EDIFIED EDITION

# Zephaniah

*A modern rendering of the Holy Scriptures*

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Numbered notes follow each chapter.



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## Chapter 1

*Zephaniah 1 announces a sweeping judgement. The LORD will sweep away everything from the face of the earth: people and animals, birds and fish. He will stretch out His hand against Judah and Jerusalem and cut off the remnant of Baal, the idolatrous priests, those who bow on the rooftops to the host of heaven, those who swear by Milcom, and those who have turned back from following the LORD. Be silent before the Lord GOD, for the day of the LORD is near; He has prepared a sacrifice. He will punish the officials and the king's sons, those who wear foreign clothes and fill their master's house with violence. Wailing will rise from the Fish Gate and the Second Quarter, and the LORD will search Jerusalem with lamps for those who say, "The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad." The great day of the LORD is near and hastening fast: a day of wrath, distress, ruin, darkness and the trumpet blast, when neither silver nor gold can save, and the whole earth is consumed by the fire of His jealousy.*

[1]The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah.[1]

[2]I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the LORD.

[3]I will sweep away people and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea, and the ruins along with the wicked. I will cut off humanity from the face of the earth, declares the LORD.[2]

[4]I will stretch out My hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the very name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests,

[5]those who bow down on the rooftops to the host of heaven, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and also swear by Milcom,[3]

[6]and those who have turned back from following the LORD, who do not seek the LORD or inquire of Him.

[7]Be silent before the Lord GOD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; He has consecrated His guests.[4]

8 On the day of the LORD's sacrifice I will punish
the officials and the king's sons and all who dress
in foreign clothes.
9 On that day I will call to account everyone who
jumps over the threshold, all who stock their
lord's house with plunder gained by force and
fraud.[5]
10 On that day, declares the LORD, a cry will go up
from the Fish Gate, wailing from the Second
Quarter, and a great crash from the hills.[6]
11 Wail, you who live in the Mortar, for all the
merchants are destroyed; all who weigh out silver
are cut off.[7]
12 At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps
and punish those who are complacent, who are
like wine left on its dregs, who say in their hearts,
"The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad."
13 Their wealth will be plundered and their houses
laid waste. They will build houses but not live in
them, plant vineyards but not drink their wine.
14 The great day of the LORD is near, near and
coming very fast. Listen! The day of the LORD is
bitter; there the warrior cries out aloud.
15 That day will be a day of fury, a day of anguish
and hardship, a day of wreck and ruin, a day of
blackness and murk, a day of cloud and deep
gloom,[8]
16 a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the
fortified cities and the high corner towers.
17 I will bring such anguish on mankind that they
will grope about like the blind, for they have
sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be
spilled like dust and their bodies flung out like
dung.
18 Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to
rescue them on the day of the LORD's wrath. In
the fire of His jealousy the whole earth will be
consumed, for He will make an end, a sudden end,
of all who live on the earth.

**1** Josiah reigned 640–609 BC. Zephaniah probably prophesied before Josiah's reform of 622 BC (2 Kings 22–23), since Baal worship still flourished. The Hezekiah named may be the king.

**2** 'Sweep away' (asaph) reverses creation, removing what God made on the fifth and sixth days. 'The ruins' may also be read 'the idols that cause stumbling'.

**3** Milcom was the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:5). The Hebrew can also be read 'their king'.

**4** Judah is the sacrifice; the guests are the nations invited to the slaughter.

**5** Perhaps a pagan custom (1 Samuel 5:5), or the servants who rush in to plunder for their masters.

**6** The Fish Gate and the Second Quarter were in the newer, northern part of Jerusalem, where an enemy from the north would attack first.

**7** The Mortar (Maktesh) was probably a market district in a hollow of the city. 'Merchants' is literally 'the people of Canaan', the traders.

**8** 'A day of fury' is in Latin dies irae, the opening of a medieval hymn on the Last Judgement drawn from this verse.

# Chapter 2

*Zephaniah 2 calls the shameless nation to gather before the decree takes effect and the LORD's burning anger comes. All the humble of the land, who do His justice, are to seek the LORD, seek righteousness and humility; perhaps they will be hidden on the day of His anger. Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron will be deserted, and the coast of the Philistines will become pasture for the remnant of Judah. The LORD has heard the taunts of Moab and Ammon, and they will become like Sodom and Gomorrah, a possession for the remnant of His people. He will bring low all the gods of the earth, and every coastland will bow to Him. The Cushites too will fall by His sword, and Assyria will be destroyed: Nineveh, the carefree city that said, "I am, and there is none besides me," will become a desert where wild animals lie down, and every passer-by will hiss and shake his fist.*

1 Gather together, gather, you shameless nation,[1]
2 before the decree takes effect and the day blows
away like chaff, before the burning anger of the
LORD comes upon you, before the day of the
LORD's anger comes upon you.
3 Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land who
do what He commands. Seek righteousness, seek
humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day
of the LORD's anger.
4 For Gaza will be abandoned and Ashkelon left a
ruin; Ashdod will be driven out at noon and Ekron
uprooted.[2]
5 Woe to you who live by the sea, nation of the
Kerethites! The word of the LORD is against you,

Canaan, land of the Philistines: I will destroy you until no one is left.[3]

6 The seacoast will become pastures, with wells for shepherds and pens for flocks.

7 The coast will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah; there they will graze their flocks. In the evening they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon, for the LORD their God will care for them and restore their fortunes.

8 I have heard the taunts of Moab and the insults of the Ammonites, how they taunted My people and boasted against their territory.

9 Therefore, as I live, declares the LORD of Armies, the God of Israel, Moab will become like Sodom and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland for ever. The remnant of My people will plunder them; the survivors of My nation will possess them.[4]

10 This is what they will get for their pride, because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of Armies.

11 The LORD will be terrible against them when He starves all the gods of the earth. Then the nations on every shore will bow down to Him, each in its own land.

12 You too, Cushites, will be slain by My sword.[5]

13 And He will raise His hand against the north and bring Assyria to ruin; He will leave Nineveh desolate, parched as the wilderness.

14 Flocks will lie down in her midst, every kind of wild creature. The desert owl and the screech owl will roost on her columns; a voice will hoot in the window, rubble will lie in the doorway, and the cedar panelling will be stripped bare.

15 This is the carefree city that lived in security, that said to herself, “I am, and there is none besides me.” What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beasts! Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist.

1 ‘Gather’ is literally ‘gather stubble’, fitting the picture of chaff in verse 2. ‘Shameless’ may also be ‘undesired’.
2 More wordplay: Gaza (‘azzah) will be abandoned (‘azubah), Ekron (‘eqron) uprooted (te’aqer).
3 The Kerethites were a people related to the Philistines, probably from Crete.
4 Moab and Ammon were descended from Lot, who escaped from Sodom (Genesis 19:30–38).
5 Cush (the upper Nile) had ruled Egypt until shortly before Zephaniah’s time.

# Chapter 3

*Zephaniah 3 pronounces woe on the rebellious and defiled city, the oppressor, which will not listen or accept correction or draw near to her God. Her officials are roaring lions, her judges evening wolves, her prophets reckless and her priests profane, while the righteous LORD within her brings His justice to light every morning. He has cut off nations, hoping she would fear Him, but they were eager to act corruptly. So they must wait for the day when He rises to gather the nations and pour out His anger. Then He will give the peoples pure lips to call on His name and serve Him together, and His scattered people will bring offerings from beyond the rivers of Cush. He will remove the proud and leave a humble and lowly people who take refuge in the LORD’s name and speak no lies. Daughter of Zion is told to sing and rejoice, for the LORD, the King of Israel, is in her midst; He will rejoice over her with gladness and exult over her with singing. He will gather the lame and the outcast and give them praise and honour among all the peoples of the earth.*

1 Woe to the city that is rebellious and defiled, the city of the oppressor![1]

2 She obeys no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD or draw near to her God.

3 Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are wolves at evening that leave nothing until morning.

4 Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men. Her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law.

5 The LORD within her is righteous; He does no wrong. Morning by morning He brings His justice to light, and He does not fail, yet the wrongdoer knows no shame.

6 I have cut off nations; their corner towers are in ruins. I have laid waste their streets, with no one passing through. Their cities are devastated, with no one left, no one living there.

7 I said, “Surely you will fear Me and accept correction.” Then her dwelling would not be cut off for all I have brought on her. But they were all the more eager to make all their deeds corrupt.

8 Therefore wait for Me, declares the LORD, for
the day when I rise up to seize the prey. For I have
decided to gather the nations, to assemble the
kingdoms, and to pour out on them My
indignation, all My burning anger. In the fire of
My jealousy the whole earth will be consumed.[2]

9 Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, so that
all of them may call on the name of the LORD and
serve Him shoulder to shoulder.[3]

10 From beyond the rivers of Cush My
worshippers, My scattered people, will bring Me
offerings.

11 On that day you will not be put to shame for all
the deeds by which you rebelled against Me, for
then I will remove from among you those who
exult in their pride, and you will never again be
haughty on My holy mountain.

12 But I will leave within you a people humble and
lowly, and they will take refuge in the name of the
LORD.

13 The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and
speak no lies; no deceitful tongue will be found in
their mouths. They will graze and lie down, and no
one will make them afraid.

14 Shout for joy, daughter of Zion; raise a cry,
Israel! Rejoice and exult with your whole heart,
daughter of Jerusalem!

15 The LORD has taken away the judgements
against you; He has turned back your enemy. The
King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you will
never again fear harm.

16 On that day it will be said to Jerusalem, “Do not
be afraid, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.

17 The LORD your God is in your midst, a Warrior
who saves. He will take great delight in you; He
will be quiet in His love; He will rejoice over you
with shouts of joy.”[4]

18 I will gather those who grieve for the appointed
festivals; they were from you, and reproach was a
burden on her.[5]

19 At that time I will deal with all who oppress you.
I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I
will turn their shame into praise and fame in every
land.

20 In that time I will lead you home; in that time I
will gather you in. For I will make you renowned
and praised among every people on earth, when I
bring back your captives and you see it with your
own eyes, says the LORD.

**1** The city is Jerusalem. ‘Oppressor’ (yonah) also means ‘dove’, perhaps a bitter play on the word.

**2** ‘To seize the prey’ follows the Hebrew; the Greek has ‘as a witness’.

**3** A reversal of Babel, where the one language was confused (Genesis 11:1–9). ‘Shoulder to shoulder’ is literally ‘with one shoulder’.

**4** ‘He will be quiet in His love’ may mean His love needs no words; the Greek has ‘He will renew you in His love’.

**5** The Hebrew of this verse is uncertain.