

**A PERSONAL
VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY**

ZEPHANIAH

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Zeph. 1:1 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, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

The prophet Zephaniah ministered to Judah in the days of Josiah (640-610 BC). Some of the commentaries identify him as a great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah. Another possibility is that he is the great grandson of one of the high priests, Amariah, that served under King Hezekiah. It really doesn't matter since the Holy Spirit is the author of the book; Zephaniah is just the human vessel that penned it.

Scripture is clear that Amon was an evil king and Josiah a good king.

2Kings 21:19 Amon *was* twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah.

2Kings 21:20 And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did.

2Kings 22:1 Josiah *was* eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath.

2Kings 22:2 And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

This father and son serve as a good example that children aren't doomed because of the example of their fathers. They can choose to be different. As a mom, I would like to think that the mom was the main influence for righteousness in young Josiah's life.

Zeph. 1:2 I will utterly consume all *things* from off the land, saith the LORD.

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 stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

Zephaniah begins with a message of judgment to come upon the land. The Hebrew for *land* can apply to the earth in general or to a country. I believe it probably has a double application here. It is probably referencing the destruction to come to Judah through the armies of Babylon and looks forward to the future destruction to come on planet earth during the time of God's wrath associated with the tribulation period. It is going to be a devastating judgment. It will result in the destruction of things on the earth (man and beast), in the air (birds), and in the sea (fishes). In fact, there will be few men left in the land of Judah. The Hebrew for *stumblingblocks* made reference to idols, which were associated with the wicked—in this case, those Jews who had rebelled against Almighty God and turned to idol worship. Ezekiel used this same term in reference to idol worship.

Ezek. 14:3 Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?

Ezek. 14:4 Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his

heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols;

Zeph. 1:4 I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;

Zeph. 1:5 And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship *and* that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham;

Zeph. 1:6 And them that are turned back from the LORD; and *those* that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.

God has singled out Israel and specifically Jerusalem as his possession on planet earth; it is specifically identified with the name of God.

1Kings 11:36 And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there.

Psa. 87:2 The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

God is clear that He is a jealous God, and jealous for His name because His name represents Who He Is.

Ex. 34:14 For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God:

Ezek. 39:25 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name;

The fact that the people of Judah had blatantly turned to idol worship, Baal being specifically named, had roused God's anger. Isaiah also associated God's stretched out hand with anger and judgment.

Is. 5:25 Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses *were* torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still.

The *Chemarims* were the idolatrous priests of Baal. It would seem that they were serving alongside the priests of Judah. Others in Judah worshipped the hosts of heaven—the sun, moon and planets and stars. This is directly tied to the use of astrology in my mind.

2Kings 23:5 And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven.

The flat housetops provided the obvious place for this type of worship. Some of the people gave a public display of worshipping and professing allegiance to the Lord while also worshipping and professing allegiance to Malcham, another name for Molech, the awful idol to which they sacrificed their young children.

Others had angered God through their rebellion and rejection of Him as YHWH. They did not seek Him in worship or prayer. My mind connected these people with those today who claim to be atheists and live as though there is no God.

I think it is important to note that Josiah made a valiant effort at eliminating idol worship and turning the people back to the Lord (cf 2Kings 23). The sad truth is that God was not appeased and was determined to bring judgment based on the acts of Manasseh, Josiah's grandfather.

2Kings 23:24 Moreover the *workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiyah the priest found in the house of the LORD.*

2Kings 23:25 And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there *any* like him.

2Kings 23:26 **Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.**

2Kings 23:27 And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.

This is one of those areas that is hard for me to understand. If it was Manasseh's reign that incurred His wrath, why was it not Manasseh's reign that experienced the judgment? I have to again claim Isaiah 55.

Is. 55:8 For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

Is. 55:9 For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

I don't have to understand it; I know that God is righteous in all His ways. One day I believe He will help me understand.

Psa. 145:17 The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

Zeph. 1:7 Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests.

This verse brings to mind the words of Habakkuk.

Hab. 2:20 But the LORD *is* in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

This is a hard verse to me. It seems that Zephaniah is trying to impress upon the people the seriousness of God's message of judgment. Who is the sacrifice that He has prepared? Judah. Who are the guests he has invited to partake of this sacrifice? The Babylonians.

I note that the term "day of the Lord" is a term of judgment. It has applied in the past and will apply again in the future. I personally believe that this verse

speaks of judgment soon to come upon Judah and has future application during the 70th week of Daniel that we call the tribulation.

Zeph. 1:8 And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.

Zeph. 1:9 In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

It would seem that the Lord is making a point that being a person of rank and privilege will not allow you to escape His judgment. In fact, these are some of the very people who are leading the people in their idolatrous ways. This obviously didn't apply to King Josiah, but sad to say it did apply to his sons as well as father and grandfather. I would assume that clothing oneself with strange apparel was another public identification with the worship of idols. JFB supplied the following explanation.

"GROTIUS refers the "strange apparel" to garments forbidden by the law, for example, men's garments worn by women, and vice versa, a heathen usage in the worship of Mars and Venus." [as referenced in Deut. 22:5 The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so *are* abomination unto the LORD thy God.]

Some of the commentaries connect not stepping on the threshold in deference to the worship of Dagon.

1Sam. 5:5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

It seems to have direct connection to servants who have rebelled against their masters—with violence, deceit or both.

I decided to check the internet and found another possible explanation from Iakov Levi at <http://www.geocities.com/psychohistory2001/taboo.html>.

"...Theodor Reik's article "The Doorkeepers"', in which the author deals with the taboo, common to many peoples, of treading on the threshold. Reik shows that the reason for the taboo is that treading is unconsciously interpreted as an aggressive and contemptuous act towards the owner of the house."

Adam Clarke's commentary contained another possibility.

"...others think that leaping on the threshold refers to the customs of the Arabs, who used to ride into people's houses and take away whatever they could carry...."

This seems to fit in better with the rest of the verse. Maybe this references Jewish servants who had determined to identify with the Arabs in rebellion against their masters.

Zeph. 1:10 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills.

Zeph. 1:11 Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off.

According to JFB, the fish gate corresponds to the gate known today as the Damascus Gate, in the north wall, which is the direction associated with the attack of the enemy. According to the NIV Commentary, these verses describe the attack of the Babylonians until they reached the market place (Maktesh) in the southern part of the city. The destruction of Jerusalem is going to be complete.

Zeph. 1:12 And it shall come to pass at that time, *that* I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.

Zeph. 1:13 Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit *them*; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof.

Verse 12 connects in my mind to verse 6. The Lord is pointing out that He is going to punish those that are “settled on their lees.” The CJB seems to give the best translation from the Hebrew:

When that time comes, I will search Yerushalayim with lamps and punish those who are [smug and thick, like wine] left too long on its dregs, who say to themselves, ‘ADONAI will do nothing — neither good nor bad.’

The NIV references complacency, and the NLT “contented in their sins.” I think they are all giving the right idea. Maybe they aren’t denying there is a “god,” but they certainly don’t think He is interested in the affairs of men. So maybe I should have used the term agnostic in commenting on verse 6 rather than atheist.

I think it is interesting that the Lord is intent on searching Jerusalem to identify these people who think that their rejection of Him or failure to acknowledge Him is their own business as long as they don’t bother anyone else. God is clear in His purpose that every created being is going to confess that He Is YHWH.

Is. 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else.

Is. 45:23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.

Phil. 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

Phil. 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth;

Phil. 2:11 And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

These rebellious Jews will have their belongings taken as the booty of war and their houses destroyed. They may build houses and plant crops, but they will eventually be taken captive or killed.

I liked this quote from David Guzik’s commentary; it seems to apply equally well to the people of Judah.

Edward Gibbon in his book *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* described the attitude towards religion in the last days of the Roman Empire - attitudes remarkably like our own today.

- The people regarded all religions as equally true.
- The philosophers regarded all religions as equally false.
- The politicians regarded all religions as equally useful.

Zeph. 1:14 The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.

Zeph. 1:15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

Zeph. 1:16 A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

At this point, the prophet's message seems to reference the time still future to us known as "the day of the LORD" and the day of God's wrath [with varied wording]. I would assume you could still make application to the judgment Judah would suffer at the hands of Babylon, but it definitely applies to end times.

It's always interesting that in God's economy of time, "it is near." Considering that 1000 years to Him is as a day or a watch in the night, that's understandable.

Psa. 90:4 For a thousand years in thy sight *are but* as yesterday when it is past, and *as* a watch in the night.

2Pet. 3:8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. In human thinking, however, it's been a long time coming.

"the voice of the day of the LORD" – I would assume this to reference the thundering voice of God in judgment as well as the fearful cries of the people who are experiencing that judgment. It would include the sounds of war and the sounds of pain and sorrow. It would include the sounds associated with earthquakes, roaring seas and other supernatural forms of judgment (e.g., the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments in Revelation). Jesus described it as a time when there "shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matthew 24:21)

The "day of the Lord" will cause even mighty men to cry; but, sadly, their tears will be those of anger (from the Hebrew for *bitterly*), not repentance. It is described as:

- A day of wrath – Not just anyone's wrath—God's wrath
- A day of trouble and distress
- A day of wasteness and desolation – devastation and ruin
- A day of darkness and gloominess – The Hebrew for *darkness* references misery, death and wickedness, and for *gloominess* references "misfortune."

- A day of clouds and thick darkness – I knew this was more than just a repetition of the previous two. The Hebrew for *clouds* states, "...to act covertly, i.e., practice magic...observe times...sorcerer." That makes a clear connection to the works of the Antichrist and his false prophet. Paul describes this time in his letter to the Thessalonians.

2Th. 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

2Th. 2:9 *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

Jesus described this time with the following words:

Matt. 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

The "thick darkness" speaks to me of great wickedness.

- A day of the trumpet and alarm against fenced cities and high towers – I can't help but think of the seven trumpet judgments in Revelation that will precede specific judgments during that time. In context, the *alarm* gives reference to the battle cry or the clamor of battle. Fenced cities and high towers reference places that are prepared to defend themselves, but their preparation will prove useless.

Zeph. 1:17 And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung.

Zeph. 1:18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

The prophet is speaking the words of YHWH. It is God who is exacting this judgment upon men. Scripture is clear elsewhere that this judgment is directed at his enemies. The whole context of this chapter is judgment directed against those who have rejected God as LORD.

Is. 13:9 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and **he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.**

Jer. 46:10 For this *is* the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, **that he may avenge him of his adversaries:**

"they shall walk like blind men" – This would seem to reference the inability to find their way to safety. There is a verse in Deuteronomy that applies well.

Deut. 28:29 And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save *thee*.

“because they have sinned...” – God judges in righteousness. Once His judgment is declared, there is no escape. Those judged are reaping what they have sown. Their treasure of silver and gold, which has been sufficient to purchase what they needed and/or wanted until this time, will not be able to deliver them from God’s wrath. He is acting in honor of His holy name. He had privileged Israel as His chosen people and chosen Jerusalem as the place of His name on planet earth, and they had thoroughly dishonored Him in every way. His jealousy for His honor demands judgment, and He will purge the land of evil. Sadly, to purge the land He must destroy wicked men—and the wicked men far outnumber the righteous. Ezekiel makes a point of telling us that before the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem God sets a mark upon the righteous to deliver them through this time as part of the promised remnant that He is preserving for Himself.

Ezek. 9:4 And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

Ezek. 9:5 And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity:

Ezek. 9:6 Slay utterly old *and* young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom *is* the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which *were* before the house.

During the 7-year period of the 70th week of Daniel, He will also preserve for Himself a remnant.

Rev. 12:14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

(see comments in journal on Revelation 12)

The evil choices of men will not cause His promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and most importantly, His Son Jesus, to fail.

Gal. 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.