

**BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH**

1. This is an obscure book. Zephaniah was a minor prophet sent by God to the Southern Kingdom, Judah. He was one of the last prophets sent to warn the Southern Kingdom.
2. There had been 70 years of silence from God since the prophecy of Isaiah who warned Judah (the Southern Kingdom of Israel), during the time of the most evil king, King Manasseh. King Manasseh was the one who sawed Isaiah into two. Isaiah died as a martyr.
3. Hence, Zephaniah sounded like a repetition to us but there was actually a 70-year gap since the previous prophet, Isaiah, to the Southern Kingdom.
  - a) Zephaniah was sent to warn a new generation. The sins of Judah became so much a part of life that they did not even see them as sins.
  - b) As Christians, we need these repetitive warnings too. We think materialistically, we are selective in Bible hearing, etc. and these have become so normal and acceptable to us. We need the grace of God to respond to such repetitive warnings.
4. Zephaniah was part of the royal family (see the genealogy in Zephaniah 1:1). He used apocalyptic type of poetic messages that are intense with shocking images of God’s judgment. (The NLT Bible version gives a good feel and you can listen to it in the dramatized form.)
5. There are 400 references in the book of Revelation to the Scriptures in the Old Testament. Many of these reference verses came from the book of Zephaniah, e.g. the pictures of the New Jerusalem in future.

**Structure of the book of Zephaniah**

1. Zephaniah 1:1 to 2:3 - Judgement on Judah (and its capital Jerusalem).
2. Zephaniah 2:4 to 3:8 - Judgement on all nations (including Judah and Jerusalem).
3. Zephaniah 3:9-20 - Hope for all nations (including the Jews).

**Why does Section 2 of the structure include Judah (and Jerusalem) under “all nations”?**

1. This prophecy was made during the reign of King Josiah who was a reformer king but he started to reign too late to make much difference. King Josiah reigned as the King of Judah at about 641 BC to 609 BC.
2. The corruption in Jerusalem was so bad during the reign of King Josiah’s predecessor, King Manasseh (about 686 BC to 642 BC) that it was already at a point of no return. Such sins became a part of Judah’s lifestyle. Manasseh worshipped and promoted all the Canaanites gods, including the burning of own son. Other religions became interwoven into the Israeli’s religion.
3. Therefore, when God judged all nations, Israel was no different in the way they sinned. Israel behaved just like any other nation instead of shining for God as His chosen nation. Today, about 1/3 of the world claim to be Christians but this is not true because many are, in reality, pagan “Christian” nations.
4. God had sent His chosen people to the filthiest land (Canaan) to cleanse it by eliminating the inhabitants there and replacing it with the light of God’s truth. Israel was to be God’s light for the world to see. The Israelites not only did not eliminate these

inhabitants but instead they compromised and took in their pagan practices, gods, shrines and sex religion. At the time of King Manasseh, no one could tell a Jew apart from a Canaanite except for their circumcision (like an identification card stating a person's religion).

5. Today, 1/3 of the world's population has an ID as "Christian." Some of the world's worst immorality and injustice are found in these "Christian" nations.
6. Therefore, there was a need for repetitive attacks sent by God, on the nation of Israel who was supposed to carry the banner of God's name. We too, have to examine ourselves if we have been brainwashed into accepting a lifestyle not pleasing to God.
7. God did not include the 12 Minor Prophetic books in the Bible for nothing. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 say that all scriptures are inspired by God. So, do not try to look for something new but to see ourselves and see God in these books. See the filthiness of ourselves against the holiness of God.

### Zephaniah 1:1-2:3 - Judgement on Judah (and Jerusalem)

1. Zephaniah 1:2-4.
  - a) God says He will consume everything on Earth, inclusive of Judah and all the nations.
  - b) The Babylonian invasion was God's weapon. God used the phrase "I will...." multiple times.
  - c) The problem was no one saw the hand of God when the Babylonians attacked them despite all the repeated prophecies given by God through His prophets. Babylon was not explicitly identified in these verses.
  - d) God was tired of warning them repetitively through the attacks of Philistines, Moabites, etc. because Israel did not repent. They did not see these minor attacks as God's hand of judgement, so God decided to use the powerful and ruthless Babylonians.
  - e) God is acting behind many events in the world, e.g. Covid-19, but it may not be obvious to many people. .
  - f) These verses adopt an apocalyptic speech of "destroying everything" due to the Babylonian's "scorched-earth policy". The term "apocalyptic" commonly refers to the coming complete destruction of the current Earth.
2. Zephaniah 1:5 refers to the priests.
  - a) These priests claimed identity as God's people but at same time, they worshipped other gods.
  - b) Just like some Christians today who check the horoscope every day and claim "Oh, I'm a Leo, so my character is like that." They do not recognize that it is God who gave them their personality. They believe more in the power of the stars than the Almighty God.
3. Zephaniah 1:6.
  - a) When these "Christians" need help, they do not go to God to inquire from His Word. Most Christians do not know what God wants them to do!

- b) If you know your own earthly father well, you will intuitively know what pleases him so you do not need exact instructions from him for every situation.
  - c) We must know God our Father well through reading the Bible and not just picking verses out of context.
  - d) "Do not inquire of God" here means they do not bother to read God's Word. It is just like most of today's Christians who never read through the entire Bible.
4. Zephaniah 1:8. "Foreign apparel" refers to Israeli priests who dressed and behaved more like the Canaanite priests. Christian pastors today also dress like Hollywood stars imitating the latest fashions.
5. Zephaniah 1:9. Here, the phrase "leap over the threshold" refers to a pagan practice. Today, there are many "Christian" motivational speakers who make money via deceitful preaching.
6. Zephaniah 1:10-18 describe the Babylonian attack. The book of Zephaniah has lots of poetry where we need to pick up the gems and sense the writer's intent.
7. Zephaniah 2:1.
- a) The phrase "undesirable" or shameless nation refers to Judah.
  - b) "Before the day of the Lord", means this time, it will be soon over because it is the burning anger of the Lord, no longer His simmering anger. It is like an earthly father who keeps issuing verbal warning until the cane is brought out.
8. Zephaniah 2:3.
- a) "Seek the Lord, all the meek of the Earth" and perhaps you can be hidden from the anger of the Lord's Day. Humble yourself and repent. Never mind about the past, just ask for mercy from God now. Only those who realise they are wicked people will ask for mercy from God.
  - b) As Christians, do we see our wicked sins? Most Christians ask for good health, good results for their children, etc. but we do not ask for mercy. We think we are "good".
  - c) Pray "God have mercy on us" and know how much we have compromised in our Christian living.

Zephaniah 2:4-3:8 - Judgement on all nations (including Judah and its capital Jerusalem)

1. Zephaniah 2:4-12. All the nations took advantage of the Israelites when they were used by God to punish Israel. (Note that Israel here includes both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel.)
2. Zephaniah 2:13 prophesies that Babylon would destroy Assyria and its capital Nineveh.
  - a) At the time of this prophecy, Assyria was very powerful so people thought the prophecy of Zephaniah was crazy. The walls of Nineveh walls were about 10- storey high, 100 km long and 10 m thick!
  - b) Yet Nineveh was indeed destroyed by the Babylonians. Ruins of Nineveh were only discovered 100 over years ago. There was indeed such a city called Nineveh but it had disappeared from the face of the Earth for 2000 years!

- c) To the people at the time of Zephaniah, the prophecy that Nineveh would be destroyed was like prophesying that the city of New York will disappear from the face of the Earth today.
3. Zephaniah 3:1.
    - a) The oppressing city here refers to Jerusalem. Woe to Jerusalem who would also be judged with the nations.
    - b) Jerusalem was rebellious and oppressing people and did not accept God's correction. They did not trust God nor draw near to Him. They had the Torah but did not read or obeyed it.
    - c) Christians today are just like them; they know a lot about the Bible but do not know the Bible itself. E.g. they know who the authors of the books in the Bible are, etc. but not what the Bible books actually says. For example, the book of Zephaniah is hardly read by Christians. If you believe God, you will believe in His Word. Jesus is the Word. If "you love Jesus" but "do not know the Word of God", how is that even possible?
  4. Zephaniah 3:5. However, God remains faithful to Judah. God's Word (the Bible) was there every day, free for access yet Christians do not want it. It is such a sad state; many Christians today as are just like the rebellious Jews during Zephaniah's time.
  5. Zephaniah 3:6-7. God had already allowed all nations to be attacked at this point except Judah and its capital Jerusalem, yet they still refused to fear God.
  6. Zephaniah 3:8. God says He would rise up and plunder, and pour out His wrath to consume the Earth. This prophecy was fulfilled when Babylon wiped out Jerusalem (in 586 BC) as well as all the nations.

Zephaniah 3:9-20 – Hope for all the nations (including the Jews)

1. Zephaniah 3:9. This is the turning point. Some things would be changed. After the destruction of Jerusalem, it would be purification. Restoration would happen because all false prophets, etc. would be gone by then.
2. Zephaniah 3:11-12 say that God will not remember our past deeds and sins on that day and we will not be ashamed of these deeds. There will be no more proud people but only the humble and the meek ones will be left. There will be no deceit amongst the new people in the New Jerusalem. This is the effect of a new heart and new spirit promised by God in Ezekiel 36:26-27.
3. Zephaniah 3:14. People will sing and rejoice because the King is in their midst!
4. Zephaniah 3:17. God will also rejoice! It will not be just the Church choir singing but God will sing too. Our God is an emotional God and will sing with us with loud singing. He will be in our midst rejoicing over us.
5. Zephaniah 3:18-20 prophesy the regathering of the people of God.

What have we learned?

1. God's judgement is scary.
2. God's rejoicing is amazing.

3. God's justice is sure. God will cleanse us if we humble ourselves. Those who refuse to repent shall be gone! "Seek mercy" from God and God will grant repentance.
4. Why does your father keep warning and chastening? It is because he wants you to be ready for his blessings so does our God, our Father in heaven.
5. Do not select verses to study. Know the whole Bible that God will cleanse out all the filth and arrogance, and He will prepare us for a time of great rejoicing.
6. Be humble to get right with God. Humble yourself before the Cross and His Word. Be justified and sanctified. Know that all these judgements are for one purpose which is purification of His people for the eternal Kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem.