

10. ZEPHANIAH

Written during King Josiah's reign 640-609 BC

Zephaniah was a descendant of King Hezekiah who in the eighth century BC warned Judah about God's coming judgment on the Day of the Lord, both from Babylon shortly, and then a final judgment in the latter days which would result in the Messiah, the king of Israel, being in their midst. The final great Day of the Lord needs to be interpreted as the day the Messiah returns; it is not God judging the wicked while being absent.

The Day of the Lord's wrath (Zeph 1:2-4, 14-18)

The Lord said he will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth ... birds ... fish ... he will cut off mankind from the face of the earth. The Hebrew word for 'earth' is not the usual word for 'earth/land', but ground as the Earth's visible surface. It is comprehensive and describes the same event as Ezekiel 38:19-20: In fiery anger and wrath I declare that at that time (when Gog invades Israel) there will be a massive earthquake in the land of Israel. All the fish and the birds and the wild animals and the reptiles, and every single human being who lives on the face of the earth, will tremble at my presence. Mountains will crumble, cliffs will collapse, and every wall will fall to the ground.

In vv. 4-13 Zephaniah focuses on Judah and Jerusalem, because they are just as guilty as the rest of mankind, and as with other prophecies about the Day of the Lord, Jerusalem is the center of activity and the place where the Lord descends.

Vv. 14-18 go on to describe 'the great Day of the Lord', the Day of the Lord's visitation in judgment as described in Revelation 6:12-17, 16:17-21. God is angry with mankind because they have sinned against him. This is the day of God's wrath and vengeance when the

whole Earth will be consumed. He will make a sudden end to all the ungodly inhabitants of the Earth by means of earthquake and warfare. Zephaniah doesn't name the aggressors, but Ezekiel calls them Gog and his hordes coming from the remotest parts of the North with many nations with him.

This is the great Day of the Lord spoken of by Joel and other prophets, the Day of the Lord at the end of the Great Tribulation when the Messiah returns to Earth. It is a day of trumpet blasts and battle cry, of bloodshed and slaughter, a day of darkness and wrath. It involves the whole Earth and there will be no respect for human life. The destruction will be massive, but it is not the annihilation of the world or mankind, cf. Zeph 3). This will be a terrible and terrifying end to civilization as we know it. Isaiah said that God will make people scarcer than pure gold (Isa 13:12), but Zechariah talks about the survivors of the nations who will go and worship the Messiah during the subsequent millennium (Zech 14:16).

Messiah will be in Israel's midst (Zeph 3:14-20)

The survivors in Israel and Jerusalem are told to shout and sing aloud because their enemies have been cleared away. God's judgments on Israel are now over and the King of Israel, the Lord (the Messiah), is now in their midst.

It is important to realize that the last great Day of the Lord is the day of the Messiah's arrival, the day that Jews and Christians have hoped for for centuries and millennia. When he arrives, they won't fear evil any longer. After saving them, he will delight in his people and quiet them with his love. The Lord, the God of Israel, will be in their midst! He is their king, reigning on the throne of David in Jerusalem. Don't think of Jesus as being a king outside of politics. Don't think of him as ruling in people's hearts. That is not what the Kingdom of God is about. He is in their midst! Don't think of the great Day of the Lord as a day when God indirectly brings judgment. When he is king, he will be present, theocratic, ruling the world with a rod of iron, forcefully, strictly, and justly. There will be no more war, and justice and morality will be enforced by courts of law. The Bible is clear about what behaviors are abominable to God. All forms of idolatry will be outlawed. The family unit will be encouraged. Incest, homosexuality,

and bestiality are all forbidden in the strongest terms by the moral law of Moses which is an eternal guide for mankind.

At that time, the Messiah will deal with oppressors resulting in peace and righteousness, justice and virtue, and purity. The regathered people of Israel and others who live in their land will be treated as the Messiah's people. They will be renowned and praised by all nations during the millennium. The resurrected Church will live in the heavenly realm from where they will rule with Christ. They are not in focus here, the future of the Church is detailed in the book of Revelation. The books of the OT prophets deal almost exclusively with Israel's future, and that of Jerusalem, as is highlighted in this book.

The Messiah's presence *in the midst* of (among) his people in Israel sounds like a physical presence, but what does that mean for a resurrected person like the Lord? Is he present spiritually or physically? Visibly or invisibly? This is a question of vital importance when thinking about the millennium. The following verses are visible sighting of the resurrected Jesus

Lk 17:21 Jesus answered them (the Pharisees) saying: The kingdom of God (the king from God) does not come in a way people think. People won't say look here or look there. The king from God is here *in your midst*.

Lk 24:36 As they were saying these things, he stood *in their midst* and said to them: Peace to you!

Acts 1:11 Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking into the sky? This Jesus who God has taken from you into heaven will return *just as you have seen him going there*.

1 Cor 15:6 After that he revealed himself to more than 500 of our brethren who were gathered in the same place.

Heb 9:28 So Christ offered himself once to bear the sins of many, and *he will appear (show himself)* a second time without sin to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Rev 1:7 Look, he's coming in the clouds and *everyone will see him*, even those who pierced him and all the families of their land will wail over him.

Rev 22:4 *They will see his face.*

Ezek 37:26-27 I'll put my temple among them forever. My dwelling place will be over them. I will be be their God and they will be my people.

Ezek 37:26 *And I will put my temple among them forever. And my dwelling will be above them.*

Ezek 43:6-7 *I heard someone speaking to me from in the temple, saying: Son of man, This is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. I'll live among Israel here forever.*

Ezek 48:35 From that time the city will be called: *The Lord is There.*

Zech 2:10 People of Zion, shout with joy for I'm coming and *I'll live among you.*

Zech 12:10 *They will set eyes on the one whom they pierced.* Cf. Jn 19:37.

Zech 14:4 On that day *his feet will stand* on the Mount of Olives.

The Lord told Ezekiel that he would set his sanctuary in their midst forever and that his dwelling place would be *over them* (Ezek 37:27-28).

All these verses imply a visible presence, but we are not given details of his appearances. There is no palace in Ezekiel's detailed vision of the millennial temple and the presence of a temple suggests the Messiah's spiritual presence. The New Jerusalem in the sky will be his home. Cf. Ezek 37:26 My dwelling will be *above* them.