



# Zephaniah

## Transcript

### Introduction

00:00-01:00

The book of the prophet Zephaniah. Zephaniah lived during the final decades of the southern kingdom of Judah. It was when King Josiah had attempted to bring about real change in the land by removing idols and restoring the temple to the worship of Israel's God alone. But Israel was just too far gone. Worshipping other gods was too entrenched in the life of the people, and it ended up that Josiah's pride led him to a tragic death on the battlefield, as he set Jerusalem on a collision course with Babylon. And Zephaniah? He had seen all of this coming. For years, he had been warning the leaders of Jerusalem, and this little book is a collection of his poetry summarizing his message.

It's designed to have three main parts. The first focuses on the day of the Lord's judgment coming on Judah and Jerusalem. The second part is about the day of the Lord's judgment on the nations and Jerusalem again. And then the third section explores the hope that remains for the nations and for Jerusalem on the other side of God's judgment.

### Chapters 1-2:3

01:00-02:18

The first section opens with this shocking reversal of Genesis 1. So God's good, ordered world is going to descend back into disorder and darkness and chaos, becoming uninhabitable once again. And as you keep reading, you realize Zephaniah is developing all of these powerful poetic images to describe how Jerusalem's world is going to end. All of the city's institutions for worshipping the gods of the Canaanites will be destroyed. All the leaders who perpetrated injustice, all the economic centers where crooked lending and borrowing took place, all of it will be gone along with the city's walls. Zephaniah develops these almost

apocalyptic images to show the significance of what's going to happen. It all refers to a great army that is coming to take out Jerusalem.

Now, it's interesting that Zephaniah never mentions whose army God's going to use to bring this judgment. Now, we know from the other prophets, Micah or Habakkuk, that it's Babylon, but Zephaniah never mentions that, and it's because he wants to highlight God's role in orchestrating the rise and fall of the city. And actually, that's what gives Zephaniah hope. Not that Jerusalem as a whole can avoid its fate, but in the closing poem of section 1, he calls on anyone in Jerusalem who would seek the Lord. And he says these will make up the faithful remnant, the people who could be spared if they repent.

## **Chapters 2:4-3:8**

**02:19-03:22**

In the second section, Zephaniah widens his focus to include the nations around Judah, so the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, even the Assyrians. He accuses all of them of corruption and violence and arrogance, and he predicts that all of them will fall before Babylon too. And what's shocking is that the final people group targeted in this section are the Israelites in Jerusalem. It's like the leaders and prophets and priests of Israel are so corrupt and violent, so estranged from their God, that he doesn't even recognize them as his people anymore.

And so this section ends with God's final decision. He says he's going to gather up all the nations, including Jerusalem, and pour out his burning indignation. God's justice becomes this consuming fire that devours evil from the land, which is really intense. And so the following line that brings us into the final part of the book comes as a total surprise. We discover that this burning fire of divine judgment is not aimed at destroying people. Rather, its purpose is to purify the nations, including Jerusalem.

## **Chapter 3:9-20**

**03:23-04:22**

So this section begins as God says that he's going to heal and transform the rebellious nations into one unified family. And that after being purified, they're going to turn from their evil and call upon the name of the Lord. These images point to the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, all the way back in Genesis 12, that God would find a way to bless the nations and Jerusalem as well.

The conclusion of the book focuses on the restoration of the city at the center of the nations. God's presence is there in the restored city, along with that faithful remnant that's been humbled and transformed by God's mercy, and they're called to sing and rejoice. And then, in this striking image, we are told that God is a poet

who wants to sing too. “Your God will live among you, and he will celebrate you with songs of joy,” Zephaniah says. The closing poem of the book ends with these very powerful images about God gathering up into his family the outcast and the poor and the broken, where he exalts them into a place of honor. And that’s how the book ends.

## **Conclusion**

**04:23-05:10**

This little book of Zephaniah, it contains some of the most intense images of God’s justice and love that you find anywhere in the prophets. His justice is about his passion to protect and to rescue his world from the horror of human evil and violence. God won’t tolerate the horrible things that humans do to each other and to his world. But he brings this justice in order to restore, in order to create a world where people can flourish in safety and peace because of his love.

And so Zephaniah forces us to hold together these two aspects of God’s character, his justice and his love. And he wants us to discover that together they contain the future hope of our world. And that’s what the book of Zephaniah is all about.