

**The Minor Prophets**  
**Zephaniah and Haggai**

**Zephaniah**

The prophecy takes place during the reign of Josiah (640–609 b.c.), a significant Judean king (2 Kings 21:26–23:20; 2 Chron. 33:25–35:27). The northern kingdom of Israel had already been exiled, in 722 b.c., so “Israel” (Zeph. 2:9; 3:13–15) does not refer to it. Rather, these references speak of the remainder of the nation of Israel: little Judah and its capital, Jerusalem.

Josiah was a reforming king, trying to reestablish acceptable worship practices that had fallen out of use since the time of his great-grandfather Hezekiah (2 Kings 21:1–26). Even after a religious reform, not all lives are changed. No matter how clear the call to repentance, there were always those who refused to respond and who need to hear the prophetic word afresh.

### Theme

The theme of Zephaniah, one preached more consistently by him than by any other prophet, is the “day of the Lord” (1:7, etc.). This approaching day shows two faces: one of judgment against those who sin against God, and one of blessing for those who follow him. God will show himself just in both punishment and praise.

### Key Themes

1. God will judge the whole earth (1:2–3, 17–18; 3:8), Judah (1:4–16; 3:1–7) and her pagan neighbors (2:4–8) alike.
2. God, as covenant keeper, will bless his people when they return to their covenant relationship with him (3:11–20).
3. God will extend blessing and grace to all peoples and nations (3:9–10).
4. Judgment and blessing occur both in the near future for the prophet and his audience (1:4–18; 2:3) and also in the more distant future (3:8–9, 11, 13–17).
5. There is no such thing as a second-generation child of God. Every generation must own God's covenant, not relying on the faith of a previous generation.

1. Introduction (1:1)
2. Judgment Coming Against Judah (1:2–6)
3. The Day of the Lord (1:7–3:20)
  - a. Day of sacrifice and punishment (1:7–9)
  - b. The coming wrath (1:10–18)
    - i. Against God's people (1:10–16)
    - ii. Against all humanity (1:17–18)
  - iii. **Repentance is still possible** (2:1–3)
  - iv. Nations warned (2:4–3:8)

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1. Philistines (2:4–7)
  2. Moab and Ammon (2:8–11)
  3. Cush (2:12)
  4. Assyria (2:13–15)
  5. Jerusalem (3:1–7)
  6. Summary (3:8)
- v. Anticipation of hope (3:9–20)
1. **Conversion of the nations (3:9–10) (remnant of Romans 9)**
  2. Judah's return (3:11–13)
  3. Joyful song (3:14–17)
  4. God's promised restoration (3:18–20)

### Haggai

The word of the Lord comes to Haggai between late August and mid-December of 520 b.c. Haggai motivates the leaders (Zerubbabel and Joshua) and the people of God to consider their current economic and spiritual circumstances and to renew their efforts to complete the work of temple restoration.

The Persian ruler Cyrus the Great (559–530 b.c.) captured Babylon in 539. His edict in 538 b.c. permitted the return of Jews to Jerusalem so that they might rebuild the temple (Ezra 1–2). Initial work stalled, however, when opposition arose (Ezra 3:1–4:5).

The events within the book of Haggai take place during the reign of Darius I (522–486 b.c.), a general who rose to power following the death of Cyrus's son Cambyses (530–522). The specific mention of the “second year of Darius” (Hag. 1:1) places the book firmly in the year 520 b.c. Darius's support was vital for the completion of the temple (Ezra 5–6).

#### Key Themes

1. *The restoration of God's house.* Temple restoration highlights the Lord's desire to renew a covenant relationship with his people, characterized by his presence (1:13; 2:4–5). A decaying temple signifies a decaying relationship and brings defilement rather than holiness to the people (2:14).
2. *The prophetic word is the divine Word.* The divine message comes “by the hand of Haggai” (1:1, 3; 2:1, 10), is characterized by “thus says the Lord” (1:2, 5, 7; 2:6, 11), is a message “to Haggai” (2:20), is characterized by “declares the Lord” (1:9, 13; 2:4 [3x], 8, 9, 14, 17, 23 [3x]), is the “voice of the Lord their God” (1:12), and is the “Lord's message” (1:13).
3. *The Lord is sovereign.* The phrase “Lord of hosts” occurs 14 times in these 38 verses (see 1:2). The Lord gives the divine word, controls the fortunes of his people (1:9; 2:17, 19) and

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nations (2:6–8), directs nature (1:10), motivates his people to action (1:14; 2:4), and establishes and deposes kingdoms (2:20–23).

4. *The people must work.* A restored house will bring pleasure and glory to the Lord (1:8) and convey blessing to the people (2:19), but there is work to be done. Physical labor (1:14) is urged in the form of numerous imperatives (1:7–8; 2:4–5). But there is also “heart” work to be done, as evidenced by the call to consider past experience in light of the present inaction (1:5–7; 2:15–19).

5. *The restoration of David's house.* Zerubbabel, the heir of David, is promised an elevated status (2:23). The Lord, who had taken off the “ring” of the Davidic house (Jer. 22:24–27), now promises to wear it once again. As in the OT (2 Samuel 7; Ps. 2:6), the NT understanding unites king and temple. It is only as the temple is rebuilt (Matt. 26:61; 27:40; John 2:18–22) that Christ Jesus, the Davidic heir, is installed as the messianic King (Rom. 1:1–4), thus fulfilling the promises to Zerubbabel (Matt. 1:1, 12–13; Luke 3:27).

After the exile, the Lord is renewing his promises to his people and calls on them to finish rebuilding the temple so that he might be with them and fulfill his promises to bless the whole world through them (2:9), particularly through the Messiah from the house of David (2:23).

1. Introduction: Reluctant Rebuilders (1:1–2)
2. Consider Your Ways: Fruitless Prosperity (1:3–12)
  - a. Work without satisfaction (1:3–11)
  - b. General response: obedience and fear (1:12)
3. Promise and Progress (1:13–15a)
  - a. God's promise (1:13)
  - b. Specific response: work begins (1:14–15a)
4. The Former and Latter Glory of This House (1:15b–2:9)
  - a. Comparing past and present (1:15b–2:3)
  - b. Acting based on the past (2:4–5)
  - c. An image of God's house restored (2:6–9)
5. Consider Your Ways: Holiness and Defilement; Repentance and Blessing (2:10–19)
  - a. Analogy: holiness and defilement (2:10–14)
  - b. Consider life before restoration began: you did not turn (2:15–17)
  - c. Consider life since restoration began: I will bless (2:18–19)
6. Zerubbabel: The Signet Ring (2:20–23)
  - a. Destruction upon kingdoms (2:20–22)
  - b. An image of David's house restored (2:23)