

I. NAME AND PERSONALITY OF THE PROPHET.

- A. The name *Zephaniah* means "Jehovah hides" or "he whom Jehovah has hidden."
- B. All we know about him is found in the book that bears his name.
- C. But his personality is revealed in his writing.
- D. Due to the genealogy in 1:1 Zephaniah was a prophet and a prince as well.
- E. Some say that Zephaniah preached before all of the reforms under Josiah (thus encouraging them), others think he preached after they were made and only mentions them.
- F. Zephaniah speaks of the "day of Jehovah" for Judah and other nations of the earth, warning them of pending doom.

II. THE DATE OF THE BOOK AND OF THE PROPHET.

- A. Date of the book is about 625BC. Israel has been in captivity for some 100 years.
- B. Background of the times (the political scene in Judah) is as follows:
 - 1. Good King Hezekiah succeeded by his son, bad King Manasseh, a boy of 12 years.
 - 2. The heathen party assumed control of the government (2Chr. 33:1-9; 2Kgs, 21:10-16).
 - 3. Later Manasseh repented but without saving the nation (2Chr. 33:10-20).
 - 4. Amon, who followed Manasseh, was also wicked (2Chr. 33:21-25).
 - 5. Josiah, the last good king of Judah, came to the throne at the age of eight, sought God at 15, began to reform the land at 20, and completed the reform at age 26. He was killed by Pharaoh-Neccho at Megiddo in his one act of rebellion against God.
- C. Background of the times (the political scene in the East) is as follows:
 - 1. Israel had fallen to Assyria and had been carried away.
 - 2. In 625BC, Nabopolassar established Babylon as a separate nation and began to battle with Assyria.
 - 3. In 612BC, Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, defeated the Assyrian empire and destroyed the great city of Nineveh.
 - 4. No doubt it was this rise of Babylon to power that gave occasion for the prophecy of Zephaniah.
- D. The sins of Judah:
 - 1. Religious syncretism; Baal (1:4), Milcam (1:5), the Host of Heaven (1:5).
 - 2. Wearing of foreign apparel, becoming like the Gentiles (1:8).
 - 3. Leaping over the threshold, robbery (1:9).
 - 4. Fraud and violence (1:9).
 - 5. Prophets, priests, and judges are violent and wanton (3:3-4).
 - 6. Indifference, they considered God as uninterested in human behavior (1:12).
 - 7. A refusal to receive correction (3:2, 7).

III. OUTLINES OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.

- A. Simple outline:
 - I. Threatening and Judgment--Chapter 1.
 - II. Warning and Admonition--Chapter 2.
 - III. Encouragement and Promise--Chapter 3.
- B. Supplemental outline:
 - I. The Day of the Lord (1:1-2:3).
 - A. Superscription (1:1).
 - B. God's righteous judgment upon the world (1:2-6).
 - 1. Upon the entire earth (1:2-3).

- 2. Upon Judah and Jerusalem in particular (1:4-6).
- C. Sinners of every rank to be judged (1:7-13).
- D. The day of the Lord is near (1:14-18).
 - 1. A terrible time of wrath (1:14-17).
 - 2. No escape by carnal means (1:18).
- E. An appeal for men to seek deliverance from God (2:1-3).
- II. The Judgment of the Nations (2:4-3:8).
 - A. Judgment against all nations (2:4-15).
 - 1. Small nations nearby (2:4-11).
 - 2. Great nations afar off (2:12-15).
 - B. If the heathen are punished, Judah cannot escape either (3:1-8).
 - 1. Woe to the polluted city of Jerusalem (3:1-7).
 - 2. Its rejection of God demanded punishment (3:8).
- III. Salvation for the Remnant (3:9-20).
 - A. A righteous remnant to be gathered from among the heathen (3:9-10).
 - B. The remnant to be cleansed and sanctified (3:11-13).
 - C. Israel exalted before all (3:14-20).

IV. THE THEME AND THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.

- A. The theme of the book is: **The day of Jehovah is at hand.**
- B. The message of the book is: **DOOM.**
- C. The religious and moral background of the day:
 - 1. Sweeping religious and moral reforms took place in the day of Josiah.
 - 2. Yet, although reform had restored the ritual the people worshipped only externally.
 - 3. Social injustice and moral corruption were widespread.
 - 4. Luxury and extravagance were seen on every hand.

V. PRACTICAL LESSONS OF PERMANENT VALUE.

- A. All men and nations are within the power of God and are accountable to Him.
- B. The day of the Lord was that day on which a nation received its just due for sin.
- C. One becomes like the god he worships.
- D. Earnest warning is needed to draw us back to the presence of God.
- E. God gives assurance that humble seekers will be safe in the Day of Judgment.
- F. God's ministers should put strong emphasis on the spiritual nature of the kingdom.
- G. God's purpose is not vengeance but to cleanse and refine and save those who will allow Him to save them.

VI. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

- A. Why do you think the day of the Lord isn't something most Christians sing about in the assembly or think about very often?
- B. What is our responsibility toward others concerning the day of the Lord? What should we say? In what situations should we say it?
- C. If God were to clear out the idols in our culture today, what would they be and what might he do?
- D. For what specific sins does Zephaniah announce judgment? Why does God hate those sins?
- E. How should a godly remnant live in a world that disregards God? For instance, should they try to isolate themselves from the negative influences? What aspects of culture should they be involved in? What should they not be involved in?
- F. What lesson can we learn from someone who has strayed from God's will?
- G. What are some current examples of the results of forgiven sin?
- H. Why do you think the prophets always end their messages with words of hope?