



A Course

*In*

**ZEPHANIAH,  
HABAKKUK,  
HAGGAI, STUDIES  
IN**

Prepared by the  
Committee on Religious Education  
of the  
**American Bible College**

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Pineland, Florida 33945

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# FORWARD

As you study the Scriptures you will find that it is of the greatest importance to approach the Bible in a reverent attitude of mind, looking upon it as the inspired Word of God, and not just an ordinary piece of literature. If the Bible is studied in the same manner as one studies Shakespeare, Milton or some historical work, it may be found interesting and profitable. But by this approach, the Bible student, persistent though he may be, will never find its rich treasures. The Apostle Paul says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor. 2:14) For the profitable study of the Word of God, the right spiritual attitude is indispensable.

In your studies of the Bible, will you appropriate the riches thereof to your own personal use, or will you read as you would read a book of fiction, a mystery, etc. In order to make full use of the pearls of wisdom contained in the Bible readings, it is suggested you reread them. Go into its wonderful fields of truth; go down into its valleys; climb its mountain peaks of vision; follow its streams of inspiration; enter its halls of learning. Many Bible truths do not appear on the surface; they must be dug up and be brought into the light by toil and effort.

There are various methods of Bible study, such as the topical method, the study of books, the study by chapters, the study of important passages, and the biographical method. In this course we approach the text in the expository-exegetical method. In this way each verse will be interpreted by explaining the major words in their context in order to gain an over-all perspective as well as a contextual understanding.

Although the American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, this method of study allows the writer to occasionally condense a passage in his own paraphrase. This should not be construed to imply that A. B. C. is correcting God's Word.

During this course the student is required to read through the entire Book of Zephaniah ten times.

## APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF THIS BOOK

Although one of the shorter Old Testament books, Zephaniah is most profound in its prophecy of God's coming judgment on Judah, yet emphasizes God's preservation of a remnant. A lifetime of study would be too short to master it. The thoughts are deep, and the student who is not willing to do prolonged and patient thinking ought not to undertake the book. Each phrase and each verse is of value, and to get at the meat of the book it must be carefully broken down and analyzed into its component parts. Each part must be studied for itself and then in its relation to the other parts. Analysis is not enough. We must synthesize, or see the book as a whole.

### *Suggestions for Study*

As we undertake these studies in Zephaniah, our primary effort should be to familiarize ourselves with the text itself. This we may do through careful reading and rereading. Following Dr. James M. Gray in his book, *How to Master the English Bible*, we suggest the following five rules for this reading:

- (1) Read the whole book at one time, ignoring chapter and verse divisions.
- (2) Read it continuously, right through at a single sitting, without break or interruption.
- (3) Read it repeatedly, over and over again; not twice, but ten or fifteen times.
- (4) Read it independently, without consulting other people's interpretations until you have direct contact and immediate acquaintance with the book itself.
- (5) Read it prayerfully, seeking your interpretation from the Holy Spirit who is present in the subject matter and also in the heart of the devout reader.

Reading is our First step, but mere reading is not study. Having read Zephaniah, we must study it carefully and purposefully, closing the book from time to time to summarize our study. We will use for our guide in this study the comments of Doctor Sorenson. Additional books should be consulted where available, and a comparative study made of the different interpretations.

### *Some Values to Be Sought*

Closely connected with our purpose in reading and with the problems that we face are the values that we seek. First, we want a working knowledge of the *content* of the Book of Zephaniah. Then, we want to know its *aim* and *purport*. Finally, we want to lay hold of the message of the book both for its Old Testament and its present day readers. The final test of value will be not how much of the text we have mastered, but how much Christ has mastered our lives through these *Studies in Zephaniah*.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The compiler of this course is using by gracious permission, Zephaniah, in the commentary series, UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE, Ezra, Vol. 36, by David Sorenson. The American Bible College recommends our students purchase the complete set, UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE from Northstar Ministries located at 1820 West Morgan Street, Duluth, MN 55811 or call (218) 726 0209. Dr. Sorenson, as a pastor, seminary professor, church-planter and soul-winner, is an outstanding fundamental Bible scholar who holds to the verbal, plenary, infallible inspiration and preserved Word of God.

This course study will consist mainly of this text book with the inclusion of additional notes from other sources, unless otherwise noted. The scripture texts conform with the King James Version except where the authors are using their own rendering. This should not be construed to imply that the American Bible College is correcting God's Word. The American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, and this method of study allows the writer to accurately present the historical meaning in a relevant, current setting. It is our desire that this study will be enlightening and spiritually rewarding as you understand the Book of Zephaniah. All other references will be footnoted and bracketed.

During this course the student is required to read through the entire Book of Zephaniah ten times.

Respectfully your servant in Christ Jesus,

Dr. Marvin W. Royse

# ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH<sup>1</sup>

I. *Parentage.* — Zephani'ah (Heb. Tsephanyah', זפניה [in the prolonged form Tsephanya'hu, זפניה], 2 Kings 25:18), *hidden of Jehovah* [or *Jeh is darkness*] . . . A prophet of whom we have no information beyond what his book furnishes. In this (Zephaniah 1:1) he is said to have been "the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah," which last is usually regarded as the same with king Hezekiah. If so, he lived B.C. cir. 620. With this agrees the date, of his prophecy there given; namely, in the reign of Josiah. We do not elsewhere, however, read of an such son of Hezekiah as Amariah, and, so far as the record and probability go, Manasseh was his only son.

Contrary to usual custom, the pedigree of the prophet is traced back for four generations "the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah." This formal record of his lineage has led many to suppose that Zephaniah had sprung from a noble stock (Cyril, Pref. ad Zephaniah), and the occurrence of the highest name in the list, which in the Hebrew text is spelled and pointed in the same way as that rendered Hezekiah in the books of Kings and Chronicles, has induced some to identify it with that of the good king Hezekiah, and to pronounce the prophet a cadet of the royal house of Judah. . . .

II. *Date* — It is recorded (ch. 1) that the word of the Lord came to him "in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah." We have reason for supposing that he flourished during the earlier portion of Josiah's reign. In the second chapter (ver. 13-15) he foretells the doom of Nineveh, and the fall of that ancient city happened about the eighteenth year of Josiah. In the commencement of his oracles, also, he denounces various forms of idolatry, and specially the remnant of Baal. The reformation of Josiah began in the twelfth and was completed in the eighteenth year of his reign. So thorough was his extirpation of the idolatrous rites and hierarchy which defiled his kingdom that he burned down the groves, dismissed the priesthood, threw' down the altars, and made dust of the images of Baalim. Zephaniah must have prophesied prior to this religious revolution, while some remains of Baal were yet secreted in the land, or between the twelfth and eighteenth years of the royal reformer.

III. *Contents.* — In ch. 1 the utter desolation of Judaea is predicted as a judgment for idolatry, and neglect of the Lord, the luxury of the princes, and the violence and deceit of their dependents (ver. 3-9). The prosperity, security, and insolence of the people are contrasted with the horrors of the day of wrath; the assaults upon the fenced cities and high towers, and the slaughter of the people (ver. 10-18). Ch. 2 is a call to repentance (ver. 13), with prediction of the ruin of the cities of the Philistines, and the restoration of the house of Judah after the visitation (ver. 4-7). Other enemies of Judah, Moab, Ammon, are threatened with perpetual destruction, Ethiopia with a great slaughter, and Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, with desolation (ver. 8-15). In ch. 3 the prophet addresses Jerusalem, which he reproves sharply for vice and disobedience, the cruelty of the princes and the treachery of the priests, and for their general disregard of warnings and visitations (ver. 1-7). He then concludes with a series of promises, the destruction of the enemies of God's people, the restoration of exiles, the extirpation of the proud and violent, and the permanent peace and blessedness of the poor and afflicted remnant who shall trust in the name of the Lord. These exhortations to rejoicing and exertion are mingled with intimations of a complete manifestation of God's righteousness and love in the restoration of his people (ver. 8-20). It has been disputed what the enemies are with whose desolating inroads he threatens Judah. The ordinary and most probable opinion is that the foes whose period of invasion was "a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities and against the high towers" (ch. 1, 16), were the Chaldeans. . . . The general style of the oracle, and the sweeping vengeance which it menaces against Assyria, Philistia, Ammon, and Cush, as well as against Judah, by some great and unnamed power, point to the Chaldean expedition which, under Nebuchadnezzar, laid Jerusalem waste, and carried to Babylon its enslaved population. The contemporary prophecies of Jeremiah contemplate the musterings, onset, and devastations of the same victorious hosts.

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<sup>1</sup> John McClintock and James Strong, CYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL LITERATURE, EZRA, Vol. 10, pp. 120-257. Hereafter referred to as [MCCLINTOCK].

# INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, one of the best of the kings of Judah. He reigned from 640 BC to 609 BC. His reference to the future destruction of Nineveh (Zephaniah 2:13), which took place in 612 BC, fixes his writing before that event. So the prophet ministered somewhere between 640 and 612 BC. His contemporaries were Nahum, Habakkuk, and the young Jeremiah. Jeremiah's ministry continued beyond the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

In view of his references to Baalism, and the lack of reference to Josiah's reform, most would place his writing before that reform which took place on discovery of the book of the Law in the temple (around 622 BC), although some level of reform had probably already taken place in the first place in order for the book to be discovered.

The political situation in Judah during Josiah's reign was fairly peaceful. Following Assyria's capture of Samaria in 722 BC, the Assyrian Empire first advanced to new heights until it had overstretched itself, and then began to decline, and around one hundred years later Nabopolassar, the first of the Neo-Babylonian kings, (626-605 BC), began his campaign to free Babylonia from their grasp, in alliance with the Medes and Scythians. They were successful and finally destroyed Nineveh in 612 BC (see our commentary on Nahum), by which time the Assyrian empire was on its last legs.

In 605 BC it met its final end at Carchemish in alliance with its old enemy Egypt who feared the rise of Babylonian power. Josiah in fact met his end seeking to prevent the Egyptians from joining the Assyrians.

But the fact that Zephaniah does not target the Babylonians (or the Medes) as the instruments of God's judgment suggests an early date for the prophecy, before they came to prominence.

Josiah, who came to the throne at the age of eight, after his father, King Amon, died, was guided by the godly priest, Hilkiah. His evil grandfather, Manasseh previously had strongly encouraged the worship of the Assyrian gods. Josiah was able eventually to get rid of much of the Assyrian religious practises, partly due to Assyria's growing weakness. (Conquerors usually insisted that their gods were prominently worshipped by subject nations along with their own). He extended Judah's territory north into Naphtali.

But while the Assyrian gods strongly affected temple worship, it was Baal, the Canaanite god, and Melek (Moloch), the Ammonite god (who demanded human sacrifice), who gripped the idolatrous hearts of the people outside Jerusalem, something which the kings had never been able successfully to combat.

It was in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (622 B.C.) that Hilkiah the priest discovered the Law of Moses in the temple, (probably Deuteronomy at least), and when Josiah read it he instituted major reforms throughout Judah. Josiah's reforms were good. He eliminated much of the idolatry in the land and revived the celebration of the Passover, but unfortunately his reforms could not change the hearts of all the people, and when he died they slipped back to their idolatry, as Jeremiah reveals in his earlier prophecies.

So the people to whom Zephaniah ministered had a long history of formal and syncretistic religion behind them without much real commitment to YHWH [Jehovah]. And God brought home to his heart that because of their formal religion and their negligence with regard to God's Law, and their willingness to compromise with idolatry, God would have to chastise and punish them in order to produce a remnant for the furthering of His purposes.

While we may see in what follows a pattern of the judgment to come in the final days, we must take note that Zephaniah specifically relates it to Jerusalem and Judah and the surrounding nations. It is not honouring to the word of God to make it say more than it does in order to support a theory.

Finally we should note that Zephaniah was a member of the royal house [of Judah]. He had influence where others could not reach, and was directly related to those whose misdeeds and misgovernment would bring about what he prophesied. He is, however, not called 'the prophet' (compare Habakkuk 1:1; Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1), and was thus probably not an official prophet.

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<sup>2</sup> Pett, Peter, PETER PETT'S COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE, Introduction to Zephaniah, [www//studyLight.org/commentaries/pet/view](http://www.studyLight.org/commentaries/pet/view). Hereafter referred to as [PETT].

# OUTLINE by Peter Pett

## **I. The Initial Return Of The Exiles And The Building Of The Temple - 538 BC to 516 BC (chapters 1-6).**

- A. As a result of the decree of Cyrus a group of returnees under the leadership of Sheshbazzar make for Jerusalem bearing with them the Temple vessels previously appropriated from the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (chapter 1).
- B. A list of the returnees who accompanied Sheshbazzar and of the treasures they brought with them (chapter 2).
- C. An altar is built in Jerusalem, sacrifices are offered, and the foundations are laid for a new Temple (chapter 3).
- D. Local adversaries prevent the continuation of the Temple, and later prevent the building of the walls of Jerusalem (chapter 4).
- E. Renewed attempts are made to build the Temple which are looked into by Tattenai, governor of Beyond the River who sends a letter to King Darius seeking instructions. Darius finds the decree of Cyrus and commands that the Temple be built with state aid (chapters 5-6).

## **II. The Arrival Of Ezra Along With A Further Batch Of Returnees, And What He Accomplished - 458 BC onwards (chapters 7-10).**

- A. Ezra, a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses sets off for, and arrives at, Jerusalem with another group of returnees, carrying a letter from Artaxerxes authorising his activities, such as the teaching of the Law and the setting up of judges (chapter 7).
- B. Ezra gathers the returnees together, and they are listed, but there are no Levites. Levites and Nethinim are encouraged to join the party which makes for Jerusalem along with the treasures that they have accumulated. They have a safe journey and arrive in Jerusalem, delivering the treasures to the Temple and Artaxerxes letter to the Persian officials (chapter 8).
- E. Ezra deals with the problem of idolatry creeping into Judah through marriage with foreign women and thus saves Judah from the wrath of God (chapters 9-10).

# COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

*Introduction to Zephaniah: The Book of Zephaniah is the ninth in order of the twelve minor prophets. Zephaniah was a descendant of king Hezekiah of Judah and a prophet in the time of king Josiah of Judah. Zephaniah was also a contemporary of Jeremiah. His ministry was during the reign of Josiah. In some ways, like Habakkuk, the Book of Zephaniah is a condensation of the major prophecies of Jeremiah. The Babylonian captivity was impending. Though there had been a superficial revival under Josiah, judgment by God was inevitable. The book also looks into the Day of the Lord.*

*The book is in several divisions: (1) approaching judgment, a figure of the Day of the Lord, 1:1-2:3; (2) judgment on other nations, 2:4-15; (3) the reason for judgment on Judah, 3:1-7; and (4) judgment and blessing in the Day of the Lord, 3:8-20.*

*Overview of Zephaniah 1: After a brief introduction, the coming judgment against Judah is described. The latter portion of the chapter suggests that the immediate judgment against Judah at the hand of the Babylonians was a figure of the greater judgment in the Day of the Lord.*

**1:1 The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.** The precise lineage and time of ministry of Zephaniah are specified. He is identified as the great, great grandson of Hezekiah, king of Judah. (Hizkiah is a variant of the more common name Hezekiah, but both are one and the same.) He thus was descended of one of the most godly kings of Judah. The time of his ministry is specified as during the reign of Josiah. It was under Josiah that a revival came upon Judah, though unfortunately it was only superficial. The main body of the nation of Judah remained steeped in their sin. It was during these dark days that God raised up prophets

such as Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Significant is the first phrase of the chapter, “the word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah.” The source of the prophet’s message is made clear. It came from God. Thus, the inspiration of this small book is introduced in the first phrase thereof.

1:2-3 The prophet wastes no time in getting down to the business at hand. He immediately pronounces the wrath of God against Judah. **I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.** The thought literally is ‘I will remove and consume all things.’ “The land” is the common Hebrew reference to the land of Israel. Zephaniah thus wasted no time in announcing the impending judgment awaiting Judah.

**3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.** The word translated as **consume** (𐤇𐤍𐤏𐤃 *suph* in the Hiphil stem) literally means ‘to make an end.’ God announced that He would soon make an end of man and animals of the land of Judah. Even the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea adjacent to Judah would be consumed. [This, in referring to the ‘Day of the Lord’, describes the land of Judah when in the future the land will be so desolated that even the wildlife in the land will be completely void. In applying this to God’s judgment by the Babylonians.] The “stumblingblocks with the wicked” likely refers to the idols of the wicked in the land of Judah. It should be noted that idolatry is associated with and essentially equated to wickedness. Not only would the wicked of Judah be destroyed or deported, even the righteous would suffer the same fate. This may be to what the reference of man being cut off from the land refers. Certainly Daniel and Ezekiel were righteous, yet they were cut off from the land. In short, God tersely warned that the land of Judah was about to be depopulated, both of Jews and their livestock.

*END OF SAMPLE*