

ZEPHANIAH

Introduction

Author. Zephaniah is distinguished from his contemporaries by his genealogy of four generations (1:1). While the exact significance of the genealogy is uncertain it seems that Zephaniah must have been a man of some pedigree and importance. The identity of the last name, Hezekiah, is difficult to determine with certainty although it may refer to King Hezekiah himself. The book gives no information about his residence although judging from his familiarity with the city of Jerusalem (1:10-11) it is likely that he at least delivered his prophecies from there, if it was not his own city.

Date. The book is dated during the reign of Josiah who ruled from 640 to 609 B.C. Since there is no mention of the fall of Assyria the book was probably written before then. Also, due to the heated prophecies against Baal it may well be that Zephaniah prophesied early in the reign of Josiah and may well have been the spark of the King's religious interests and the consequential reforms. Deducing from the dates of the Chronicler, Josiah began to "seek the Lord" in 632 and instituted many reforms in 628 B.C. Zephaniah's preaching then would have likely begun between 640 and 632. His ministry may have overlapped with Jeremiah's.

Historical Background. With the people's historical penchant for Baal worship and Manasseh's 50 year official endorsement and enforcement of Baal worship, the land was fully inundated with foreign religions and Yahwistic syncretism. Even though, according to the Chronicler, Manasseh repented toward the end of his life and instituted certain reforms "the people still sacrificed at the high places," (2 Chronicles 33:17). Manasseh so muffled the voice of propheticism during his reign that after his death the voice of God was desperately needed to call a nation to repentance and warn of the coming Day of the Lord. Zephaniah was in the vanguard of that movement.

Structure. The book divides easily into two sections of judgment (1:1-3:8) and blessing (3:9-20). The first section which deals with universal judgment is introduced and concluded with the inclusio of

statements of universal judgment (1:2-3 and 3:8).

Message Statement. The argument of the book seems to be to elicit repentance from the wicked in Judah in light of the coming Day of the Lord and to comfort the righteous with the prospects of future salvation. The message may best be expressed: *God's blessings for obedience and His punishment for disobedience will come upon all people, both Jew and Gentile.*

Argument

1A UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT UPON THE WICKED 1:1--3:8

As mentioned above, this section is introduced and concluded with God's announcement of judgment on all nations (1:2-3 and 3:8). Not only this, but the section also begins and ends with judgment proclaimed upon Judah (1:4--2:3 and 3:1-7). Sandwiched in the middle of these two sets of book ends are four oracles which are intended to further amplify this theme of universal judgment. Zephaniah speaks four oracles of judgment aimed at nations which represent the four points of the compass. Thus, Zephaniah's point of universal judgment in which all nations, and especially Israel is included is well emphasized.

In his description of Judah's sin Zephaniah specifically mentions those who incorporate foreign gods into the worship of Yahweh (1:5). This indictment of religious failure is followed by a graphic and terrifying description of the DOL (1:7-18). Zephaniah's hope is that after the indictment and announcement of judgment that the people will be prepared for a plea for repentance (2:1-3). The rest of the section consists of the four oracles against various nations concluded by a final indictment of Jerusalem.

2A UNIVERSAL BLESSING UPON THE RIGHTEOUS 3:9-20

This division balances the first division in its announcement of blessings upon both Gentiles and Jews who turn to the Lord. It is a description of messianic blessing which provides a positive motivation for repentance for both Jew and Gentile.

Outline

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| 1A | UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT UPON THE WICKED | 1:1--3:8 |
| 1B | <u>Superscription</u> | 1:1 |
| 2B | <u>Introductory Statement: Judgment of All Nations</u> | 1:2-3 |
| 1C | General predicted | 1:2 |
| 2C | Specifics predicted | 1:3 |
| 3B | <u>Oracles Against All Nations</u> | 1:4--3:7 |
| 1C | Against Judah | 1:4--2:3 |
| 1D | Judgment theme introduced | 1:4-6 |
| 1E | upon Baal worship | 1:4 |
| 2E | upon syncretism | 1:5 |
| 3E | upon apostasy | 1:6 |
| 2D | Day of the Lord announced | 1:7-18 |
| 1E | God's purposes in it | 1:7-13 |
| 2E | The horror of it | 1:14-18 |
| 3D | Repentance encouraged | 2:1-3 |
| 2C | Against nations to the West: Philistia | 2:4-7 |
| 3C | Against nations to the East: Moab and Ammon | 2:8-11 |
| 1D | The predictions | 2:8-9 |
| 2D | The reasons | 2:10-11 |
| 4C | Against nations to the South: Ethiopia | 2:12 |
| 5C | Against nations to the North: Assyria | 2:13-15 |
| 1D | The predictions | 2:13-14 |
| 2D | The pride | 2:15 |
| 6C | Against Jerusalem | 3:1-7 |
| 1D | The people's sin | 3:1-4 |
| 1E | the populous rebellious | 3:1-2 |
| 2E | the leadership rebellious | 3:3-4 |
| 2D | The Lord's justice | 3:5 |
| 3D | The people's refusal to learn | 3:6-7 |
| 4B | <u>Concluding Statement: Judgment of All Nations</u> | 3:8 |
| 2A | UNIVERSAL BLESSING UPON THE RIGHTEOUS | 3:9-20 |
| 1B | <u>Upon Gentiles</u> | 3:9-10 |
| 2B | <u>Upon Israel</u> | 3:11-20 |
| 1C | Her cleansing | 3:11-13 |
| 1D | Removal of the wicked | 3:11 |
| 2D | Preservation of the humble | 3:12-13 |

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| 2C | Her rejoicing | 3:14-20 |
| 1D | The command | 3:14 |
| 2D | The reasons | 3:15-20 |
| 1E | forgiveness | 3:15 |
| 2E | protection | 3:16 |
| 3E | presence of God | 3:17-18 |
| 4E | vengeance on oppressors | 3:19 |
| 5E | international esteem | 3:20 |