests people who have become spiritually stagnant, undisturbed, and complacent.
- The problem is not open atheism, but spiritual indifference
- Judah assumed God would neither intervene in blessing nor in judgment

### Universal Judgment

- Judgment begins with Judah, but does not end there
- Nations addressed in chapter 2 include Philistia (2:4–7), Moab and Ammon (2:8–11), Ethiopia / Cush (2:12), and Assyria with Nineveh (2:13–15).

### The Remnant

- Zephaniah does not present total destruction as the end
- God preserves a humble and trusting people (3:12–13)
- The remnant theme connects Zephaniah to the broader prophetic message of restoration after judgment

## V. Structure of the Book

### Chapter 1 – Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem

- Universal opening announcement of sweeping judgment (1:2–3)
- Specific condemnation of Judah’s idolatry and syncretism (1:4–6)
- The day of the LORD announced as near (1:7, 1:14–18)
- Special attention is given to religious corruption, royal and social arrogance, and spiritual complacency.

### Chapter 2 – Judgment on the Nations and a Call to Seek the LORD

- Call to repentance and humility: Zephaniah 2:3 (KJV), “Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth...”
- Judgment pronounced on surrounding nations
- Demonstrates that the LORD rules beyond Judah alone

### Chapter 3 – Jerusalem’s Rebellion and Future Restoration

- Jerusalem indicted for rebellion and refusal to obey (3:1–4)
- The LORD shown as righteous in contrast to the city’s corruption (3:5)
- Promise of purified peoples and restored worship (3:9–10)
- Preservation of a humble remnant (3:11–13)
- The book ends in restoration, rejoicing, and divine presence (3:14–20)

## VI. Notable Closing Promise

### Zephaniah 3:17

- “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save...”
- One of the strongest restoration statements in the Minor Prophets
- Balances the severe judgment language earlier in the book