

SPENDING TIME WITH THE PROPHETS

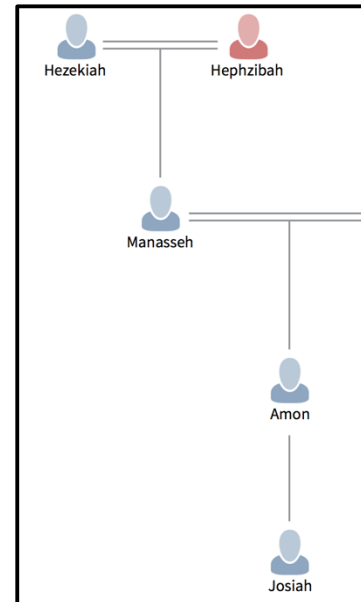
the book of Zephaniah

Zephaniah And The Reforms Of Josiah

While not a perfect man, Hezekiah was a faithful servant of the Lord during his 29 year reign as king. However, his son Manasseh did not continue in the faithful ways of his father, and was so wicked during his 55 year reign that the Lord declared He would bring judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (see 2Kings 21.10-15). Although Manasseh repented toward the end of his reign (2Chronicles 33.10-13), he could not undo all the effects of his wickedness or prevent his son, Ammon, from being just as wicked as Manasseh had been (2Chronicles 33.21-25).

Josiah came to the throne at the young age of 8. During the 8th year of his reign he began correcting the wickedness which had taken hold of the country during the 57 year combined reign of his grandfather and father (2Chronicles 34.1-7)). Then in the 18th year of his reign Josiah commissioned the repair of the Temple which led to the discovery of the Book of the Law (2Chronicles 34.8ff).

The prophet Zephaniah was another great-grandson of Hezekiah and prophesied during the reign of his cousin Josiah (see Zephaniah 1.1). It seems likely that Zephaniah's prophecies occurred shortly after the Law was found and were intended to aid Josiah's reforms. It's clear from the text that the people had not yet given up their idols



Parallel Phraseology in Zephaniah & Deuteronomy

- Zeph 1.13; Deut 28.30.
- Zeph 1.13; Deut. 28.39.
- Zeph 1.15; Deut 28.53,55,57.
- Zeph 1.15; Deut 4.11.
- Zeph 1.17; Deut 28.29.
- Zeph 1.18; Deut 32.21-22.
- Zeph 3.5; Deut 32.4.
- Zeph 3.17; Deut 28.63; 30.9.
- Zeph 3.19-20; Deut 26.19.

(Zephaniah 1.5), yet the Lord was still offering the people hope if they would repent (Zephaniah 2.1-3). Furthermore, Zephaniah uses numerous quotations from Deuteronomy (see side box) indicating that the Law had been found and would have been familiar to the people. "The description of Josiah's reforms in the book of Kings appears as something of a blitzkrieg. But even if his major policies were instituted in a relatively short period of time, he still would have needed the strong supporting confirmation of a contemporary word from the Lord to make his policies even remotely acceptable to the public. Very possibly this supporting word came from Zephaniah the prophet. Incorporating into his message the very

phrases of the recently discovered book of the covenant, he addressed the people as God's

contemporary mouthpiece, applying God's ancient word to the current situation. So it may be proposed that Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah, and more specifically in the days immediately following the discovery of the book of the covenant approximately in 622 b.c." (NICOT)

The Message Of Zephaniah: The Day Of The Lord

1. Intro (1.1)
2. The Day of Judgment (1.2-3.8)
 - a. Picture of God's judgment (1.2-6)
 - i. On the world (1.2-3)
 - ii. On Judah & Jerusalem (1.4-6)
 - b. The Day of the Lord announced (1.7)
 - c. Judgments on that day (1.8-18)
 - i. On God's people (1.8-13)
 - ii. On the world (1.14-18)
 - d. How the nations should respond (2.1-3)
 - e. Pictures of judgment (2.4-3.8)
 - i. Philistia (2.4-7)
 - ii. Moab & Ammon (2.8-11)
 - iii. Cush (2.12)
 - iv. Assyria (2.13-15)
 - v. Jerusalem (3.1-7)
3. The Day of Hope (3.8-20)
 - a. His people called to "wait" for the Lord (3.8)
 - b. Return of His people (3.9-10)
 - c. Restoration of a sinful people (3.11-13)
 - d. Rejoicing of a saved people (3.14-20)

Lessons Regarding The Day Of The Lord:

1. Two sides of the Day: In Zephaniah's prophecy the Day of the Lord is both a day of punishment (1.8-9, 14-18) and a day of blessing (3.11, 16-17). The New Testament refers to the day in the same way, as a day of destruction (2Peter 3.10) and a day of promise (2Peter 3.13). Furthermore, Zephaniah shows how both aspects of the Day are related, i.e. God's judgments on that day are necessary so that God's remnant can be blessed (see Zephaniah 3.8, 19-20). We would do well to remember this when we question God's judgment on this world: His judgment MUST happen if we are to truly be saved.
2. The Day is near: Zephaniah declared that the Day when God would judge Jerusalem was near (1.7,14) even though it still be several years before God destroyed the city and Temple. But the Day is emphasized as being near so that the wicked might repent (1.12) and so that the righteous might be comforted (3.8). The New Testament emphasizes the nearness of that day for the same reasons (see 2Peter 3.10)
3. Preparations can be made: That is the message of Zephaniah 2.1-3. The Day is coming, but if the people would turn and seek the Lord they look forward to that Day, rather than dread His approach. We are encouraged to do the same (see 2Peter 3.14-15).