

Analysis of Zephaniah

General

Judah had misplaced her loyalty once more and the day of the Lord was upon her. Nothing would deliver her, yet God is faithful to His promises. We catch a glimpse of the glorious worship of His remnant and restored people.

Authorship

This book is one of the few OT books that scholars do not heavily debate. The author is believed to be Zephaniah [1:1]. The unique listing of four previous generations (usually only the father is listed) helps us see Zephaniah's great-great-grandfather was the famous king of Judah, Hezekiah.

Date

The time of composition was during the reign of Josiah [1:1], which was between 640-609 B.C. The book had to have been written before Nineveh fell in 612 B.C [3:13]. Jeremiah primarily refers to the conditions of Judah after Josiah's death, while Zephaniah refers to conditions in Judah before Josiah's reforms begin. Though some scholars believe this book could have been written in the later years of Josiah, it is most likely that it was written in his earlier years, roughly 630 B.C.

Original Audience

Zephaniah's hearers consisted of the people of Judah, the surviving Southern Kingdom. While Zephaniah spoke to the people of Judah, his message was passed on in his writing for all of Israel to repent, seek the Lord, and see His faithfulness.

Key Interpretive Issues

Key issues about Zephaniah are: (1) the timing of Zephaniah's ministry; before or after Josiah's reforms, (2) the identity of the invaders [1:4,10-13; 2:1; 3:1-4], (3) 'the day of the Lord'; is there one or many days and when do they all take place, (4) God's choosing a remnant but how can they be all that is described...'will do no wrong' [3:13].

Summary/Purpose Statement

Zephaniah records the coming day of the Lord. Judah has abandoned her Lord and He will send terrible punishment upon her and her enemies. In spite of her sin, Zephaniah shows God's faithfulness to His nation, Israel. The prophet's message applied for all of Israel to see and fear God's burning anger [3:8], and was a challenge to seek and obey Him [2:3]. The Lord will remove the wicked and preserve a holy remnant [3:12-13]. The Lord will restore His remnant and in His rich mercy He will bless them. Jerusalem is in store for a glorious day [3:16].

Outline of Zephaniah

- I. Nations will be purified through judgment in the day of the Lord. [1:1-3:8]
 - A. Eschatological judgment declared on the earth and nations. [1:1-3]
 - B. Historical judgment deserved on Judah. [1:4-13]
 - C. Eschatological judgment on the nations is described. [1:14-18]
 - D. Historical judgment could have been diverted on Judah. [2:1-3]
 - E. Eschatological and Historical judgments on surrounding nations of Israel is designated. [2:4-15]
 - F. Historical judgment on Jerusalem is determined. [3:1-7]
 - G. Eschatological judgment declared to the nations again. [3:8]
- II. Nations will be purified through the blessing in the day of the Lord. [3:9-20]
 - A. Surviving Gentiles will be purified. [3:9]
 - B. Surviving Jews will be purified. [3:10-20]

Theological Issues

The Day of the Lord: judgment but also restoration. Yahweh is involved with His creation. Eschatological language proclaiming the destruction of all the earth but promises of God's gathering of His own. God's holiness and righteousness working with restoring the humble. The Lord is merciful and faithful to His promises.

Theological Application

The North American church can be much like Judah. We can fall prey to religious practices and become complacent in our prosperity. We can quickly forget the Lord and His Righteousness. When reading Zephaniah, we can be reminded that the Lord calls to us to seek Him, seek righteousness and humility, walk in obedience [2:3]. God will have His day of judgment [1:2-3] but as Christ followers, we can rest in confidence knowing that if we are in Him, we will serve with Him [3:9].