

Lesson 4 – Zephaniah

Zephaniah prophesied during Josiah's reign (640-609 BC). His prophecy primarily concerned Judah's impending fall, though nations surrounding Judah were also mentioned. All of these would fall to Babylon shortly after the fall of the Assyrian Empire in 609 BC, though this prophet did not name Babylon as the conqueror. Zephaniah probably prophesied in Josiah's early days, before the king's reforms. Although Josiah's reforms turned Judah back to God, the kingdom immediately reverted to evil upon his death, showing that the people had not wholly repented. The "day of Yahweh" (day of judgment) the prophet foretold was fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. This followed two prior Babylonian invasions in 605 and 597 BC. The final part of the book looks ahead to the restoration of Judah. The first exiles returned c. 536 BC. They finished rebuilding the temple in 516 BC and the wall of Jerusalem c. 444 BC. It is commonly assumed that Zephaniah's ancestor, Hezekiah, in 1:1 was King Hezekiah. The prophet's genealogy is traced back four generations, which is unusual, leading many to believe the ancestor was notable.

1. What does the name Zephaniah mean?
2. Were the judgments Zephaniah prophesied near or far? (Zeph. 1:7, 14)
3. How is the "day of the LORD" described? (Zeph. 1:14-16; 2:2)
4. How might individuals be spared from the impending judgment? (Zeph. 2:3)
5. How are the good people described in Zeph. 2:3 and 3:12? What does this reveal about the heart of many people in Judah? (Zeph. 3:11)

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6. What nations did Zephaniah prophecy against, and what were their sins?
 - a) Zeph. 2:4-7
 - b) Zeph. 2:8-11
 - c) Zeph. 2:12
 - d) Zeph. 2:13-15
7. How were the Jews in Zephaniah's day like those described in Psalm 10? How did this attitude toward God affect the way they lived? (Zeph. 1:12)
8. Who would be the "remnant" and "survivors," and what would they do to the kingdoms who had taunted them? (Zeph. 2:8-9; Ezra 1:3; 9:15)
9. How had Judah responded to God's correction? (Zeph. 3:2, 7)
10. What three terms are used for God's restored people in Zeph. 3:14?
11. What is the benefit of having God "in your midst"? (Zeph. 3:17)
12. What questions or additional comments do you have about Zephaniah?
13. How would you summarize the book of Zephaniah?