

SIMPLE STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

LEADER'S STUDY GUIDE



Dr. Stanford E. Murrell

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The Book of Zephaniah

Human Author: Zephaniah

Divine Author: Holy Spirit

Date of writing: c. 640 BC

Key Thought: *The Day of the Lord*

Key Verse: Zephaniah 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”.

Introduction

Zephaniah ministered before the Babylonian captivity began in 586 BC and not long before Jeremiah, who lived at the time of the captivity. The prophet predicts the general destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. Personal and national sins had provoked God to bring judgment. Zephaniah calls the nation to repentance and warns foreign nations to repent as well. The voice of judgment is softened by gospel promises. Zephaniah foresees the joyful return from captivity in due time.

The outline of the book is simple.

- Chapter 1 Judgment upon Judah
- Chapter 2 Judgment upon the Nations
- Chapter 3 Judgment upon Jerusalem

ZEPHANIAH 1

Judgment on Judah

1 The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah [Jehovah hath hidden] the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah [Jehovah is great], the son of Amariah [Jehovah hath said], the son of Hizkiah [strengthened of Jehovah], in the days of Josiah [Jehovah supports] the son of Amon [faithful], king of Judah.

1:1 Little is known about the prophet Zephaniah except for what he shares about himself in this verse. His heritage is traced through four generations.

- Zephaniah was the son of Cushi
- Cushi was the son of Gedaliah
- Gedaliah was the son of Amariah
- Amariah was the son of Hezekiah. This means that Zephaniah was a great-great grandson of king Hezekiah. While “*not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called*” (1 Cor. 1:26) some are. As a member of the royal family Zephaniah would help bring spiritual renewal c. 621 BC

1:1 The ministry of Zephaniah began during the days of Josiah (640 – 608 BC) the son of Amon, king of Judah. Because Josiah was a good and godly king, there were days of blessing for a remnant according to the election of grace. Nevertheless, most people lived in spiritual darkness. Zephaniah warned of an impending judgment while providing hope for the faithful.

2 I will utterly consume [destroy] all *things* from off the land, saith the LORD.

1:2 Zephaniah speaks of a judgment soon to fall first upon Judah and then upon Jerusalem. The northern ten tribes had already been carried into Assyria nearly a century before, c. 721 BC.

3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling-blocks [idols] with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

1:3 Though God will use greed and other wicked impulses of the human heart as instruments in His hand of discipline, the Lord takes responsibility for the pain and suffering the nation of Israel is about to suffer. Not only man but also the beasts, the fowls of the air and the fish of the sea would know the effects of divine wrath for there is cursing by association.

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 [ascetics] with the priests;

1:4 The reason for this utter desolation can be traced to the worship of Baal. The priests of Baal, called the Chemarims, dressed in black reflecting the darkness of their hearts.

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;

1:5 The coming judgment would also fall upon the worshipers of the heavenly bodies along with those who professed to follow the Lord but whose profession was false. There is an abiding attempt to mingle worldly and sensual ideas and thoughts with the worship of God. Such efforts must be challenged. There is a pure religion that must be kept. Professing Christians who read astrology and dabble in the occult or accept the false teaching of cult leaders should take heed to the prophetic word of Zephaniah.

1:5 Malcham (the great king), is identified with Molech, a pagan god to which human sacrifices were made.

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

1:6 There were two classes of people to be judged. There were some who had responded to the gospel message only to turn back. Jesus said, "*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*" (Luke 9:62). Others had not even sought the Lord nor cared to know the mind of God in personal matters. All will perish in the coming judgment.

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.

1:7 "*The day of the Lord*" is an expression that finds both a near and far fulfillment. In context the reference was to the Babylonian conquest. The ultimate day of the Lord is the time of His second advent. 2 Peter 3:10 explains what will happen. "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*"

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.

1:8 Neither high social class rank nor princely priviledges shall allow individuals to be exempt from divine judgment when it comes. Foreign dignitaries dressed in strange apparel will also be caught up in the momentous events not to mention any that have adopted the apparel of the pagans.

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.

1:9 Individuals guilty of covetousness and violence will come under judgment. Those who are willing to take by force or deceit what belongs to others will not go unnoticed or unpunished.

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.

1:10 There were several main gates in the wall surrounding the city of Jerusalem.

Name	Alternative Name
-------------	-------------------------

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| • Mercy Gate | Golden Gate |
| • Damascus Gate | |
| • Herod's Gate | Flower Gate |
| • Jaffa Gate | Gate of Hebron |
| • Lion's Gate | |
| • Dung Gate | |
| • Zion's Gate | Prophet David's |
| • Haggai's Gate | Valley Gate |

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

1:10 –11 With the coming of judgment comes the disruption of commerce. The merchants will be murdered and those who handle money will be destroyed. Because of the uncertainties of life the Christian is exhorted to be content with food and raiment and to owe no man anything but love (1 Tim. 6:8; Rom. 13:8).

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.

1:12 Not only will the Lord seek to discipline those who engage in false worship, He will seek out with a lighted lamp those who promote agnosticism and atheism. Those who ridicule the idea of divine providence will be made to acknowledge there is a God and He is not silent. The universal Laws of nature are suspended as the Law Maker uses them for His own purposes.

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.

1:13 When God moves in judgment He gives the possessions of one people as booty to another. Homes become desolate as individuals flee in fear to a place of safety. The enemy comes to inhabit homes. Ripe vineyards ready to produce wine to drink will find others drinking the vintage. When God's power and hatred against sin is not honored then He will manifest His fury.

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.

1:14 The excitement of the prophet grows as he declares the Day of Judgment is near, very near and with hast it comes like a driver in a chariot lashing his team of horses. The strongest of individuals shall soon cry out in anguish and with bitter tears.

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,

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

1:15-16 In the day of judgment no refuge will be found. There is no cave deep enough and no fence high enough to protect a person from the avenging hand of Divine discipline.

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.

1:17 The Babylonians will instill emotional fear and mental anguish into the hearts of the people. Like the blind leading the blind all will fall because they have sinned against the Lord. The wages of sin is death. There is spiritual death in eternity and physical death in time. The stench of free flowing blood and rotting carcasses smelling worse than excrement indicates how odious sin is to God.

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.

1:18 In the day of judgment individuals cannot beg, bargain or buy their way out of a desperate situation. God is not like a man who can be negotiated with. He is the Sovereign of the soul and the Righteous Ruler of the universe.

1:18 By way of personal application to the church today the ancient words of warning are still valid. There is another "*day of the Lord*" for Jesus is coming again (Heb. 9:28). The last warning to mankind has been issued. Now the world is to know, the "*day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*" (1 Thess 5:2). There are no more signs to be fulfilled. Any day could literally be the last day of human history. Skeptics may scoff and ask what is the sign of his coming "*for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*" (2 Peter 3:4). The simple reply for the Christian is to say to the unbeliever, "*I have just two words for you, 'Don't die'.*" That is the best response. Just tell the unbeliever not to die without Christ, without repenting for if the Christian message is true they will die without hope and without eternal life. Tell them also that grace always precedes judgment. Flee to Christ and live!

*“Crown Him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon His throne.
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of Him
who died for thee,
and hail Him as thy matchless King
through all eternity.”*

Matthew Bridges

Leader's Study Guide

The Book of Zephaniah

Questions and Answers on Zephaniah 1

1. When did Zephaniah minister?

Answer.

Zephaniah ministered in the sixth century BC prior to the fall of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

2. What two classes of people found themselves the object of divine wrath?

Answer.

There were two classes of people to be judged. There were some who had responded to the gospel message only to turn back. Others had not even sought the Lord nor cared to know the mind of God in personal matters.

3. Identify the Chemarims and Malcham.

Answer.

The Chemarims were ascetic priests in the service of Baal. Malcham has reference to the god Molech to whom human sacrifices were made.

4. Define "*the day of the Lord.*"

Answer.

The "*day of the Lord*" refers to any special time of divine visitation in wrath upon a nation.

5. What are the stumbling blocks of Zephaniah 1:3?

Answer.

A stumbling block is any obstacle over which a person may trip or fall. In context the reference is to the pagan idols.

Personal Application and Reflection

1. Do you believe that prophecy can have a near and far fulfillment? Explain
2. Is it wrong for Christians to read daily horoscopes? Why or why not?
3. Is the principle of cursing by association moral? Is God unjust to include the innocent in discipline that is destined for a particular people?
4. In what ways do people today mix false religious idea with true worship of God? Be specific in your examples.
5. Does the threat of impending judgment change many hearts? Did it change yours prior to salvation? Has it changed any person you know ?

Hiding God's Word in My Heart

Zephaniah 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.

Leader's Study Notes

1: 10 Nehemiah mentions several gates in the city of Jerusalem.

- The Sheep Gate, also known as Stephen's Gate, or the Lions Gate (Nehemiah 3:1,32, 12:39), is located on the east wall, north of the Temple Mount.
- The Fish Gate was an ancient gate on the east wall, just west of the Gihon spring, where men gathered to sell fish, sometimes in violation of the Sabbath (2 Chronicles 33:14, Nehemiah 3:3, 13:16). It may be the same as the Middle Gate (Jeremiah 39:3).
- The Old Gate, or Jeshanah Gate, was located at the northwest corner of the city during the time of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:6)
- The Valley Gate, overlooked the Kidron Valley (Nehemiah 3:13)
- The Beautiful Gate, near the Temple Mount, where Peter healed a man in "*the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*" (Acts 3:1-10)
- The Golden Gate was located on the east wall adjacent to the Temple Mount. Originally constructed by the Byzantines, it was later sealed by Muslims to "*block the future path of the Messiah into Jerusalem.*"
- The Dung Gate was one of the 12 or so gates that existed at the time of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:14). It was located at the southwest corner of the wall, and used for the disposal of garbage and dung. It led out to the Valley of Hinnom.

- The Fountain Gate was located at the southeast corner of the wall (Nehemiah 3:15).
- The Zion Gate was on the south wall, overlooking Mount Zion.
- The Water Gate (Nehemiah 3:26).
- The Horse Gate was located between the Water Gate and the Sheep Gate (Nehemiah 3:28).
- The East Gate (Nehemiah 3:29).
- The Inspection Gate (Nehemiah 3:31).
- The Jaffa Gate on the west wall.
- The New Gate on the west wall just north of the Jaffa Gate.
- The Damascus Gate on the north wall. Saul of Tarsus may have left the city through this gate on his fateful journey to immortality on the road to Damascus..
- Herod's Gate on the north wall, just east of the Damascus Gate.

ZEPHANIAH 2

Judgment on the Nations

1 Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired;

2:1 In the first three verses the attitude of God toward Judah has changed. It is no longer a desired nation. It is no longer beautiful in the sight of the Lord. Polluted by sin the people are now fit for judgment.

2 Before the decree bring forth, *before* the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger come upon you.

3 Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger.

2:2 - 3 Seek ye the Lord. Though ripe for judgment where sin abounds grace does much more abound. In grace God summons the elect to gather together. The godly are identified.

- The godly seek the Lord.
- The godly keep His commandments.
- The godly seek righteousness.
- The goodly seek meekness.

2:3 "*Ye shall be hid.*" The Lord has often been pleased to bring His faithful people through periods of great tribulation, not by translating them from the world but by divine faithfulness in meeting their every need no matter how dark the days..

Judgment on Philistia

Zephaniah 2:4-7

4 For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day [unexpected time], and Ekron shall be rooted up.

2:4 Gaza (ga'-zah; strong), was the last town in the southwest of Palestine. It was predicted that Gaza would be forsaken and that the king should die. Alexander the Great took the city in 332 BC after it resisted for two month. He bound Betis the satrap to a chariot and dragged him around the city and then executed 10,000 of its citizens and sold the rest as slaves.

2:4 Ashkelon (ash'-ke-lon; starting point; migration) was one of the five major cities of the Philistines (Judg. 14:19). A seaport city it was located on the Mediterranean, twelve miles north of Gaza. Zechariah (9:5) predicted the destruction of Ashkelon, as did Zephaniah.

Despite the administration of divine judgment a remnant of citizens survived. Herod the Great was born in the city.

2:4 Ashdod (ash'-dod; fortified place; a castle; a stronghold), was one of the five major cities of the Philistines. The cities were at the height of their power during the days of Saul (c. 1020 BC).

2:4 Ekron (ec'-ron; extermination), was located 11 miles from Gath. It was assigned to Judah and to Dan (Josh. 15:45, 46; Judges 1:18; 19:43). Prior to the monarchy it was again inhabited by the Philistines (1 Sam. 5:10). The prophets spoke against the city (Jer. 25:20; Amos 1:8).

5 Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the LORD *is* against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant.

2:5 Cherethites (ker'-e-thites; Carians or Cretans), refers to the men of Philistia who served as bodyguards for David (2 Sam. 8:18; 15:18; 1 Kings 1:38, 44). The descendants of this nation, which dwelt in the S area of Canaan, came from Crete (1 Chron. 18:17; Ezek. 25:16).

2:5 Canaan (ca'-na-an; merchant or trader), refers to the region along the Mediterranean Sea. The priests of Canaan would read the entrails of the animal to forecast the future. They also told the future by looking at the stars, practiced necromancy, and engaged in prophetic trances. The Canaanites offered to their gods animals, food, and humans. For all this and more they were to be judged.

2:5 Philistines (fil-is'-tin; wandering) refers to an ancient non-Semitic people from Crete which lived along the coast of S Palestine. Following the division of the kingdom of Israel, the Philistines were able to regain some power. Then, beginning around 900 BC, Nadab and other kings of Judah invaded Philistia (1 Kings 15:27; 16:15).

6 And the seacoast shall be dwellings *and* cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks.

7 And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

2:6-7 As grace precedes judgment by words of warning to repent so grace follows judgment lest all people be consumed in the day of divine wrath. God will allow a faithful remnant to live in the Land of Promise, drive out the false gods of Ashkelon and live in freedom from the tyranny of captivity.

Judgment on Moab and Ammon
Zephaniah 2:8-11

8 I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified *themselves* against their border.

2:8 Moab (mo'-ab; from father), was located in the territory east of the Dead Sea. The Moabites constantly fought with Israel. During the days of King Omri of Israel (885-873 BC) the Moabite territory was subjected to Israel. Near the end of the reign of Ahab, the son of Omri, Mesha of Moab led his country to regain their freedom.

2: 8 Ammon (am'-mon; inbred; son of my relative) along with Moab was the incestuous son of Lot by his youngest daughter (Gen. 19:33-38). His descendants established the nation of Ammon. Spiritually Moab and Ammon speak of fleshly lusts that will not be denied nor satiated and so must be judged.

9 Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them.

2:9 Sodom (vineyard, burning), was one of the most ancient cities of Syria. It was located at the south end of the Dead Sea in a fertile area that was well populated.

2:9 Gomorrah (guh-mor'-ruh; submersion), was one of the five "*cities of the plain*" located in the Valley of Siddim (Salt Sea or Dead Sea). At one time it was well populated and productive (Gen. 10:19).

2:9 Nettles. The Hebrew root means to be prickly or pointed, such as a bramble or other thorny weed.

10 This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified *themselves* against the people of the LORD of hosts.

2:10 Sometimes Christians wonder why bad things happen to good people. They want to know if they are under divine discipline. Scripturally, all who have been judged know the reason for their punishment. There are many reasons why Christians suffer. If the Holy Spirit does not reveal the difficult days are a result of God's anger then look to some other reason for the trails of life (James 1:3-4).

11 The LORD *will* be terrible unto them: for he will famish [reduce] all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, *even* all the isles of the heathen.

2:11 Repentance is one grand objective of Divine punishment. When the false gods of this world are seen to be starved of content and character it is possible the heart's of men will begin to seek the true God. *Ps 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.*

Judgment on Ethiopia and Assyria Zephaniah 2:12 – 15

12 Ye Ethiopians also, ye *shall be* slain by my sword.

2:12 Ethiopia, is the name generally assigned to the descendants of Cush the son of Ham (Num. 12:1; Isa. 20:4; Jer. 13:23; Acts 8:27). The impending judgment upon Ethiopia and Assyria speak spiritually of the dark nature of man, the Ethiopian unable to change his skin (Jer. 13:23) but still proud like the haughty Assyrians.

13 And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, *and* dry like a wilderness.

2:13 Assyria (as-sir'-e-ah), originally was the land between the upper Tigris and Zab rivers. The first capital was at Assur and then later at Nineveh. Once a mighty empire it has been relegated to the dustbin of history.

2:13 Nineveh (nin'-e-veh), was the capital of the Assyrian empire. As the prophets predicted it was finally desolated for the people were extremely wicked and cruel illustrated by Ashurbanipa. It was his custom, after a military victory, for him to cut off the hands and feet, and the noses and ears, and put out the eyes of his captives.

14 And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her [Nineveh], all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; *their* voice shall sing in the windows; desolation *shall* be in the thresholds; for he shall uncover the cedar work.

2:14 Cormorant, refers to a large water bird (such as the pelican) with webbed feet and a pouch under its beak for holding fish (Lev. 11:17). This fowl was ceremonially unclean.

2:14 Bittern, refers to a bird or animal. The porcupine or the lizard has been suggested. In context it may refer to the heron (Isa. 14:23; 34:11).

15 This [Nineveh] *is* the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, *I am*, and *there is* none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! Every one that passeth by her shall hiss, *and* wag his hand.

2:15 The pride of military conquest, the success of financial gain, the security of a nation can easily lead politicians and people to inordinate self esteem. In the hour of doom individuals learn again that ultimate power belongs to God alone.

Leader's Study Guide

The Book of Zephaniah

Questions and Answers on Zephaniah 2

1. List four distinguishing marks of the godly.

Answer.

The godly are identified.

- The godly seek the Lord.
- The godly keep His commandments.
- The godly seek righteousness.
- The godly seek meekness.

2. Spiritually what does the judgment on Moab and Ammon indicate?

Answer.

Spiritually Moab and Ammon speak of fleshly lusts that will not be denied nor satiated and so must be judged.

3. What does Ethiopia and Assyria represent spiritually?

Answer.

Spiritual Ethiopia and Assyria speak of the dark natural depraved condition of the human soul, which retains an inordinate amount of pride.

4. How is God often pleased to protect His people in difficult days of national calamity?

Answer.

The Lord has often been pleased to bring His faithful people through periods of great tribulation, not by translating them from the world but by divine faithfulness in meeting their every need no matter how dark the days.

5. What two principles undergird God's grace?

Answer.

The grace of God precedes judgment by giving fair warning to repent. Grace succeeds judgment by providing resources to live.

Personal Application and Reflection

1. List at least five reasons for pain and suffering in the life of Christians apart from divine discipline.
2. Distinguish between being proud of an accomplishment and being a proud person. Is any form of pride sin?
3. Why is it easier to trust in silver and gold and national security than in God? Is it hard to walk by faith and not by sight? Why or why not?
4. Do you believe in the doctrine of total depravity, that a person is by nature evil? Explain.
5. What do you think the future of America is? Are the sins of America any worse than the sins of Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria?

Hiding God's Word in My Heart

Zephaniah 2:3 Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger.

Leader's Study Notes

2:9 Nettles. The plant referred to is *Acanthus Syriacus*. The tough flower stalks appear toward the end of May and may be decorative until about August. Light mauve blooms grow between the thorns.

2:14 Cormorant. Another possibility is that the cormorant is a reference to a hawk or vulture (Isa. 34:11; Zeph. 2:14).

ZEPHANIAH 3

Judgment upon Jerusalem

1 Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!

3:1 The sins of the people of Jerusalem are enumerated.

- The people oppress the truth and they persecute the prophets.
- The people are morally filthy and engage in acts that pollute the mind, body and spirit.

2 She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God.

3:2

- The people are disobedient to the known will of God.
- The people refuse to be corrected.
- The people trust more in gold and silver and in personal security than in the Lord.
- The people do not worship or draw near to God in their hearts.

3 Her princes within her *are* roaring lions; her judges *are* evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow.

3:3

- The rulers are wicked acting more like animals than concerned potentates.
- The judges of Jerusalem are also beastly in nature as they devour cases for personal pleasure and profit. Legal justice is not served.

4 Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.

3:4 The people are evil, the princes are corrupt, the judges are unjust and even the religious leaders are treacherous. There is sin in the sanctuary. Rather than exhort God's people to holy living the religious leaders are just as corrupt as all others. The priests who were to be holy and undefiled personally have polluted the sanctuary by allowing the worship of false gods. They have erred by not speaking the truth. They have done violence to the moral, civil and ceremonial law of God.

5 The just LORD *is* in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he [the LORD] bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame.

3:5 The people know no shame such is the hardness of their hearts. They are adamant as stone. There is no remorse, no twinge of guilt or regret. The emotions have become those of a cold-blooded reptile. What must be done? The Lord must render a righteous judgment upon the people for He is in the midst of it all, but without sin. He is the *“Faithful and True witness.”* He is the Amen.

6 I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant.

7 I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.

3:7 The many sins of the people of Jerusalem appears to astonish the Lord. *“Surely,”* He said, *“they will fear me”*, but they did not. There was and is still coming a time when the voice of grace will be silenced and the terror of the Lord will be made manifest. Though years may pass with many warnings it will actually be carried into effect as surely as the flood waters once covered the earth in the days of Noah after 120 years of gospel preaching. The world that was, perished (2 Peter 3:6).

8 Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

3:9 All the earth. Within the past hundred years all the earth has known large-scale conflicts so that history records World War I and World War II. Lesser wars but with devastating impact include the Korean conflict, the Vietnam war, Operation Desert Storm and the war with Iraq. Historically, God has judged several nations close together as He did with Judah, Edom and Moab, Ethiopia and Assyria in the sixth century BC. The larger point to remember is that the Lord rules the earth and He rules with a rod of iron in righteousness.

9 For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.

3:9 At the tower of Babel the languages of the earth were confused. On the day of Pentecost, for one brief shining moment Babel was reversed as the gospel was preached. *Acts 2:6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.* A pure language happened once, it will happen again when Jesus comes. *“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom 14:11).*

10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, *even* the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering.

3:10 Mercy and grace is extended to Ethiopia though nothing is said about Assyria or Nineveh. For Ethiopia there is hope when she shall stretch out her hands unto God (Psa. 68:31).

11 In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain.

3:11 When the Lord comes in grace and glory to change hearts He takes away their shame and He removes inordinate pride

12 I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.

13 The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid.

3:13 The work of divine grace in the heart continues as the Lord puts in the heart of His people to obey His commandments so they not commit iniquity nor speak lies nor engage in deceitful and self-serving behavior.

*“Come down, O love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing”.*

Bianco da Siena, d. 1434

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

15 The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, *even* the LORD, *is* in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.

3:13 In the day of grace visitation the Lord removes the curse and condemnation and defeats all the enemies of the church – the world, the flesh, and the devil. In addition God is pleased to dwell in the midst of His people and protect them so they are not witnesses to evil let alone partakers of the same.

*“O for a thousand tongues to sing
my dear Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!”*

Charles Wesley

16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: *and to Zion*, Let not thine hands be slack.

3:16 When the Lord visits His people He removes illegitimate fears and invites vigorous work to be done on His behalf in holy service.

*“Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with lesser things,
give heart and soul and mind and strength
to serve the King of kings.”*

William Pierson Merrill

17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee *is* mighty; he [the LORD] will save, he [the LORD] will rejoice over thee with joy; he [the LORD] will rest in his love, he [the LORD] will joy over thee with singing.

3:17 Not all spiritual activity is one-sided where by the worshipper rejoices in God his Savior. There is divine pleasure expressed. God is not only pleased to save but He expresses positive joy. He remembers their sins no more as He is silent in His love for them. It is a happy and blessed thought of the Singing Sovereign who expresses His love in song. The concept of the Singing Messiah is confirmed in Matthew 26:30.

18 I will gather *them that are* sorrowful for the solemn assembly, *who* are of thee, *to whom* the reproach [shame] of it *was* a burden [weight].

3:18 Once divine grace and mercy begin to flow there is blessing upon blessing for the Lord moves to comfort the broken hearted. The objects of love have a bountiful treasure of the gifts of grace. Let the church seek earnestly for these spiritual pearls of great price.

*“Spirit divine, attend our prayers,
and make this house thy home;
descend with all thy gracious powers,
O come, great Spirit, come!*

*Come as the fire and purge our hearts
like sacrificial flame;
let our whole soul an offering be
to our Redeemer's Name.*

*Come as the dove, and spread thy wings,
the wings of peaceful love;
and let thy Church on earth become
blest as the Church above.*

*Come as the dew and sweetly bless
this consecrated hour;
may barrenness rejoice to own
thy fertilizing power”.*

Andrew Reed, 1829

19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

20 At that time will I bring you *again*, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

3:19-20 Because the goodness and grace of God cannot be exhausted, because the Lord knows how to give to the soul abundantly more than it could ever ask or think more promises are made. The Lord will draw His people together with irresistible cords of love. He will gather His people for prayer and praise and make their glory an honor among the nations. Others will be blessed because of the church. *“Come Lord, set the spiritual captives free from the bondage of sin and shame and make the church a blessing. Come Lord. Come quickly.”*

Leader's Study Guide

The Book of Zephaniah

Questions and Answers on Zephaniah 3

1. List at least five sins associated with the people of Jerusalem.

Answer.

The sins of the people include the following.

- The people oppress the truth and they persecute the prophets.
- The people are morally filthy and engage in acts that pollute the mind, body and spirit.
- The people are disobedient to the known will of God.
- The people refuse to be corrected.
- The people trust more in gold and silver and in personal security than in the Lord.
- The people do not worship or draw near to God in their hearts.
- The people have no shame.
- The people have no fear.
- The rulers, judges and priests are corrupt.

2. How is the positive joy of God in His church displayed?

Answer.

The Lord displays His pleasure in the church by singing to her in love.

3. List three actions the Lord will take on behalf of His people.

Answer.

First, the Lord will draw His people together with irresistible cords of love. Second, He will gather His people for prayer and praise and make their glory an honor among the nations. Third He will make them a source of blessing to others.

4. What is meant by pure language in Zephaniah 3:

Answer.

At the tower of Babel the languages of the earth were confused. On the day of Pentecost, for one brief shining moment Babel was reversed as the gospel was preached (Acts 2:6).

5. What verse in chapter 3 indicates the majesty and absolute sovereignty of God in salvation?

Answer.

Zephaniah 3: 17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he [the LORD] will save, he [the LORD] will rejoice over thee with joy; he [the LORD] will rest in his love, he [the LORD] will joy over thee with singing.

Personal Application and Reflection

1. Have you experienced the downward progression of sin ending in a cold heart made as it were of stone and past feeling? If so did the Lord bring you to repentance and give you a new heart?
2. There is a strength to sin that should be alarming and yet it is not. Why?
3. Answer as True or Not Yet.
 - I obey the Lord.
 - I receive correction well.
 - I trust in God more than all else.
 - I worship God sincerely.
 - I am ashamed when I sin.
 - I fear the Lord.
4. When you pray, what do you pray for most? Write your petitions down as they come to mind for examination. If you do not pray for God's holiness and purity and visitation will you pledge to begin to do so now?
5. Does the idea of a singing Sovereign who not only receives worship but takes pleasure in His people change your concept of God in any manner? Explain.

Hiding God's Word in My Heart

Zephaniah 3:13 The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

Zephaniah 3: 17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.