

Tuesday Evening Bible Study
Series #8: The Minor Prophets
Session #15: Zephaniah & Haggai
Tuesday, May 9, 2017

Summary of Zephaniah

In three chapters Zephaniah ranges through the major prophetic themes of judgment and salvation. The book announces judgment in comprehensive terms matched only by the extensiveness of God's transformation and restoration. The book prompts consideration of the communal consequences of sin and squarely focuses any future beyond judgment on God's removal of the judgments and reconstitution of a faithful people. The book opens with the announcement of the Day of the Lord, which is characterized as a day of massive, even total, destruction. It is a day that reverses creation; humans, animals, birds, and the whole world will be swept away (1:2-3; 17-18). Officials (1:8), persons of means (1:13), and other subgroups are mentioned, but the chapter does not limit the devastation to specific groups within Judah. A possibility of being protected through the destruction is mentioned at the start of chapter 2, but it is not promised. The bulk of chapter 2 contains oracles against nations and shifts to destruction outside of Judah. Chapter 3 returns to Judah. Threats against Judah are intermingled with references to a surviving remnant that is cleansed of their deceit. They will speak purely and are enjoined to rejoice and sing in concert with God's own rejoicing over them as restored people.

The book moves at a quick pace and enwraps readers in God's fury through an abundant variety of images, descriptions, and metaphors. The poet's portrayal of God is the book's most significant theological aspect. He heralds a fire-and-brimstone God whose quest for sovereignty over peoples and other gods, and whose sense of ethics will not allow for injustice and the inordinate assertion of power of one people over another. God makes no distinction between guilty human beings and nonhumans: all creation will experience divine wrath. Finally Jerusalem, portrayed as a woman who has been divinely scorned because she defiled herself and acted oppressively, now becomes the source of divine exultation.

When was Zephaniah written?

The superscription places Zephaniah in the reign of Josiah, who reigned from 640 to 609 BCE. Josiah's reign is described in 2 Kings 22:1-23:30 and 2 Chronicles 34:1-36:1. Starting in 640 B.C.E., it spans the latter days of Assyrian dominance. During the gap between Assyrian and Babylonian dominance in Judah, Josiah engaged in a major reform and in territorial expansion. Josiah was killed by the Babylonian army in 609 B.C.E. However, Josiah's reform and Judean expansion are not mentioned by Zechariah. Assyria and Nineveh are mentioned, but Babylon is not. The combined effect of these factors has led most interpreters to assume the book is set in the early part of Josiah's reign. The name Zephaniah means 'Yahweh has hidden or stored up.'

Major Theological Themes

- 1) Day of the Lord
- 2) Remnant
- 3) Seek the Lord

Outline of Zephaniah

- A. Superscription (1:1)
- B. The Coming Day of the Lord (1:2 – 2:3)
 1. Judgment against Jerusalem, Judah, and the world (1:2-6)
 2. The day of the Lord (1:7 – 2:3)
- C. Judgment against other nations (2:4-15)
- D. Judgment, salvation, and restoration (3:1-20)
 1. Judgment against Jerusalem (3:1-7)
 2. Judgment and salvation of the nations (3:8-10)
 3. Salvation in Jerusalem (3:11-13)
 4. Restoration of Daughter Jerusalem & a call to rejoice (3:14-20)

Notes about Zephaniah

- Milcom = an Ammonite god
- The Fish Gate, the Second Quarter, and the Mortar all likely refer to wealthy districts of Jerusalem.
- Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron are four major cities of the Philistines.
- The use of the images of Sodom and Gamorrah suggest total annihilation.
- Note at the end how Jerusalem is portrayed in the feminine to imply vulnerability and utter dependence on God, whereas God is portrayed as a virile king and warrior.

The bottom line?

We need not dread God's coming judgment, but we anxiously await the full measure of God's promised blessings.

Resources

Enterthebible.com, <https://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament>

<https://bible.org/seriespage/42-book-zephaniah>

Notes from The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV), 2010

Notes from HarperCollins Study Bible (NRSV), 1989

Notes from *The CEB Women's Bible* (CEB), 2016

Summary of Haggai

His name is related to the Hebrew word for festival, ‘*chag*.’ The prophet Haggai, in 520 B.C.E., urges those who have returned from Babylonian exile, including Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor, to rebuild the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. Haggai blames their lack of prosperity on the fact that the temple still lies in ruins while they themselves live in paneled houses. The people are moved by Haggai's prophecy to start rebuilding the temple. Through Haggai, the Lord promises to be with the people and to make this second temple greater than the first. Haggai's book ends with a prophecy for Zerubbabel, a descendant of David. When the Lord defeats the nations, Zerubbabel will become like a "signet ring" on God's hand; he will be the Lord's chosen ruler. Haggai gives us a glimpse into a critical period in Jewish history, when those who have returned from exile are struggling to reshape their identity as a people in the land of their ancestors. To help in forming that identity, Haggai looks to the past, evoking the Exodus from Egypt (2:5), and to the future—the vision of a glorious rebuilt temple (2:9) and a new Davidic ruler (2:23). Hope for the future rests on God's faithfulness in the past.

When was it written?

The book of Haggai can be dated very accurately. According to several chronological notes in the book itself, Haggai prophesied in the latter half of the year 520 BCE, during the reign of the Persian ruler, Darius I. His prophecies must have been written down shortly thereafter.

Major Theological Themes

- 1) Judgment and hope
- 2) The promise of prosperity

Outline of Haggai

- A. Prophetic call to rebuild the Temple (1:1-11)
- B. The People and Leaders respond (1:12-15a)
- C. Promise of a Glorious Second Temple (1:15b – 2:9)
- D. Cleansing the community (2:10-14)
- E. The Temple is rededicated (2:15-19)
- F. Zerubbabel, the Chosen One (2:20-23)

Notes about Haggai

- “Second year” = 520 BCE. “Sixth month” = Elul (Aug-Sep)
- Zerubbabel is the grandson of Jehoiachin and a descendent of David. He was made governor of Judah by Zerubbabel.
- “Seventh month” = Tishri (Sep-Oct)
- “24th day of the 9th month” = approximately Dec. 18.
- “signet ring” = a symbol of authority; the bearer of the signet ring enjoys the authority of the king, thus Zerubbabel bears the authority of the Lord.

How is Haggai relevant to us today?

Haggai gives us a glimpse into a critical period in Jewish history, when those who have returned from exile are struggling to reshape their identity as a people in the land of their ancestors. To help in forming that identity, Haggai looks to the past, evoking the Exodus from Egypt (2:5), and to the future--the vision of a glorious rebuilt temple (2:9) and a new Davidic ruler (2:23). Hope for the future rests on God's faithfulness in the past.

Resources

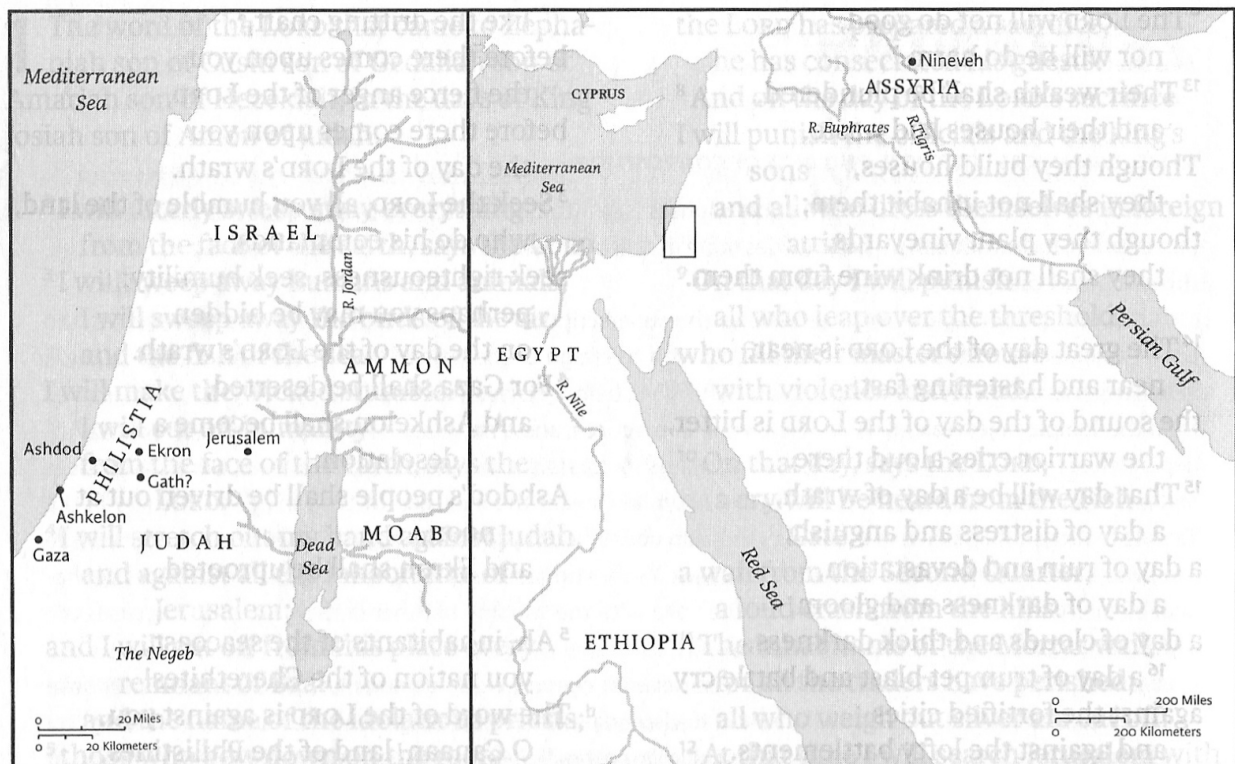
Enterthebible.com, <https://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament>

Bible.org, <https://bible.org/seriespage/haggai>

Notes from The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV), 2010

Notes from HarperCollins Study Bible (NRSV), 1989

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Ch 2.4–15: Places mentioned in the oracles against foreign nations.