

FLOURISH

March 2026

Zephaniah:

The Day of The LORD

Week 1: Zeph 1:1-2:3	<i>sweep, sweep, sweep</i>
Week 2: Zeph 2:4-3:7	<i>woe, woe, woe</i>
Week 3: Zeph 3:8-3:20	<i>gather, gather, gather</i>

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

2 “I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the Lord.

3 “I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth,” declares the Lord.

4 “I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal

and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests,

5 those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom,

6 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 and consecrated his guests.

8 And on the day of the Lord's sacrifice— “I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire.

9 On that day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold, and those who fill their master's house with violence and fraud.

10 “On that day,” declares the Lord, “a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter, a loud crash from the hills.

11 Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar! For all the traders are no more; all who weigh out silver are cut off.

12 At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent,

those who say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.’

13 Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.”

14 The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there.

15 A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, **16** a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.

17 I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.

18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

2 Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, **2** before the decree takes effect—before the day passes away like chaff—before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord. **3** Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.

⁴For Gaza shall be deserted,
and Ashkelon shall become a desolation;
Ashdod's people shall be driven out at noon,
and Ekron shall be uprooted.

⁵Woe to you inhabitants of the seacoast,
you nation of the Cherethites!
The word of the Lord is against you,
O Canaan, land of the Philistines;
and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left.

⁶And you, O seacoast, shall be pastures,
with meadows for shepherds
and folds for flocks.

⁷The seacoast shall become the possession
of the remnant of the house of Judah,
on which they shall graze,
and in the houses of Ashkelon
they shall lie down at evening.
For the Lord their God will be mindful of them
and restore their fortunes.

⁸"I have heard the taunts of Moab
and the revilings of the Ammonites,
how they have taunted my people
and made boasts against their territory.

⁹Therefore, as I live," declares the Lord of hosts,
the God of Israel,

"Moab shall become like Sodom,
and the Ammonites like Gomorrah,
a land possessed by nettles and salt pits,
and a waste forever.

The remnant of my people shall plunder them,
and the survivors of my nation shall possess them."

¹⁰This shall be their lot in return for their pride,
because they taunted and boasted
against the people of the Lord of hosts.

¹¹The Lord will be awesome against them;
for he will famish all the gods of the earth,
and to him shall bow down,
each in its place,
all the lands of the nations.

¹²You also, O Cushites,
shall be slain by my sword.

¹³And he will stretch out his hand against the
north and destroy Assyria,
and he will make Nineveh a desolation,

a dry waste like the desert.

¹⁴Herds shall lie down in her midst,
all kinds of beasts;
even the owl and the hedgehog
shall lodge in her capitals;
a voice shall hoot in the window;
devastation will be on the threshold;
for her cedar work will be laid bare.

¹⁵This is the exultant city
that lived securely,
that said in her heart,
"I am, and there is no one else."
What a desolation she has become,
a lair for wild beasts!
Everyone who passes by her
hisses and shakes his fist.

3 Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,
the oppressing city!

²She listens to no voice;
she accepts no correction.
She does not trust in the Lord;
she does not draw near to her God.

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

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

⁵The Lord within her is righteous;
he does no injustice;
every morning he shows forth his justice;
each dawn he does not fail;
but the unjust knows no shame.

⁶"I have cut off nations;
their battlements are in ruins;
I have laid waste their streets
so that no one walks in them;
their cities have been made desolate,
without a man, without an inhabitant.

⁷I said, 'Surely you will fear me;
you will accept correction.
Then your dwelling would not be cut off
according to all that I have appointed against you.'

But all the more they were 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 my decision is to gather nations,
 to assemble kingdoms,
 to pour out upon them my indignation,
 all my burning anger;
 for in the fire of my jealousy
 all the earth shall be consumed.

⁹“For at that time I will change the speech of the
 peoples
 to a pure speech,
 that all of them may call upon the name of
 the Lord
 and serve him with one accord.

¹⁰From beyond the rivers of Cush
 my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed
 ones,
 shall bring my offering.

¹¹“On that day you shall not be put to shame
 because of the deeds by which you have
 rebelled against me;
 for then I will remove from your midst
 your proudly exultant ones,
 and you shall no longer be haughty
 in my holy mountain.

¹²But I will leave in your midst
 a people humble and lowly.
 They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord,

¹³ those who are left in Israel;
 they shall do no injustice
 and speak no lies,
 nor shall there be found in their mouth
 a deceitful tongue.
 For they shall graze and lie down,
 and none shall make them afraid.”

¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
 shout, O Israel!
 Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
 O daughter of Jerusalem!

¹⁵The Lord has taken away the judgments
 against you;
 he has cleared away your enemies.
 The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
 you shall never again fear evil.

¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
 “Fear not, O Zion;
 let not your hands grow weak.

¹⁷The Lord your God is in your midst,
 a mighty one who will save;
 he will rejoice over you with gladness;
 he will quiet you by his love;
 he will exult over you with loud singing.

¹⁸I will gather those of you who mourn for the
 festival,
 so that you will no longer suffer reproach.

¹⁹Behold, at that time I will deal
 with all your oppressors.
 And I will save the lame
 and gather the outcast,
 and I will change their shame into praise
 and renown in all the earth.

²⁰At that time I will bring you in,
 at the time when I gather you together;
 for I will make you renowned and praised
 among all the peoples of the earth,
 when I restore your fortunes
 before your eyes,” says the Lord.

1:1-2:3 The day of the LORD of Creation

Sweep, sweep, sweep...

The book of Zephaniah is one prophecy, so while we are splitting it into 3 weeks, some aspects, themes or questions won't really find resolution until we view the whole book. This week's study, and even next week, might leave us with some unanswered questions, and some uncomfortable ideas to just hold onto. Take this opportunity to trust and have faith in God with things we might not understand, and wait for the Holy Spirit to speak wisdom as we examine God's word.

1. What is prophecy? What is its purpose:
 - For the historical audience?
 - For us/as Scripture?

How will we approach this text?

Read Zeph 1:1-2:3

2. Do you recognise this God? Is this God good?
How do you feel about facing this God?

Zephaniah begins with a brief genealogy, naming some ancestors of Zephaniah and Josiah. This is actually the most extensive genealogy in any prophetic scroll!

3. Who are the people mentioned in the genealogy? Why do you think are they mentioned? How does this set the context and expectations for the book?

Zephaniah likely prophesied around 628-621 BC, during King Josiah's reign, recorded in most detail in 2 Chron 34-35. This prophecy likely falls between Josiah's 12th to 18th year of rule (when the king was aged 20-26), after he has begun to purge the high places but before the book of the Law of Moses is found in the temple. King Josiah resembles former king Hezekiah, the reformer who brought down the high places that Judah (and earlier kings) had set up for idol worship. However, there have been a few bad kings since the time of Hezekiah, and Judah has been practicing worship like the nations around them, failing to obey their God.

Zephaniah announces judgement on the corruption, injustice and non-yahwehistic religious practices which are spreading throughout the leaders and people of Judah. At this time, Assyria's influence is weakening, and so all of the nations under Assyria's control (including Judah, since King Ahaz made a covenant with them) are wondering whether it will be Egypt or Babylon who rises up to take over. Interestingly, even though we know that God will use Babylon to bring about judgement at the end of Josiah's reign, Zephaniah never outright says this. His emphasis that *God* will bring judgement, the nation he will use is not the focus.

7. What response does God's just wrath require? (refer to 1:7,11, 2:1,3) Highlight these, we will refer back to them in later weeks
8. What does God promise to do? Highlight the "I will" statements that God makes (again, we will look back on these)

So who is subject to God in this passage? It is all of creation, but there is extra attention and scrutiny on God's people and their religious leaders. They were in a covenant relationship with God, but they failed to uphold their duties and proper worship of YHWH. As a consequence they are going to experience *covenantal malediction*, the covenant curses that they agreed to. The blessings they had enjoyed under the covenant (things like fruitful land, victory in battle, enjoying their God) will be taken away. You can read about these in Deuteronomy 28. Take a look now at Deut 28:20, 25-26, 28-30

9. Certain views on God are under judgement here (look at verses 5, 6 and 12)... Are you ever guilty of seeing God in these ways? How?

There is no indication that God's judgement action can be avoided or turned away, (1:18) apart from a hope of some people perhaps being *hidden*...

Paul's letter to the Colossians lays out what it means to be united with Christ, which is what we are as Christians. In Col 3:3 Paul writes that since we are united with Christ, we died and our life is now *hidden* with Christ in God. When Christ appears again at this return in the last days, the Day of the LORD, we will appear with him in glory.

Read Colossians 3:1-6:

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."

YHWH, Lord of Hosts, God of Israel is the rightful Lord over his creation, with authority to judge

Give thanks that we are hidden from God's judgement in Christ.

2:4-3:7 The day of the LORD of the Nations

Woe, woe, woe...

This section of Zephaniah includes oracles against the nations – that is lands, peoples and empires surrounding Judah at the time. But Zephaniah’s message would not have actually reached them – this prophecy was for the nation of Judah. It will be helpful to keep this in mind as we consider and ask what God intended by telling Judah about his plans for other nations.

Read Zeph 2:4-3:7

1. What is your gut response to this passage?
2. Why are the foreign nations in 2:4-15 judged and destroyed?
3. What happens after their destruction? Who does the land go to? What will it be used for?
4. God makes more “I will” statements in 2:7, 2:11. Highlight them. Compared to the I will statements highlighted last week, what difference do we see here?
5. Why is Jerusalem judged? What is the effect of her inclusion at the end of this section?
6. What explanation does God give for his judgement on Jerusalem in 3:7?

7. How do people respond to God's judgement? ie. did they fear God and accept his correction?

8. In what ways do we fail, or struggle to fear God and accept his correction? Are there specific sins or situations that you notice?

9. What have you found challenging about Zephaniah so far? Have you found any reassurance?

Prophets always bring *both* judgement and hope. As Christians, we must find this balance too – we have security in grace, hope secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus, but we are warned that faith without works is dead (Ja 2:17), and we will be called to give account for our lives (Matt 12:36, Rom 14:12).

Look up these passages

10. Which of these is more difficult for you to grapple with? Pray that God would make you certain of the fullness of this truth, that we need (and are given) hope because of judgement, and that judgement is necessary in the eyes of a Holy God.

YHWH is sovereign over *all* nations, and he keeps his covenant with his chosen people

3:8-20 The Day of the LORD of mercy

Gather, gather, gather!

We left off at 3:7 with God's people hammering the nails into their own coffin – they did not listen to the correction of God but only became more corrupt. Now we will finally see what God will do as he *gathers* people together to lay out both judgement and blessing.

Read Zeph 3:8-20

1. How does God describe the way he will act? What will he get people to do? (re-read verses v8-13) Circle/underline the actions of God

2. What then was the purpose for God's judgement? v8-13

3. Highlight God's instructions and promises in these verses, how do they compare to what we highlighted in week 1?
 - 3:8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20

Through the progression of the scroll, we have seen a revealing of God's character. He has moved from a wrathful, merciless judge, to a merciful judge who restores from ruin.

- "I will" statements in 1:2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 17 highlighted in week 1
 - "I will" statements in 2:7, 11 highlighted in week 2
 - "I will" statements in 3:9, 11, 12, 17, 19, 20
4. Does this mean that God's character changes?

 5. How have God's instructions to *gather* changed throughout the chapter? (3:8, 18-20)

6. Shame is mentioned a few times in Zephaniah, twice in week 2, and twice in today's reading. In 2:1 Judah is called a shameless nation, and in 3:5 declaring the unjust knows no shame – both of these are critiques that Judah *ought* to be ashamed of their corruption.

A change occurs in 3:11 and 3:19 where they will be shameless in a new way. How is this made possible?

7. We see a similar transformation with silence and quietness. Re-read 1:7 and 3:17. What change do you see, and who is the agent of change?

For Judah, we see exactly what God promised occurs at the end of Josiah's reign. They are cut off from the land as Babylon destroys Assyria, and sweeps God's people away into exile for 70 years. But God preserves a remnant in exile, those who sought righteousness and humility, and restores their fortunes when they return to the land under the order of the Persian empire.

However it is not all restored, as neither was the whole earth swept away, and it did not last. It was only about 200 years in the land before God's people were again handed over, this time to Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire.

8. Verse 15 stands out in this text because it uses *past* and *present* tense language, when most of God's other statements refer to what he will do in the *future*. How has God already worked out verse 15 in the lives of Christians?
9. How does knowing God's judgement aims at restoration and purification make you feel?
- when you face judgement yourself?
 - when others question God's judgement (and rebel against it)?

One day we will all face Jesus as our Judge. He has seen all of our failures, all the times we failed to respond to God's correction and instead chose corruption...

But God our King is a mighty one who will save (3:17), and he has taken away the judgements against you (3:15) through his work in Christ. Therefore sing aloud, rejoice and exult with all your heart.

YHWH is the God who promises, judges and reorders *in order* to bring restoration, purification and re-creation to all the earth