



of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign." (Jeremiah 1:1-2)

- 626 BC - **Nabopolassar** led Babylonians in a successful revolt against Nineveh in 626 BC after Ashurbanipal died in 627 BC.
- 626-605 BC – Judah remains stable during Nabopolassar's rule in Babylon
- 622 BC - **Josiah's reforms** and purification of the Temple in his 18<sup>th</sup> year, or 622-621 BC, may have been in response to:
  - the collapsing Assyrian Empire,
  - the rising (but, not yet dominant) Babylonian Empire,
  - and the politically neutralized Egypt, who had a ruling dynasty at this time that supported Assyria, was watching the power base on the world stage change.This would be a perfect time in international politics for Josiah to attempt a restoration of Davidic rule over a united Israel which included the land of Israel in the North and Judah in the South while also instituting the national religion and worship of their God YHWH.
- 620 BC – Nabopolassar had successfully united the chieftains of Babylonia under his control for the rising Babylonian Empire
- **620 BC – ZEPHANIAH writes his book**
- 614 BC – Babylon defeats Assyrian city of Ashur
- 612 BC –
  - **Nineveh falls** to Nabopolassar;
  - Power base begins to shift to Babylon
  - Judah begins to become unstable as the international power
    - fades from Assyria,
    - grows in Babylon,
    - but is challenged by Egypt
- 610 – Haran falls to Nabopolassar; Pharaoh Neco II rules in Egypt (610-595 BC)
- 609 – **Josiah killed in Megiddo Valley** by Pharaoh Neco II
- 609-598 – Judah's King Jehoiakim (Josiah's son) switches allegiance back and forth between Egypt and Babylon.
- 605 – Assyria is totally defeated at Carchemish by Babylonian General Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt's power in the north, Syria, Mediterranean Coast and Israel is broken.

### **Date of Prophecy (620)**

- There are two basic options to consider for the time of Zephaniah's ministry:
  - Before 622-621 BC when Josiah began reforms in Josiah's 18<sup>th</sup> year as king (or, Josiah's age of 26 years old).
  - After 622-621 BC when the Book of the Law had been found during Josiah's reformation and the cleaning of the Temple. After a few years of reform the people proved to have failed to respond to Josiah's reforms and did not return to the Lord.
- Internal evidence or hints to the time of writing:
  - Nineveh's predicted collapse in Zephaniah 2:13-15. This collapse began half way through the reign of Ashurbanipal (640's BC), set in hard with Ashurbanipal's death in 627 BC during the reign of his son Ashur-etel-ilani (627-623 BC) and was fulfilled in 612 with the fall of Nineveh. Assyria's total disappearance was complete in 605 with their meager last stand at Carchemish.

Extreme estimate: 640-612

Best estimate: 624 BC

- Josiah's reform began in Josiah's 18<sup>th</sup> year which would be the year 622-621 BC. There is no mention of Josiah's reforms mentioned specifically, but the book was written during Josiah's reign which was 640-609 BC. Is there no mention of the reforms because they had not yet began or because they had taken place without success? Extreme estimate: 640-609 BC

Best estimate before reforms: 624 BC

Best estimate after reforms: 620 BC

- The oracles (or, prophecies) against the surrounding nations (Moab, Ammon, Assyria, Philistia) need to be considered. Would these oracles fit best early in Josiah's reign before Josiah's reforms of 622-621 BC or sometime later?  
Extreme estimate: 640-609 BC  
Best estimate: 624-620 BC
- There are several references or phrases from Deuteronomy in Zephaniah. If the "Book of the Law" discovered while cleansing the Temple was the book of Deuteronomy, and if Josiah had never seen it before its discovery by the priests, then it is hard to imagine Zephaniah using quotes and references from a book that had never been seen by his generation. (Of course, the prophet inspired by the Lord could have done this.) It would make more literary sense that if Zephaniah is writing references to the book of Deuteronomy that this lost "Book of the Law" had already been discovered and made known to the priests, leaders, scribes and, eventually, the general public.

Extreme estimate: 622-609 BC

Best estimate: 620 BC

- There are reference to the "remnant of Baal" worship in Zephaniah 1:4 would give the appearance that Josiah had already eliminated a good portion of Baal worship with his reforms which began in his 12<sup>th</sup> year as king in 628-627 BC.

"Josiah was **eight years old** (640 BC) when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left. In **the eighth year** (632-631 BC) of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his **twelfth year** (628-627 BC) he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles and idols. Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles and the idols. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem. In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them, he tore down the altars and the Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem. In the **eighteenth year** (622-621 BC) of Josiah's reign, to purify the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and Maaseiah the ruler of the city, with Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the temple of the Lord his God." – 2 Chron. 34:1-8

Extreme estimate: 628-609 BC

Best estimate: 624-620 BC

- The mention of the king's sons in Zephaniah 1:8 – “I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire.”
  - The sons of the king could be sons of King Manasseh (Josiah's grandfather) or King Amon (Josiah's father). They most likely cannot be the sons of Josiah.
  - It would seem strange to be referring directly to the dress and behavior of the sons of Josiah:
    - When Josiah was in his 12<sup>th</sup> year (age of 20 in 628-627 BC):
      - Jehoiakim was 6
      - Jehoahaz was 4
      - Zedekiah not yet born
    - When Josiah was in his 18<sup>th</sup> year (age of 26 in 622-621 BC):
      - Jehoiakim was 12
      - Jehoahaz was 10
      - Zedekiah was not yet born (He was born in 619 BC)
    - If we assumed Jehoiakim is at least 16 and Jehoahaz 14 years old when this verse possibly was addressing their behavior it would be the year 617 BC when Zedekiah was 2 years old. This really seems unlikely, unless it was predicting their individual behavior and pronouncing judgment on them.

Extreme estimate: 622-609 BC

Best estimate: **617 BC**

With this information we could assume that Josiah's reforms had been implemented and failed. The failure of Josiah's reforms to change the people and the heart of God are addressed in 2 Kings 23:23-27:

*“In the eighteenth year of King Josiah (622-621 BC), this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the Lord. Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses. Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to arouse his anger. So the Lord said, “I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city I chose, and this temple, about which I said, ‘My Name shall be there.’ ” - 2 Kings 23:23-27*

And, remember Huldah's words after the Book of the Law was found and Josiah humbled himself. The nation was already doomed from the days of Manasseh when Josiah found the Book of the Law and began purifying the land in 622 BC:

*“This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people—all the curses written in the book that has been read in the presence of the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all that their hands have made, my anger will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.’ Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled*

*yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord. Now I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here.” – 2 Chronicles 34:24-28*

Manasseh’s utter failure:

*“The Lord said through his servants the prophets: “Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down... Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end—besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of the Lord.” – 2 Kings 21:10-16*

It could be that Zephaniah’s prophecy came during Josiah’s life, but after the mass of the population refused to repent. Many had responded to Josiah’s reform and these are the remnant mentioned in Zephaniah’s writings. Zephaniah’s book announces a judgment that is guaranteed, but also promises the faithful that there will be a restoration.

## **Conclusion: The Purposed Date of the Book: 620 BC**

### **Correlation with the book of Jeremiah**

- Jeremiah Chapters 1-12 occur during King Josiah’s reforms in 627-622
- Shared subjects between Zephaniah and Jeremiah:
  - Worship of YHWH
    - Zephaniah 1:5
    - Jeremiah 6:20
  - Idolatry
    - Zephaniah 1:4-5
    - Jeremiah 7:17-18
  - False swearing to YHWH and swearing in name of idols
    - Zephaniah 1:5
    - Jeremiah 5:2; 7:9; 5:7; 1:16
  - Failure to honor the Law
    - Zephaniah 3:4
    - Jeremiah 8:8-9
  - Failure to take heed to warnings
    - Zephaniah 3:2
    - Jeremiah 2:30; 7:28
  - Moral corruption in royal family, princes, prophets and priests
    - Zephaniah 1:4; 1:8-9 ; 3:3-4
    - Jeremiah 2:8; 2:26
  - Judah is a shameless nation
    - Zephaniah 2:1; 3:5

- Jeremiah 3:3; 6:14; 8:12
- Jerusalem is a rebellious city
  - Zephaniah 3:1
  - Jeremiah 4:17; 5:23
- Jerusalem is stained with blood
  - Zephaniah 3:1
  - Jeremiah 2:22-23; 2:34
- Jerusalem is oppressive to widows and orphans
  - Zephaniah 3:1; 1:9
  - Jeremiah 5:27-28; 6:6

## Deuteronomy and Zephaniah

Did Zephaniah write after the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy) was found in the Temple? Here are some identical or similar phrases from Deuteronomy that appear in Zephaniah:

1. Building but not dwelling in houses:
  - a. Zephaniah 1:13 – “Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.”
  - b. Deuteronomy 28:30 – “You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall ravish her. You shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit.
2. Vineyards:
  - a. Zephaniah 1:13 – “Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.”
  - b. Deuteronomy 28:39 – “You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them.
3. A day of constraint and distress:
  - a. Zephaniah 1:15 – “A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,
  - b. Deuteronomy 28:53, 55, 57 – “...in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you.... in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns....in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns.
4. A day of thick darkness:
  - a. Zephaniah 1:15 – “A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,
  - b. Deuteronomy 4:10-11– “how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, . . . And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.
5. Walk as blind men:
  - a. Zephaniah 1:17 – “I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.

- b. Deuteronomy 28:29 – “and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways. And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you.
6. The Lords Jealousy and Fire:
- a. Zephaniah 1:18 – “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.
- b. Deuteronomy 32:21-22 – “They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.
7. The Lord is Righteous, no iniquity:
- a. Zephaniah 3:5 – “The LORD within her is righteous; he does no injustice; every morning he shows forth his justice; each dawn he does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame.
- b. Deuteronomy 32:4 – ““The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.
8. The Lord Rejoicing over you with singing:
- a. Zephaniah 3:17 – “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.
- b. Deuteronomy 28:63 – “And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.  
Deuteronomy 30:9 – “The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers,
9. Set you for a praise and a name:
- a. Zephaniah 3:19 – “Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.
- b. Zephaniah 3:20 – “At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the LORD.
- c. Deuteronomy 26:19 – “and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.”
10. God inspiring fear:
- a. Zephaniah 3:7 – “I said, ‘Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction.
- b. Deuteronomy 4:10-11 (and, many other places) – “how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.’
11. Scattered Ones
- a. Zephaniah 3:10 – “From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering.

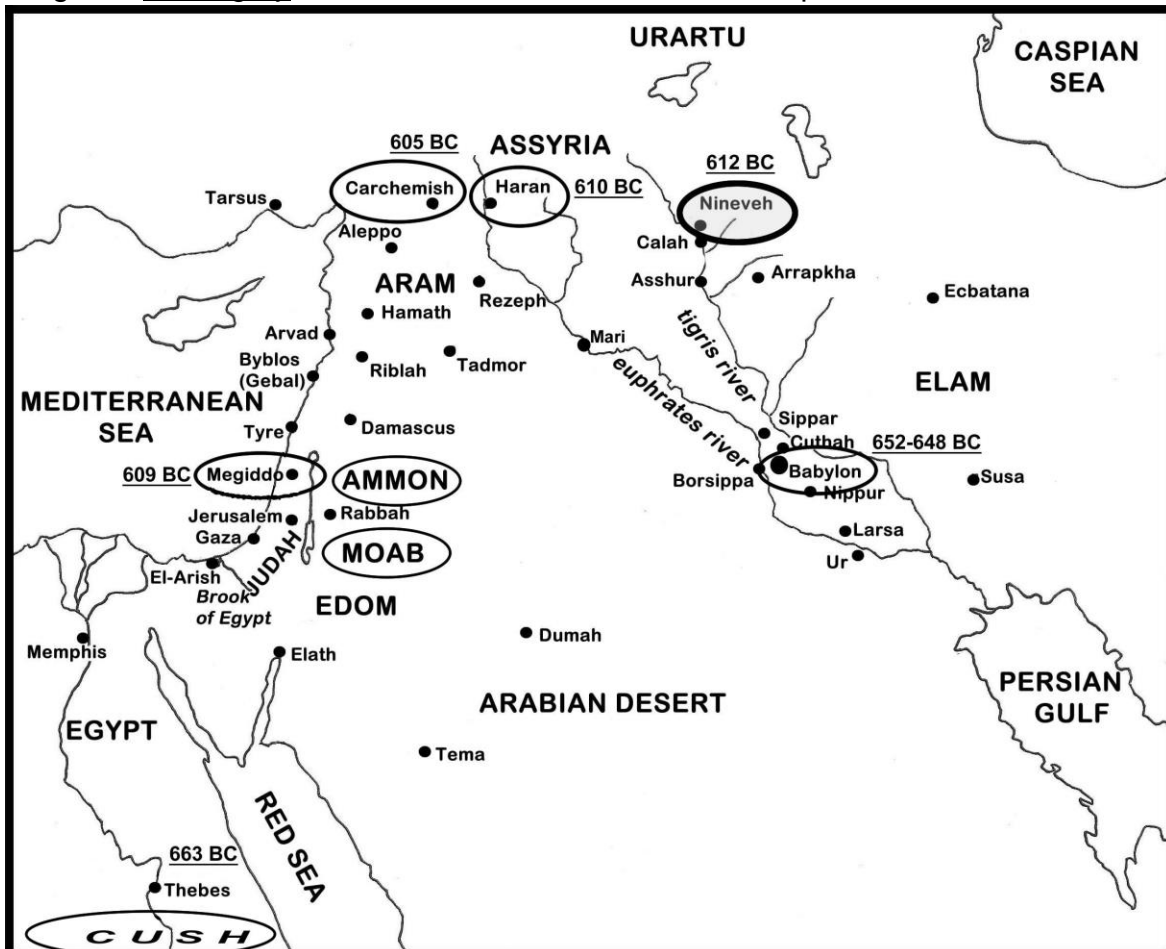
- b. Deuteronomy 4:27 – “And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you.
- c. Deuteronomy 28:64 – “And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

12. God’s Love for Israel:

- a. Zephaniah 3:17 – “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.
- b. Deuteronomy 4:37 – “And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power,
- c. Deuteronomy 7:8, 13 – “but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt....He will love you, bless you, and multiply you.
- d. Deuteronomy 10:15 – “Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.

13. God is King, Lord and Mighty Hero:

- a. Zephaniah 3:17 – “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.
- b. Deuteronomy 10:17 – “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.





## Overview of the Book Zephaniah

1. Three times Zephaniah writes of a remnant being saved:
  - a. 2:3 – “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.”
  - b. 2:7 – “The seacoast shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah, on which they shall graze, and in the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the Lord their God will be mindful of them and restore their fortunes.”
  - c. 3:12-13 – “But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord, those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”
2. Two times Zephaniah mentions Israel’s return from captivity:
  - a. 2:7 – (see above)
  - b. 3:20 – “At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the Lord.
3. A main theme of Zephaniah’s is the “day of the LORD”
  - a. Zephaniah uses this expression “day of the LORD” more than any other prophet.
  - b. Verses:
    - i. 1:7 – “Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the **day of the LORD** is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests.”
    - ii. 1:8 – “And on the **day of the LORD’s** sacrifice— “I will punish the officials and the king’s sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire.”
    - iii. 1:14 – “The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the **day of the LORD** is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there.”
    - iv. 1:15-17 – “A day of wrath is **that day**, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,  
1:16 – “a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.”  
1:17 – “I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.”
    - v. 1:18 – “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the **day of the wrath of the LORD**. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.
    - vi. 2:1-2 – “Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, before the decree takes effect—before the day passes away like chaff— before there comes upon you the burning anger of the LORD, before there comes upon you the **day of the anger of the LORD**.”
    - vii. 2:3 – “Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the **day of the anger of the LORD**.”
    - viii. 3:8 – “Therefore wait for me,” declares the LORD, “for **the day** when I rise up to seize the prey. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to

pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.”

- ix. 3:11 – “On **that day** you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.”
- x. 3:16 – “On **that day** it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak.”

## Outline of the Book of Zephaniah

- 1. 1:1 – Introduction
- 2. 1:2-2:3 – Day of the Lord’s Wrath
  - a. 1:2-2:3 – Day of the Lord’s Wrath vs. Judah
    - i. 1:2-3 – a warning
    - ii. 1:4-13 – the judgment
    - iii. 1:14-2:3 – description of the Day of the Lord’s Wrath vs. Judah
      - 1. 1:17-18 – judgment on all mankind
      - 2. 2:1-3 – a chance for Judah to repent
  - b. 2:4-15 – Day of the Lord’s Wrath vs. the Nations (Gentiles)
    - i. 2:4-7 – against Philistia
    - ii. 2:8-11 – against Moab and Ammon
    - iii. 2:12 – against Cush
    - iv. 2:13-15 – against Assyria
- 3. 3:1-8 – Day of the Lord’s Wrath vs. Jerusalem
- 4. 3:9-20 – Day of the Lord includes Joy and Restoration
  - a. 3:9 – The Lord Changes the peoples of the nations that call on him
  - b. 3:10 – The Lord Returns Dispersed Israel
  - c. 3:11-13 – Removal of Sin and Restoration of the Sanctified Sinners (Jews and Gentiles)
  - d. 3:14-20 – The Rejoicing of the Saved People with their Rejoicing LORD