

Zephaniah

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Zephaniah - the Gospel of Christ to a dark world

This tiny book of Zephaniah contains some of the most intense images of both God's wrath and His love that you will find anywhere in the prophets. After two and a half chapters of God's justice and wrath being poured out upon Judah and the nations you find the last 12 verses speaking of God's love bringing Judah and the nations into a marriage covenant with God. It is a description of an exquisitely joyful relationship that the same Mighty Warrior that destroyed them will now have with them. And because of the bold juxtaposition of God's justice and love, this book displays the Gospel in brilliant colors. I'm going to start with the Gospel conclusion because it is so so beautiful.

O. Palmer Robertson speaks of chapter 3:17 as being the John 3:16 of the Old Testament - God so loved the world - not just Israel, but the world. And it is an astonishing love for many reasons. It is an astonishing love because we know exactly what the world was like in the first two and a half chapters - and its not pretty. There was nothing lovable about it. It's astonishing because of the *degree* of that love. How much does God love the world? He sent His Son to die for the world and take away the sins of the world. He plans to save the world by casting Satan and all the non-elect out of it. Robertson calls that verse the "poem of personal love." Let me read his comments because I think he does a good job of describing how astounding this love and delight is in context of the first two and a half chapters. He says,

Three parallel lines each containing three phrases express the deepest inner joy and satisfaction of God himself in his love for his people. Delight, joy, rejoicing, and singing on God's part underscore the mutuality of emotional experience felt by God and the redeemed.

That Almighty God should derive delight from his own creation is significant in itself. But that the Holy One should experience ecstasy over the sinner is incomprehensible.

God breaking out in singing! God joyful with delight! All because of you.¹

And again, the fact that He would love you and me at all is astonishing. It is clear that each of us deserve the very wrath and judgments that the first two and a half chapters have so vividly displayed. What God sees as delightful in the nations in the last 12 verses is a righteousness and beauty that He Himself has given to the nations so as to turn ugliness into a beautiful bride without spot or wrinkle.

How can a book put such intense wrath side-by-side with such intense love and delight? And this is where we get to the Christology of the book. According to chapter 3, it is only

¹ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 339-340.

because of the King of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ their King and Warrior is said to be in their midst. That's what makes them beautiful. God looks upon Christ and His beauty in us. And because He bore our judgments the text says that He took those judgments away from us. Chapter 3:14-15 tells us why the bride can rejoice:

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more.

This is how we keep from being depressed by the judgments of the first two and a half chapters. We *know* we deserve those judgments. But verse 15 says, "The LORD has taken away your judgments..." Praise God! That is the Gospel in a nutshell. And in the next phrase that Gospel goes on to give us victory against the world, the flesh, and the devil - our enemies. Having taken away the judgments that were against us, it says, "He has cast out your enemy." Justice and mercy kiss each other in Jesus, the King of Israel.

And it is by being united to Jesus in faith, that we can study the judgments of all of these minor prophets and *rejoice* in God's justice rather than finding that justice depressing. The Judge and Mighty Warrior who wipes horrible enemies off the face of the map (and we were once one of those enemies also deserving to be wiped off the face of the map) has saved us and is now a loving husband in whom the bride can have ultra security. That's the message of Zephaniah.

Overview of the book via two structures

Let's do an overview of the book via two structures. The first structure I have put into your outlines is the linear structure. It goes through the book in the order of the chapters.

Linear Development Outline of Zephaniah

- A. Introduction (1:1)
- B. **A very near** 587 BC (קָרוֹב and מִהֵרָ מְאֹד) **day of the Lord impacting Israel & nations** (1:2-3:7)
 - 1. An imminent "day of the Lord" upon Judah (1:1-2:3)
 - 2. An imminent "day of the Lord's anger" upon pagan nations (2:4-15)
 - 3. God's righteousness in bringing these judgments (3:1-7)
 - 4. God will have His remnant preserved during this day of the Lord (Zeph. 2:3,7)
- C. **A very distant** AD 70 ("wait" – חכה) **day of the Lord impacting Israel & nations** (3:8)
- D. **This AD 70 day of the Lord will reverse history** (3:9-20)
 - 1. This will result in all nations having a purified lip and united service (v. 9)
 - 2. This will result in all nations having hearts directed towards God (vv. 10-11)
 - 3. This will be begun by a faithful remnant of Jews (vv. 12-13 – see Rev. 14:5 and vv. 1-5)
 - 4. Jew and Gentile will delight in Christ and He in them (vv. 14-17)
 - 5. All persecutors will be dealt with (vv. 18-19)
 - 6. All Jews will be joined with Gentiles as Christians (vv. 18-20)

He starts just by announcing who he is.

The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

He was a descendant of godly king Hezekiah, and since he was of royal blood, he no doubt had access to the royal family. Many commentators believe that he tag teamed with King Josiah in seeking to bring reformation to the nation. And it seems like a reasonable hypothesis.

But as we will learn from this book, Josiah's reformation was short-lived. Though King Josiah made great strides in cleansing the temple of idols and bringing reforms to the nation where he could, idolatry was too deeply entrenched to be able to eradicate it. This was a top-down forced Reformation and we know that politics can only bring about superficial and shortlived change. All it took for Judah to fully revert back to the full blown idolatry that it had previously engaged in was the three month reign of the next king, Jehoahaz, that is described in 2 Kings 23. That's amazing. Within three months everything won by King Josiah was overturned. My take home from that fact is that top-down political reforms are good, but they tend to be short-lived. And Zephaniah warned the people that apart from full repentance of the populace as a whole, the nation was doomed to destruction from Babylon.

But like Nahum and Habakkuk, Zephaniah will point out that judgment won't just fall on Judah. It will also fall upon the pagan nations all around them. Both Jew and Gentile would suffer under the great and awesome Day of the Lord.

And I want to take some time talking about that Day of the Lord. The first two and a half chapters outline a Day of the Lord that will happen very, very soon. If you are dealing with Dispensationalists who insist that the day of the Lord must refer to the Second Coming and can only refer to the Second Coming, take them to the book of Zephaniah. It will blow them away. Even the most diehard dispensationalist will have a hard time proving that the Day of the Lord in Zephaniah 1 and 2 is the Second Coming. And the reason that is significant is that Zephaniah refers to the day of the Lord more than any other prophet. This "day" is referred to 21 times. If any book defines the Day of the Lord, this book does. I will just show you three or four of the day of the Lord passages. Look at chapter 1, verse 7.

Be silent in the presence of the Lord GOD; For the day of the LORD is at hand...

The Hebrew word for "at hand" means its about to come. It cannot mean (as Dispensationalist try to define imminence) that it *could possibly* happen any time over the next 4000 years. Even on their system it can't mean that. Why? Because even on their system the First Coming has to happen before the Second Coming, and therefore the Second Coming could not have been imminent for Zephaniah - by definition. It's a fatal flaw in their theory. And besides, the Hebrew word for "at hand," *Karov* (קָרוֹב), means to be nearby, close, at hand, in the near future, about to happen. So this particular day of the Lord could not possibly occur beyond Zephaniah's lifetime. Look at verse 14:

The great day of the LORD is near; It is near and hastens quickly.

So that there can be absolutely no confusion, He uses three Hebrew words to indicate the incredible soonness (if that is a word) with which this day of the Lord will come. It will not tarry. In contrast, chapter 3:8 speaks of another day of the Lord that *will* tarry and that *will* require patient waiting. My point is that everything in chapter 1, chapter 2, and the first

seven verses of chapter 3 all occur in 587 BC. It refers to the Babylonian decimation of Judah and the surrounding areas and the absolute decimation of Jerusalem, where no one lived in it till the exile was concluded. This is critical to understand in the debates on the eschatology of the Day of the Lord.

Now, I've given you four subpoints related to this Day of the Lord. In chapter 1 we have the very near Day of the Lord upon Judah. How devastating will Babylon be to the land? Look at verses 2-3. It is likened to a decreation - an emptying out of everything God had put in.

2 "I will utterly consume everything From the face of the land," Says the LORD;

And the word for land there, *adamah*, is just ground - the stuff Adam was made from. During the seige that Babylon brought against Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar used all the nearby trees, bushes, crops, grass, animals, and anything else that was useable and then burned what was left. That was in the region around Jerusalem. Verse 3 says,

3 "I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, The fish of the sea, And the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land," Says the LORD.

As the seige went on, the Babylonians ran out of Israelite food, so they had to hunt, fish out the sea of Galilee, and pretty much destroy the land all around Jerusalem. And God may have also supernaturally made a massive fish kill, like you see in your picture. But the point is that the land around Jerusalem was scrubbed.

Once Babylon got into the city, they continued their destruction. He destroyed Baal worship, the idolatrous priests, the syncretistic Jews who mixed Yehowah worship with Milcom worship, etc. It's clearly referring to a destruction that occurred in Zephaniah's day. Instead of there being sacrifices on the altar, the Babylonians would make human sacrifices. And interestingly God takes credit, saying that it is the day of the *Lord's* sacrifice in verse 8. Zephaniah is simply applying a covenant lawsuit. Covenant lawsuits apply the law of God to a court condemnation of a nation. Though I don't have time to get into it, it really is astonishing how many quotes he gives from Deuteronomy to prove that Judah and the nations were worthy of judgment.² And again, the application of the law of Deuteronomy to both Jews and pagans shows that all people are subject to God's law and not just Jews. In any case, God is not embarrassed to take ownership of this judgment. He uses the evil of man for righteous purposes, but God indicates that *He* is the one bringing Babylon. Babylon is His rod of judgment.

Zephaniah also specifies parts of Jerusalem that only existed in Zephaniah's day that would be destroyed. In verses 10-13 he assures them that God would use a lamp (so to speak) to search every nook and cranny and hiding place in Jerusalem and ferret out everyone. The mighty men of Israel would be powerless. And the words of verses 15-18 are simply terrifying:

15 That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, 16 A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And

² See Appendix A for examples.

against the high towers. 17 “I will bring distress upon men, And they shall walk like blind men, Because they have sinned against the LORD; Their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse.” 18 Neither their silver nor their gold Shall be able to deliver them In the day of the LORD’S wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance Of all those who dwell in the land.

They were killed or cast into exile. This does not mean that God overlooked the righteous remnant. Even Zephaniah’s name shows that this was not the case. His name means, “hidden by Yehowah.” So He explicitly excludes the righteous remnant from his earlier description. And chapter 3 especially is a promise that God will hide and preserve His elect during the Day of the Lord. Of course, they wouldn’t be left in Judah. As Jeremiah words it, the good figs would be preserved by being taken into Babylon. But chapter 2 does the same. Verses 1-2 call upon Judah to repent before this day of the Lord falls, and verse 3 calls upon the righteous remnant to all seek the Lord in humility and says in the last clause, “It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.” He preserves a remnant.

But chapter 2 goes on to say that it wouldn’t just be Judah being judged in very soon Day of The Lord. The word “For” at the beginning of chapter 2:4 connects the judgments about to fall on the pagan nations around Judah to the same Day of the Lord’s anger. This too is near. And he speaks of destruction coming upon the Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron. He calls those Philistines Cherethites, but then goes on to say that they are Philistines. Again, this has to have been fulfilled in the day of Zephaniah. There are no Cherethites today. And as a side note, this helps to define David’s security guard composed of Cherethites and Pelethites as converted Philistines (2 Sam. 8:18; 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kings 1:38; etc). God has always had a remnant even among the nations as well as among Israel. Even in David’s day you have righteous Gentiles like Uriah the Hittite.

In verse 7, God spares a remnant of believing Jews who would return from captivity and inhabit those Philistine territories. So there is hope in the midst of destruction.

In verses 8-11 He says that Moab and Ammon would be wiped out and no longer exist as nations. That happened. It cannot possibly refer to our future. Those nations do not exist. They were wiped out.

In verse 12 He speaks of Ethiopians being slain by Babylon’s armies. You can see how far reaching this Day of the Lord was.

In verse 13 He promises to destroy Assyria and to make Nineveh a desolation. That’s not future to us. That’s already happened.

And in chapter 3:1-7 he says that everyone deserved these judgments and that it was His righteousness that brought about all of these judgments. All of those things were fulfilled to a T in the years surrounding 587 BC.

But now we come to a second Day of the Lord. In chapter 3, verse 8 he talks about something that they will have to wait for. It is the word *chaku* (חכה), which means to wait, delay, tarry, be patient for a long time, etc. But here is the thing - *even this day of the Lord is not the last day of history either*. How do I know? Well, the context makes it clear because there is plenty of history after this day of the Lord in the subsequent verses. But even apart from the context, this section is quoted twice in the New Testament - in Revelation 14:1

and in chapter 16 where God's bowls of wrath are poured out for a final time upon Israel. God would once again gather the nations against Israel in Zephaniah's distant future - in AD 70. He doesn't amplify a lot because it will be a similar judgment to the 587 BC judgment he has just described. Indeed, Hebrews 10:27 picks up some of the phraseology of Zephaniah 1:18 to indicate that AD 70 would be just as devastating as the first judgment that Zephaniah speaks about. So there are two Days of the Lord in the midst of history - one in 587 BC and one in AD 70. This is so important to understanding the book.

And here comes the really exciting part. Verses 9-20 indicate that the AD 70 Day of the Lord would be different than the previous Day of the Lord because Jesus would be present to begin the reversal of the Old Covenant pervasive darkness, apostasy, and discouraging times. The word "then" (the Hebrew *ahz - תָּחַל*) in verse 9 means from that time forward and afterwards. For example, the same word for "then" (*ahz - תָּחַל*) is used in Leviticus 26:34, which says, "Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate and you are in your enemies' land." That "then" began at a given point and lasted for 70 years. This "then" begins in AD 70 and lasts as long as there are new people who need lips purified and who have divisions that need to be repaired. Christ is at the heart of chapter 3:9-20 bringing constant reversal.

Now let me go on a rabbit trail. In my discussions with some of you on the subject of tongues I have misinterpreted verse 9 as applying to the last day of history. I thought it was in eternity that everyone would be miraculously given a new language with a new vocabulary. I based that on the New King James translation here and had never restudied the context since I ditched Premillennialism. But the context forced me this week to make a retraction on that interpretation. Many commentators point out that even the translation of "language" is not right since the Hebrew word is "lip," not "tongue." They point out that this is the same kind of purification of lip that Isaiah received in Isaiah 6 and the same kind of purification of mouth that is spoken of in Hosea 2:17 where God promised that he would eventually take out of people's mouths the names of idols and other defiling things. They would no longer speak such blasphemy. So verse 9 is speaking of *sanctification of speech*, not a miracle of speech. I had misunderstood that. Let me read it to you out of the NASB. "For then I will give to the peoples purified lips [that's the literal Hebrew], that all of them may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder." It is speaking of sanctification of speech, and sanctification of action. Where division tends to characterize mankind, Christ's work will cause people to work shoulder to shoulder - which is the literal Hebrew. So that is the meaning of verse 9, and that's my retraction of my previous teaching on that verse.

And if you look at your first linear outline, I will show you all the things that AD 70 began:

Verse 9 says that it would result in all nations having purified lips and unified service. This restoration by grace doesn't happen all at once, as I had thought. It is an ongoing restoration that begins then and continues to happen as long as new people with lips and with shoulders come into existence till the end of history.

Verses 10-11 says that it will result in all nations having hearts directed towards God. That too is a radical change of grace. It transforms self-serving nations into worshiping nations.

Verses 12-13 tells us of the means by which God will begin this process in AD 70. He will use a faithful remnant of Jews. It says,

12 I will leave in your midst A meek and humble people, And they shall trust in the name of the LORD. 13 The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness And speak no lies, Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, And no one shall make them afraid."

If you look in your marginal notes, you will probably see Revelation 14:5 being referenced. That's because Revelation 14:5 quotes parts of these verses and applies it to the remarkable remnant of 144,000 Jews that escaped from Jerusalem to Pella during the Roman war against Jerusalem. Most of the church was wiped out during that Great Tribulation. But God spared the lives of exactly 12,000 Jews from each of twelve tribes (totalling 144,000). In our Revelation series we saw that once the war was finished, they became God's shock troops to evangelize the nations and establish and teach churches everywhere. This reference to feeding flocks is probably a reference to feeding spiritual sheep like Peter was commanded to do by Jesus - feed My sheep. Those 144,000 were said by Revelation 14 to speak no lies, and to have no deceit in their mouths, and to be righteous saints, and to be utterly fearless. They were utterly fearless in advancing the gospel.

And as a result of their Gospel, they introduced the nations once again to the King of Israel. And God formed a new Israel made up of Jew and Gentile; an Israel who loved God and whom God loved. These are the verses we began the sermon with. The very Judah and nations that God had cast away will once again be a Judah and nations that God will draw into His bosom and shower His love upon and take great delight in. And it deeply moves my heart to see that grace takes a world under God's wrath and moves it to being a world of Christians who sing praises to God and delight in God and love God, and God singing over them, and rejoicing over them, and showering them with *His* love. It's hard to do justice to the emotional impact that Zephaniah has upon my soul when I read the book as a whole. It makes me love my God and not want to displease Him. But it also makes me realize how shallow my love still is. I want to be glad in God and rejoice with all my heart as verse 14 commands me to. Verse 15 gives me every reason to have that gladness. The Lord has taken away my judgments. Praise God! I deserved those judgments, but God has taken them away through Christ.

In any case, this book shows a linear progress over history from judgment, to a remnant being saved, to the growth of the church among the nations, to eventually all persecutors being dealt with in verses 18-19. May God hasten that day when there are no more persecutors.

But he ends the book in verses 18-20 saying that all Jews will be joined with all the peoples of the earth after the nation of Israel is brought from captivity, is saved from spiritual captivity, and rejoined to the church. It will be a world in which nothing but the church exists among men. There will be one people of God who love Him because He first loved them.

Of course, we are not there yet, are we? And that's where I find Dorsey's chiasm to be helpful. With the help of some other scholars, I have tweaked his chiasm and included it in your outlines. This is a thematic way of looking at the book.

Chiastic Thematic Outline of Zephaniah

Introduction (1:1)

- A** An imminent (מִהֵרָ מְאֹד and קִרֹּב) de-creation of wicked Jerusalem (1:2-6)
- B** Judgment of corrupt leaders (הַשֹּׁרְיִים), rich, and powerful (1:7-13)
- C** Judgment on whole land (1:14-18)
- D** **Call to repentance to nation (2:1-2) and remnant (2:3)**
- C** Judgment on all nations (2:4-15)
- B** Judgment of corrupt leaders (הַשֹּׁרְיִים), rich, powerful (3:1-7)
- A** A distant (“wait”) de-recreation of a spiritual Jerusalem (3:8)
- A** A creation of a spiritual Israel made up of Jew and Gentile (3:9-20)

Adaptation of Dorsey’s outline

I won’t go over it. I just want to point the heart of the chiasm. If Dorsey is correct, the heart of the book is chapter 2:1-3 - a call to repentance. Repentance, humbling ourselves before God, and calling upon Him in prayer is the key to personal revival, family revival, church revival, national revival, and eventually world revival and reformation. We don’t need to know the times when the nations will be converted. All we need to do is follow the *recipe* for that to happen - a recipe that is the same for personal revival. When we use the recipe for personal revival and trust God to raise up other individuals God will eventually bring such a stream of individuals whose hearts are turned to God that cultural changes begin to happen. But we start where we can. I’ll read those three verses with only a few concluding thoughts.

First, chapter 2:1-2 calls upon a hopelessly lost nation to cry out to God. That’s significant. A hopeless nation should not make us hopeless. We can’t take a hopeless attitude toward America or any other nation. If Zephaniah was willing to call the nation of His day to repentance (as bad as that nation was), we should offer that key to our nation. What’s the key to turning things around in our world? And since Zephaniah was applying the laws of Deuteronomy to pagan nations, true repentance in America must include a recommitment to following Deuteronomy’s laws. Telling the nations to repent, and trusting God to give grace to enable that to happen. He says,

1 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, 2 Before the decree is issued, Or the day passes like chaff, Before the LORD’S fierce anger comes upon you, Before the day of the LORD’S anger comes upon you!

Just two things to notice here: It doesn’t matter that the nation is utterly undesirable to God. All of us are utterly undesirable to God until God puts Christ in us and beautifies us with His Spirit. The key is to repent and turn to Jesus.

There is one thing that is irresistible to God (and I use that term lightly because ultimately it is God alone who can give this quality to make them irresistible), but it is humble repentance. Psalm 51:17 says,

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.

It is impossible for God to despise a broken and a contrite heart because humility is a beautiful gift of His grace, and He loves what His grace produces. Humble repentance makes you irresistible to God because it is a God-given grace that He delights in.

But then in verse 3 God focuses upon the righteous remnant within a nation. Even if a nation refuses to repent, the remnant can still do something. He says,

Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the LORD'S anger.

Zephaniah means, "Hidden by Yehowah." If you are meek, God sings over you, finds great delight in you, and showers you with His love, hides you under the shadow of His wings. And I know exactly what Satan will do to make you forget what I have said - he will tell you that you aren't meek enough. But if you mourn over the fact that you aren't meek enough and sin still tends to dominate you, this verse still gives hope for you. It says, "Seek righteousness." If you are seeking, it implies you are lacking it. Join the club. Make it your goal to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness first, and all the other things will be added to you. If you lack humility, then he says, "Seek it." It implies that we must seek it from a source other than ourselves. In other words, we must seek it from God. "Lord, give me the humility that you delight in. I want Your delight." God cannot pour out His wrath upon that in which He delights, and He always delights in that which He creates. When you grow even a little in God's graces, God delights in those graces. So Colossians 3 tells us,

Col. 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Don't worry that you haven't found *everything*. If you are seeking for those things which are above, your life is hidden with Christ in God and you can be safe with God during the storms. Chapter 3:12 sums up the kind of people God sings over and delights in. They are products of His grace. He says,

I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.

That's it, brothers and sisters. Don't trust in your goodness, trust in the Lord and seek what you need from Him. Don't trust in *your* self-made worthiness. It is *Christ's worthiness in you* that makes you worthy of God's singing over you. Trust in the Lord and may the God of Zephaniah hide you in the secret place of His pavilion. Amen.

Appendix A - references to Deuteronomy

The following two quotes from O. Palmer Robertson gives an introduction to Zephaniah's dependence upon Deuteronomy. Others have demonstrated other connections, though these should suffice.

1. "And they shall build houses, and they shall not dwell (in them)" (Zeph. 1:13)

"And a house you shall build, but you shall not dwell in it" (Deut. 28:30)>

2. “And they shall plant vineyards, but they shall not drink their wine” (Zeph. 1:13)
“Vineyards you shall plant and you shall serve, but (their) wine you shall not drink, and not shall you glean” (Deut. 28:39)>
3. “A day of constraint and distress” (Zeph. 1:15)
“In the constraint and in the distress by which your enemy will distress you” (Deut. 28:53, 55, 57)>
4. “A day of darkness and thick darkness, a day of cloud and thick cloud” (Zeph. 1:15)
“(The mountain) ... (with) darkness, cloud, and thick cloud” (Deut. 4:11)>
5. “And they shall walk as blind men” (Zeph. 1:17)
“And you shall be groping ... as a blind man gropes” (Deut. 28:29)>
6. “And in the fire of his jealousy all the earth shall be consumed” (Zeph. 1:18)
“They have provoked me to jealousy ... fire is kindled in my wrath, and it shall consume the earth and its produce” (Deut. 32:21–22)>
7. “Yahweh (is) righteous ... he will not do iniquity” (Zeph. 3:5)
“A God ... who does no iniquity, righteous and just (is) he” (Deut. 32:4)>
8. “He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17)
“As he rejoiced over you to do you good ... Yahweh will rejoice over you to destroy you” (Deut. 28:63)
“Yahweh will return to rejoice over you for good” (Deut. 30:9)>
9. “And I shall set them for a praise and for a name” (Zeph. 3:19)
“For I shall set you for a name and for praise among all the peoples of the earth” (Zeph. 3:20) “And to set you high above all the nations which he has made for a praise and for a name” (Deut. 26:19).

Other comparisons between Zephaniah and Deuteronomy deserve attention. Note the reference to God’s threat that he will “bring distress” on Israel (Zeph. 1:17; cf. Deut. 28:29); the concentration on God’s inspiring “fear” in Israel, often by the manifestation of his righteous judgments (Zeph. 3:7; cf. Deut. 4:10–11, 13; 5:29; 6:2, 13; 13:11; 14:23; 17:13, 19; 19:20; 21:21; 31:9–13); the description of the exiles as the “scattered ones” (Zeph. 3:10; cf. Deut. 4:27; 28:64; 30:3); the distinctive concentration on the “love” of God for Israel (Zeph. 3:17; cf. Deut. 4:37; 7:8, 13; 10:14–15; 23:6 [Eng. 5]); and the representation of God as the King, the Lord, a Mighty Hero (Zeph. 3:17; cf. Deut. 10:17).³

...A second and much more likely explanation for the parallels of phraseology between Zephaniah and Deuteronomy may be found in the supposition that Zephaniah prophesied after the discovery in 622 B.C. of the book of the covenant that promoted Josiah’s reform. As a consequence of the revelation of Israel’s true status before their covenant God, Zephaniah addressed his contemporaries. Under this construction, Zephaniah appears as a prophetic helper to advance the reform instituted by Josiah. Such a perspective offers a much more realistic picture of the progress of reform under the young king. It should not be supposed that a people committed to the

³ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 254–255.

worship of idolatrous gods would give up their practices very easily. Judah's return to its former habits within the brief three-month reign of Josiah's successor establishes that fact rather definitively (cf. 2 K. 23:32–33).⁴

⁴ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 256.