

Zephaniah. Lessons for today over the next two weeks from centuries ago.

WEEK 1 Please read chapters 1-3. As you do so for the first time please write down anything that comes to mind. Any thoughts, questions or random learnings.

We will discuss these very early on and then later decide if there were changes to your initial snapshot. At this point I would like to say that I have noticed several of you deep thinkers often leave excellent comments until the end (thinking of some of your comments Tim). We have no time to explore them usually so please bring them in early this and next week! 😊

My month away was full toddler immersion. I thought I would have lots of time to think and research this “little book” with only 3 chapters but, yet again, another powerful message. My brain thought otherwise. Now it’s Thursday morning and I am trying to formulate some notes and I am struggling. Thankfully most of you are a day behind.

We will look at several headings, but these were my initial musings in no particular order.

How Does Zephaniah fit in history? Contemporaries?

Are these carrot or stick words?

Do people switch off when it sounds similar?

Why do I only know this book as part of a list to get the order of the OT books of the Bible?

Why is Ethiopia mentioned this time and not others?

Is he different to the other prophets?

Who is he addressing then and now?

What is the literary style (it doesn’t read the same)? Can’t see the couplets like Micah uses.

What parallels are there and any cross-references?

Relevance to me.

We will share initial findings and discuss now and again at the end of week two.

I watched a doco/movie with and about Nick Cave’s life and beliefs while I was on the plane. In that someone said “Prophets say what we are supposed to be like and they call us back when we are not living as we should” I like that. **Comment.**

That brings me to a comment months ago that Steve said. He mentioned that he has never pointed anyone to read the prophets particularly. That made me think why and after studying them why not?

So, I would like us to discuss this prophet looking thru two lenses and I will keep these in focus and try to bring your comments back to answer two questions

1 What can we highlight from this book to encourage others to read it?

2 How can we draw a non-believer to understand this message?

BACKGROUND

*Lineage outlined in verse 1. Royal line from Hezekiah and tasked with passing on the Word from God. Only prophets or people who spoke for God said that. **Comment.**

*Contemporary kings; Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz.

*Contemporary prophets; Nahum, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah. How would these have influenced him?

*Audience; primary was Judah as well as the faithful remnant in Judah. Secondary was the surrounding nations of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush (including Ethiopia) and Assyria. Thirdly, us.

*Timeline, before the southern kingdom of Judah was taken into captivity (640-626 BCE)

*Literary style. This is a very complex book from a literary perspective. It is “elevated Hebrew poetry” using rhythm and clear phrases. It is not in the same style as Micah (rhyming couplets used primarily). Although he uses this style critics say he was not a great poet like Isaiah but he had a powerful message which he gave with vigour and clarity meaning his listeners took notice. What he lacked in grace and charm he made up for in his compelling manner. He felt the approaching terror and wanted to communicate that. He calls to praise (3:14-17) and uses oracles as a way of delivering the important message (we will look into oracles more deeply next week) And this is where my look at style became overwhelming (I have a good grade in English Lit A level and most of what I read about I didn’t understand or couldn’t pronounce). This summary is a starting point for now. **Any thoughts or comments?**

Differences between prophets and their style, message and tone. The tone and style is different to any others and I think his heritage is why this is obvious. Micah speaks to the people but Zephaniah is addressing courtiers and others of standing.

*Canonicity. Some critics question the inclusion in Scripture but Jesus draws on Zeph 1:3 in Matt 13:4. John draws on Zeph 1:14-18 in Rev 6:17, Zeph 3:13 in Rev 14:5 and Zeph 3:8 in Rev 16:1. We can read these if you would like to. The lines are pretty loose in some ways. I can see how it works though.

*Outline for next week; looking at the three Oracles and what they mean and 4 powerful lessons for us today from Zephaniah. Then discuss whether our initial thoughts have changed or any comments you would like to make.

*Any more comments from today’s time and what will you be taking away to think about this week?

*Conclusion

Zephaniah 1:12 and pray the words.

