

ZEPHANIAH SHORT VERSION

Historical context. Zephaniah preached in the Southern Kingdom during the reign of King Josiah, around 630 B.C. In its introduction to this book, *The Catholic Youth Bible* states:

“Zephaniah follows the footsteps of the classical Old Testament prophets in denouncing the wrongdoing of society. His main contribution is considering pride (1:6, 2:10, 3:11) as the source of problems such as smugness (1:12), rebellion (3:2), and treachery (3:11). All these attitudes toward God lead to idolatry and social sin. Although all people sin, leaders have a greater responsibility, and their sins will provoke a harsh judgment during the coming day of the Lord (1:14). Only those who worship God humbly and who seek justice will be spared. Zephaniah calls them the remnant (3:12-13), meaning “a little piece that is left over.” They are the ones who will stay faithful to God through both good times and bad.

The book ends with a song of joy reassuring the people of Jerusalem that God still loves them and will save them in the end. We are not sure if the song is from Zephaniah himself or is the addition of a later editor. It is as if the writer knows that when people are experiencing the negative results of sinful actions, they need to be reassured that they are still loved. God’s punishment is to teach us, not to destroy us. Therefore, God’s people should not despair but keep their trust in God” (p. 1093).

Though we live in a fallen world surrounded by evil, we can hope in the perfect Kingdom of God to come, and we can allow any bad experiences that touch us now to purify us from sin.

Division and content of chapters

- Oracles condemning the idolatrous practices of Judah (1:1-2:3).
- Oracles condemning the nations for their harsh treatment of Israel (2:4-15).
- Oracle against Jerusalem (3:1-7)

- The final section sounds more positive (3:8-20). The punishment of the nations will bring about conversion (3:8-13), leading the prophet to proclaim a *Song of Joy* that God will once more restore the fortunes of the chosen people (3:14-20).

SUGGESTED TEXT TO READ

3:14-20 – A book which began with condemnation ends with a burst of joy.

Verses 14-18 are sometimes used as a first reading for a feast of Mary who is seen as the pre-eminent daughter of Jerusalem.