

Zephaniah and Jeremiah

Commentary for November 1, 2013 — Contemporary Prophets

This month's article is "The Book of Zephaniah" transcribed from a 1997 audiotape by Dr. Ernest L. Martin. Read first the "[November 2013 Newsletter](#)" for background about Zephaniah.

The prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah were contemporaries. Both held their prophetic office during the time of King Josiah of Judah. Read these two introductory passages:

"The word of YHWH 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."

• *Zephaniah 1:1*

"The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of YHWH came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign."

It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month."

• *Jeremiah 1:1-3*

It is interesting to note that Zephaniah was a direct descendant of Hezekiah, his great-great-grandfather. Hezekiah was also the great-grandfather of King Josiah. Verse 1 says "**in the days of Josiah**" but we do not know if those words cover the entire 31 year reign of Josiah or a portion of his reign. Josiah was 8 years old when he began to rule as king.

Jeremiah was not from royalty. His lineage was "**of the priests,**" meaning the Levitical priesthood. His father was Hilkiyah, likely the chief priest who was given "**the Book of the Law**" found in the basement or the archives of the Solomonic Temple being restored at King Josiah's order.

Jeremiah began receiving his prophecies as a young man "**in the thirteenth year of his [Josiah's] reign**" (Jeremiah 1:2). Josiah was 21 years old:

"And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah [then age 26], that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of YHWH, saying, 'Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may sum [do an inventory of] the silver which is brought into the house of YHWH, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people ...'

And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the book of the law in the house of YHWH.' And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. ... And Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king."

• *2 Kings 22:3-4, 8, 10*

The Book of the Law was taken to Huldah the prophetess (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22) who prophesied that God would surely punish Judah for its sins, but not until Josiah died. Being a righteous king and a good man who tried hard to reform Judah's evil religious practices, everyone anticipated God would preserve him so he could finish the reforms and he would live a long time (2 Kings 22:15–20; 2 Chronicles 34:23–28).

King Josiah had the highest accolades possible by the writer of Second Kings:

“And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to YHWH with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.”

• 2 Kings 23:25

Nevertheless, when Josiah died, all the evil, injustice, and unrighteousness that occurred in Judah for generations, particularly during the 55-year evil reign of Manasseh, Josiah's grandfather, God (through Huldah) told Judah He would no longer hold back His punishment. The prophecies of Zephaniah are God's description of the future punishment in his time and in a time future to us:

“Notwithstanding YHWH turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.

And YHWH said, ‘I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.’

• 2 Kings 23:26–27

The prophecies of Jeremiah focus on Judah's punishment. The entire Book of Lamentations is a prophetic song describing the horrors of God's punishment in Jeremiah's time. Jeremiah focuses on the religious aspect of God's punishment and the effects on the people. The Book of Zephaniah describes God's punishment on the wicked from the point of view of a member of royal lineage. Zephaniah's personal story surely would be fascinating, but all we know is what is in three small chapters, and most biographical information is in verse 1:1.

Long before God's punishment happened, Moses told all Israel the consequences of sin, injustice, and unrighteous behavior from individuals and the institutions of the tribal leaders, the priesthood, and later the royal establishment and administration. The consequences of violating Israel's covenant with YHWH were severe. Prophets informed the people and leaders what would happen if the people sinned, but even the prophets became corrupted in the time of the kings. The false prophets became just another corrupt institution like the priesthood, the government, commercial interests, and royalty. By the time of Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Josiah, each of the institutions was corrupt, the people were corrupt, and Zephaniah lists their sins.

Jeremiah's writings and the Books of Kings and Chronicles cannot be read in isolation without the relevant books of the Minor Prophets. The Book of Zephaniah must be included for a total understanding of all relevant prophecies. Enjoy Dr. Martin's article.

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