

## Commentary on Zephaniah Chapters 1 and 2 by Chuck Smith 7.3.24

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### **May memory verse Romans 6:8 (NKJV)**

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

### **June memory verse Romans 6:9 (NKJV)**

knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more.

Death no longer has dominion over Him.

### **July memory verse Romans 6:10 (NKJV)**

For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God.

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**Includes John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - Zephaniah**

### **CHAPTER 1**

Shall we turn now in our Bibles to the book of Zephaniah. The opening verse tells us that,

This is the word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, who was the son of Gedaliah, who was the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah ([Zep 1:1](#)).

Now, of the minor prophets we really have very little of their background. For some reason we have more of Zephaniah's background than any of them, as he gives his lineage. He takes his lineage actually back to Hezekiah, who was, of course, one of the great kings of Judah. So Zephaniah was actually of the royal family. He prophesied during the reign of Josiah. Josiah had a fairly successful reign in Judah, especially from a spiritual standpoint. Under Josiah there was at least a surface reformation.

Now, the fact that he prophesied during the time of Josiah makes him a contemporary to Jeremiah. So during the time that the southern tribe of Judah was in the final decline, moving down towards the end of the southern kingdom, towards the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah and Zephaniah were exercising their office as a prophet to Judah at that time. And the Lord declares in His prophecy through Zephaniah that He

will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD ([Zep 1:2](#)).

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Now in Zephaniah's prophecy there definitely is the double aspect of fulfillment. There was that fulfillment that was to take place under the destruction that came from Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar, but that also looked out to the end. Zephaniah looks out to the Great Tribulation and does prophesy much about the Great Tribulation, the judgment of God, the indignation of God that is going to come upon this godless age in which we live. So the Lord is declaring, "I will utterly consume all things from off the land."

I will consume the man and the beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, the fish of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD ([Zep 1:3](#)).

This, no doubt, is a reference to the Great Tribulation period in which the cataclysmic judgments of God are gonna fall upon this planet Earth, and this planet Earth is going to see a turmoil such as it has never seen before or will ever see again. Jesus speaking of this time said, "And there shall be a time of Great Tribulation such as has never been before or will ever be again." As the whole kingdom of the animals, fish, and man will be affected by the cataclysmic judgments of God. God is now speaking,

He is now gonna stretch out his hand against Jerusalem, and Judah; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests ([Zep 1:4](#));

The Chemarims were actually the priests that exercised their offices at that time of apostasy. They were the priests in the high places, as referred to in the II Kings. So because of the idolatry there in Jerusalem and in Judah, God was going to turn them over into the hands of their enemies.

Now here again, as Zephaniah is telling of the destruction and the judgment of God that is going to come, there is the mention of the worship of Baal. So many little idols to Baal, which means *lord*, were discovered. The priests, the Chemarims, the priests of the high places.

And them that worship the hosts of heaven upon the housetops ([Zep 1:5](#));

Which was the practice of astrology, which is an ancient cult going back to the Babylonian period where people imagined that the stars had certain influences over their lives. So the time that you were born and all, feeling that the stars determined your destiny. Isn't it amazing that this modern, scientifically enlightened age there are those who still look at their horoscopes to determine whether or not they should go to work today. "They worship the hosts of heaven upon the housetops,"

and them that swear by the LORD, and swear by Malcham ([Zep 1:5](#));

Which, of course, is the idol of the Ammonites, which had its equivalent of Molech.

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And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for him (Zep 1:6).

Here they were worshiping all of their idols, but they had forsaken Jehovah, and had not inquired of Jehovah.

Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the LORD is at hand (Zep 1:7):

The day of the Lord is, of course, again, a reference to the great day of God's judgment that is coming.

for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests (Zep 1:7).

You remember in the book of Revelation, chapter 19, as it speaks of this great day of the Lord's wrath that is coming, that He invites the birds to come and feast on the carcasses of kings and so forth. The great day of the Lord's wrath. So He has prepared a sacrifice, a feast. He has bid His guests, which are the birds, the vultures to come and to eat the carcasses of men.

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. In the same day also will I punish all of those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit. It shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that there shall be a noise of a cry from the fish gate, and a howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills. Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh (Zep 1:8-11),

That is actually the little area where the shopping, the bazaar. If you go to Jerusalem today the sukes, the commercial place within the city, these long narrow little streets where all of these little shops are on all sides, that's the Hebrew Maktesh. It's the place where they did all of their selling. "Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh,"

for all of the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off. 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 (Zep 1:11-12).

In other words, God is withdrawn; it doesn't matter to God. "We can live as we please. What difference does it make to God? He won't do good; He won't do evil." People who live as though God did not exist.

Now, I think that we look at some people and we are appalled at the brazen declarations that they make of atheism. They are so bold in their speaking out against the things of God. Many times we are shocked at their blasphemies. But you know, I think that even worse than some of these blasphemous persons are people who say

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they believe in God, and yet, they live as though God did not exist. Who never take God into account in any of the decisions of their lives. Now to me this is a greater blasphemy than a man who utters oaths with his mouth. They say, "Oh, I believe in God. Yes, I believe in God," but he never takes God into account in any of the decision-making processes, never seeks the Lord. He has the attitude, "Well, the Lord's not gonna do good or do evil." It's that careless attitude concerning God and the things of God. The Lord said He's gonna punish those that have settled on their lees.

Therefore, their goods shall become a booty, their houses a desolation (Zep 1:13):

they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof. The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and it hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, it is 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, a day of the trumpet [the battle trumpet that calls the troops to assemble] and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. 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. 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 (Zep 1:13-18).

Of course, the prophecy here does definitely spread out in the double fulfillment going to the great day of God's judgment that is coming yet upon the earth.

### Chapter 2

Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired (Zep 2:1);

Now that "not desired" in the Hebrew literally means "a nation that knows no shame." They were doing shameful things, but they refused to be ashamed.

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 has come upon you. 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 (Zep 2:2-3).

So the Lord's promise to hide those from the day of His anger.

When the Great Tribulation comes upon the earth, just before it comes, and what will actually be the final straw, so to speak, will be the desecration of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

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Now, prophetically the temple is to be rebuilt. When the temple is rebuilt, this man, who in the scripture is known as the son of perdition or the man of sin, the beast, often called the antichrist, he is going to come to the temple; he's going to stand in the holy place and declare that he is god and is going to demand to be worshiped as God. Jesus speaking to Israel, to the Jews at this time, who see this manifestation, said to them, "And when you see the abomination of desolation that Daniel the prophet spoke about, standing in the holy place, then flee to the wilderness" (Matthew 24:15-16).

Now in the book of Revelation, chapter 12, (Rev 12) as John sees, first of all, the woman, Israel, clothed with the sun and the moon and the twelve stars. And then he sees the second wonder in heaven, the great dragon, Satan, who is cast out of heaven. And he goes to make war against the woman's seed, or the remnant of the nation of Israel, or the people of Israel. But in the book of Revelation it says that the woman's seed are given wings of an eagle, to bear them to the wilderness place where they will be nourished for three and a half years. So that they will not come under the dominion and the control of the antichrist, but will flee to this wildernesses place that God has prepared for them. Which according to Isaiah, chapter 16 (Isa 16), will be the rock city of Petra, where many of the Jews will flee for survival. And God will watch over them and take care of them there. This also is made mention of in the twenty-sixth chapter of Isaiah (Isa 26), the last few verses, where God bears them safely to a place of refuge until His indignation be overpassed, or the wrath of God, the judgments of God are over.

So here again is the promise of the Lord for those people in that day to seek 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." It is possible that they can be those that will be preserved miraculously by God in this wilderness place where they will be taken care of by the Lord for three and a half years. So that's a yet future experience for the Jews. It is not the church. The church, of course, will be caught up in the rapture before these things take place.

For [he said] Gaza shall be forsaken [or Gaza], and Ashkelon a desolation: and they shall drive out Ashdod at the noonday, and Ekron shall be rooted up (Zep 2:4).

These are the cities, the major cities of the Philistines. The Gaza, and of course, you're reading an awful lot in the last couple weeks of the Gaza Strip and the problems that are going on there right now. Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron.

Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites! for 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. And the seacoast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah (Zep 2:5-7);

Now this is a fascinating prophecy, because during the time of the Old Testament, the Philistines were one of the strong and perennial enemies of the Jews. The cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath were the major Philistine cities. They were in the

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coastal plains. They were a constant thorn in the flesh to Israel. The tribe of Dan tried to settle in that area, but they found that the Philistines were too strong for them. So the tribe of Dan went way up in the north part of the land in the upper Galilee region, and there the tribe of Dan settled north of Lachish, clear on up near the base of Mount Hermon.

But the Lord is here predicting that the Philistines are going to be destroyed and that these cities will be desolate. They will just be places where the Nomadic Bedouins keep their flocks. But then the prophecy goes on to declare, "The coast shall be for a remnant of the house of Judah,"

and they shall feed thereon (Zep 2:7):

Now it's extremely interesting that in these days in which we live, these Philistine cities Ashdod, Ashkelon have been rebuilt into Jewish communities. In Ashdod the Israelis have built their major seaport. Most of the shipping is no longer done out of Haifa, but it's done out of Ashdod. And as God has declared, this area for years, for over a thousand years, was just grazing land for the Bedouins. But when Israel became a nation again, they began the rebuilding projects. One of the major projects was the rebuilding of this area of Ashdod and the making of this modern seaport. Also, Ashkelon, and so they have settled now in the area that was once a part of the Philistine territory. So this fascinating prophecy of Zephaniah has been fulfilled during some of our lifetime. Some of you kids are still too young; it happened before you were born, but I do remember it. "And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah, they shall feed there upon."

and in the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity (Zep 2:7).

So this, of course, is a prophecy of the rebirth of the nation Israel.

I've heard the reproach of Moab, the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified themselves against their border (Zep 2:8).

Moab and Ammon, of course, had magnified themselves; they took the West Bank from Israel when Israel became a nation in 1948. King Jordan moved in with his troops and took the West Bank. The Lord here speaks about it, "I know the reproach how they've magnified themselves against their border."

Therefore, as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab will become as Sodom [that's present day Jordan], and the children of Ammon [the capital of Jordan] 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 (Zep 2:9).

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This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of hosts ([Zep 2:10](#)).

The Lord said, "Touch not My anointed, do My prophets no harm." The Lord said He would bless those that blessed Abraham; He would curse those that cursed them. So Moab, or Jordan, is to fall because of their treatment of God's people, the people of the Lord of hosts. Now, it isn't that the people of the Lord of hosts are so righteous. It's just that God has chosen them. And because God has chosen them, we should respect them.

The LORD will be awesome unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen [or the coasts of the heathen]. Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword. And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and he will make Nineveh a desolation ([Zep 2:11-13](#)),

So at this time that Zephaniah was prophesying, Nineveh was still existing. It had not yet been destroyed by the Medes and the Babylonians.

The flock shall lie down in the midst of her, all of 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. This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: [that great city of Nineveh] and how has she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand ([Zep 2:14-15](#)).

Nineveh, one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. It took three days to walk through the city of Nineveh from one end to the other. Yet here's the prophet making this amazing prophecy: it's gonna be desolate. Sheep are gonna graze there. In the houses that once existed there, the owl and the bittern will lodge in the thresholds. It will be a place for the dwelling of wild animals. As improbable as that prophecy of Zephaniah did seem at that time, yet it came to pass.

### John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - Zephaniah

#### Title

As with each of the 12 Minor Prophets, the prophecy bears the name of its author, which is generally thought to mean "the LORD hides" (cf. [2:3](#)).

#### Author and Date

Little is known about the author, Zephaniah. Three other OT individuals share his name. He traces his genealogy back 4 generations to King Hezekiah (ca. 715–686 B.C.), standing alone among the prophets descended from royal blood ([1:1](#)). Royal genealogy

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would have given him the ear of Judah's king, Josiah, during whose reign he preached. The prophet himself dates his message during the reign of Josiah (640–609 B.C.). The moral and spiritual conditions detailed in the book (cf. [1:4–6](#); [3:1–7](#)) seem to place the prophecy prior to Josiah's reforms, when Judah was still languishing in idolatry and wickedness. It was in 628 B.C. that Josiah tore down all the altars to Baal, burned the bones of false prophets, and broke the carved idols ([2 Chr. 34:3–7](#)); and in 622 B.C. the Book of the Law was found ([2 Chr. 34:8–35:19](#)). Consequently, Zephaniah most likely prophesied from 635–625 B.C., and was a contemporary of Jeremiah.

### Background and Setting

Politically, the imminent transfer of Assyrian world power to the Babylonians weakened Nineveh's hold on Judah, bringing an element of independence to Judah for the first time in 50 years. King Josiah's desire to retain this newfound freedom from taxation and subservience undoubtedly led him to interfere later with Egypt's attempt to interdict the fleeing king of Nineveh in 609 B.C. (cf. [2 Chr. 35:20–27](#)). Spiritually, the reigns of Hezekiah's son Manasseh (ca. 695–642 B.C.), extending over 4 decades, and his grandson Amon (ca. 642–640 B.C.), lasting only two years, were marked by wickedness and apostasy ([2 Kin. 21](#); [2 Chr. 33](#)). The early years of Josiah's reign were also characterized by the evil from his fathers ([2 Kin. 23:4](#)). In 622 B.C., however, while repairing the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the High-Priest found the Book of the Law ([2 Kin. 22:8](#)). Upon reading it, Josiah initiated extensive reforms ([2 Kin. 23](#)). It was during the early years of Josiah's reign, prior to the great revival, that this 11th hour prophet, Zephaniah, prophesied and no doubt had an influence on the sweeping reforms Josiah brought to the nation. But the evil kings before Josiah (55 years) had had such an effect on Judah that it never recovered. Josiah's reforms were too late and didn't outlast his life.

### Historical and Theological Themes

Zephaniah's message on the Day of the Lord warned Judah that the final days were near, through divine judgment at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, ca. 605–586 B.C. ([1:4–13](#)). Yet, it also looks beyond to the far fulfillment in the judgments of Daniel's 70th week ([1:18](#); [3:8](#)). The expression "Day of the Lord" is employed by the author more often than by any other OT writer, and is described as a day that is near ([1:7](#)), and as a day of wrath, trouble, distress, devastation, desolation, darkness, gloominess, clouds, thick darkness, trumpet, and alarm ([1:15](#), [16](#), [18](#)). Yet even within these oracles of divine wrath, the prophet exhorted the people to seek the Lord, offering a shelter in the midst of judgment ([2:3](#)), and proclaiming the promise of eventual salvation for His believing remnant ([2:7](#); [3:9–20](#)).