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Zephaniah 1:1–3:20

The prophet Zephaniah brought messages of judgement and hope to the people of the southern kingdom. He spoke the messages as poems. He used apocalyptic writing to describe the day of the Lord. That was a time when God would bring judgement. God would bring judgement against the people groups and nations living around the southern kingdom. These included the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, the people of Cush and the Assyrians. God would also bring judgement against the southern kingdom.

Zephaniah explained why the southern kingdom would be judged. The officials, rulers, prophets, priests and merchants didn't follow the Law of Moses. They didn't make sure that God's people were faithful to the Mount Sinai covenant. God brought judgement against the other nations. But the people and leaders of the southern kingdom paid no attention to it. They were committed to following the evil practices of the other nations. God's people refused to follow the ways that God had taught them to live.

Zephaniah warned the leaders and the people of the southern kingdom. He warned them to stop being proud. He urged them to worship God faithfully and to do what God wanted done. This would show that they had turned away from their sin and repented. In Zephaniah's time, King Josiah led the people to repent. He stopped them from worshipping false gods. But the people didn't change their ways for very long.

God's anger against their sins was very strong. Zephaniah described it as a jealous anger that burnt like fire. Fire is used to destroy things and also to purify things. It purifies metals by burning away the scum in order to make silver. Zephaniah announced that God would purify what all the nations say. People's words show what they believe in their heart and who they worship. This meant that God's judgement would purify the southern kingdom and other nations. Those who were proud were like the scum that God would get rid of. The only people left alive would be those who trust in the Lord. They were like the silver in a metal that has been purified.

The message of hope for these people was that they would have the covenant blessings. They would have everything they needed and would live in peace. This message of hope was for people from the family line of Jacob. It was also for people from all nations who bow down to God. Bowing down to God showed that they worshipped God as the only Lord and King. The message of hope led people to sing and celebrate with joy. God would also sing for joy. He would sing over people who followed him faithfully. God would take great delight in them.

Jews came to understand this message of hope as a prophecy about the messiah. New Testament writers came to understand that Jesus is the Messiah.