

## ZEPHANIAH

David C F Wright DD

The name Zephaniah means God has hidden (as in treasures) or God protects.

His father was Cush, an African, and the lengthy genealogy may have been recorded to overcome any opposition to his African father.

In turn, Cush was the son of Gedaliah. Was this same Gedaliah who Nebuchadnezzar appointed governor of Judah after the Babylonian invasion and who saved Jeremiah's life?

The Gedaliah in this genealogy was the son of Amariah who was a son of King Hezekiah who reigned from about 715 - 686.

God spoke to Zephaniah in the days of good king Josiah whose reforms began in 622BC when the king was about 18. His father, Amnon, was assassinated and his father before him was Manasseh who reigned for 55 years and was evil and subservient to the Assyrians. Manasseh had pagan temples and the Jerusalem temple staged pagan rites, ' sacred prostitution ', divination, magic and human sacrifices (2 Kings 21 1-16, 23 4-7).

As with other minor prophets, such as Habakkuk, there is judgment to be poured out on Judah and its capital of Jerusalem, and a prophecy of the day of the Lord, a call for repentance, oracles, or woes against five nations (there are five woes in Habakkuk) and God's promise of restoration of the Jews.

After an introduction to the prophet, we have in chapter 1 verses 2 to 4 details of the dreadful calamity to befall Judah. The whole land would be consumed, man and beast would perish and this disaster would kill fish and birds of the air. The Chemarim, that is to say the idolatrous priests named in 2 Kings 23. 5 and Hosea 10.5, who were stumbling blocks, would perish. It must be remembered that God hates idolatry and those who practise or allow it and this was being practised in the land He gave to His people. Such evil, and other evils, were conducted even in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Kelly refers to two types of Jews at this time....those who, on the one hand, honoured God to some extent and then abandoned Him and those who never enquired of Him. The idolaters honoured their pagan gods even from the house tops publicly and shamelessly. This allegiance to false gods included the god Malcam, otherwise known as Moloch, the god of atrocious cruelty to which children were sacrificed in the fire. Baal was the god of fertility worshipped by the Canaanites and they were decadent and immoral hence many of the Temple prostitutes.

The day of the Lord in verse 7 is used to indicate any day of God's judgment and punishment. The reference to silence speaks of the shock, awe and wonder at what God will do. He speaks of the preparation of a sacrifice and invited guests. Usually, Judah is described as the victim and the guests are the invaders (1 Samuel 9.22) but here it seems as if the invaders are honoured whereas the Jews are the guests ready to be slaughtered. No one is exempt from God's judgment whether they are royalty or the eccentrics who dress in weird ways. There are those who intrude upon their respective master's houses with both deceit and violence and they will also be punished.

Violence is not God's choice. Judgment is God's strange work but it is always just (John 5.30). Remember Lamentations 3.33, The Lord does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

There will be weeping and wailing from Jerusalem's fish gate says verse 10. The merchants and traders will be cut down even those who trade in silver.

The day of the Lord is a day of wrath.

In verse 12, we have an example of complacency. God will search Jerusalem and find those who are complacent and who say, God will not do good or evil.

Does this exist in our churches today? One cannot generalise but many churches have introduced worldly methods. Others are complacent and I am fully aware of some churches who do not honour the Lord Jesus but believe that they have to entertain both God and their congregations with pop music, dancing by pretty young things, acted sketches, football matches for their men and some even have pub quizzes and people talking about themselves giving testimonies and often relishing in recounting their past life of crime and drugs. What God has forgiven must not be brought up again. We are called upon to evangelise not to entertain and to preach Christ and not ourselves. Worship is not a variety show.

Verse 13 tells us of those who build houses and create vineyards but that these things will become a booty to the invaders. There are many who are materialistic and value their possessions about all else. The following verse states that the great day of the Lord is near and this is due to God's anger at the evil committed, and still being committed by His people. There would be cosmic upheavals, death and destruction and emotional crisis and human loss of control with the terrors of the invasion and the greatest calamity. It would be a day, or time, of darkness and desolation and utter gloominess and depression. The trumpet of verse 16 is an alarm, a warning against Judah's fortresses as well as the people and the land itself. Mankind would stumble like blind men and cry bitterly and all this suffering is because they have sinned against the Lord and the vastness and despicably of their evil ways has gone on for a long time and the Lord had to act (verse 17). The land would be full of rotting corpses. The people would not be able to escape or buy their way out of the horrendous devastation that was to come.

Jealousy is often given a bad name but it is a means of protection for those who are loved. God will not tolerate a rival. After all, He has loved His people with an everlasting love, protected them and cared for them. His love for them was their greatest blessing and yet they threw it all away to pursue their own ways in violation of God's will and slapping God in the face with their betrayal and apostasy.

The coming judgment would not happen had the Jews been true to God. They continually grieved Him and mostly disowned Him and counted all His goodness and mercy of no value. The people were utterly corrupt. God calls them shameless.

I wish to briefly refer to the day of the Lord at the end times which centres on His Second Coming. It begins with the rapture of the church as set out in 1 Thessalonians 4.17ff, when the trumpet shall sound and all the dead in Christ will rise and those who are alive will be caught up as well to meet the Lord in the air. Then, following a period of seven years which is called the great tribulation, details of which begin in Revelation chapter 4 in which fantastic calamities will take place and about 75% of the world's population will perish. After which, the Lord will come to the earth as set out in Revelation 19 to fight against the nations of the world who have attacked His beloved people. We read in Zechariah 14 that all nations will gather against Jerusalem to battle and the city will be taken, houses rifled, the women raped and 50% of the Jews will be taken captive. This is when the Lord will go forth to fight the oppressors. His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives which will cleave in two. It will be a day that is not dark nor light. The victory of the Lord will set up His millennial reign in Jerusalem and during that thousand years Satan will be bound (Revelation 20.2). While Satan is bound there will be universal peace. Thereafter, he will be loosed (Revelation 20.7) and cast into the everlasting fire and, thereafter, the eternal state will be established as stated in Revelation 21.

Chapter 2 begins with God calling on Judah to repent of their shamelessness and evil ways and indicates that He does not desire them because of their iniquity. The implication is that God's righteous anger

may dissipate since the verse states Seek ye the Lord as a parallel to seek righteousness which means to know the character and will of God and to recall His mighty acts, love and mercy as well as his longsuffering. The Jews should seek meekness, and that is not weakness as some assert. Such humility is a parallel to righteousness.

There follows five woes, five Divine condemnations against the Philistines (verse 5ff), Moab and Ammon (verses 8 to 11), Ethiopia (12), Assyria (verse 13ff) and Judah (chapter 3 verse 1 to 7).

The Philistines and their main cities of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron will be forsaken and become desolate and rooted up. All will be punished including the Cherethites who were people from Crete. Utter destruction will come upon them.

The word Palestine comes from the word Philistia and the Philistines are often described as Israel's most dangerous enemy but whatever this enemy will do, God promises to restore His people.

Moab is the nation thought to be the descendants of Lot and Ammon were also antagonists of Israel who made themselves great and were very proud and constantly ridiculed the people of God and, as a consequence, they would be like Sodom and Gomorrah but would eventually acknowledge God.

Ethiopia may be a reference to Egypt since Egypt had been Ethiopian. The Lord would slay this nation.

Assyria was the enemy of Israel. In 722 BC Assyria invaded Israel. Assyria and its capital Nineveh will be destroyed and be as a wilderness inhabited only by animals and birds. The country will be desolate and a byword to all who see it and its desolation.

All the enemies of God will perish. Kelly writes, The great charge of the Lord is to fully put down all idolatry. This is why God punished Solomon severely whose evil ways and idolatry caused the one kingdom of Jews to split into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Chapter 3 begins with God's complaint about Judah and Jerusalem whose people are rebellious and the holy city is now portrayed as the capital of paganism. She had to be punished by extreme and adverse circumstances sent to chasten them. Her prophets made prophecies of comfort which were popular and the people were faithless, fickle, full of deceit and involved in idolatry. The priests committed sacrilege and violated the Divine will.

But in all this, there is the certainty that God is just. He cannot sin and His power does not fade. The Lord has cut off His people since the unjust Jews had no shame. The fall of other nations and empires was his doing although the fates of other nations made the Jews complacent. The Lord tells the Jews to wait for all this to happen and often the word wait refers to piety and sincerity as in Isaiah where it reads, Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Any Jews who remained true to the Lord, known as the remnant, had to remain steadfast in the time of God's anger.

Verse 7 reminds us that the Lord is to be feared. We are not talking here of being terrorised by God but respecting and honouring the Lord and, of course, He is worthy to be honoured. Although correction for the Jews was despised, it was necessary.

Verse 8 onwards instructs waiting on the lord which we have already mentioned and all the oppressing nations will have God's wrath poured upon them and they will be converted which means to be taken away from prayer to pagan deities who have been no help to them. The reference to pure speech speaks of new dawning, a fresh start when people call upon the Lord and recognise the need for moral character and being enabled to serve the Lord. The scattering of people will be reversed from the regions known to the prophet and these, the Lord's dispersed people will acknowledge His deity and worship Him.

Pride has been reduced to shame. The previous arrogance, self-assertion and paganism of God's people now will reveal itself in humility in unspeakable joy (verse 14) not only for God's people but for the Lord Himself (verse 17). The acknowledgement of sin and its shame (chapter 2.1) results in God's exaltation (verse 20). Those who do no iniquity, nor speak unwisely or practise deceit will have no one to make them afraid.

After all the judgments and hardships, God will establish His people again which proves that He still loves them.

(2138)

---

© COPYRIGHT David C F Wright DD 1976. No part of this article, however small, may be reproduced or stored in any system whatsoever. It must not be copied, altered or downloaded. Failure to comply is illegal being theft and contrary to International Copyright law and will render any offender liable to action at law.