ZEPHANIAH

*The Day of the Lord: Judgment or Salvation*

TIME PERIOD

Under King Josiah (640-609 BC)

KEY VERSE

*"Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger."*

2:3

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Zephaniah is mostly about the *"Day of the Lord"*, and it is a book that looks at two aspects in two different ways. The first aspect is that the *"Day of the Lord"* is negative for the proud, those who put themselves above God, and positive for the humble, those who trust God. E.g., on the same day that *"the whole world will be consumed"* (3:8), the nations will *"call on the name of the Lord"* (3:9). This means that Zephaniah contains a lot of judgment and "darkness", but at the same time some of the most positive verses we find in the Bible, which is also perhaps what this book is best known for (3:17-18). This is because the day of the Lord is both judgment and hope, depending on where you stand with God.

The second aspect is that this judgment (*“the day of the Lord”*) refers both to:

1. when God used other nations to judge Judah and the neighboring countries in the century that followed.
2. the final global judgment, which is still in the future.

Zeph 1:1 says that this message came under King Josiah, who was one of the best kings of Judah. Josiah reformed the country in 628 and 622 BC and stopped much of the idolatry. Zephaniah contributes to this with his message to *"destroy every remnant of Baal worship"* (1:4).

Much of the *"Day of the Lord"* in Zephaniah is thus about judgment coming in the form of wars, and Zephaniah is possibly the last prophet before the exile to warn against this judgment. The first neighboring countries began to fall only 10 years after Josiah's last reform, and Judah was taken by the Babylonians a little later, in 586 BC. The second aspect is what these historical events point toward, i.e., the day when God will judge the whole world. Parts of the book seem to be more about a universal judgment than a national judgment that has already happened from our point of view.

God's intention is not the judgment itself but to restore the relationship with the people. We find the solution in 2:1-3: Seek the Lord, seek justice, and seek humility. After this, *"a remnant"* of the people is mentioned several times, i.e., the small group that is saved by following what is said in 2:1-3.

Chapter 1 is generally about the *"Day of the Lord"* coming, and so the solution is given in 2:1-3. He then continues with judgment on the nations, and some were taken before Judah and should act as a wake-up call when they saw that this judgment was beginning to happen. Then he slides right over from talking about Nineveh to talking about Jerusalem in 3:1. From 3:8 onwards, the book is about the *"Day of the Lord",* which includes both judgment and salvation. There is salvation for the small *"remnant"* who trust in God and not in themselves. There is one cycle of sin, judgment and restoration, and the restoration begins in 3:9.

We find Jesus in the judgment because *"the Lord's day"* in the NT is the same as Jesus' return, when Jesus will judge. We also find Jesus in salvation, the other aspect of *"the Lord's day"*. And 3:9 is very similar to Romans 10:13, where *"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (quote from Joel). And the *"Lord"* in Romans 10 is Jesus, as is most often the case in the rest of the NT as well.

**Sin and judgment**

Ch. 1 The day of the Lord is coming.

2:1-3 Salvation: Seek the Lord, justice, and humility.

2:4-15 The judgment of the nations is what awakens Judah.

3:1-7 Jerusalem will be destroyed.

**Restoration (from 3:9)**

3:8-20 The day of the Lord includes both judgment and salvation.

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