

Zephaniah

The Twelve Minor Prophets · Biblical Prophets

Zephaniah, a descendant of King Hezekiah, prophesied during the reign of Josiah (c. 640-609 BC), likely before the king's reforms.

Note: Zephaniah's genealogy is unusually detailed, tracing four generations back to Hezekiah—likely the righteous king of that name, making Zephaniah of royal blood. His prophecy probably preceded Josiah's reforms (beginning 622 BC), as it condemns idolatrous practices Josiah later abolished. The terrifying description in 1:14-15 inspired the medieval Latin hymn 'Dies Irae' ('Day of Wrath'), attributed to Thomas of Celano (13th century), which became the standard Requiem Mass sequence and profoundly influenced Western literature and music, including works by Mozart, Verdi, and Berlioz.

His message centers on 'the day of the LORD'—that eschatological day of divine judgment that would first fall on Judah and Jerusalem, then extend to surrounding nations, and ultimately encompass all the earth. Zephaniah's description of this day is among Scripture's most terrifying: '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.' The medieval hymn 'Dies Irae' drew upon this passage. Yet Zephaniah's prophecy does not end in darkness. Following judgment comes restoration: God will purify a remnant, gathering the scattered, restoring the humble, and dwelling in Zion's midst. The book's conclusion portrays God rejoicing over His people with singing—a stunning image of divine delight in redeemed humanity.

Key Verses

Zephaniah 1:14-15

The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. 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.

Zephaniah 2:3

Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger.

Zephaniah 3:9

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

Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

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