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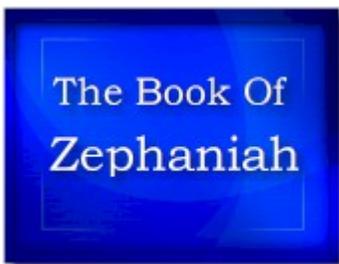
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# The Book of Zephaniah

by Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., August 1997

Transcribed and edited by David Sielaff, November 2013

Read the accompanying [Newsletter for November 2013](#)



**The prophecy by Zephaniah is a companion to that of Habakkuk. Both prophets lived at the end of the Assyrian period and the beginning of the Neo-Babylonian Empire later led by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. In fact, the Assyrians were still in power when they gave their prophecies. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC according to the normal chronological system that historians use today.<sup>1</sup>**

We can begin to comprehend some prophetic teachings when we get the time period in mind. Then we are able to see the theme of the prophecy itself and know the characters on the prophetic stage. We know the time, and the individuals who will cause punishment and chastisement upon Judah at that time, who they were and who they will be. In this case, they were the Babylonians (the Chaldeans) from the area of Cush between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates.

In Zephaniah 2:12 when it speaks about the Ethiopians, it means the Cushites of Mesopotamia, referring to the land of Mesopotamia.<sup>2</sup> If you do not differentiate the prophecies relative to geography of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, you will go astray. The word “**Ethiopian**” in verse 2:12 talks about where the Cushites had their origin, the land of Mesopotamia. (In Cuneiform tablets written by people who lived in that area, they called

<sup>1</sup> Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned frequently in the last part of the Book of Second Kings. His armies destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon in about 586 BC on our common chronology and took the people of Judah into exile. The precise year of 586 BC may need adjustment, about 30 years or so. Some of those dates are not exactly accurate, but they are close enough for us to understand basic teachings of the prophecies. Jeremiah, who wrote the Book of Lamentations, was also the contemporary of Zephaniah and Habakkuk. Lamentations was a prior description, a prophecy, of the destruction of the Temple. He designed Lamentations to be read at the anniversary of that destruction. *ELM*

<sup>2</sup> “**You Ethiopians** [Cushites] **also, you shall be slain by my sword**” (Zephaniah 2:12). Though they were not Cushites by race by this time in history, nevertheless, they came from the area first settled by Cush. The people of Cush moved out of that region. Many went through Arabia, south, and east to the other side of the Persian Gulf. The southern ones went into Africa and became the Ethiopians, a dark skinned people. Others went east and became the Hindu Cush, a dark skinned people with different racial characteristics from the people of Africa. Both were known in early times as the two Cushites. The Greeks called them Ethiopians. The word Ethiopia means “black skinned.” The Cushites were named Ethiopians by the Greeks because of the color of their black skin. Actually, the Cushites are named because they came from where Cush the son of Ham originally settled. *ELM*

themselves in ancient times the Cassites, after these Cushites.) We have clear evidence of what was intended in both the prophecies of Habakkuk (which spoke about the Cushites, or Cushan), and in Zephaniah where the King James translators wrote “Ethiopia,” when the Hebrew meant “Cush,” the people of Mesopotamia. It means the Chaldean peoples living in the original area of Cush.

### *The Time of Zephaniah’s Prophecy*

When was the prophecy given? It was at the commencement of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and at the end of the Assyrian period. A little later Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Habakkuk spoke (and wrote) about these Babylonians and the powerful armies that they had under Nebuchadnezzar. We also have the prophecies of Daniel which deal with Nebuchadnezzar in a very personal way, and how all the kingdoms of the world would be known as “Babylon,” inheriting the Babylonian system of government.

When you come to the Book of Revelation written some 700 years later, we find that the whole system that exists at the end time is the Babylonian system of government.

Zephaniah is talking about the beginning of that government of Nebuchadnezzar, written just *before* his time. Yet the people involved here are the Cassites, or the Chaldeans, from Mesopotamia with their capital city at Babylon. A few years later they destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, and took the people of Judah captive for at least 70 years. These prophecies are relevant chronologically. They are also relevant from a prophetic point of view, and deal with the very end of the age as depicted in the Book of Revelation.

The Book of Revelation is just a reflection or a restatement about a period of 7 years in the future as stated in the Book of Daniel. Revelation garners references from all areas of the Bible, from Isaiah, from Ezekiel, from the Minor Prophets, from Psalms and even some from Moses’ writings, all types of information about various nations. It puts them into 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 woes or plagues, into a type of chronological scheme so you can understand what will happen at the “**end of the age.**” The Book of Zephaniah refers to this period of time mentioned in the Book of Revelation. In the middle of the 7 years some events will take place that are mentioned in the books of Revelation and Daniel.

Once you get Daniel and the Book of Revelation firmly in mind chronologically, then you can flesh it out with New Testament teachings by the apostle Paul, Old Testament teachings of Zephaniah, and the previous prophet Habakkuk, and others dealing with end-time events. Habakkuk’s prophecy was about the Chaldeans rising and conquering the entire world. It is also a prophecy of a single individual who will lead the Chaldean armies. The Chaldeans, plural, will do the job but an individual will lead them. The apostle Paul speaks about a Man of Sin to come in the future, calling him the Son of Perdition, the Wicked One. In the Book of Revelation John calls him the Beast, in the epistle of First John he calls him the Antichrist, a singular individual who will be a false Christ, and lead Gentile forces as well as Israelite forces at the end of the age.

So “Zephaniah and Modern Times”<sup>3</sup> is an apt description for this prophecy. It is for the future period called the “**Day of the Lord**” (the “**Day of YHWH**”).<sup>4</sup> To know when the Day of YHWH actually commences,

Table 1: Structure of the Twelve Prophets

1	<i>Assyrian Period</i>	}	Hosea
2			Joel
3			Amos
4			Obadiah
5			Jonah
6			Micah
7			Nahum
8	<i>Babylonian Period</i>	}	Habakkuk
9			ZEPHANIAH
10	<i>Post- Babylonian Period</i>	}	Haggai
11			Zechariah
12			Malachi

<sup>3</sup> “Zephaniah and Modern Times” was the title of Dr. Martin’s original presentation on audiotape. *DWS*

<sup>4</sup> **Editor’s note:** The phrase in the King James Version “Day of the Lord” loses its impact when YHWH is left out of the translation. In the rest of this article I will use “Day of YHWH” whenever the phrase occurs. Also, where Dr. Martin uses “the Lord,” I change it to YHWH. *DWS*

go to the Book of Revelation. It commences with events described at the end of chapter 6, continuing through chapter 7 with the blowing of the 7 trumpets, all the way to the 7 last plagues. That period of time is divided into two halves making a period of 7 years. It is known as the **“Day of YHWH”** or the **“Day of YHWH’s wrath.”**

The Book of Zephaniah is about the **“Day of YHWH.”** The previous prophecy of Habakkuk said that certain peace and security would come to the people of God in the middle of that appointed time period. It will seem to be delayed but it will not be delayed, God says.

The Book of Zephaniah is a companion prophecy to Habakkuk. Put the two together and you can begin then to comprehend what was going on in the minds of those prophets written at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC and in the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, in the Neo-Babylonian period. The chief king to come up a few years after these prophecies was Nebuchadnezzar. The most powerful people at the time were the Chaldeans with Babylon as their capital, sometimes called the people of Cush. “Babylonians” was another name for these people. Zephaniah is 3 chapters long and it begins:

**“The word of YHWH which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah [King Hezekiah], in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.”**

• **Zephaniah 1:1**

Josiah, King of Judah, was a righteous king. He died at 39 years of age when he went to fight the Egyptian army, after God told him not to do so. He was killed in battle at Megiddo (or as we say in the New Testament terms, Armageddon). Zephaniah was written before Josiah died.<sup>5</sup> The prophecies of Armageddon in the Book of Revelation chapter 16 fit in to this scheme here, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

God says, **“I will utterly consume all things off the land, says YHWH.”** The word land is *'erets* in Hebrew. It can mean the entire earth, or it can mean a particular land under discussion. In Zephaniah the land of Judah is being discussed. God will put a consummation upon that land and it will be in the superlative sense. **“I will utterly consume all things from off the land, says YHWH”** (Zephaniah 1:2).

When will He do this? In the Day of YHWH. The Day of YHWH was not back in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, nor when the Romans captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple some 2000 years ago. The Day of YHWH is on the horizon to us, not far away as the time approaches. When the Day of YHWH is introduced, these prophecies will be more understandable to us.

We can begin to see from these prophecies just what will happen prior to and during the Day of YHWH.

**“I will utterly consume all things off the land, says YHWH. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of heaven, the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land,’ says YHWH. ‘I will also stretch out my hand upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”**

• **Zephaniah 1:2–4**

Zephaniah is using events contemporary to his time to give us some information to future end-time events. We need to learn how Zephaniah understands such statements. Here is why God says He will punish **“... Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off the remnants of Baal from this place [in other words, false gods]. And the name of the Chemarims with the priests””** (Zephaniah 1:4).

Who are the Chemarim, in the plural? Chemar means “dark clothed people.” The commentaries and the Jews have long known what it means. It is a proper name for a group of people who go around in black garb. Many of the priests, particularly the Babylonians, wore black garments.<sup>6</sup> I have a quote from the

<sup>5</sup> Note that Zephaniah was born into the Davidic royal lineage from King Hezekiah of Judah, the great grandfather of Josiah. It is unlikely Zephaniah ever had any claim to the throne. *DWS*

<sup>6</sup> The other two places this word occurs are in Hosea 10:5 where Chemarim is used to denote the idolatrous priests of the northern Israelite kingdom of Samaria, and it occurs in 2 Kings 23:5:

*Cyclopedia of Biblical and Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, volume 2, page 229, article “The Chemarim”: **“the priest who officiated in the service of the golden calves at Dan and at Bethel were called Chemarim in the Bible.”** Black robed priests. This was in northern Israel,. Still quoting the *Cyclopedia*:

**“Even to this day the Jews retained the word and they apply it in the region, to Christian ministers on account of their black robes that they wear.”**<sup>7</sup>

Here were people taking over the black customs of the pagans and doing it in ancient Israel, in Dan and Bethel in northern Israel. God through the prophet Zephaniah says, “I’m getting tired of these people going after the traditions of Baal and dressing like priests of Baal.” Dressed in black garments, they performed pagan idolatrous customs. We have as much paganism in our traditions today as the ancient Jews did in theirs. Zephaniah’s words had relevance at that time but it also has to do with the Day of YHWH coming in the future.<sup>8</sup>

### **Human Sacrifice?**

God was upset. Why was He bringing judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem? It was not only because of the Chemarims and the remnants of Baal, but He says,

**“And them that worship the host of heaven [the stars], upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear YHWH, and that swear by Malcham.”**

• **Zephaniah 1:5**

Malcham was the name of a very powerful angel. The name meant messenger. It was a god of the Ammonites, and they were swearing by him as well as by YHWH.<sup>9</sup>

**“And them that are turned back [away from] from YHWH; and those [the ones God is against] that have not sought YHWH, nor enquired for him. Hold your peace at the presence of YHWH God [be silent]: for the day of YHWH is at hand ...”**

• **Zephaniah 1:6–7**

If the Day of YHWH is **“at hand,”** what will God do? Here is what Zephaniah says, speaking in the name of YHWH [finishing verse 7]: **“... for YHWH has prepared a sacrifice, and he has bid for his guests [to come]”** (Zephaniah 1:7).

A sacrifice was something beautiful in ancient times. When you brought a sacrifice to YHWH in the Temple, a great ceremony was associated with it depending on the type of sacrifice. If it was a burnt offering, or a peace offering, you would eat part of the meal (if you were an Israelite), God had part of the meal, and part was given to the priest. You would all have a good time with the sacrifice.

**“And he put down the idolatrous priests [Chemarim], whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven.”**

DWS

<sup>7</sup> I [Dr. Martin] am a Christian minister, and I have been for over 40 years. In the early days of my ministry, I would normally wear a black suit to preach. Why did I wear a black suit? It was customary to do so. Where did we get black suits in the Protestant environment? We got it from the black robes that came from the Roman Catholic traditions or the Greek Orthodox traditions. Most priests today dress in black. Special black clothes at a religious service is just carrying on with the old Chemarims. The Bible says God’s priests in the temple at Jerusalem were to wear white garments. *ELM*

<sup>8</sup> Those in Israel in the future (if not now already) will again worship Baal and Malcham as in the time of King Josiah and Zephaniah. And why not? Solomon built a high place for his wives so they could worship their gods (1 Kings 11:7). God punished Solomon for these sins (1 Kings 11:9–11). *DWS*

<sup>9</sup> See Dr. Martin’s excellent article [“Lingering Idolatry in the Temple of God”](#) where the god Malcham (also called Moloch or Milcam) is discussed. King Solomon of Israel was the first king to allow the beginnings of Milcom worship in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:5) for which he was punished by God (1 Kings 11:33). God was angry at other Judean kings, particularly King Manasseh. Religious reform toward YHWH, Israel’s God, was the King Josiah’s object (2 Kings chapters 22 and 23, see 23:9–13). *DWS*

God has invited His guests. He will have a sacrifice, a nice meal with all these people. Read the rest and you will find out what type of sacrifice He will have. The sacrifice will not be what you thought might occur in the Temple at Jerusalem because He just said the people of Jerusalem were going after Baal, dressing in black garments, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Going on He says they are turning from YHWH. They call his name, they use him, but they are turning from Him. So I will prepare a sacrifice, He says, and I have bidden the guests to come. Verse 8,

**“And it shall come to pass in the Day of YHWH’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.”**

• **Zephaniah 1:8**

Foreign apparel, black religious clothes, and not dressing as God says. God disapproves of black garb. He is very interested in outward appearance, the way an individual looks. A person who has an appearance of a heathen, that person will act like a heathen as far as God is concerned. He says to those people, I invite them to a sacrifice, but it shall be the Day of YHWH and the sacrifice will be against the princes of Israel.

### ***Judgment and the Day of YHWH***

When we read Zephaniah we see a prophecy given within the context of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, but it really has to do with the Day of YHWH, the Day in the future when God will intervene directly in human affairs, the Day that the books of Revelation and Daniel talk about at the end of the age. Zephaniah is giving a prophecy from God principally to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. He will use kings from outside that nation, as we will see in chapters 2 and 3.

Zephaniah in the first chapter sets a theme and he shows a judgment and a correction that He will bring upon His own people because they have gone over to the teachings of Baal. They dress like Chemarim in black garments. Most religious people today, especially those in authority, whether they are Jews, Christians, or Muslims, dress in black today.<sup>11</sup> God says in His Temple the priests should dress in white, exactly the opposite of what we think is correct.

I long ago gave up wearing a black garment when I do a religious service. That goes with the territory of paganism in the ancient past. I read these scriptures in the Book of Zephaniah and I understand what they mean. I hope you understand what they mean, because they are clear and plain. It shows God’s opinion on what people do in religious services. What difference does it make? It makes no difference if you are ignorant about such things. What we should do is to find out God’s opinion on these things, read His prophecies, and find out if we practice paganism and Baalism in any of our religious services today.

He says He will **“stretch out my hand upon Judah and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem”** (Zephaniah 1:4), His own people. Why? It was because they practiced the ways of Baal: the Chemarims with their black robed priests, people performing heathen rites, worship of the host of heaven with their stars and occult symbols. They are turning their backs on God, He says, I will prepare a sacrifice for them and I shall invite guests, but it will be a sacrifice of judgment. It will be a sacrifice of chastisement, **“the Day of YHWH’s sacrifice,”** verse 8. Why? It was to punish the princes and the people of Judah, God’s own people, and even to punish the king’s children. Why? It was because the king’s children, the princes, were leading the common people astray.

<sup>10</sup> You see Jewish Rabbis today dressing in black garments. You do not see them in white garments. You might say that is a minor point. It may be a minor point to you and me but it is a major issue to God. He says I do not want these people dressing like Chemarims, in black garments. They are deceiving people. *ELM*

<sup>11</sup> Religious authorities can often be identified by their clothing, which designates their authority just as a badge identifies a law enforcement officer, unique headgear identifies a firefighter, a rank insignia identifies the military, or certain tattoos identify street gang members. Religious buildings have identifiers on their outside, doorways, and inside with pagan symbols. *DWS*

He says, **“All such that are clothed with strange [foreign] apparel”** (Zephaniah 1:8). That means strange garments unlike those Jerusalem Temple priests normally wear. When you dress in a garment coming from a different culture or religious environment, you will act like those people act.

**“In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on [or over] the threshold, which fill their masters’ house with violence and deceit.”**

• **Zephaniah 1:9**

What does he mean, **“leap over the threshold”**? It was a Philistine superstition. When the Philistines would come to the temple of Dagon, their god, to worship they would jump over the threshold because they did not want to step on a crack that was there. Their reason for doing this is in 1 Samuel 5:1–5.<sup>12</sup>

Zephaniah shows that in their religious services that they were practicing pagan rituals and acts which in themselves, you would think mean little, but they are physical gestures, mimicking the pagans. You see them all over in our churches today. We have steeples on our churches to identify where the church is. God does not like high towers. What did He do with people after the flood when they built a tower that reached up to heaven? He stopped it from being completed (Genesis chapter 11). We adopt pagan traditions everywhere. If I see a black cat go in front of me, I deliberately cross its path, because I just know it has no significance. If I see a number like 666, it makes no difference to me.<sup>13</sup>

These superstitions are just ramifications of paganism, but if you participate in them, you are in the middle of paganism, of Baalism. The people were led by the king’s princes, and by others. King Josiah of Judah himself was righteous, but the king’s children were not. God says He will begin judging them. Nebuchadnezzar later took some of those very princes captive because of the sins and evils they committed in ancient Judah.<sup>14</sup> Verse 10,

**“And it shall come to pass in that day, says YHWH, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate [on the north side of the city], and an howling from the second [area in Jerusalem], and a great crashing from the hills.”**

• **Zephaniah 1:10**

In the middle of Jerusalem He will bring judgment. Those who come to Jerusalem will be cut down.

<sup>12</sup> One reason was the memory of this event in 1 Samuel 5:5:

**“Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon’s house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.”**

DWS

Many people do superstitious acts when they enter a church building, like “knocking on wood.” In religious services there are all types of superstitious acts that people have done and do today, things you do not find in the Bible but which have a pagan origin that do not conform to the ways of God. *ELM*

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 7, **“The Secret of the Number 666”** from Dr. Martin’s book, *101 Bible Secrets that Christians Do Not Know*, available free online and for purchase. *DWS*

<sup>14</sup> For a very interesting understanding of the paganism in Christian practice today, see **“The Pagan Images of Christians Today,” “The Anatomy of a Church - Part 1,” “The Anatomy of a Church - Part 2,” “Female Sex Signs in Churches.”** In fact, even the Tabernacle and Temple of God contained pagan imagery. See the article, **“Lingering Idolatry in the Temple of God.”** You will no doubt enjoy reading the truth about the source of ancient paganism in **“The Secret of Ancient Religion Revealed – Part 1,”** and **“The Secret of Ancient Religion Revealed – Part 2.”** Finally, the development of Christian paganism and its historical progression is dealt with in Dr. Martin’s book, *The People that History Forgot*, which can be read online.

See also the excellent book *Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practice*, by Frank Viola and George Barna (Grand Rapids: Tyndale, 2008), which I have mentioned before. It gives an account of pagan practices incorporated into Christian practice, tradition, and symbolism throughout the centuries and today. Frank Viola is a Christian evangelist and George Barna is a retired Christian consultant to churches and denominations. He was the founder of The Barna Group. While I disagree with Viola’s theology presented in his other writings, he is correct on paganism in Christian thought and practice. I am unaware of Barna’s theology. The book should be available at many public and church libraries. Those familiar with Dr. Martin teachings since the 1970s, and that of the (now defunct) denomination he was associated with, both strongly presented information about the paganism in Christianity, 40+ years before Viola and Barna’s 2008 book. *DWS*

**“Howl, you inhabitants of Maktesh [a district in the city of Jerusalem], for all the merchant people are [will be] cut down; all they that bear silver are [will be] cut off. And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles ...”**

• **Zephaniah 1:11–12**

Actually, they did not have candles in those days. That is a King James mistranslation, it means oil lamps. I will search it out with lights, I will go into every little corner. When He finds them God will:

**“... punish the men that are settled on their lees [sitting back, relaxing and not thinking about all these wrong things]: that say in their heart, ‘YHWH will not do good, neither will he do evil.’”**

• **Zephaniah 1:12**

It does not make any difference. I will search them out God says. Notice what happens to them:

**“Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof. The great Day of YHWH is near ...”**

• **Zephaniah 1:13–14**

A destruction from God did happen to ancient Judah, that is true, but these words have ramifications for the end time. This prophecy, as we shall see, has to do with things that never happened in the last part of the 7<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The **“day of YHWH”** is on the horizon.

**“[It] is near. It is near and hastes greatly, even the voice of the Day of YHWH: the mighty men shall cry there bitterly.”**

• **Zephaniah 1:14**

This is the sacrifice God is preparing. Who will be sacrificed on the altar? It will be God’s own people, those who do wrong things deliberately.

In the next chapter the people who are not doing sinful and evil acts will be saved during this time. Those who do sin and evil with pagan gods and say God does not care, they will find out He does care. He goes on to say — and note the evil from God which will occur:

**“That day is a day of wrath,  
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 and alarm [war]  
against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.**

**I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against YHWH: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the Day of YHWH’s wrath.”**

• **Zephaniah 1:15–18**

That Day of YHWH’s wrath starts in Revelation 6:17: **“For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”** In Greek it actually says, it is the **“great day of their wrath,”** meaning the Father and the Son. The 7 trumpets start chapter 7 of the Book of Revelation. The last trumpet is divided into 7 last plagues extending through chapter 16 in the Book of Revelation. The entire section is a 7-year period divided in half, 3½ years on one side when the two witnesses will be there at the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, 3½ years on the other side when the beast and false prophet will be there.

We also find a 7-year period mentioned in the Book of Habakkuk,<sup>15</sup> the contemporary of Zephaniah. In the middle of that period is when Zephaniah says there will be a release, a peace, for the people of God. This Day of YHWH will come.

**“... but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His [God’s] jealousy for he shall make you even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.”**

• **Zephaniah 1:18**

That is referring to the disobedient **“in the land.”** It concerns those of Judah and Jerusalem. He is talking about His own people.

We come to chapter 2. Verses 1–3 will happen in the Day of YHWH, future to us today. It says in these verses that the first chapter of Zephaniah, which we just went through, is a decree from God. It is a judgment from God. You know what a decree is? It is like an ordinance, a commandment. The decree has been written. It says in chapter 2 verse 1:

**“Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired ...”**

• **Zephaniah 2:1**

Who is this **“nation not desired”** by the people of Jerusalem and Judah, who are the king’s sons and the princes? The **“nation not desired”** are the lowly of mind, the worshippers of the true God.

**“Gather yourselves together ...,**

**before the decree bring forth** [before this decree from the first chapter starts]

**before the day pass as the chaff,**

**before the fierce anger of YHWH come upon you,**

**before the day of YHWH’s anger come upon you.**

[1] **Seek you YHWH** [before the Day comes], **all you meek of the earth** [the land of Judah] **which have wrought his [God’s] judgment;** [2] **seek righteousness,** [3] **seek meekness; it may be you shall be hid in the Day of YHWH’s anger.”**

• **Zephaniah 2:1–3**

It says “may be”; what it means is you will be. You will **“be hid in the Day of YHWH’s anger.”**

That is a commandment of respite, of peace that Habakkuk talked about. You can have peace and security — it did say “may,” it is in the subjunctive. Do you think God will cause chaos on people that do not deserve it? He has never done that before. This judgment pronounced by Zephaniah is upon people who are practicing wrong. He says, you may **“be hid in the Day of YHWH’s anger.”** That is about the nation of Judah.

### ***Next: the Day of YHWH for the Nations***

What about the surrounding nations in the Day of YHWH? From verse 4 through the rest of chapter 2 we are told what will happen to the heathen in the Day of YHWH. This also has never happened in history. But it will happen in that 7-year period in advance of us.

In the last several years we have been hearing about Gaza. That is where the new Palestinian state will begin adjacent to Israel. Look at verse 4. He starts with what will happen to the nations around Judah in the Day of YHWH:

**“Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod** [one of the sea coast cities], **at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up** [all are Philistine cities on the coast]. **Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites!** [= Cretans. The

<sup>15</sup> See Dr. Martin’s presentation [“The Book of Habakkuk”](#) which also deals with the **“Day of YHWH.”** DWS

Philistines originally came from Crete] **the word of YHWH is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy you, that there shall be no inhabitant.**

**And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for YHWH their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.”**

• **Zephaniah 2:4–7**

Jews are at present time in Ashkelon and in Ashdod.<sup>16</sup> But here is a prophecy about these cities being occupied by Philistines, then destroyed. That is the seacoast area of the Philistines. After they are destroyed in the Day of YHWH, the Jews will return to Ashkelon and to Ashdod. They will be **“for the remnant.”** What about other nations around Israel? What about on the east side of Jordan? Moab and Ammon are on that side.

**“I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people [during the Day of YHWH], and magnified themselves against their border.”**

• **Zephaniah 2:8**

They have taken away a land from Judah (and Israel) at this particular time.

**“Therefore as I live,’ says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon 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.”**

• **Zephaniah 2:9**

They will take over Moab and Ammon, but Moab and Ammon right now are not completely desolate. I have been to Ammon many times. It is a nice country. A time is coming in the Day of YHWH when these things will happen. Then Israel will come and take over that land once more.

**“This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of YHWH of hosts.”**

• **Zephaniah 2:10**

This may have happened in the past, but it also will happen in the future, because the Day of YHWH has never occurred in history.

**“YHWH will be terrible unto them: he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him [God] everyone from his place, even all the isles of the heathen.”**

• **Zephaniah 2:11**

They will worship God when this occurs as a result of the end of the Day of YHWH.

Verses 12 to 15 start out by saying in the King James Version, **“You Ethiopians.”** Remember at the beginning of chapter I said the word “Ethiopians” is really Cushites in Hebrew? The Cushan people, the Cassites, the Cushites, first settled and dominated in a sovereign way the first nations after the flood under Nimrod who was from Cush. They were the first world despots. The people who lived in the Cushan area lived between the rivers as it says in Habakkuk 3:7, contemporary with Zephaniah.

You must learn the geography that they knew and apply it to our end time if we want to understand what is being talked of here. The land of Mesopotamia is the topic. Check the commentaries. Then cross out the

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<sup>16</sup> This is still the situation in November 2013. An expanded explanation of the destruction of the east coast of the Mediterranean is given in Dr. Martin’s article, [“The Asteroid Destruction - Its Timing and Purpose”](#) and [“The Destruction of the World in Prophecy.”](#) DWS

word Ethiopia and put down “Cushites,” or if you prefer the Babylonian term, “Cassites.” On cuneiform clay tablets found in Mesopotamia, scholars can read the cuneiform wedge shape writings and get information from them. Those are the people being talked of here in Zephaniah.

The Cassites were a people who lived in Mesopotamia. They are the object of God’s judgment. What will happen to the Cassites? God goes forth from Jerusalem to the coastal areas of the Philistines, then to the east side of Jordan River to the Moabites and the Ammonites. He next reaches the people at the end of the Assyrian Empire who emerged to become the great and powerful Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>17</sup>

These Cassites are the last remnants of Babylon in existence at the end of this age, the 7-year period called the Day of YHWH that Zephaniah presents to us. That is why you need Daniel and Revelation to put the prophecies of the Minor Prophets into proper chronological and prophetic scenarios so that you will comprehend what is going on.

**“You Ethiopians also [Cassites, you people of Mesopotamia], you shall be slain by my sword. And he will stretch out his hand against the north [it is up north], and destroy Assyria [in that area north of Israel]; and will make Nineveh a desolation.”**

• **Zephaniah 2:12–13**

The destruction of Nineveh happened about 10 to 15 years after Zechariah gave his prophecy.

**“... and dry like a wilderness. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations; both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it.”**

• **Zephaniah 2:13–14**

The city of Babylon down in verse 15 is a careless city, a carefree city. It will howl in desolation.

### **Judgment on Zion**

Chapter 3 speaks of Zion; it deals with the judgment upon Judah and the surrounding nations. It has to do with the Day of YHWH to the end of the book, and with “**the remnant of Israel**” (Zephaniah 3:13) which will come out of this holocaust called the Day of YHWH at the end of the age.

It says in chapter 3, “**Woe to her ...**” The city or the individual being spoken of here is not identified at first. As you go on you discover who “she” is in this case. It will be Zion and God is talking about His own city, His new city, His Zion that He will bring to pass. However, the Zion that He has destroyed is called, “**the filthy and polluted,**” the oppressing city, that is what the original Jerusalem was like.<sup>18</sup>

**“She obeyed not the voice;  
she received not correction;  
she trusted not in YHWH,  
she drew not near to her God.**

**Her princes within her are roaring lions;  
her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not at the bones until the morrow.  
Her prophets are light [very frivolous] and treacherous persons:  
her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.**

<sup>17</sup> Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold of a new Babylonian system that would last until the time of the 10 toes in Daniel chapter 2. The 10 toes would be those peoples and their kings who exist at the end of the age. A mountain would emerge, a stone would come down from the mountain, hit the Babylonian image on the 10 toes. That stone would pummel the Babylonian image to powder and the wind would blow it away. It would be no more. That Babylonian image was to last to the end of the age. (The 10 nations are mentioned in the Book of Revelation as well.) This Babylonian image is nothing more than the head of gold represented by Nebuchadnezzar, the Persian period of silver, the Greek period of bronze, and then iron, and finally iron mixed with miry clay. *ELM*

<sup>18</sup> This description of Jerusalem during the Day of YHWH must be incorporated with the information regarding Mystery Babylon, which is Jerusalem. See Dr. Martin’s article “[Mystery Babylon the Great.](#)” *DWS*

**The just YHWH is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning does he bring his judgment to light [for the morning sacrifice], he fails not; but the unjust know no shame.**"

• **Zephaniah 3:2–5**

They are arrogant. God is in the midst of them, yet they **"know no shame."** Then he turns his judgment towards the nations. YHWH says:

**"I have cut off the nations [the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Assyria, the Cushites, the Cassites, Babylon, all have been destroyed]: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none pass by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant [left].**

**I said, 'Surely you will fear me, you will receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early and corrupted all their doings [they still continued].' Therefore wait you upon me, says YHWH, until the day that I rise up to the prey, for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms [to what end?],**

**to pour upon them [the nations and kingdoms] mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy."**

• **Zephaniah 3:6–8**

### **God's Language for Israel**

One further result of the Day of YHWH will be that God will bring **"a pure language"** finally into Israel, a language that God speaks:

**"For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of YHWH, to serve him with one consent."**

• **Zephaniah 3:9**

This language will be perfect, righteous, and good.<sup>19</sup> He will clean up Israel, **"the remnant of Israel"** (verse 13). Though they do iniquity, though they have done spiteful things, though they **"speak lies,"** He nonetheless brings the solemn assembly and a burden upon them. Verse 18: **"I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of you, to whom the reproach of it was a burden"** (Zephaniah 3:18).

**"At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you, for I will make you a name [a very powerful people] and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, says YHWH."**

• **Zephaniah 3:20**

That ends the prophecies of Zephaniah. Even after the nations are destroyed, we find Israel is still not quite right with God. Then He brings a pure language to them and finally they are saved. That is the prophecy of Zephaniah. It is a beautiful thing and it means salvation and redemption in the end.

Ernest L. Martin, 1997  
David Sielaff, November 2013

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<sup>19</sup> I believe Dr. Martin was mistaken on this point of the pure language. Verse 8 talks about the punishment of the nations, while verse 9 follows directly without a change of subject. The Hebrew "peoples," means more than just Israel. It means the nations:

**"For then will I turn to the peoples [plural, meaning *nations*] a pure language [literally, *a pure lip*], that they may all call upon the name of YHWH, to serve him with one consent." (King James Version)**

**"Surely, then, will I turn unto the peoples a lip made pure, — that they all may call on the name of YHWH, may serve him with one consent." (The Rotherham Bible)**

The world will begin to learn a single language, a "pure lip" as Zephaniah says. This is not farfetched. The phrase is used in Genesis chapter 11: The nations will be traumatized from God's punishment and will do as He wishes. Will it be an ancient language or a new language? We cannot know. Resurrection of an ancient spoken language has a precedent with the recovery of Hebrew as a spoken language, a seemingly miraculous process. It is a wonderful true story. See the Wikipedia article "[Revival of the Hebrew language](#)." Will God's "pure lip" language be Hebrew? I do not know. *DWS*

### *Addendum by David Sielaff*<sup>20</sup>

The Book of Zephaniah is the last of the nine smaller “pre-exilic” prophetic books of the Twelve Minor Prophets (see the chart on page 2 above). The last three books of Haggai, Zechariah,<sup>21</sup> and Malachi, each was written for audiences after the Jews were allowed to return to Judea from Babylon. Zephaniah predicts God’s punishment of His people, but then presents hope of the restoration of Judah given in Zephaniah 3:9–20. This information was known and available to the exiles in Babylon as were Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the prophecies of the seven other Minor Prophets, particularly Habakkuk (a companion book to Zephaniah).

This means that the people of Judah were fully informed about God’s requirements and their impending doom for disobedience. This information was available to them before, during, and after the exile. With this in mind, let us look at some structural aspects of the Book of Zephaniah.

After the introduction in verse 1:1, the verses 1:4–6 identify the enemies of YHWH within Judah. Some of their sins are listed. Let me show you another aspect of Zephaniah 1:4–7. The main point is these people turned away from God, and went after other gods, and even things that are not gods:

**“I will also stretch out mine hand  
upon Judah, and  
upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and**

**I will cut off**

[1] **the remnant of Baal from this place, and**

[2] **the name of the Chemarims with the priests;**

[3] **And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and**

[4] **them that worship and that swear by YHWH, and that swear by Malcham;**

[5] **And them that are turned back from YHWH; and**

[6] **those that have not sought YHWH, nor enquired for him.**

**Hold your peace at the presence of the Lord YHWH: for the day of YHWH is at hand: for YHWH has prepared a sacrifice, he has bid his guests.”**

**• Zephaniah 1:4–7**

Most commentators separate verses 2–6 from verse 7, saying they deal with different topics, but after identifying those who are subject to God’s wrath, and why they will receive His punishment, verse 7 naturally follows with the horrific consequences of God’s punishments upon the people and various leaders of Judah. Verse 7 also begins the mentions of the Day of YHWH. Between Zephaniah 1:7 to 3:8 there are at least 12 mentions of the Day of YHWH and/or the day of YHWH’s punishment and anger. Another list of targets of God’s wrath is given in Zephaniah 3:2–5 (presented on pages 10–11 above).

### *David Dorsey, The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*

Below is the outline of the Book of Zephaniah by David Dorsey. I usually agree with his structural outline, second only to Dr. Martin’s, who uses a different method of analysis. I am limited by copyright constraints from showing a more complete structure of Dorsey’s detailed outline. It is important to note that there are substantial correspondences between the major points and corresponding letters (**b** and **b’**, for example) shown below:

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<sup>20</sup> As with the article “[The Book of Habakkuk](#)” I will not include information from Ingram Cobbin’s *The Bible Remembrancer: Containing an Analysis of the Whole Bible* (1848) because there is not much new information. Dr. Martin covers what Cobbin says about the Book of Zephaniah. *DWS*

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Martin shows in “[The Expansion and Portability of Zion](#)” that Jeremiah was the original author of prophecies attached to chapters 9–14 to the Book of Zechariah. This was done by some unidentified editor, likely Ezra the Priest. *DWS*

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- a coming judgment upon the wicked of Jerusalem (1:2–6)
  - b coming judgment of corrupt leaders (*sārim*) and rich of Jerusalem (1:7–13)
  - c YHWH's judgment of all nations: the great and terrible day of YHWH (1:14–18)
    - YHWH will be against all the earth and all the inhabitants (*yōšēbîm*) of the earth
  - d CENTER: call to repentance (2:1–3)
  - c' YHWH's judgment of all nations: oracles against the nations (2:4–15)
    - YHWH will be against all the gods of the earth and the inhabitants (*yōšēbîm*) of the seacoast, etc.
  - b' coming judgment of corrupt political leaders (including *sārim*) & religious leaders of Jerusalem (3:1–7)
  - a' coming restoration of Jerusalem and its fortunes (3:8–20)<sup>22</sup>
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Dorsey makes this point about God's punishment of Judah:

**“Zephaniah begins with an attention-getting announcement of the coming destruction of Judah's idolatrous population (unit 'a'), followed by a more specific prediction of the coming punishment of Judah's corrupt leadership (unit 'b') and, proceeding up the ladder of power, a prediction of the coming punishment of all the nations (unit 'c').”**

• Dorsey, p. 314

### *James Nogalski's Analysis*

Nogalski reads the general pattern of the text of Zephaniah differently than Dorsey's extended outline. Like Dr. Martin, Nogalski also recognizes three intermingled themes in the Book of Zephaniah:

- (1) the Day of YHWH (Zephaniah 1:2–2:3),
- (2) punishment of nations and survival of the remnant of Judah expressed in oracles (2:4–3:8) and
- (3) rejoicing about the restoration of the remnant of Judah (3:9–20).

These three basic themes are well known to commentators.<sup>23</sup>

**“Impending judgment against Jerusalem in Zephaniah, then, assumes the logic of the Kings account, where YHWH announces Jerusalem's destruction because of what happened during the reign of Manasseh (2 Kings 21:10–15; 22:14–17).”**

• Nogalski, p. 716

Manasseh reigned for 55 years (2 Kings 21:1). He performed human sacrifice on at least one of his sons (2 Kings 21:6). Because of him God's sacrifice in Zephaniah 1:8 will begin with the royal family, because they were the perpetrators of evils committed on others. God is paying them their due punishment.<sup>24</sup>

- Verses 1:7   **“Hold the peace [i.e., “Hush!”] ...  
for the day of YHWH is at hand: for YHWH has prepared a sacrifice ...”**
- 8   **“... it shall come to pass in the day of YHWH's sacrifice ...”**
- 9   **“In the same day also will I punish ...”**
- 10   **“And it shall come to pass in that day, ...”**

God's sacrifice separates the evil from the faithful remnant. Nogalski explains God is willing to sacrifice those who are evil from among His own people to teach mankind that He will have no compromise with sin.

**“The day of YHWH in 1:7 refers to a sacrifice and a consecration of guests. The metaphor**

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<sup>22</sup> Quoting from section “35.9 The Book of Zephaniah” in Dorsey, “Chapter 33: Zephaniah ...,” p. 313. *DWS*

<sup>23</sup> James Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah–Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), p. 708. *DWS*

<sup>24</sup> Many of the religious sins Manasseh committed are listed in 2 Kings 21:1–9. God's reaction is in verses 10–15. *DWS*

connotes danger, since both the preceding context and what follows anticipates that Judah is intended as the sacrifice. The identity of the ‘consecrated guests’ [to view the sacrificial ritual] is more difficult to ascertain. Likely candidates include the heavenly host or, more likely, the army who will be doing the slaughter — Babylon.”

• *Nogalski, The Book of the Twelve, p. 718*

In Zephaniah chapter 3, Nogalski notes a chiasmus in verses 14–17 which announce God’s completion and cessation of punishment upon Judah and Jerusalem. This is reflective of Psalm 85. YHWH is presented as both King and Warrior. Nogalski notes that YHWH’s kingship would be familiar to the readers of Ezekiel 10:1–5, 11:22–25, and 43:1–5 where YHWH is shown in glory on a living throne. Ezekiel may have been contemporary with Zephaniah or he may have been commissioned as a prophet shortly after Zephaniah died, and Ezekiel may be expanding on what Zephaniah wrote.<sup>25</sup>

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- a **Rejoice, Zion, YHWH has withdrawn judgment** (3:14–15a)  
 b **King YHWH is in your midst** (3:15b $\alpha$ )  
 c **Do not fear Zion** (3:15b $\beta$ )  
 c’ **“Do not fear!” Jerusalem will be told** (3:16)  
 b’ **Warrior YHWH is in your midst** (3:17a)  
 a’ **YHWH will rejoice over you, Zion** (3:17b)<sup>26</sup>
- 

Isaiah said the remnant people of Israel will say: **“For YHWH is our judge, YHWH is our lawgiver, YHWH is our king; he will save us”** (Isaiah 33:22). Then a new return from exile begins, a new Exodus, a new gathering of the people of Israel and Judah back to the promised land and Jerusalem. God will protect and nurture His people (Zephaniah 3:18–20).

### *Allusions to Genesis in Zephaniah*

Commentators have also recognized obvious references to Genesis in the Book of Zephaniah.

- **First**, Zephaniah 1:2–3 presents a list of God’s future punishments on Judah and Jerusalem which are presented in an order (humanity, beasts, birds, fish) reversing the order of creation events of the earth in Genesis chapter 1. In addition, God’s acts punishing evil also bring to mind the Genesis flood story.
- **Second**, Zephaniah 2:4–15 lists nations around Judah which are slated for punishment and even destruction, nations familiar from Genesis 10:5–11.
- **Third**, there is a specific mention in Zephaniah 2:9. This verse tells of the punishment of Moab and Ammon as being like that of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapters 18–19.
- **Fourth**, some scholars feel that Zephaniah 3:8–10 tells us that God will reverse the situation of the confusion of tongues at Babel and even the dispersal of the nations told Genesis chapter 11.

Dr. Martin understands the giving of a pure language and a future return from exile only applies to Israel, although God will gather the nations to purify them (their armies) of evil.<sup>27</sup> Judgment begins with God’s chosen people, then expands out to the rest of the nations. God rescues the remnant.

David Sielaff

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<sup>25</sup> Nogalski, *Book of the Twelve: Micah–Malachi*, p. 748. DWS

<sup>26</sup> Nogalski, *Book of the Twelve: Micah–Malachi*, p. 748. DWS

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 19 above. Nogalski, *Book of the Twelve: Micah–Malachi*, pp. 697–755. DWS