


ARAMAIC BIBLE COMAPANION

PROPHECY OF ZEPHANIAH

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CHAPTER 1

ZEPHANIAH THE ROYAL PROPHET 1

The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah (*The LORD hides or treasures*) son of Cushi... (*Ethiopian*) *Could it be that Zephaniah was one of the earliest Ethiopian Jews of which we have a record after the time of Solomon and that somewhere in the line of Hezekiah there was an Ethiopian Jewish wife? ...son of Gedaliah (whom the LORD made great) son of Amariah (whom the LORD promised) son of Hezekiah. Amariah was born before Manasseh and Zephaniah in the fifth generation of the royal family was a contemporary of Josiah who was the fourth generation great-grandson of Hezekiah. The probable setting of his prophecy is in the years before the reforms of Josiah which would make Zephaniah older than Josiah. In the days of Josiah son of Amon King of Judah Manasseh named his son Amon (artificer) but Amon named his son Josiah ("may the LORD heal") and under Josiah there was indeed appreciable healing of the spiritual maladies of Israel. Zephaniah's ministry is very difficult to pin down to a year but it commenced in the 8th decade of the 7th century B.C.-somewhere in the 630-622 B.C. period.*

GATHERING AND DESTRUCTION 2-3

(a) **I will take away or collect -I will collect** everything from the faces of the earth whispers the LORD. *This is a very emphatic statement speaking of a "collection" or an "in-gathering" from the whole circle of the earth. This is a great promise of the gathering of those whom the LORD will deliver*

(b) I will **collect or cause to vanish or perish man and beast**. I will destroy the **bird** that flies in heaven and the **fish** of the sea and the stumbling or **weak and trembling** or that which causes offence along with **the wicked** and **I will cause mankind to be cut off from the faces of the fertile earth** whispers the LORD. *From this final judgment there is simply no escape for any living thing!*

GOD PROMISES REFORMATION 4-6

I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all those who dwell in Jerusalem and **I will cut off** the remnant of Baal from this place-the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests (of God). I will cut off those who worship the host of heaven on the rooftops-those who worship and swear to the LORD and swear through Milcom. *The people professed a relationship with Yahweh whilst being in the house of Milcom and swearing in that name. We read in 2Kings 23.13 that Josiah broke down the high places of Milcom or Molech to whom child sacrifice was done. And I will cut off those who turn back from following after the LORD who do not seek the LORD and do not consult Him or frequent and promote Him. This section proclaims judgment not of the Great Day but of the Nation of Israel for its involvement with Molech-the practice of the nations who were destroyed before Israel. The more immediate blessing of reform long preceded destruction which did indeed come within 25 years of Josiah's death in 586B.C. Reformation took hold in 622B.C.*

THE DAY OF THE LORD 7-17

(1) **Hush** before the presence of the LORD for the DAY OF THE LORD is near. The LORD has prepared or appointed **a sacrifice. He has caused His called ones to be set apart.** *This statement reiterates that God will sanctify His own and place them in the New Jerusalem ere that great Day of Judgment here foretold 14 times devastates the earth.*

(2) **ON THE DAY** of the sacrifice of Yahweh I will also visit the stubborn rulers [*rrv*] and the king's sons and all who are dressed in the glory of the stranger. And I will visit punishment on all who leap upon the threshold... *The reference may well be to infant sacrifice made at the threshold and embedded*

in a house consecration ceremony...in that day-those who fill the house of their lords with violence and fraud or craft

(3) ON THAT DAY whispers the LORD there will be a shout for help from the fish gate and howling from the second *Possibly the "sheep gate" to the East supplying entrance to the temple area or perhaps the Mishneh gate to the West which was so called as the gate of "second rank" for the entrance of dignitaries* and a great clashing sound of weaponry from the hills. Those who live in the mortar homes [LXX has *"the city" with the word "catacomb" which might seem suggestive of troglodyte character though I surmise what is described is a primitive area of little mortar shops constituting something like a market as may be found extant still in the Asia Minor city of Sardis and the forerunner of the present suq*] must cry out because all the people of Canaan or the merchants will be silent-all those laden with silver will be cut off.

(4)And it will happen AT THAT TIME I will thoroughly search Jerusalem with lamps or candles and I will visit judgment upon the men who sit indifferent [*apq "who sit with the feet drawn up" on couches*] to the things they watch [*The LXX is virtually essential to the sense of this expression*]-those who are saying in their hearts "The LORD will not cause good but He does not do evil. Their wealth will be spoil and houses will be destroyed and they will build houses and not dwell there-plant vineyards and not eat the wine thereof.

(5)THE GREAT DAY of the LORD is near-near and in the very near future [*the "near tomorrow"*]

(6) The voice of THE DAY OF THE LORD is bitter.

(7) That is THE TIME of the warrior's shout. *Whether the shout be one of victory or a call for support it is within the context of battle that the world meets its final destined end-not in the quiet routine of life that signals the rapture(Jerome's term) or "catching away"*

(8) THAT DAY is a day of anger or passing over. *By parallel with the anger of the LORD after 400 years of persecution in Egypt this final nemesis after 1000 years of peace will be universal and international*

(9) A DAY of "flowing balsam"[*hrx for wounds*] and distress or oppressive scantiness [*qwx*]. *The "flowing" suggests a massive medical emergency*

(10) A DAY of calling crashing or tumult [*hav*]and tempestuous calamity [*awv*]*The feature of terrible noise if not profound "breaking" perhaps best described in terms of the "splitting" of the atom.*

(11) A DAY of darkness and going down of the sun or thick darkness [*lpa*] *The sun according to our LORD JESUS CHRIST would go down in darkness. The best equivalent we know is the nuclear night*

(12) A DAY of cloud [*m*] and gloom or dropping cloud [*lpr*] *The world is not ever totally covered with cloud. This day is specifically notable for its great cloud concentration. This cloud may not at all be rain cloud but a contaminating cloud associated with distillation but of a terrible sort*

(13) A DAY of the trumpet and battle-cry against **fortified cities** and against high corner defence towers. *In the book of the Apocalypse we are told of the "fall of the cities of the nations". Here too cities which are the hubs of modern civilisation fall victim.*

THE MOST CONCLUSIVE TEXT IN THE BIBLE ON THE END OF MANKIND ON THIS PLANET 17-18

(14) **And I will cause hostile distress for mankind** and they will walk **as the blind or mentally blind** for they sinned against the LORD and their blood will be poured out as dust and their bodily **feasting** as

dung. Even their silver-even their gold will not be able to deliver them IN THE DAY of the *passover* wrath of the LORD and by the fire of His jealousy all the earth will be consumed -a definitely terrifying (by its nature) finish or end of all the inhabitants of the earth. *The picture of men walking at the last before the final destruction like blind persons suggests that such as survive will be physically and mentally incapable as the final phase of destruction by fire tumbles upon the earth.*

This first chapter of Zephaniah should be compulsory reading for every theological student. There is this prophecy no escape-no relenting-no qualification in favour of the continuation of a remnant on earth. If man is to live on he must live elsewhere-hence the "New heaven and new earth" which the LORD will make!

CHAPTER 2

ISRAEL AND THE WRITTEN DECREES OF GOD 1-2

O nation not desired or nation in shame gather yourselves -you should have been gathered together.

(1) In the house of the beginning or before the beginning of **the decree** [*td literally "the beginning belonging to the decree-which word is of Persian origin and probably alludes to "the unalterable" and to a "fiery shekinah decree" cf Deuteronomy 33.2*]

(2) Before **the day ordained or written in the book** [*qj*] passes away as winnowed chaff in the wind

(3) Before the beginning of the burning of the anger of the LORD has not yet or does not upon you

(4) Before the beginning of the day of the anger of the LORD has not (yet) come upon you

The prophetic expression is most curious. Its negative speaks of the previous and future history of a nation that should have gathered to Messiah when He came but knew not its appointed time. The prophet speaks of the passing of time and probably of several days of judgment from the divine presence before the burning that follows the harvest of the earth and winnowing away of the evil thereof. The figure speaks both of the kingdom of our LORD and the final conflagration.

THOSE WHO SEEK GOD FROM THE NATIONS IN THE GOSPEL 3

Seek the LORD all you afflicted or humbled ones of the earth to the end that or because they undertake or practice His justice or prepare and undertake his justification or government or defence of one's cause [*fpvm*] *The prophet typically addresses the wide world and the effect of his message is to call for a universal seeking of the LORD for His way of justifying the sinner and for involvement in His kingdom and its government. He further alludes to this in this verse. Seek righteousness-seek humility; who knows or perhaps -or better "If you do you will be hidden in the day of the anger of the LORD"*

*Hiding in Thee, Hiding in Thee
Blest rock of Ages I'm hiding in Thee*

THE FUTURE OF PHILISTINES, MOAB-AMMON, ETHIOPIA NINEVEH WHICH ARE MODERN WEST BANK JORDAN ETHIOPIA & IRAQ 4-15

(1) PHILISTINES/PALESTINIANS 4-7

For **Gaza** will be let go, unmarried, left to its will, deserted. And **Askelon** is headed for desolation. **Ashdod** (*N.T.Azotus*) will be plundered divorced or cast out at noon or "a time of great prosperity". And **Ekron** will be uprooted. *The absolute end of Ekron is an historical fact. The "great prosperity" of Ashdod languished and was spoiled by the Assyrian. It is a thriving revived city today under Israeli rule. Askelon became desert but again today.*

Woe to those who live along the track or region of the sea-the nation of Cretans [*trk those "cut off" like the Cretans who were cut off from their original roots in mainland Europe. The Cretans were originally Minoan but their civilisation was disrupted possibly by pirates and the mixed race that resulted produced sea peoples who infiltrated the coast of Israel and gave it the name "Palestine"*] The word of the LORD'S promise is against you-Canaan-the land of the Philistines. I will cause your total destruction so that no inhabitant remains. *The LORD who never lies promised the end of the Philistines.*

The coastline or region of the sea will be resting places of hewn caves of shepherds and folds of flocks. And the coast or sea margins will belong to the remnants of the house of Judah. *Somewhere in the days beyond the ancient monarchy of Israel's kings and the theocratic period when this did not happen the prophecy had to be implemented. In these days of the 21st century this prophecy has been realised.* She (Judah) will hold intercourse, take pleasure in or rule over or through the homes of Askelon [h[r] In the evening they will repose or lie down to rest for the LORD will visit them and turn their misery or captivity away.

ORIGINS OF THE CANAANITE AND PHILISTINE

(1) **The Canaanites are Arab Semites** who through a wave of droughts migrated north in the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. to the eastern Mediterranean-Lebanon Jordan and Palestine. A sub set of this people-the Jebusites-established Jerusalem. Western scholars are in agreement that the **Canaanites and Jebusites are Hamitic peoples** who predate Arab existence by at least five centuries

(2) **Philistines were a people of Aegean origin** who settled the southern coast of Palestine in the 12th century B.C. shortly before the arrival of the Israelites. They occupied the coastal plain" *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Webster's dictionary defines "Philistine" as "a member of non-Semitic people who lived in south-western Palestine from c 1200B.C. on"

(3) **The Arabs-** Arab peoples are sprung from Ishmael whose descendants spread into Egypt and Arabia. The original Egyptians were Copts Professor Philip Hitti and Arab historian testified under oath "There is no such thing as **Palestine** in Arab history". As to religion the Arabian peoples-prior to the 7th century of the Common Era they worshipped the sun god (female) and the moon god (male). The *personal* name of the moon god was "Allah". The moon god tradition alleges married to the sun god and produced three goddesses Al-lat, Al-Uzza and Manat. The emblem crescent moon emblem continues to have religious and national connotation. Subsequent to failed rapprochement with the Jews the founder of Islam ceased to keep the Jewish Sabbath; turned to the seat of Arab constellation worship; had all other idols in Mecca destroyed; commanded submission to Allah, and changed the direction of prayer from Jerusalem.

(4) **The Palestinians**-It was Yasser Arafat that constructed the concept that "Goliath was a Palestinian and from that base argued that "his people must set right the shameful ignominy of this assassination." The Arab activist Musa Alam (circa 1948) proposed that the Arab people were "in great need of a myth to fill their consciousness and imagination". The now widely accepted view that Arabs are the original (extinct) Philistines and original occupants of Palestine is the curious resultant enigmatic concept.

(2) MOAB-AMMON/JORDAN

I have listened to the reproach or scorn of Moab and the reproaches of the sons of Ammon [*The son of Lot by his younger daughter Genesis 19.30 -whose descendants lived between the Arnon and the Jabbok*] who have poured scorn on my people and made themselves great against their borders. *Moab had sought enlargement at Israel's cost and made incursions into Israel's territory.* Therefore as I live whispers the LORD of hosts the God of Israel at that time Moab will be as Sodom and the sons of Ammon as Gomorrah-a possession of nettles and sold out to salt or barrenness and a desolation for an age. The remnant [rav] of my people shall spoil it and the remaining pre-eminence [rty]of my people possess them. *The prophet sees two stages of change in Moab's suzerainty. The first would be far distant and far different from 2 Kings 24.2 where Ammonites attacked Judah. There is evidence in Ezekiel 39.11 that in the days of the Third World War Israel will have spoiled Moab and presumably during the subsequent millennium she will possess that land.* This is their lot instead of their pride for they insulted and exalted themselves against the people of the LORD of hosts. The LORD will be making them tremble when He emaciates or starves out or destroys [hzz] all the gods of the earth and man from where he was raised of all the coastlands of the Gentiles will worship Him. *The day of universal acknowledgment of Christ is prophesied and indeed the end of all idolatry and counter culture in religion. Every man and every land where the ocean laves will worship him. This is the worship of the Kingdom of Christ Jesus our LORD. This also must happen before the judgment of Chapter 1.*

(3) ETHIOPIA/ETHIOPIA-EGYPT

Also you Cushites -My sword will continually slay them. *The continual wars that have involved the Copts and the Ethiopians rather affirm this prophecy. Even of late the struggle that led to the emergence of Eritrea continued the fulfilment of this prophecy as does the smouldering conflict of factions to this very day.*

(4) ASSYRIA-NINEVEH/IRAQ

And He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria and set up Nineveh for a ruin as dry as the desert. Herds will lie down or repose in the centre of (what was Nineveh)-every animal species [*The rarer use of ymq to signify animal genre is notable*] Also the **vomiting pelican** -also the **shrinking hedgehog** will lodge in its crowning chaplet columns. A call will constantly be sung through the window; dry desolation will be at the threshold or dish [*ps*] for He will make the cedar wainscot or skirting naked. *The portraiture of Nineveh in ruins is vivid and heightens the drama of her doom. She offers nothing but a poor sanctuary for beast and bird-the threshold is even without the water that might be expected to greet its feathered inhabitants.*

This is a city of triumphant rejoicing-one that continues to live for security-that says in her heart "I am exceptional-there is none still or again (akin to me). She has become a ruin, a repose for wild beasts. Every one who passes over her hisses and shakes his hand.

THE STORY OF ASSYRIA'S DISINTEGRATION

With the rise of Nabopolassar of Chaldea the Assyrians were expelled from Babylonia in 625B.C. and with the help of the Medes Asshur fell in 612B.C. The walls of Nineveh were broken down by flood waters and Sardanapalus the son of Ashurbanipal -the last powerful warring king was burned in the torching of the city in 606B.C. The last city of the empire to fall was Harran in the North West. Harran was overrun by the Scythians and Babylonians in 609B.C. Thus an empire that ran 500 miles East West and 400 North South was wiped from the map. Xenophon writes much of the history of the empire at its zenith and in its decline

From this chapter we learn that nations that forget God will be forgotten in the passage of time.

CHAPTER 3

WOE TO JERUSALEM ON 4 COUNTS

Woe to the rebellious city that has defiled itself-the city that causes oppression!

- (1) She has not obeyed the voice
- (2) She has not received teaching instruction or discipline [*rsj*]
- (3) She has not trusted in the LORD
- (4) She has not come close to her God.

The princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are wolves of the evening that reserve [*mrq*] nothing for the morning. Her prophets are treacherous arrogant rash men. Her priests continuously violate the sanctuary; they do violence to Torah [*smj* "to tear parts from" or "to break it up"]

The LORD in her midst is righteous. He will not do iniquity. He delivers His justice morning by morning. As to the first light of dawn He is not trailing behind or missing [*rd*["loitering like a lost sheep"] -the one who does evil is not ashamed or delayed. [*vwb* "shame" and "delay" share the same root] *God is always on time always there to provide light for living but evil doers fail and their failure is their own responsibility for it flies against conscience and light given.*

I have caused nations to be cut off. Their battlements are destroyed. I have caused their streets to be desolate. Because none pass through their cities are ambushed or destroyed [*hdx*] without man without inhabitant. I said "Definitely you will or should fear me; you should take my instruction and her dwelling or home would not be cut off. Yet certainly [*nc*] they caused themselves to rise early and

were corrupt or marred in all their repeated or habitual deeds. [//] Therefore wait for me whispers the LORD until the day when I rise to the spoil for my judgment is:

(1) To gather Gentiles or nations

(2) To quibbutz kingdoms

(3) To pour my fierce anger [m[z] upon them-all my burning anger

For by the fire of my ardent zeal [ytanq] **the whole earth** will be consumed.

HUGE REVIVAL AND A SEA-CHANGE OF INTERNATIONAL SPEECH 9

There are seven enormous promises for the latter day restoration of Israel in the latest times subsequent to the fullness of the Gentiles-when Messiah Yeshua brings in His kingdom. He will truly gather the "other sheep" into one unified fold of believing people from all the earth and especially honour the Messianic Jews at that time.

At the inception of the British Broadcasting Corporation a mission statement was issued among the high endeavours of which was one undertaking "that nations should speak peace to nation". At the appointed time spoken of now by Zechariah God will implement such ideal worldwide conversation (1) Nevertheless then (at that future time) I will turn back or convert [Jph] the peoples to a morally pure speech. This is as if to say the language would be washed or purified as with soap or refurbished as metal sharpened and polished or winnowed as grain. There are two tantalising prophecies in this section. First the fact that God would bring whole peoples to use language morally and accurately and to be guarded and disciplined of speech. This must be a matter of strict discipline and result from divine judgment. The "consumption" spoken of is not to be taken as synonymous with the destruction of Chapter One. What we are being told is not that the entire world "will be consumed by" the fire of God's zeal but that the whole world will "consume or imbibe with joy" [the tense of the verb is active not passive] the wonderful enthusiasm of the LORD Himself and his Spirit's unbounded pure fire of zeal. Besides the judgment of nations an unprecedented spiritual awakening will be poured out on all mankind. The Millennium will explode with fervour and zeal and a living spirituality never before seen on the earth on such a scale. This awakening spirituality and revival may well begin to be outpoured before the Judgment of Nations is implemented nevertheless this scripture lends no brief to break the connection between international judgment and this deep change.

I will convert or restore them to a pure speech so that they all may call on the name of Yahweh to serve Him with one shoulder. This vivid metaphor sees the whole of humanity as mutually helping with the needs of the whole. The obvious comparison is with the "oneness of speech" at Babel by which men wanted to raise a tower to heaven to rebel against God. In this instance the linguistic unity of nations has a spiritual purpose of worship and service.

(2) *From beyond the rivers of Cush or Lower Egypt my suppliants-the daughter of my dispersed one will run with or carry downstream my offering. There appears to be recognition on the part of the prophet of a Jewish minority people settled in Ethiopia. The latter day homecoming of the Ethiopian Jews is already a reality.*

(3) *On that day you will not be ashamed of all the repeated acts in which you transgressed against Me for at that future time I will cause to be removed or put away from among you the your uplifted braggarts and you will not continue to be arrogant on my holy mountain. The end of pride and the commencement of the vigorous Christian life of a people estranged from Christ so long in the ransom of true forgiveness accomplished are prefigured by the LORD as something in which he exults. The prospect of engaging and evangelical Jewry rejoicing in the LORD in the city is what the whole world is waiting for. And I will cause there to be a remnant of humble poor people in your midst and they will be confident [hsj "trust"] in the name of Yahweh. The remnant of Israel will not do evil and will not speak falsely and a slack deceitful tongue will not be found in their mouths for they will feed and rest (at night) none giving them concern. [Equivalent to our idea of "not a care in the world."] Sing and shout for joy O daughter of Zion; they must roar O Israel; be radiant and exult for the object of joy with all your heart O daughter of Jerusalem. The LORD has caused your just punishment to depart;*

He has turned away your enemies. The LORD the king of Israel is in your midst-do not fear calamity any more!

(4) On that day it will be said to Jerusalem "Do not fear" "O Zion do not let your hands be lazy or relaxed" *In the days of Christ's rule the LORD requires an industrious people. The LORD your God is among you a hero who will bring or cause salvation. He will rejoice over you with radiance. He will cause you to be re-sculpted or formed or silent and quiet [vrj] by his love. The beautiful peace of the people under Christ will be unprecedented. Equally the formation of a people by salvation that will take on the look of Christ in its character-these are especial millennial joys. He will circle round above you with joy celebration and invitation.*

I will gather those who have been removed from the appointed place or assembly. A part taken from you [Jmm] (Israel) they will be an offering borne a reproach against her. *[Jerusalem as above in her previous pride] The unrecognized Christians or Messianic believers will be accepted fully by Christ and no longer separated-because they are part of Israel.*

(5) At that time (of Judgment and millennial beginnings) behold me working with all who afflict you. I must cause the halt or lame to be saved and I will continually gather those driven out [j dh]. And I will make those who were in shame through the whole earth to have praise and renown.

(6) At that time I will cause you to come back

(7) At that time I will qibbutz or house you in communities for I will give you to have a name and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I bring back your restoration or renewal before their eyes says the LORD.

THE END

Bob Coffey L'shuvkha Marya
To the glory of the Lord
Aramaic Bible Companion