

ZEPHANIAH

- 1) – Written before Josiah's reformation between 630 and 620 BCE. The MT upon which our English translations are based is in very good condition. Zephaniah means “Yahweh protects.” Cushi means “African,” indicating African heritage. “Cush” refers to the upper Nile, i.e. Ethiopia. Moses had an Ethiopian wife. An Ethiopian brought David news of Absalom’s death. There are other references to that country. /// The Hezekiah in 1:1 may be the king of Judah, making Zephaniah the great-grandson of that king. Josiah was, too, so Zephaniah was the king’s second cousin. /// His knowledge of the city, temple rites, plus concern for the people of Jerusalem, labels him as a Jerusalemite. And, for reasons explained by Robert Bennett on p. 661 of the NIB, his ministry is best located in Jerusalem at the very beginning of Josiah’s deuteronomic reform movement. Comprised of nine oracles, marked in the text..
- 2) 1:4-6 – This oracle makes three specific charges against Judah: 1) idolatry, worshiping Baal, a Canaanite fertility god, 2) syncretism, mixing worship of the Lord with worship of “hosts of heaven,” and Milcom, 3) not calling on the Lord. These conditions resulted from 70 years of political and religious subservience by Manasseh and Amon to Assyria. The collapse of Assyria and Josiah’s ascension to the throne allowed a reform movement to begin.
- 3)1:7 – Recalls Habakkuk 2:20: “But the Lord is in his holy temple; silence before him, all the earth.” /// God as high priest is about to offer sinful Judah as sacrifice. The invited guests are the armies of destruction.
- 4) 9 – See 1 Samuel 5:1-5 for the miraculous toppling of Dagon in his temple in Philistia and the superstitious fear of stepping on the temple threshold.
- 5) 1:10 – All four neighborhoods listed are in the northern part of Jerusalem, especially vulnerable to enemy attack.
- 6) 1:12-18 – Zephaniah and his audience would understand that God needed no lights to find the sinners; “lamps” refers to the invading army functioning as the instrument of God’s wrath. /// “Men who thicken on the lees” : new wine was allowed to stand with the dregs to increase color and body, but was drawn off before it could become too syrupy. Zephaniah compares these people who were spoiled by sitting too long on the dregs. /// The cursing of the rich is taken from the ancient futility curses of Deut 28 where an individual denied the benefits of his labor. Vv 14-18. In Latin these vss became one of the most famous hymns in the Middle Ages: "Dies irae, dies illa."
- 7) 2:1 – The Hebrew word translated here as “gather” actually means “collect to burn,” a threat that the nation is in a flammable situation..
- 8)2:3 – Echoes Micah 6:8 (“You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.”) And Amos 5:24: (“Then let justice surge like water and goodness like an unfailing stream.”)
- 9) 2:5 – A marriage metaphor: jilted before marriage, abandoned after marriage, divorced, made barren.
- 10) 2:15 – Parallels Nahum 3:19b – “All who hear the news about you (Nineveh) clap their hands over you.”
- 11) 3:9 – Ecumenicals invoke this verse: See Zeph 14:9 and Mal 1:11. Bennet believes v 10 indicates that the conversion of the nations to Christianity began with the baptism of the

Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39. The eunuch was a Jew. Cornelius and his friends were the *Gentile* converts (Acts 20, note# 27).

12) 3:17b – literally: “He will be silent in his love.”

13) 3:19-20. Present-day Israelis invoke these verses. /// v20 was probably added by a later redactor after the return from exile.