LIFE-STUDY OF ZEPHANIAH

MESSAGE ONE

JEHOVAH'S JUDGMENT AND SALVATION

Scripture Reading: Zeph. 1—3

In this message we will consider the book of Zephaniah. The revelation in this book is very simple and concerns two matters—Jehovah's judgment and His salvation.

I. THE INTRODUCTORY WORD

Zephaniah 1:1 is the introductory word.

A. The Meaning of the Name Zephaniah

The name Zephaniah in Hebrew means "Jah hides" or "Jah treasures," probably signifying to be hidden by Jehovah as His treasure in the day of His anger (2:3). In the day of God's anger, we need to be the treasure hidden in Him.

In 1:1 we are told that Zephaniah was "the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah." As a descendant of Hezekiah, a good king, Zephaniah was a royal descendant. One of his ancestors was another good king, Josiah.

B. The Time of Zephaniah's Ministry

The time of Zephaniah's ministry was about 630 B.C., at the time of Habakkuk and Jeremiah, not long before the beginning of the Babylonian captivity.

C. The Place of His Ministry

The place of Zephaniah's ministry was Judah.

D. The Object of His Ministry

The object of his ministry was the territory of Judah and Jerusalem, the capital of Judah.

E. The Subject

The subject of Zephaniah's prophecy is Jehovah's judgment on Israel and on the nations and His salvation to the Gentiles and to Israel. Jehovah judges Israel as well as the nations, and He saves the nations as well as Israel. His judgment and His salvation are universal.

Jehovah's judgment on Israel and on the nations and His salvation to the Gentiles and to Israel have a particular order. His judgment is first on Israel and then on the nations, but His salvation is first to the Gentiles and then to Israel. Today thousands of Gentiles have been saved, but very few among the millions of Jews have been saved. In God's economy, this is the age for His salvation to go to the Gentiles.

F. The Central Thought

The central thought of Zephaniah is that Jehovah is the judging and saving God both to Israel and to the nations, issuing in His reigning among Israel (3:15b) and in Israel's singing and rejoicing in their restoration (3:14).

G. The Revelation concerning Christ

In this book the revelation concerning Christ is in His being the King of Israel in the midst of her in the restoration (3:15).

H. The Sections

The book of Zephaniah has three sections: the introductory word (1:1); Jehovah's judgment (1:2—3:8), including His judgment on Israel (1:2—2:3; 3:1-7) and on the nations (2:4-15; 3:8); and Jehovah's salvation (3:9-20) to the Gentiles (v. 9) and to Israel (vv. 10-20).

II. JEHOVAH'S JUDGMENT

Let us now go on to consider the matter of Jehovah's judgment.

A. On Israel

1. Jehovah Cutting Off the Wicked

In His judgment on Israel, Jehovah will cut off man, beast, birds, fish, stumbling blocks, the wicked, the remnant of Baal, the idol worshippers, the idol priests with the priests, the worshippers of the host of heaven, the worshippers of Malcam, and those who have been turned back from going after Jehovah (1:2-6).

2. Jehovah Preparing Jerusalem with Its Princes

In His judgment on Israel, Jehovah would also prepare Jerusalem with its princes, the sons of the king, all who wore the clothing of foreigners, and all those who did violence and deceit, as His sacrifice, and He would call the Chaldeans, whom He had sanctified, to come and eat His sacrifice by plundering the wealth of Jerusalem and desolating the houses and vineyards in Jerusalem (vv. 7-13). God had prepared His sinful elect as His sacrifice to offer to the invading army of the Chaldeans (Ezek. 39:19-20; Jer. 25:9). The Chaldean army, as the cutting, swarming, licking, and consuming locusts, would destroy Israel, and this destruction would be their eating of the sacrifice.

3. The Great Day of Jehovah Being Near

In verses 14 through 18 the prophet said that the great day of Jehovah was near. This would be a day of overflowing wrath, a day of trouble and distress, and a day of waste and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep darkness, and a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and the high battlements. Jehovah would bring distress upon the people so that they would walk about like the blind. Their blood would be poured out like the dust, and their bowels like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold would be able to deliver them. The whole land would be

devoured by the fire of Jehovah's wrath and jealousy, for He would make an end, a sudden destruction, of all the inhabitants of the land.

4. The Prophet's Admonition to the Shameless People of Israel

In 2:1-3 we have the prophet's admonition to the shameless people of Israel.

a. Admonishing Them to Gather Themselves Together to Repent to Jehovah

"Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, / O nation that has no shame, / Before the decree has effect, / (The day passes like chaff) / Before there comes upon you / The burning anger of Jehovah, / Before there comes upon you / The day of Jehovah's anger" (vv. 1-2). Here the prophet said that before the burning anger of Jehovah came upon them, they should gather themselves together to repent to Jehovah.

b. Admonishing Them to Seek Jehovah, Righteousness, and Meekness

"Seek Jehovah, / All you meek of the earth, / Who have performed His judgments. / Seek righteousness; / Seek meekness; / Perhaps you will be hidden / In the day of Jehovah's anger" (v. 3). Here the prophet admonished them to seek Jehovah, to seek righteousness, and to seek meekness so that they would be hidden in the day of Jehovah's anger.

5. The Degradation of Jerusalem at the Prophet's Time

In 3:1-7 the prophet speaks concerning the degradation of Jerusalem at his time. This degradation was the cause of God's coming in to judge, correct, and chastise them.

B. On the Nations

Jehovah's judgment on the nations would include His judgment on the Philistines (2:4-7), on Moab and Ammon (vv. 8-11), on the Cushites (v. 12), on Assyria (vv. 13-15), and on all the nations (3:8).

III. JEHOVAH'S SALVATION

In 3:9-20 we have a word concerning Jehovah's salvation to the Gentiles and to Israel.

A. To The Gentiles

In His salvation to the Gentiles, Jehovah, in the time of restoration, will "change the language of the peoples / Into a pure language" (v. 9). To change a people's language is to change their culture because culture is wrapped up with language. The original language of any people is dirty and impure. But in His salvation God will change the language of the peoples into a pure language. When a person's language has become pure, this indicates that a person has been thoroughly saved.

B. To Israel

In verses 10 through 20 the prophet speaks regarding Jehovah's salvation to Israel. His salvation to Israel is for Christ to be the King of Israel. In these verses first we see Jehovah's deliverance (vv. 10-13, 15-20) and then Israel's singing and rejoicing (v. 14).