



Zephaniah

Jesus Christ, a Jealous Lord

by Dana Burkinshaw

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Meaning of the Name

The name *Zephaniah* (Heb. *Tsephan-Yah*) means “hidden of Yahweh” or “hidden by Yahweh” or “Yahweh has hidden (him).”

*“Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be **hidden** on the day of the anger of the LORD.” (2:3).*

F-L-I-G-H-T

F – The author of the book of Zephaniah was the prophet Zephaniah, a prophet with a royal bloodline, the great-great grandson of King Hezekiah. Zephaniah 1:1 lists his father and other grandfathers: Cushi, Gedaliah, and Amariah. Zephaniah was probably born around 648 BC.

Zephaniah was among the last of the prophets to prophesy before the fall of the southern kingdom, Judah. He preached during the reign of King Josiah, so his book likely dates between 640 and 609 BC.

F-L-I-G-H-T

L – Zephaniah was a prince of the royal house of Judah and served as a prophet during the reign of King Josiah. His book addressed the social injustice and moral decay of Judah and her neighbors, pointing to and warning them of the coming day of the Lord and his wrath upon the nations, including Israel. He was a prophet of the 11th hour, whose ministry led to reform and revival during his lifetime – but at the last possible moment before God’s judgment of Judah.

F-L-I-G-H-T

I -

Look Within (1:1-2:3)

Look Around (2:4-3:8)

Look Beyond (3:9-20)

F-L-I-G-H-T

G - Zephaniah's prediction of the kingdom age points to Christ as the Lord within Israel, the righteous judge of all earth's nations, and the reigning "King of Israel, the Lord." Zephaniah warned Judah that a day of the Lord, a more immediate and local series of judgments, was coming - first against the Jews for their idolatry, and then for the nations whom God would use to punish them. These judgments would serve as a type (a preview) of the ultimate day of the Lord, when God will judge the entire world in the end times.

F-L-I-G-H-T

G - But mercy is as much a characteristic of God as justice is - displayed most obviously in the person of Jesus Christ - and we see this aspect of the Lord's character in the book of Zephaniah, too. At the end of time when all God's enemies are defeated and Jesus is dwelling as king among Israel, Zephaniah's words will be completely fulfilled: *"The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing"* (3:17).

F-L-I-G-H-T

G - What a wonderful image of the crowning work of redemption! Revelation describes how even during the tribulation God will set aside and protect a group of 144,000 Jews who believe in him, and Zephaniah framed the picture of the millennial kingdom after the day of the Lord. God's heart is to save all those who will come to him. He proved this by sending his own Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of the world.

F-L-I-G-H-T

H – The book of Zephaniah dates to around 620 BC, during the second half of Josiah’s reign. Josiah’s six-year reformation project was completed in 622 BC (2 Chron. 34). Though this project was meant to bring about spiritual revival, many Jews remained stuck in their sinful ways, continuing the practices of idolatry and injustice in the land of Judah.

F-L-I-G-H-T

H – This may be why Zephaniah specifically preached against Baal worship and idolatry. Zephaniah was likely contemporary of several prophets: Nahum, Habakkuk, Daniel, Ezekiel, Obadiah, and Jeremiah. At the time of Zephaniah’s writing, Nineveh had not yet been destroyed (its destruction, foretold in 2:13, and also predicted by Nahum, came in 612 BC.)

F-L-I-G-H-T

T – **Suffering tests your faith in God’s sovereignty.** When the winds of adversity blow against you – sometimes from all directions – don’t believe the lie that God doesn’t allow such adversity to happen to his kids. God allows bad things to happen because he wants to bring something good from it (Rom. 8:28). **Use Zephaniah’s three exhortations to the people of Judah to guide your thoughts and actions as you engage with your culture and anticipate the day of the Lord:**

F-L-I-G-H-T

T – **Look within yourself.** Are you worshipping God “in spirit and truth” – with your whole heart? Are you renewing your mind and rejecting the lies of your culture by praying and reading the Bible regularly?

Look around. Zephaniah prophesied God’s wrath on several nations for their poor treatment of his people. No matter what trials you face in this life, God will uphold you and avenge you if necessary. Don’t worry about your enemies: focus on living out a balance of love, grace, and truth that marks a true child of God.

F – L – I – G – H – T

T – **Look beyond.** Zephaniah rounded out his book by looking at the healing and restoration God’s people will one day experience during Christ’s 1000-year reign on earth. As believers, we have every reason to rejoice in the Lord, because the future he has laid out for us is glorious!

Themes of Zephaniah

The theme of the book is the vindication of God. Themes of judgment and of grace and mercy also predominate in the book.

The theme of Zephaniah’s message is that Yahweh is still firmly in control of all his world despite any contrary appearances, and that he will prove this in the near future by inflicting terrible chastisement on disobedient Judah, and complete destruction upon the idolatrous Gentile nations. The wrath can only be deferred by timely repentance.

Identity of the Invaders

Zephaniah expects an imminent foreign invasion that will bring the destruction of Jerusalem. Scholars have been divided regarding what enemy the prophet anticipates.

- Assyria
- Scythia
- Babylon

“Day of the Lord”

The expression appears frequently in the Hebrew Bible. Though it is applied to various events, in the most basic sense it is a day when the Lord intervenes in the world to judge his enemies. Here it encompasses both the Babylonian conquest of Judah in 586 BC and a more far-reaching judgment on a worldwide scale that will occur in the eschaton.