

Zephaniah 1

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 26 June 2016 15:55

There were several people with this name in scripture. The man who bears the name of this book, Tsəphanyah ('Jehovah has treasured'), one of the twelve minor prophets. He was a descendant of king Hezekiah (great-great grandson, and therefore one of the legitimate heirs to the throne), and he lived and prophesied at the time of king Josiah of Judah, between 641 BC to 610 BC. He comes ninth in the list of minor prophets, being preceded by Habakkuk and followed by Haggai. It is possible that Zephaniah's main words applied just before Josiah was enthroned and started his reforms, strongly argued-for by both Zephaniah and Jeremiah.

Zephaniah's name means that God stored secret knowledge – expressed as prophecy – in him (tsaphan). The second part of his name, Yahh, refers to Jah or Jehovah. (This Zephaniah is not the 'second priest' who was killed by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah). The Latin Vulgate bible refers to him as 'Sophonias', which means 'Yahweh protects/conceals'.

His father was 'Cushi', which tells us Zephaniah was probably of Ethiopian stock; 'Cushi' means 'Ethiopian'. Despite his lineage he did not shrink from accusing the Ethiopians of godlessness worthy of destruction. He also prophesied the fall of Ninevah.

Zephaniah was contemporary with another prophet, Jeremiah, and both were known to the people and king Josiah. Zephaniah spoke out at a time similar to our own, where Judah was ruined by worship of foreign gods, their alien cultures and immoralities. He spoke out boldly against this wickedness that had overcome Judah, and his words were echoed by king Josiah. We can see in his day our *own* day, when the evils of multiple false religions have all but destroyed the nation, and a more wicked false religion is waiting to end us all – Islam.

Part of this ruination of the nation's morals, ethics, integrity and true worship, was the wearing of 'fancy' rich clothes that copied the dress of surrounding godless nations. The clothing reflected and exemplified the ruin. Zephaniah warned the nation about impending destruction of Jerusalem and Judah by God through foreign invaders, so the people and kings after Josiah had plenty of warning. Writers see his age as a 'key historical period'. Today, I see the same warnings given to Europe and to Britain, which is why I have likened our own period to that of Zephaniah.

The first part of his prophecy is a warning to repent – ignored by the kings after Josiah and the people. Though the last part of 2 Kings speaks mainly of Judah, God's judgment also included

Zephaniah 1

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 26 June 2016 15:55

the 'rest of the (known) world', for the same sins. But, the major doom concerned Judah, because it contained not only God's people, but God's Temple. After this warning comes a far-date prophecy concerning the end times, and so it is in part Messianic. Again, I see this applying to our own day, and have thus said.

Verse 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 word of the Lord" gives this book its divine legitimacy, and it would have been as a "burden" to Zephaniah, especially as he looked out at the wickedness of the kings of Judah and how it allowed the people to live very sinful lives, much like today.

We should not underestimate or ignore this "word"; *dabar* refers to God's command. This meaning applies in every part of scripture. God never speaks His 'word' for no reason or so that we may forget it. When He speaks we must obey. For Zephaniah this was a direct command from Jehovah (Lord). We are given the family credentials of Zephaniah, because Jewish lineage is very important to the writers of scripture, giving them authority before the people.

His father was Cushi ('their blackness' – Ethiopian). His grandfather was Gedaliah ('Jehovah is great'), who was himself the grandson of king Hezekiah. This is another reason for Jewish insistence on correct lineage – this was NOT the same man who was appointed governor of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Zephaniah's great-grandfather was Amariah ('Jehovah speaks/has promised'), a prince and son of Hezekiah, who was a good king. The great-great grandfather was Hizkiah (same name as Hezekiah: 'Jehovah is my strength'). Thus, the prophet could not have had a better or more regal family line. Zephaniah lived just before, and during, the reign of good king Josiah, who would have known him as a prophet, alongside Jeremiah.

Verses 2-6

1.

I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.

Zephaniah 1

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 26 June 2016 15:55

2.

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.

3.

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;

4.

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;

5.

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

Zephaniah's prophecy was uncompromising and urgent – Jehovah would destroy everything: the land, man and beast, birds and fish. These indicate how widespread and awful the destruction would be (as we can read in the latter chapters of 2 Kings).

The "wicked" referred to are those who reject God and act wickedly against His commands. God would 'stretch out his hand' against all of Judah, even to those in Jerusalem, His holy city, and especially against the priests and worshippers of Baal, who were a stench in the Lord's nostrils.

We should remember that God thinks the same today of all who worship false gods and reject Him. He also hates those who claim His name when they adhere to, or support, or allow, these false gods to continue without challenge.

Zephaniah 1

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 26 June 2016 15:55

The worshippers of Baal were, at this time, only a “remnant”. The rest were banished or put to death by Josiah (see 2 Kings 23 for example). Modern Christians shrink back from such terrible actions by a believer – but it is necessary at times.

God condemned and warned of the coming judgment of those called the “Chemarims”; these were the kamar, or idolatrous priests. In the New Testament we read that when a demon is removed it will come back with many more if the cleansed soul does not replace its void with Christ, making the situation far worse than before. As soon as Josiah was dead his son allowed these kamar to again come into the land, thus influencing the people and driving the spiritual state of Judah downwards into an hellish pit. This is happening today.

God also judged those who worshipped the stars, moon and sun “upon the rooftops” (verse 5), and those who followed Malcham, also known as melek or Moloch (it also refers to pagan kings). Note, too, God’s hatred for those who “swear by the Lord”, which can include cursing Him. It is possible to link both phrases, where God and Malcham were worshipped together (as I showed in some chapters of 2 Kings). We see this in modern times, especially in Rome and Anglicanism, and in extreme forms of charismaticism.

Condemned, too, are those who turned away from God after worshiping him previously. They were equally as condemned as those who refused to go after God at all, or to ask Him for truth. All these things can be seen today. It is fact that people cannot be saved unless they are elect in eternity. But, it is also fact that even those who are not elect MUST obey His commands, which apply to all created beings.

Many Christians tell me that “We cannot expect the unsaved to follow God or to listen to His commands”. This is untrue and dangerous. ALL people must obey God’s commands, even if they remain unsaved. In modern parlance, this means we can accept a superficial Christianised society even if most are unsaved, because this stops gross evil from arising, and it enables us to speak openly about the mercy and grace of God, and of our need to institute His commands in law and society.

Verses 7-10

1.

Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the

Zephaniah 1

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 26 June 2016 15:55

LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests.

2.

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.

3.

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

4.

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.

No man may speak out against God at any time – we must hold our peace in His presence. When is He present? All the time, even when we are not particularly aware of it, or when He steps backwards to show His anger. Then, as now, “the day of the Lord is at hand”. That is, He will come at any time soon to judge and punish. This is described as a feast, where guests (those elected by God either to salvation or hell – in this case those who stand condemned) have all been designated. His judgment is deemed to be like a ‘sacrifice’, just as an animal was killed at the altar. In that day God would punish to death, those who rejected Him, both princes and people.

The reference to “strange apparel” speaks of the way kings in particular adopted the rich clothing worn by pagans, showing that they had copied their lifestyles. We can direct this to men and women today, who adopt the ways and clothing of the unsaved – revealing women’s clothing that act as sexual stimuli, ‘unisex’ clothing that does not differentiate men from women, the constant buying of new clothes to follow fashion and to appear well-off to others, when there is no need to buy more, and so on. In the 1960s this trend was witnessed more dramatically, thanks to the influence of homosexuals, who worked through rock bands, artists and drug takers. These all stand condemned, as were those who lived in Zephaniah’s day. As Christians we must stand apart, even in clothing.

Zephaniah 1

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 26 June 2016 15:55

God will also punish those who get into their Master's house by deceit or by violence, to wreak mischief and robbery. The people would know when God's judgment came, for every part of Judah would hear and see what was happening. The 'fish-gate' refers to the large number of people shaking with fear... all would be afraid as Nebuchadnezzar's armies surrounded Jerusalem and brought it to its knees. Today, British people voted to leave the wicked regime of the EU, but many are afraid. They should not be, for it is but one part of God's provision to His people who prayed. It will not stop the final demise of the West, but it does give respite enabling us to repent and grow in truth, and to teach the country what God requires.

Verses 11-13

1.

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

2.

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.

3.

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.

It is with some sense of humour that I read of the merchants in verse 11, who represent to me all those 'big name' businesses who howl at being cut off from the EU and its illicit favouring of wicked traders! In the text, these tended to live and operate in a valley close to Jerusalem, Maktesh (a 'deep hollow'). Think of 'The City' in London where 'fat cat' traders collect, drink, and collect their ill-gotten gains, or draw salaries that are great but unworthy. In Zephaniah's day these traders would suddenly lose everything. The same will happen soon, when God cuts off all people from trading and dealing in luxury, when so many others are forgotten and left to die or starve.

When the final days of Judah came, God said He would search the city with a candle (showing how scrupulous His anger and search would be). He would find those drunk on wine ('on their

Zephaniah 1

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 26 June 2016 15:55

lees'), and people who dismiss God, saying He will neither harm nor help. Most people in the West think this, and punishment will be swift as they lose everything and are shocked out of their quiet disregard for the Lord. Today, how many Christians so-called live out a life of holiness and desire to obey God only? Very few. They will soon be shocked into reality, as were the inhabitants of Judah.

When God struck Judah everything they held dear would be 'booty' – taken as war treasure by soldiers. Their houses would be ruined, and if some built homes they would never inhabit them. They would plant vineyards and never drink the wine. This tells us that when the enemy came the event would be swift and sudden, giving the dwellers no time to pick up their wealth and run. This is how even Christians live today, unaware of the coming of a mighty enemy under Satan. Their shock is based on their lack of biblical values and living, and their low regard for holiness.

Verses 14-18

1.

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.

2.

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,

3.

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

4.

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.

5.

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.

Zephaniah 1

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 26 June 2016 15:55

This destruction of Judah is called the “great day of the Lord”, and so it was. It was momentous, for God finally gave over Judah to Satan’s envoys as a punishment for their evils and their rejection of Him. He even handed over the Temple, His own house of prayer that He lovingly designed and had built. Yet, the people chosen by God saw and heard nothing, because they were so engrossed in their sins!

That day “hasteth greatly”, like a train thundering along the track towards a city. The sound of the coming destruction could be heard on the air, but was not heard by hearts and ears filled with evil (‘evil’ being anything not given by God). Unprepared, even the most mighty of men will collapse in fear and tears. But, too late.

This is also how we will see the last day – for Christ will return like a thief in the night, when everyone is sleeping or not watching. It is why God’s watchmen call out loudly, the same watchmen who the city demands stay quiet for disturbing their sleep! Zephaniah was such a watchman, and the people ignored his shout, too.

When I read this word of God I know it is interlinked with the events of our day. But, who will listen? Who will repent? Who will at last live holy lives? Let me be frank... I KNOW what people think; I KNOW they see me as ‘over the top’ or excessive. But, it does not bother me, for I KNOW I speak, as did the prophets, what God has given to me to speak. What others do with that word is not my concern, though it saddens me.

The day of judgment for Judah would be filled with God’s wrath; there would be trouble, distress and fear, but there would be no taking back God’s penalties. Judah would be laid waste and left desolate – see how finally only the very poor, old and who had nothing to offer were left in the land, to scrape a living if they could, living in the ruins of Jerusalem (2 Kings). Darkness, clouds and gloom would be where God’s glory once shone forth.

The day would be brought to life by the trumpet sound of the watchmen on their high towers in Jerusalem and in every fortress city in Judah, as they awoke to the surrounding enemy armies. So sudden was the huge enemy invasion, that everyone would stumble about in stark fear not knowing what to do (‘blind’). Their lazy lives were suddenly turned to real horror, and all

Zephaniah 1

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 26 June 2016 15:55

because they did not obey the Lord, but sinned continually. For their sins, God rejected them, body and soul; their blood would be spilled and their bodies would be regarded as dung. This is what happens when men ignore the only true God.

Perhaps some would try to buy their way out of the awful situation, but their gold and silver did nothing – the enemy took them anyway. May I warn all who read this not to place store in what they earn, or buy, or keep in banks, etc. To God they are nothing, and they will do nothing to stave off an enemy, or God's wrath. Judah was to be set on fire (which it was) because it shunned God's demand to be worshipped and obeyed. Though God chose Israel and Judah, "he shall make even a speedy riddance of (them all)". So, do not think today that your claim to faith will stop God bringing you crashing to the dust if you ignore Him and live for your own pleasures.

I urge readers to consider the days of Zephaniah as similar to the days we now live in, for the situation is very much the same. The warnings are there. Do not reject them and live a life of spiritual laxity. God is already on His way.

© June 2016

---oOo---

{loadposition btm_address}