

# The Book of Zephaniah

## Background and Introduction

### Authorship and Setting

Zephaniah, a prophet of royal descent of Hezekiah, ministered during King Josiah's reign (630–620 BC), which we see in the prophetic introduction,

**Zephaniah 1:1:** “**1 The word of Yahweh which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah:**”

This period aligned with Josiah's early reforms, signaling spiritual renewal in Judah. However, exile loomed, with the first Babylonian deportation in 605 BC, just 15–25 years later, stripping Judah of its elite, including Daniel. For Zephaniah, a royal descendant, this impending judgment was personal. Judah faced a dire situation; the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen, removing a buffer against Assyria and the rising Babylonian empire. Assyria remained strong, while Babylon posed a significant threat. Weakened politically and militarily, Judah could not counter these dangers. King Josiah's attempt to ally with Babylon hastened Judah's downfall and made exile inevitable. Under Josiah, Judah experienced a revival that temporarily halted moral decline, but it was largely forced and lacked true repentance. Deuteronomy emphasizes that God seeks heartfelt devotion over mere compliance. Thus, despite a righteous remnant and a godly king, Judah's superficial reforms could not prevent divine judgment.

Zephaniah serves as Judah's final warning before destruction, while other prophets like Jeremiah prophesy during it. Zephaniah represents God's last call for genuine repentance before the Babylonian invasion.

### Theological Theme

The book's theological theme is “The Hidden Treasure Behind God's Judgment.”

Zephaniah responds to Judah's dilemma: “Why undergo judgment when conditions are improving?” His name, “Yahweh hides,” reflects a message of God's protective presence and the hidden grace within judgment. Zephaniah illustrates that although judgment can be painful, it paves the way for spiritual renewal and divine blessings. Zephaniah also revisits the theme of the “Day of the Lord,” a key concept in earlier prophecies, indicating God's all-encompassing judgment that refines His chosen remnant and fulfills His redemptive plan.

### Structure

- I. God's Judgment on the World and Judah (1:1-2:3)
- II. God's Judgment on the Nations (2:4-3:7)
- III. God's Purification of His Remnant (3:8-20)

## I. God's Judgment on the World and Judah (1:1-2:3)

## A. Extensive Judgment (1:2-6)

God announces His judgment in verse 2,

**Zephaniah 1:2–3:** “2 “I will completely end all things From the face of the ground,” declares Yahweh. ”3 “I will end man and beast; I will end the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea And the ruins along with the wicked; And I will cut off man from the face of the ground,” declares Yahweh.”

The Hebrew term *adamah* (ground) is used instead of the usual word for earth, evoking the creation narrative and humanity’s origin from the soil (*adam* from *Adamah*) (Genesis 2:7). This choice signals not total annihilation but a targeted cleansing of the world’s surface, reminiscent of the flood in Genesis 6–9. Like the flood, this judgment is destructive yet renewing. God promises to remove man, beast, birds, fish, and the wicked (1:3). This mirrors the creation order (Genesis 1:20–26), implying an undoing of creation. God will wipe it all clean, removing even the ruins and the wicked.

In verse 4, God’s judgment narrows to Judah and Jerusalem,

**Zephaniah 1:4:** “4 “So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests,”

Surely, Israel expected God to act against its enemies. God’s power is shown in Exodus 15, where He destroyed Pharaoh’s army; however, now He judges His own. Judgment starts with God’s household. Those most accountable are those with His word, law, and light. God’s judgment will come upon Judah and its capital to eradicate Baal worship, idolatrous priests, and Ammonite gods like Milcom. The Israelites were blending their profane worship of idols with their worship of Yahweh, which enrages their jealous God.

## B. Extensive Sorrow (1:7-18)

The Day of the Lord is introduced as a near, overwhelming event in verse 7,

**Zephaniah 1:7–10:** “7 Be silent before Lord Yahweh! For the day of Yahweh is near, For Yahweh has prepared a sacrifice; He has set apart His guests.” 8 “Then it will be on the day of Yahweh’s sacrifice That I will punish the princes, the king’s sons, And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.” 9 “And I will punish on that day all who leap on the temple threshold, Who fill the house of their Lord with violence and deceit.”

God prepares a “sacrifice”, with the wicked as the offering, underscoring the necessity of atonement for sin (cf. Hosea’s unfaithful love). The princes and royal officials had corrupted the House of the Lord with foreign garments, foreign worship practices, violence, theft, and deceit. For this reason, they will not receive the atonement of the lamb sacrificed annually in that House. Their blood will be spilled.

In verse 12, Yahweh declares that He will search the city for the faithless,

**Zephaniah 1:12:** “12 “And it will be at that time That I will search Jerusalem with lamps, And I will punish the men Who are stagnant in spirit, Who say in their hearts, ‘Yahweh will not do good or evil!’”

Yahweh will overlook no one in Jerusalem, visiting each house with a lamp to ensure everyone faces judgment. In verses 2 and 3, His wrath appears as an all-consuming fire aimed at creation. God speaks of judgment clearly and precisely, approaching to judge those with stagnant spirits—those who claim, "Yahweh will neither do good nor evil." Stagnant is a Hebrew metaphor for spoiled wine left out too long. Israel has become complacent and indifferent, living as practical atheists, stating, "Yahweh won't take any action—no blessings or curses. Perhaps He exists, but He is indifferent." Zephaniah counters this; we will reap what we sow, and God cannot be mocked.

In verse 14, we see that the timing of this judgment is inevitable,

**Zephaniah 1:14:** "14 Near is the great day of Yahweh, Near and coming very quickly; O the sound, the day of Yahweh! In it the mighty man cries out bitterly."

The Day of the Lord is "near," not in time but as the next divine act, urgent and unavoidable. Its sound is the bitter cry of warriors, signaling profound loss (cf. Joel, Exodus). The imagery of darkness and destruction (1:15–16) recalls the plague of darkness (Exodus 10:21–22) and Joel's locust invasion. The judgment blinds people, reducing them to "dust and manure" (1:17).

### C. Plea for Repentance (2:1-3)

Before the decree takes effect, God urges repentance, 2:1,

**Zephaniah 2:1–3:** "1 Gather yourselves together, indeed, gather, O nation without shame,"

Zephaniah commands his hearers, "gather yourselves together." Indeed, gather, consider, think. Notice that he calls them a nation without shame. Instead of God referring to Judah as his people, he identifies them as a nation. You've heard the term goyim to refer to gentiles – to the nations. That's the word used here. They are just like the Gentiles, shamelessly sinning and rejecting him. So, what should this nation without shame do? Verse 2,

**Zephaniah 2:2:** "2 Before the decree takes effect— The day passes like the chaff— Before the burning anger of Yahweh comes upon you, Before the day of Yahweh's anger comes upon you."

The day of the Lord approaches swiftly, just as the wind scatters the chaff. What steps should you take before it arrives? Escape from Yahweh's anger. God is giving you a warning for a reason. The fact that Yahweh warns of His impending wrath is a sign of mercy. The Word of Yahweh coming to them and us reflects God's grace and mercy. It shows God's loving heart, as He does not desire the death of the wicked. He takes no delight in it, which is why He warns.

So, flee God's wrath—run from it. Yet, as we learned in chapter 1, escaping His wrath is impossible. Where can anyone hide from the all-consuming fire of Yahweh, which seeks out sinners in every home? No one can resist the Almighty's wrath. Where can you find refuge from Yahweh's anger? What shelter can protect you from His rightful punishment? This is the crux of the matter: God offers us no alternative for salvation than Himself. To flee from Yahweh, you must flee to Yahweh, verse 3,

**Zephaniah 2:3:** “**3** Seek Yahweh, All you humble of the earth Who have worked His justice; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of Yahweh’s anger.”

He doesn’t say to offer more sacrifices, give more tithes. Zephaniah says, “seek Yahweh.” Give him your whole allegiance. Judah is called to seek Yahweh alone, rather than remaining apathetic toward Him or seeking other gods alongside or instead of Him. This represents the language of devotion.

**Psalms 27:8:** “**8** On Your behalf my heart says, ‘Seek My face,’ ‘Your face, O Yahweh, I shall seek.’”

They are called to continue seeking Yahweh by pursuing what He has declared to be right and good, while abstaining from what He has claimed to be evil. Notice that Zephaniah is reiterating the call of the prophet Micah,

**Micah 6:8:** “**8** He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does Yahweh require of you But to do justice, to love lovingkindness, And to walk humbly with your God?”

He simply desires a repentance that leads them to love Him alone, and to love their neighbors as themselves. Matthew Henry famously said of this passage, “*From first to last his design was, not to drive the people to despair, but to drive them to God and to their duty—not to frighten them out of their wits, but to frighten them out of their sins.*”<sup>1</sup> Zephaniah concludes, saying, “Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of Yahweh’s anger.” This reflects his name, “Yahweh hides,” promising protection for the repentant remnant during judgment. Unlike Joel and Jonah, where repentance may avert wrath (Joel 2:14; Jonah 3:9), Zephaniah recognizes certain judgment but offers hope of salvation through it.

## II. God’s Judgment on the Nations (2:4-3:7)

### A. Judgment on the Nations (2:4–15)

Like Amos, Zephaniah uses compass directions to depict God’s universal judgment, focusing on Jerusalem. He starts by examining the west, addressing the Philistines (2:4-7), then the east, concerning the Moabites and Ammonites (2:8-11), followed by the south, targeting Ethiopia (2:12), and finally the north, examining Assyria (2:13-15). Notably, this judgment against Israel’s neighboring enemies, who all perpetrated significant atrocities against God’s people, ultimately results in a blessing for Yahweh’s remnant. We see this in verse 6,

**Zephaniah 2:6–7:** “**6** So the seacoast will be pastures, With caves for shepherds and folds for flocks. **7** And the coast will be For the remnant of the house of Judah; They will feed upon it. In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening; For Yahweh their God will care for them And restore their fortune.”

Historically, Israel struggled to subdue Philistia, even under David. Yet God declares that Philistia’s land will belong to Judah’s remnant through judgment. The day of Yahweh, a day of wrath, is not just about destruction. Yahweh judges the wicked for the sake of His remnant to restore their fortune and grant them an inheritance. The term remnant implies both judgment and salvation. Judgment happened, and some survived. God’s grace preserved His remnant

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1559.

from wrath. They were not only preserved but also blessed. This theme recurs in verse 9, where the remnant is promised the plunder of Moab and Ammon, lands promised to Abraham but never conquered.

But more significantly, Zephaniah reveals that Yahweh's judgment leads to His universal recognition, verse 11,

**Zephaniah 2:11:** "11 Yahweh will be fearsome to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his own place."

The prophet looks forward to the far future and explains God's purpose in judgment. God is judging the whole world so that all the gods of the nations will starve. Yahweh will be the only God left to worship because He will show Himself as the only God that exists. The point is that after God kills all the idolaters, there's going to be no one left to feed these false gods. The pagan gods depended upon humans to feed them. Obviously, Yahweh doesn't need us for sustenance. As the Psalmist records,

**Psalm 50:12:** "12 If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, as well as its fullness."

Interestingly, this verse starts with the idea that "Yahweh will be fearsome." He will instill terror among the nations and elicit their fear. We observe this theme throughout the minor prophets, right? However, it's important to note that if we concentrate solely on chapter 1, we might conclude that Yahweh intends to annihilate everyone, which explains their fear as He destroys them. Yet, when we revisit the end of verse 11, we discover that individuals from every nation will bow to Yahweh from their places. This is universal worship of Yahweh being hinted at here.

## B. Judgment on Jerusalem Revisited (3:1–7)

The passage returns to Jerusalem, described as rebellious and defiled (3:1). Despite God's presence and discipline, its leaders—officials, judges, prophets, and priests—persist in corruption and injustice (3:3–4). Yet God remains just, offering correction, as stated in verse 5.

**Zephaniah 3:5–6:** "5 Yahweh is righteous in her midst; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail. But the unjust knows no shame."

"6 "I have cut off nations; Their corner towers are desolate. I have made their streets a waste, With no one passing by; Their cities are laid waste, Without a man, without an inhabitant."

In chapter 2:5, God promised to eliminate Judah's neighboring enemies. Zephaniah reflects on this future judgment. God has destroyed the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Ethiopians, and Assyrians, leaving their cities desolate and their corner towers in ruins. Witnessing this divine judgment would suggest a call to repentance, yet they show no shame when Yahweh reveals their actions in His righteous light. They are unable to receive His discipline because they love their sin, verse 7,

**Zephaniah 3:7:** "7 "I said, 'Surely you will fear Me, Receive discipline.' So her abode will not be cut off According to all that I have appointed concerning her. But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds."

One would expect a reverent fear of Yahweh given all He has done and will continue to do. They should accept His discipline rather than face rejection. In Zephaniah and other prophetic texts, God warns out of love, urging acceptance of His discipline through repentance and reverence. Yet, the closing phrase of verse 7 reveals, “but they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.” Instead of heeding warnings, they eagerly persisted in their wrongdoing, rising early each morning to commit evil.

### III. God Purification of His Remnant (3:8-20) – A Christ Connection

#### A. Message to the Repentant Remnant (3:8)

In verse 8, God shifts to begin speaking to His remnant, verse 8,

**Zephaniah 3:8:** “**8** “Therefore wait for Me,” declares Yahweh, “For the day when I rise up as a witness. Indeed, My judgment is to assemble nations, To gather kingdoms, To pour out on them My indignation, All My burning anger; For all the earth will be devoured By the fire of My zeal.”

God will gather all the nations and sinners of the world to unleash his fierce anger upon them. He will consume them with the flames of his righteous zeal. However, it's important to note that God is not expressing his wrath primarily for the benefit of the unbelievers; instead, He addresses His people, His remnant. He instructs His remnant, “Wait for me.” They can comprehend His judgment on their wicked neighbors, but His judgment on Jerusalem is harder for them to accept. Therefore, Yahweh urges His remnant to wait—in worship—as He exacts vengeance and carries out His just wrath, even on their city.

**Proverbs 20:22:** “**22** Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for Yahweh, and He will save you.”

Wait and do not lose hope when the wicked prosper,

**Psalms 37:7:** “**7** Be still in Yahweh and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out schemes of wickedness.”

Wait for God’s glorious salvation, which will come through His purifying fire of judgment,

**Isaiah 30:18–20:** “**18** Therefore Yahweh waits with longing to be gracious to you, And therefore He is on high to have compassion on you. For Yahweh is a God of justice; **How blessed are all those who wait for Him.**” **19** O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.” **20** The Lord has given you bread of distress and water of oppression; **He, your Teacher, will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will see your Teacher.**”

#### B. Purification of the World (3:9-11)

Zephaniah has left two logical and theological questions unresolved. First, if everyone on earth merits His just wrath and condemnation, how can the remnant be concealed and blessed amid His judgment? Look at verse 9,

**Zephaniah 3:9:** “9 “For then I will change them to peoples with purified lips, That all of them may call on the name of Yahweh, To serve Him shoulder to shoulder.”

How can He justly spare those who are unrighteous? By cleansing them. To cleanse their lips, He must also cleanse their hearts. This cleansing references both regeneration and the atonement that Isaiah encountered in his vision. Recall that after witnessing the glory of the Lord, Isaiah declared himself a man with unclean lips living among a people with unclean lips. What does God do in response? He showcases His sovereign grace and mercy by purifying Isaiah’s mouth with a burning coal from His holy altar, where Christ presented Himself once and for all as a flawless lamb without blemish.

Notice the statement from Yahweh, “I will change them.” We do not accomplish purification of God’s elect before coming to Him. It is one that He performs in us, as Peter writes

**1 Peter 1:3:** “3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”

Notice also that once He purifies the lips of His remnant, then they call upon His name. This is an allusion back to Joel,

**Joel 2:32:** “32 “And it will be that everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As Yahweh has said, Even among the survivors whom Yahweh calls.”

He calls the remnant, transforms them, and then converts them. These two events occur simultaneously, at the exact same moment. However, regeneration comes first—the change—followed by conversion, which includes calling on His name. The blind can see; why? Because they have been granted the ability to see.

Now what’s even more beautiful is that this remnant does not just consist of Jews, verse 10,

**Zephaniah 3:10:** “10 “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshippers, My scattered ones, Will bring My offerings.”

Yahweh will attract worshippers from as far south as the rivers of Ethiopia, which means beyond the endpoint of the Nile tributaries, effectively reaching the ends of the earth. He will draw followers from all corners of the globe. Zephaniah briefly mentions these worshippers in 2:11, where Yahweh diminishes the gods of the world so that even the coastal nations will kneel before Him, each from their territory. This indicates a purified remnant of both Jews and Gentiles coming to worship Yahweh, and the reason is apparent: He has redeemed them from their sin and shame, as noted in verse 11.

**Zephaniah 3:11:** “11 “In that day you will feel no shame Because of all your deeds By which you have transgressed against Me; For then I will remove from your midst Your proud, exulting ones, And you will never again be haughty On My holy mountain.”

This marks a significant change. Earlier in 2:1, Zephaniah criticized the nation for lacking shame. They were so obstinate that they wouldn’t acknowledge their need to repent. But now, due to God’s intervention, they have no reason to feel ashamed. Their sins have been washed away and reconciled with the Holy God. As Paul states in Colossians 1,

**Colossians 1:21–22:** “21 And although you were formerly alienated and enemies in mind and in evil deeds, ”22 but now He reconciled you in the body of His flesh through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—”



### C. Purification of Israel (3:12-13)

Israel's shame is removed and replaced by humility and lowliness,

**Zephaniah 3:12–13:** “**12** “But I will cause to remain in your midst **A lowly and poor people, And they will take refuge in the name of Yahweh.**” **13** “The remnant of Israel will do no injustice And not speak falsehood, Nor will a deceitful tongue Be found in their mouths; For **they will feed and lie down With no one to make them tremble.**”

Here we see the sanctification of God's people. They were once proud sinners. Now they are the poor and the lowly – those who humbly take refuge not in their strength and might, but in Yahweh, that inherit the Land. As Jesus said,

**Matthew 5:3, 5:** “**3** “**Blessed are the poor in spirit,** for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...**5** **Blessed are the lowly,** for they shall inherit the earth.”

It's the humble who recognize their need for God's forgiveness, who realize they possess no righteousness or rightful claim to this kingdom, understanding that it is entirely by grace. In 3:3, Zephaniah portrays unbelieving Israel as a lion that indiscriminately devours everything around them, committing acts of violence and injustice. In contrast, this purified remnant is depicted as an innocent lamb, unafraid of evil, resting under the care of her Good Shepherd. Additionally, recall from 3:5 that Yahweh is identified as the One Who “will do no injustice.” Zephaniah then connects this description of Yahweh's holiness to the remnant – why? Because He has purified them to be holy, just as He is holy.

### D. Pure Joy and Communion (3:14-20)

In the last passage of his prophecy, Zephaniah answers the other theological question: why would Yahweh do this? What is His purpose in transforming and purifying a remnant of Jews and Gentiles alike? Why does He save us? Let's start in verse 14,

**Zephaniah 3:14:** “**14** **Sing for joy, O daughter of Zion! Make a loud shout, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!**”

Zephaniah calls God's people to a grand celebration filled with worship, reminiscent of Israel's joyful praise to Yahweh after crossing the Red Sea. There they danced, sang, and played their tambourines in gratitude for Yahweh's salvation. Similarly, recall how David, upon bringing the ark to Jerusalem, dances before it with such fervent worship that it makes his wife envious. One commentator says, “The command to rejoice was used by town heralds calling a city to rejoice when their victorious king had returned from battle.”<sup>2</sup> And this is precisely what we see in verse 15,

**Zephaniah 3:15:** “**15** **Yahweh has taken away His judgments against you; He has cleared away your enemies.** The King of Israel, Yahweh, is in your midst; You will fear evil no more.”

First, Yahweh has taken away His judgments against us. He's removed His condemnation. Why? Because He has removed our sin so that He no longer sees it. Why? Because we are in Christ

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<sup>2</sup> Mark J. Boda, [\*The Book of Zechariah\*](#), ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 562.



Jesus, the perfectly righteous One. Then He has cleared away our enemies, vindicating the evil, injustice, and persecution God's remnant has faced. We will fear no evil. Why? Our God Shepherd is with us – The King of Israel, Yahweh, will be in our midst. Ezekiel picks up on this promise a few years later when he prophesies for the Lord,

**Ezekiel 37:27-28:** "27 My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. "28 "And the nations will know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever."

When Yahweh establishes His tabernacle among men and dwells physically with them, Zephaniah is prophesying about the eternal Son of God, King Jesus, the rightful heir to David's throne, coming to reside among His people as their King. Importantly, when Zephaniah refers to King Jesus, he speaks to Judah after the ten northern tribes still address Jesus as the King of Israel, all Israel. Why is this? Because He will lead a new exodus for all of His exiled people and once again achieve what only David could: unite all twelve tribes of God's people. And when He does this. When He gathers His people. When He victoriously defeats their enemies. When He dwells among them. It will not just be us who are overcome with joy, that day will be a day of Yahweh's joy, a day of His celebration, verse 17,

**Zephaniah 3:17:** "17 "Yahweh your God is in your midst, A mighty one who will save. He will be joyful over you with gladness; He will be quiet in His love; He will rejoice over you with joyful singing."

This incredible promise is almost incomprehensible. Not only is Yahweh, the Mighty One, in our midst, but this is our Lord and Mighty Savior, Jesus Christ, back on earth at last, dwelling with us. We hope for that day. But what is so awesome about this promise is that *He* is filled with joy and gladness over *us*, and His love for us overflows with song. Remember what Yahweh said to Moses from the burning bush?

**Exodus 4:11:** "11 And Yahweh said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh?'"

On that day, the One who made man's mouth, will Himself, the Son of Man, rejoice over us with joyful singing. We can understand that we will be singing to Him on that day. We sing to Him now, for He is worthy to be praised. But the picture of Him rejoicing and singing over us is so unfathomable. We are but sinful wretches. And yet, a glimpse into the unending depths of our Savior's love for us. As the author of Hebrews wrote,

**Hebrews 12:2:** "2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

This is the joy that was set before Him. This joy and love drove Him to endure the cross and drink the cup of His Father's wrath. As Moses said to Israel at their conception,

**Deuteronomy 7:7-8:** "7 Yahweh did not set His affection on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, "8 but because Yahweh loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your fathers, Yahweh brought you out with a strong hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

# The Book of Haggai

## Background and Introduction

### Authorship and Setting

Haggai's name means "Festival of Yahweh"

Haggai is the first minor prophet after the exile, prophesying with Zechariah. In 536 BC, Cyrus decreed that the Israelites could return to rebuild the temple, providing gold and silver. Led by Zerubbabel, David's heir and appointed governor, along with Joshua, the high priest, 50,000 Israelites returned. However, they were not fully independent; the temple's foundation (Ezra 3) was minor compared to Solomon's, and the ark and Shekinah glory were absent. Construction of God's Temple stalled due to Samaritan persecution and a Persian mandate. For 16 years, Israel became complacent, prioritizing personal interests over worship, as Moses cautioned in Deuteronomy 6. In 520 BC, Haggai's prophecy motivated them to act.

### Theological Theme

Haggai's theological central theme emphasizes steadfast obedience in worship and work for the Lord. The initiatives urged by Haggai and Zechariah were significant in advancing God's redemptive plan for humanity. Without a Temple, the message of God's desire to restore His relationship with humanity is lost. This highlights why the "temple" is viewed as a single entity; Haggai 2 compares its former and latter glories—one entity, two distinct glories. Jesus Christ exemplifies the temple concept (John 1), and the church fulfills a similar role (1 Corinthians 3; 6; 1 Peter 2).

Furthermore, Haggai repeats "the word of Yahweh came" 25 times, emphasizing the power of God's word. Unlike Zephaniah's emotive preaching, ignored by its audience, Haggai's calm message to "Consider your ways" (five times) sparked national repentance and resumed temple construction.

### Structure

- I. First Oracle: Exhortation to Build (1:1-15)
- II. Second Oracle: Encouragement in Building (2:1-9)
- III. Third Oracle: Blessings in Building (2:10-19)
- IV. Fourth Oracle: Salvation in Building (2:20-23)

## I. First Oracle: Exhortation to Build (1:1-15)

### 1. Haggai's Proclamation (1:1-11)

On August 29, 520 BC, Haggai addressed Zerubbabel and Joshua during a feast. Zerubbabel, the descendant of David, serves only as governor, and his name, which means "begotten of Babylon," highlights their exile. Meanwhile, Joshua, son of an exiled priest, leads the worship. God criticizes "this people" (not referring to them as "my people") in verse 2.

**Haggai 1:2:** “2 Thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘This people says, “The time has not come, even the time for the house of Yahweh to be rebuilt.”

Citing persecution and government mandate, the people have ceased the work God had sent them home to do. Instead, they spent those resources on their own homes, verse 4,

**Haggai 1:4:** “4 “Is it time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses while this house lies waste?”

They stole from the Lord to build paneled houses while God’s house lies in “waste. Therefore, God warns them, verse 5,

**Haggai 1:5:** “5 So now, thus says Yahweh of hosts, “Set your heart to consider your ways!”

The fearful God of armies commands this people to consider their ways. Who is their priority? Who do they really worship? Who is their God? God highlights the covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28) He has begun to send upon them again, verse 6,

**Haggai 1:6:** “6 “You have sown much, but bring in little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.””

These curses stem from their theft and neglect of building God’s house. Since they used the lumber Cyrus gifted them for their own homes, God commands them to work and start cutting down trees. This required arduous journeys to the mountainous forests. Due to their greed and sin, they increased their labor and triggered a drought, famine, and poverty.

How do the people respond? Verse 12,

**Haggai 1:12:** “12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, listened to the voice of Yahweh their God and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Yahweh their God had sent him. And the people feared Yahweh.”

Extraordinary! They listened to the voice of the Lord. They listened to the prophet. They feared the Lord. And so Yahweh responds, verse 13,

**Haggai 1:13-14:** “13 Then Haggai, the messenger of Yahweh, spoke by the commissioned message of Yahweh to the people saying, ‘I am with you,’ declares Yahweh.” “14 So Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work on the house of Yahweh of hosts, their God,”

Instead of “this people,” they are called the remnant. Instead of the God of Armies calling out in warning, He declares as Yahweh their covenant God, “I am with you.” Notice also that He stirs up the Spirit of their leaders and the people to carry out His work. Here, we see the heart of the Lord toward the repentant. He warns His people out of love and then empowers their efforts as they turn from their sin and worship Him.

## II. Second Oracle: Encouragement in Building (2:1-9)

God speaks again through Haggai on the feast day, On October 17, 520 BC, commemorating the dedication of Solomon's temple, verse 3,

**Haggai 2:3–4:** “**3** ‘Who among you remains who saw this house in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem like nothing in your eyes?’ **4** ‘But now, be strong, Zerubbabel,’ declares Yahweh, ‘be strong also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land, be strong,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ declares Yahweh of hosts.”

God asks, “Who remembers this house in its past glory? Does it feel insignificant?” When the Temple's foundation was established, Ezra 3:12 notes that the older individuals returning from Babylon wept because the new foundation couldn't match Solomon's Temple's splendor. Still, God urges leaders and people to be courageous, echoing His command to Moses, Joshua, and Solomon. It's crucial to note that, besides their indifference to the Temple's construction, they faced fierce opposition from neighboring nations (Ezra 4). They sent a letter to Persian King Artaxerxes, resulting in a royal decree to halt construction, enforced by military force. Yet, Yahweh of Hosts assures His people, “Be strong...work...for I am with you.”

Haggai then encourages his hearers to build upon the Temple foundation with a vision of future glory, verse 6,

**Haggai 2:6–9:** “**6** “For thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘Once more—in a little while—I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.’ **7** ‘And I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the desirable things of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says Yahweh of hosts. **8** ‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ declares Yahweh of hosts. **9** ‘The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares Yahweh of hosts.”

In contrast to the quake at Sinai (Exodus 19:18) or the earthquake during Amos's time, this apocalyptic shaking (Zephaniah 1; Matthew 24:29; Hebrews 12:27-29) will herald the arrival of the Messiah's unshakable kingdom. The “desirable things” — gold and silver — will be returned to their rightful Owner and Creator, who will use them to beautify a magnificent future temple (Isaiah 60:5; Zechariah 14:14). The temple's glory will not stem from the richness of its embellishments, but rather from the fact that the Messiah will transform it into a house of peace. The Prince of Peace, Shiloh (Genesis 49:10), will reign over the entire world from His House, bringing peace to the earth. As foretold by Isaiah,

**Isaiah 9:6–7:** “**6** For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, **Prince of Peace.** **7** **There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,** On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will accomplish this.”

### III. Third Oracle: Blessings in Building (2:10-19)

On December 18, 520 BC, Haggai asks the priests a Levitical question, verse 12,

**Haggai 2:12:** “12 ‘If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches bread with this fold or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?’” And the priests answered, “No.”

He asks them another question, verse 13,

**Haggai 2:13:** “13 Then Haggai said, “If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?” And the priests answered, “It will become unclean.”

Sin defiles easily, unlike holiness, which is only achieved through sacrifice. God then applies this principle to His people, verse 14,

**Haggai 2:14:** “14 Then Haggai answered and said, “‘So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they bring near to Me there is unclean.’”

Their neglect, theft, self-centeredness, and fear of man have marred everything they have done and will do. This led them to once again face the curses of Deuteronomy for their disobedience (2:15-17). Nevertheless, the Lord notes, “they did come back to me.” Despite their previous sins and inability to rid themselves of guilt, they heeded God’s Word delivered through Haggai with faith and repentance. Consequently, God promises to bless them.

**Haggai 2:19:** “19 ‘Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree, it has not borne fruit. Yet from this day on I will bless you.’”

He does not wait until the Temple’s completion to bless them, choosing to bless them from that day forward, restoring their depleted harvest.

## IV. Fourth Oracle: Salvation in Building (2:20-23)

On the same day, December 18, 520 BC, God’s word comes again in a message to the Davidic descendant Zerubbabel. He begins by reiterating the promise of the future earth-shattering quake of the inauguration of the Messiah’s Kingdom (2:21). God then declares in verse 22,

**Haggai 2:22:** “22 ‘I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.’”

As He did with the armies of Pharaoh (Exodus 14), God will dismantle all earthly powers, destroying all military might against Him and His people. This apocalyptic judgment will dismantle earthly powers, replacing them with Christ’s unshakable kingdom, which will crush all other empires, powers, and authorities (Daniel 2). Haggai concludes with a declaration about the Day of the Lord, verse 23,

**Haggai 2:23:** “23 ‘On that day,’ declares Yahweh of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you.’” declares Yahweh of hosts.”

The signet ring symbolizes the authority of the rightful king. In Jeremiah 22:24-30, God disavows Jeconiah, issuing a curse on his lineage from David’s throne, likening him to a signet removed from the Hand of Yahweh and discarded. The line of Jeconiah is condemned to never reign again. In contrast, Zerubbabel signifies the revival of the

Messianic lineage following the exile. He is referred to as “My Servant”, an allusion echoing the Servant Songs of Isaiah (See Isaiah 53), and he inherits the promised authority of the Davidic King’s signet ring. This prophecy motivates Zerubbabel to fulfill his duty in rebuilding God’s Temple. Yet it also looks forward to his descendant, the Messiah, and His work of building God’s Temple, which He is completing now in the church and will accomplish in His Kingdom.

### *Christ Connection*

In Christ's genealogy, we see the cursed Jeconiah and the chosen Zerubbabel. Jeconiah appears in Matthew 1, asking why he is included if his lineage is cursed regarding David’s throne? Matthew traces Jesus’ legal ancestry through His adoptive father, Joseph, who descends from King Solomon. Importantly, Jesus is not Jeconiah's biological child, as He inherited no DNA from Joseph. Luke’s genealogy reveals Mary’s lineage, which connects to David, not through the royal line, but through David’s son, Nathan. Notably, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, is also in Mary’s genealogy, emphasizing God's unique use of him to restore David’s line. The virgin birth illustrates God's incredible plan; it ensures Jeconiah’s biological descendants will not occupy the throne while allowing David’s descendants, through Zerubbabel, to claim it. Jesus exemplifies the precision and faithfulness of God’s word and promises through His legal lineage linked to kingship via Joseph and a biological connection to David through Mary.