

# **MINOR PROPHETS – STUDY 5**

## **ZEPHANIAH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Date of writing – 640 – 609 b c during the reign of Josiah who was the last godly king of Judah and also the final revival king of a previous study. The prophets name means Jehovah hides and may refer to the fact that he had been preserved in reigns prior to Josiah for the purpose now to hand. God will always have his messenger at the right moment to deliver his message.

He was a pre-exilic prophet but by the time of his prophesy the ten tribes of Israel were already in captivity and soon the final two tribes of Judah would also be taken. He was prophesying in the closing days of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah. These days were marked by an unchanging God who “had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place” 11 Chron 36 v 15 but in return v 16 says “they mocked the messengers of God and despised his words and misused his prophets until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy”

Zephaniah was contemporary with Habakkuk and Jeremiah. We often think of Jeremiah and his writing of the book of Lamentations as the weeping prophet. It was a day that was marked by weeping despite what seemed like days of revival under Josiah. Any revival was to be only for a short time before the carrying away into captivity.

The genealogy of v 1 is unique amongst the minor prophets. None of the others are traced back for 4 generations. He was also a man of royal excellence as he was a great great grandson of Hizkiah (Hezekiah) again one of the revival kings of Judah.

We can imagine that his message would be rather unpopular – see comments above on messengers being mocked and prophets being misused. He was to warn of coming judgment upon the people of God but they were in the middle of day of revival. We can almost hear the comment “what does he think he is speaking about”. But the sovereign God makes no mistake with his timing.

### **MESSAGE**

We could entitle our study from **Judgment to Joy**. The book begins with 6 x “I will” and ends with 6 x “I will”. The first 6 are very much associated with judgment. V 2 “utterly consume” v 3 “consume” x 2, “cut off” v 3 + v 4, “stretch out mine hand upon Judah” v 4. The last speak of days of joy 3 v 18 “gather” v 19 “undo all that afflict thee”, “save her”, “get them praise and fame”, v 20 “bring again”, “make you a name”.

Clearly the message is inspired 1 v 1 “the word of the Lord”. Like our previous study in Joel we can find many references to the future. Note “the day of the Lord” 1 v 1, v 8, v 10 etc. Themes of the message were 1 v 8 “I will punish” v 15 “a day of wrath, trouble and distress” 2 v 2 “fierce anger of the Lord”.

It was to herald a day of divine intervention. 1 v 2 – 4 the six “I wills” of God. God was to be no bystander in this matter. We sometimes consider our own day and feel that things are out of control yet we are reminded that “there is no power but of God : the powers that be are ordained of God” Rom 13 v 1.

### **JUDGMENT – ON WHOM ?**

1 V 2 / 3 “all things” – v 3 makes it clear that “man and beast” “fowls and fishes” will be affected. “off the land” – or the face of the land. Specifically Judah but with implications as far as the “day of the Lord is concerned” to the whole earth. God’s judgment will be complete.

1 v 4 – “upon Judah” “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” are phrases that indicate the focus on the peoples of Judah.

### **JUDGMENT - WHY ?**

1 v 4 Because of idolatry. Clearly Baal is mentioned and the Chemarims are black-robed or cassocked people with the priests.

1 v 5 Because of astrology. There were those that “worship the host of heaven”

1 v 5 Because of hypocrisy. They were calling upon the Lord and at the same time calling upon Malcham or Moloch – see Lev 18 v 21

1 v 6 Because of apostasy. “them that are turned back from the Lord”

### **JUDGMENT – WHEN ?**

1 v 7 “is at hand” v 14 “it is near”. Although a few years would elapse even after the death of Josiah God’s timetable would move forward.

### **JUDGMENT – WHAT IMPACT ?**

1 V 13 – loss of wealth

1 v 15 – wrath, trouble, distress, wasteness, desolation, darkness, gloominess, clouds and thick darkness.

1 v 17 – wandering “walk as blind men” : wounding “blood shall be poured out”

### **CHALLENGE TO REPENT – CH 2 V 1 – 3**

V 1 To Judah “O nation not desired” (not desirous)

V 3 To other peoples “all ye meek of the earth”

### **JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS AROUND ISRAEL**

V 4 – 7 To the West - modern day Gaza strip or Palestine

V 8 – 11 To the East – modern day Jordan

V 12 – To the South – Ethiopia is mentioned but generally was aligned to Egypt

V 13 – 15 To the North – Assyria mentioned but in later days other passages include Russia

All will experience divine judgment in the “day of the Lord”

### **FURTHER DEALINGS AGAINST JUDAH AND JERUSALEM CH 3 V 1 – 7**

V 1 Description of God’s own – “filthy and polluted” v 2 “obeyed not” “received not correction” “trusted not” “drew not near to her God”

V 3 People affected “her princes” “her judges” v 4 “her prophets” “her priests”

V1 God spoke but was ignored

V4 God was present but was ignored

V6 God had acted against others but was ignored

### **FINAL JUDGMENT UPON THE NATIONS CH 3 V 8**

The language of this verse and the gathering of the nations for judgment may be a preview of the events laid out in Rev 16 – 18 and Zech 14 v 1 – 10. It is undoubtedly future “until the day” and will be characterised by “fierce anger”.

### **FUTURE JOY FOR ISRAEL V 9 – 20**

V 9 - Reunited in language they “call” “serve” worship “bring mine offering” v 10

V10 - Regathered - “from beyond”

V11 - Renewed - marked by humility and holiness v 13

V14 - Respond - “sing” “shout” “be glad and rejoice”

V15 / 17 - Rule - “the King” in the midst v 15 “the Lord thy God” in the midst v 17

V 18 / 20 - Rewards – The “I wills” “gather” v 18 “undo” “save” “get them praise and fame” v 19 “make you a name”. Then the nation will be the head and not the tail.