

Introduction to Zephaniah

Periodically in history, there are mass migrations that radically alter existing civilizations or even destroy them. Around the time of the Exodus and shortly afterward, there were migrations into Greece which started the “Greek Dark Ages.”

Wikipedia describes this.

“Mycenaean Greece (or the Mycenaean civilization) was the last phase of the Bronze Age in Ancient Greece, spanning the period from approximately 1750 to 1050 BC. It represents the first advanced and distinctively Greek civilization in mainland Greece with its palatial states, urban organization, works of art, and writing system. The Mycenaeans were mainland Greek peoples who were likely stimulated by their contact with insular Minoan Crete and other Mediterranean cultures to develop a more sophisticated sociopolitical culture of their own.”

“Mycenaean Greece perished with the collapse of Bronze Age culture in the eastern Mediterranean, to be followed by the Greek Dark Ages, a recordless transitional period leading to Archaic Greece where significant shifts occurred from palace-centralized to de-centralized forms of socio-economic organization (including the extensive use of iron). Various theories have been proposed for the end of this civilization, among them the Dorian invasion or activities connected to the "Sea Peoples".”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mycenaean_Greece

I mention Greece since I lived there for a while and became interested in the Minoans who inhabited the island of Crete.

If history is still taught in schools, it should be common knowledge of the barbarian invasions into the Roman Empire and its eventual collapse.

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

One could even ask the question, are there currently mass migrations throughout the world which are reshaping civilization?

The migration of the nation Israel from Egypt to the Levant was a mass migration that changed much. It is documented in the Pentateuch. Subsequent to the settlement of the sons of Israel in their land, they fell into paganism. As a reminder, paganism, as used in this lesson, refers to religions that do not worship the Biblical God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

From the Bible, we know there will be certain future momentous events that will change the world. We, as Christians, sometimes look forward to the imminent Rapture in which Jesus Christ “snatches” or raptures (rapiemur from the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 per Thomas Constable) believers from the earth. This brings in the Tribulation which will end with a mass destruction of the face of the earth with the “Baptism of Fire.” In due time, there will be a description of this term. If you can’t wait you can get Herman’s treatment of this subject in the lesson of 2015-05-31 in the book of Matthew. At the end of prophecy in the Bible, there will be a new heaven and and a new earth in eternity. The study of Zephaniah will deal with the Tribulation, The Day of the Lord and the Millennium (the Kingdom).

What is the book of Zephaniah?

Prior to retiring a co-worker asked me if Zephaniah was one of those books of the Apocrypha, in other words, non-canonical books. Zephaniah is a canonical book found in the sections called the “Minor Prophets.” So where in the Bible is that? Let us look at the Old Testament through Jewish eyes. The Scriptures are called the “Tanach” which is derived from “Torah,” (the Law/Instruction), “Nabiim,” (the Prophets) and “Kethubim.” (the Writings). Also note that in the Hebrew Bible, 1st and 2nd Samuel were counted as a single book; 1st and 2nd Kings were counted

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

as a single book, 1st and 2nd Chronicles were counted as a single book and Ezra-Nehemiah was counted as a single book.

The Torah is what we call the Pentateuch, the first five books in our English Bibles, sometimes referred to as “the books of Moses.”

The Prophets are further divided into the Former and Latter Prophets and the 12 (Minor Prophets).

The Former Prophets includes Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings.

The Latter Prophets includes Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. What is often called the Minor Prophets in the English Bible is considered one book in the Hebrew Bible called “the Twelve.” They include Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Although the order of the books is not usually considered inspired, there is evidence that the order had some thought placed into it. For instance, there is evidence that the book of Psalms was divided into five main sections. Here is an explanation from Wikipedia:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalms>

“The Book of Psalms is divided into five sections, each closing with a doxology (i.e., a benediction). These divisions were probably introduced by the final editors to imitate the five-fold division of the Torah.”

- Book 1 (Psalms 1–41)
- Book 2 (Psalms 42–72)
- Book 3 (Psalms 73–89)
- Book 4 (Psalms 90–106)
- Book 5 (Psalms 107–150)

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

There are also some suggestions that the order of the minor prophets tells a story. That is beyond the scope of this lesson. But it is something to keep in mind.

The third section is called the Writings which is further divided into three categories:

Poetical Books: Psalms, Proverbs and Job

Five Rolls (Megilloth): Song of Solomon, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther and Lamentations

Historical Books: Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah (1 book) and Chronicles.

Sometimes illustrations convey written material in a simple memorable manner. Here is an illustration from Herman's teaching which I picked up and redrew.



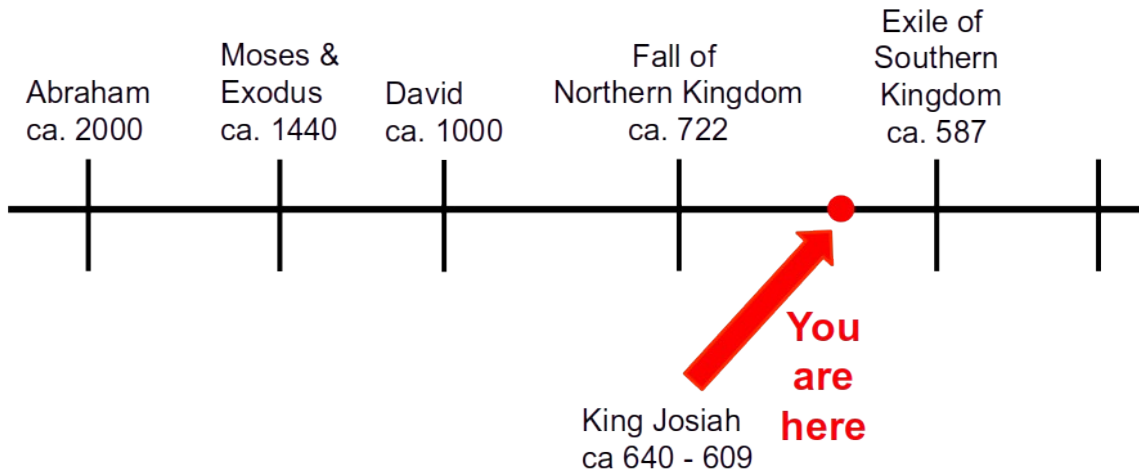
The Panorama of Scripture (Mattox)

Zephaniah is in the Old Testament, the books to Israel. They look forward to the 1st Advent of Christ and the 2nd Advent of Christ. Zephaniah is primarily looking at the 2nd Advent.

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

Context of History

Where in history was Zephaniah written. Below is an illustration I drew to show relative place in time of Zephaniah. Remember, this is prophecy which means it was written at one time looking forward to acts of God in the future.



Not drawn to scale

A graph or chart does not always give you a feel of where you are in history if you are not familiar with the details in the illustration. So, some details may help you place the historical context.

In Judges, the sons of Israel had settled the land but had not removed the indigenous people who were anti-Yahweh. They infected the people with paganism. In particular, there was widespread worship of Baal and Ashartarte. In some cases, like Gideon, it was apparent that they had so abandoned Yahweh, that they were unfamiliar with the Law, i.e. with Bible doctrine. It was up to King David to pull the nation back to worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But starting with Solomon and his multitudes of unbelieving wives/concubines, Israel again became infected with paganism and the worship of many “gods.” It got so bad in the Northern Kingdom after Solomon that God took them

Introduction to Zephaniah
Zephaniah 1:1

out in 722 B.C. In Judah, the Southern Kingdom, there were good kings and bad kings. Josiah was king when Zephaniah prophesied. One hundred years after the conquest of the Northern Kingdom, a copy of the Law was discovered in the temple. This gives a clue as to how low Judah had gone. It had forgotten Yahweh, similar to what happened in the book of Judges under the reigns of Manasseh and Amon who was son and grandson of the great king Hezekiah. Josiah took over the reign of Judah when he was eight years old. He determined to do good. A question not answered in the Scriptures is who it was that influenced and taught Josiah to be a good king. At eight years old he had to have had some kind of tutor or mentor. His father, Amon, was an evil king who was murdered. But the year 622 was key in Josiah's reign. Josiah was 16 years old then. He realized that his kingdom had wandered shamefully away from the worship of God. Under his reign, God raised up Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk. We are only concerned in this study with Zephaniah.

From Herman's Kings and Prophets chart:

642-640	Amon B	Zephaniah	635-625 Judah
640-609	Josiah R	Jeremiah	627-575 Judah
609	Jehoahaz E	Lamentations	586
609-598	Jehoiakim E	Habakkuk	620-610
598-597	Jehoiachin E		
597-587	Zedekiah E		
586	Babylonia Captivity of Southern Kingdom		

Open your Bibles. Let us read 2 Kings chapters 22-23. This gives an almost visual, graphic description of Josiah's actions when the book of the covenant was discovered in the temple. Under kings Manasseh and Amon the people had abandoned their own God and gone after the gods

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

of the surrounding peoples. They even put items dedicated to these foreign gods into the temple.

This gives a historical context during which Zephaniah wrote his book. It is not, in my opinion, about those times. It is prophecy and looked to the future for fulfillment. More on that when we come to the topic of prophecy.

Emphasis via Style

A poet is given “literary license” to stretch the meanings of words and use various techniques to make his point. Many commentators commented on the use of different literary techniques in the book of Zephaniah to emphasize a point. Here is a list of some of these techniques.

From one commentary on Zephaniah:

“The entire section concludes in a most unexpected way. The piled up Prophetic Announcements of Judgment against the people give way to a singular call to repentance (2:1-3). This creative use of prophetic forms is matched by a creative use of literary features: long, impressive, first-person speeches of God marked by alliteration and paronomasia (1:2), chiasmus and hyperbole (1:2-3), literary allusions (1:3), anthropopoeia (1:4, 12-13), metaphor and simile (1:7, 12; 2:1), lament (1:10-11), irony (1:11) merismus (1:12), personification (1:14), synecdoche (1:16), and repetition (1:2,3, 14, 15-16, 18; 2:2,3).” [Barker & Bailey, p410]

To start off, this is mostly poetry. Remember what Robby Dean said about that. I quoted him last week:

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

“First of all it is in poetry. Most of prophecy is written in poetry. In Hebrew poetry the Jews rhymed ideas rather than words. Sometimes there is synonymous parallelism where there are two lines that say the same thing with slightly different words.”

Alliteration. This technique uses words which have the same first letter. For instance, “lazy llamas.” I don’t give an example of this because I would have to delve into the Hebrew spelling with which I assume most of the audience is unfamiliar.

Chiasmus. This is an inversion in the order of thoughts or concepts in the text. If you have thought A followed by thought B

A: I went to the store

B: to buy some bread because

A’: to the store I had gone

Hyperbole. Some see hyperbole, an exaggeration to emphasize being used by Zephaniah. However, I make the assumption that if the text is inerrant, then what it says is true, not an exaggeration.

Literary allusions. I assume what is meant here is reference to other parts of the Bible. Technically, this is called “inter-textuality.” This is what I call the “fabric of Scripture.” We will see this in Zephaniah 1:2-3 where Zephaniah alludes to the flood in Genesis.

Anthropopoeia (also spelled anthropopeia) is essentially the same as anthropomorphism. In other words, describing God as having human parts like a nose or eyes or ears, etc. Often in the Bible, when the translation says something like God’s anger burned the Hebrew may say God’s nose burned. God doesn’t have a nose, but apparently, when people get really angry, their nose may warm up due to increased blood flow and become red.

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

Metaphor. A figure of speech in which a word is used in a context which it normally would not. An example from Shakespeare, “a sea of troubles.” A sea is a body of water. But, it is a vast barrier. So applied to troubles, it illustrates a predicament someone is in.

Simile. A figure of speech in which two words or concepts are compared as like. Simile and metaphor are often confused. Here is help from the on-line Merriam-Webster: “Many people have trouble distinguishing between *simile* and metaphor. A glance at their Latin and Greek roots offers a simple way of telling these two closely-related figures of speech apart. *Simile* comes from the Latin word *similis* (meaning “similar, like”), which seems fitting, since the comparison indicated by a *simile* will typically contain the words *as* or *like*. *Metaphor*, on the other hand, comes from the Greek word *metapherein* (“to transfer”), which is also fitting, since a metaphor is used in place of something. “My love is like a red, red rose” is a *simile*, and “love is a rose” is a *metaphor*.

Lament. From Wikipedia, “A lament or lamentation is a passionate expression of grief, often in music, poetry, or song form. The grief is most often born of regret, or mourning.”

Irony. From Wordnik.com, “Incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs.” I think of John chapter 9 as a study in irony. The Pharisees refuse to believe that Jesus healed a blind man. If they did, they would have to admit that is a sign of the Messiah. They did not accept Jesus as Messiah, so they have to come up with a different explanation. All the while, the reader smiles knowing that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. The Pharisees attempt different explanations to avoid the obvious conclusion.

Merismus. Wikipedia gives an understandable definition: “...is a rhetorical device (or figure of speech) in which a combination of two *contrasting parts* of the whole refer to the whole. For example, in order

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

to say that someone "searched everywhere", one could use the merism "searched high and low".

Personification. Describing an object in human terms. Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet*: "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, Who is already sick and pale with grief."

Synecdoche. A figure of speech in which part of something is used for the whole. Again from Shakespeare: "Take they face hence." In other words, take your face and the body it is attached to away from me. It is suggested that Zephaniah uses this in Zephaniah 1:16 with the words "high corner towers" to refer to an entire fortress.

Repetition. This is a word or concept that is repeated sometimes multiple times to emphasize that the concept is important. This is often used in Hebrew.

Doctrines

As was done in the study of the Servant Songs, there are certain doctrines with which you must be familiar in order to better understand the meaning of Zephaniah.

We start with the topic of "inerrancy." This is something that the evangelical community is sliding away from. This is unfortunate, for the Bible claims inerrancy. Without it, how can you have confidence in your own salvation. You end up asking, "did God say...?" Doubt. Many will agree with the concept of inerrancy but then get around it by using a hermeneutic that is not based upon a literal interpretation of the Scriptures. Basically, inerrancy says that the Bible is without error in all it says. In 1978 a group of evangelicals gathered to defend Biblical inerrancy and published a statement. Per Wikipedia:

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

“The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is a written statement of belief formulated by more than 200 evangelical leaders at a conference convened by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and held in Chicago in October 1978. The statement was designed to defend the position of biblical inerrancy against a trend toward liberal conceptions of Scripture.” This document can be found in various places on the internet such as:

https://topics.logos.com/International_Council_on_Biblical_Inerrancy_documents

Dispensations

Another topic I have emphasized is the concept of dispensations. Here is a summary I used previously:

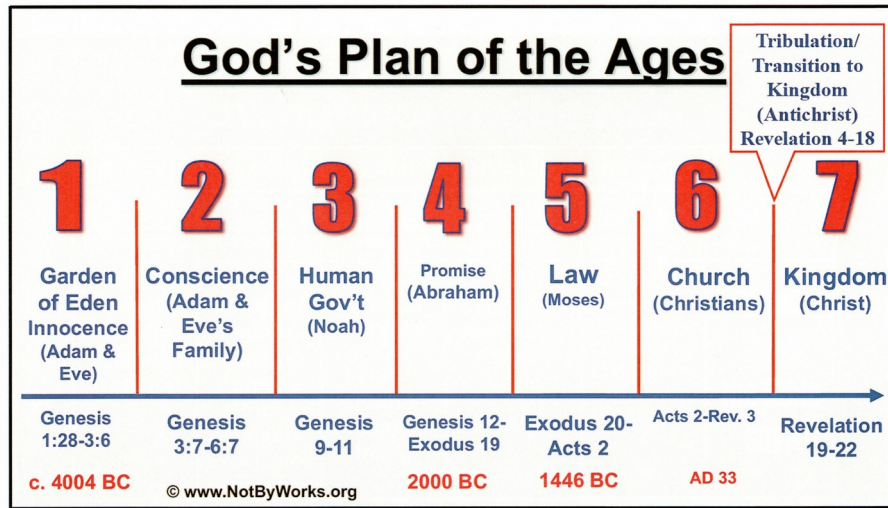
“Dispensations have to do with God's governing or administering human history through a sequence of divinely directed administrations marked by distinct periods of time as He works out His plan to destroy sin and evil. It is an understanding of the meaning and purpose of history; but when you think of the words 'purpose of history,' that means history is going somewhere.” (Dean)

In December 2019 I taught a class on dispensations. So, I will not delve into explanations of them. Jesus, in his first advent, lived in the previous dispensation under the Mosaic Law. He fulfilled many prophecies. There is yet the Tribulation, the completion of the previous dispensation, which dispensation was interrupted by the Church Age dispensation. Then there is the final dispensation, the Millennial reign of Christ in His second advent.

Here is one depiction of what the dispensations are from NotByWorks.org.

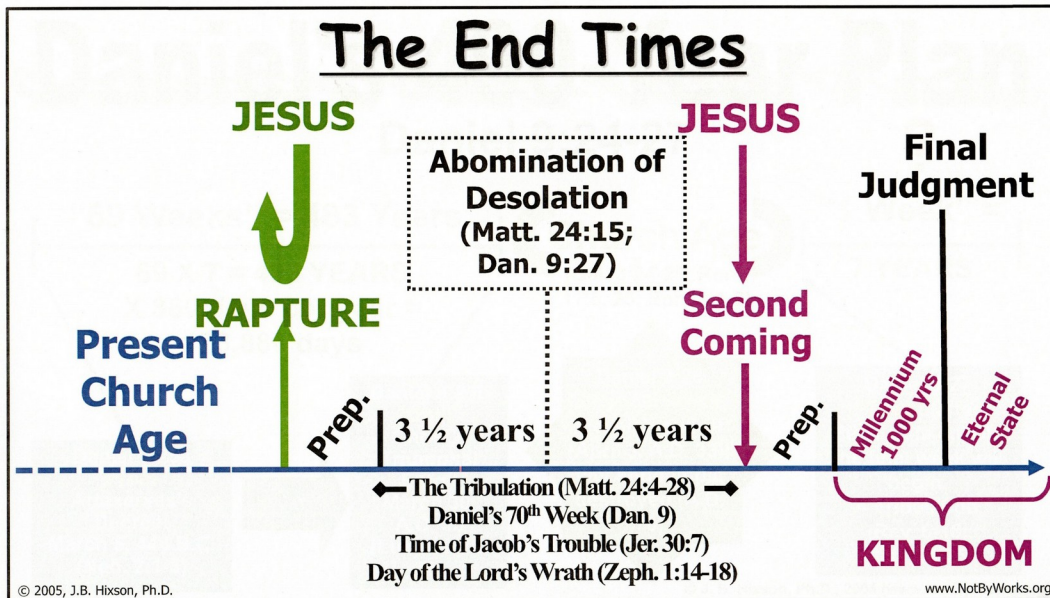
Introduction to Zephaniah

Zephaniah 1:1



Tribulation

The Tribulation is the seven years between the Church Age and the Millennium/Kingdom. From another perspective, this is Daniel's 70th week. God owes the Jews another 7 years to complete their dispensation. It is a time of great judgment. The last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation are the time of greatest suffering/judgment. In some places it is called "the Great Tribulation."



The End Times Chart (by J.B. Hixson/NotByWorks.org)

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

Since Zephaniah chapter 1 & 2 deal with great judgments on the Jews and the Gentiles, I have taken main points from Herman's lesson on the Great Tribulation which can be found at:

<http://springvalleybiblechurch.org/Audio/Matthew/notes/2015-02-01-Sunday.pdf>

Herman taught this lesson from Matthew 24:21

Matthew 24:21 For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

1. The Great Tribulation is the last 3 ½ years of the tribulational period after the rapture of the Church.
2. The Great Tribulation begins with the setting up of the Abomination of Desolation and will end with the Return of JESUS CHRIST and the battle of Armageddon.
3. Because it is called The 'Great Tribulation' by our Lord, some have concluded that the rapture of the Church will occur in the middle of the Tribulation, known as 'mid-tribulationist'.
4. While two other New Testament passages [besides Matthew 24:21] use the phrase 'great tribulation, they are not referring to these last seven years. (Acts 7:11; and Revelation 2:22) One other passage refers to these last three and 1/2 years of the 490 years promised to Israel by God, as 'The Great Tribulation'
5. Description of the Great Tribulation. (found in Matt 24:21)
6. What is interesting is that while this is the greatest tribulation in all history, it will mark two decisive tribulations:

Introduction to Zephaniah
Zephaniah 1:1

- A. It will be the worst period of tribulation and death for the Jews. It will excel all the horrors of the holocaust under Nazi Germany.
 - B. It will also be most disastrous for all Gentiles and end with the ending Times of the Gentiles. Luke 21:24
7. A careful study of Revelation, chapter 6 through chapter 19 reveals that in a short time of The Great Tribulation, hundreds of millions of people die violent deaths. Daniel 7:25, Daniel 12:7 and Revelation 12:14 reveal to us that the anti-Christ will bring about unbelievable death and torment on the earth for ‘a time, times and half a time’ or 3 ½ years.
8. What is interesting is that in most of these prophetic passages the time of The Great Tribulation will end in the redemption of the Jewish remnant.

Millennium

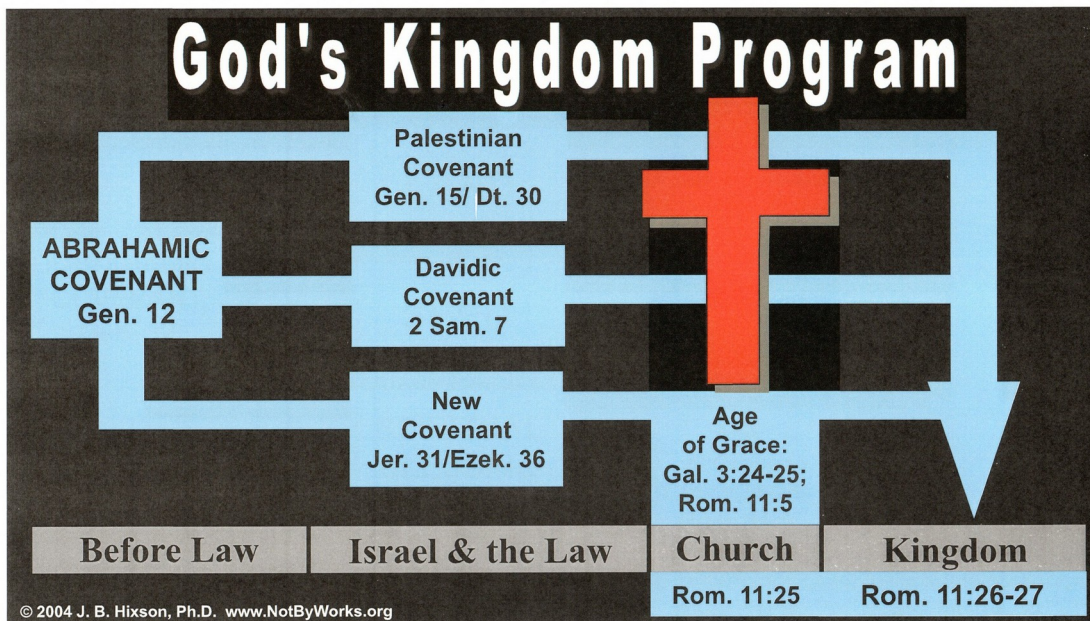
Herman has taught about the Millennium in various lessons. Here are some points taught fairly recently in the Ephesians series:

1. This is the Millennium or the Age of Christ.
2. This will start off with learning from God how Eternity will be. It will start off in Perfect Environment. One reason for the Perfect Environment will be because Satan will be bound (Revelation 20:1-3) Another reason is that there will be no religion starting off the Millennium.
3. One of the most wonderful events in the beginning of the Millennium will be the most conducive favorite for Spirituality throughout the world.

Introduction to Zephaniah
Zephaniah 1:1

4. In the Millennium there will be the Peace of Jerusalem. People throughout Jerusalem have signs asking for the Peace of Jerusalem. This prayer is for the coming of the Messiah. Look at Psalm 122:6, ‘pray for the peace of Jerusalem.’ Remember there are some historical events that must come before the Peace of Jerusalem: the Rapture of the Church and Tribulation, and the return of Jesus, and then Armageddon and the taking out of the unbelieving Gentiles and the unbelieving Jews – all these must happen in the world before the Peace of Jerusalem covers over the world. Isaiah 65:19; Joel 2:16ff.; Zechariah 10:6-12.

5. The Millennium will experience the fulfillment of the unconditional covenants to Israel mentioned in Daniel 9:24. This will be the fulfillment of the Abrahamic, the Palestinian, the Davidic covenants and the New Covenant to Israel.



By J.B. Hixson/NotByWorks.org

6. This will be Perfect Environment here on earth for the first time since the sin of Adam. Isaiah 2:4; Hosea 2:18; Psalm 46:9; Micah

Introduction to Zephaniah Zephaniah 1:1

4:3. This will accompany universal Prosperity Psalm 72:7 & 16. There will be perfect world peace as in Isaiah 11:1-2 & Zechariah 14:9.

7. Something else that many of us will love in Millennium: perfect fair Justice.
8. The Millennium begins with a population of believers only. Remember all civilizations begin with believers only. This will change in the Millennium as the population increases.

Prophecy

There are four ways the New Testament writers use the Old Testament in fulfillment passages. The slide below is based upon teaching of Robbie Dean in his series on Dispensations: God's Plan of the Ages (specifically lesson 16).

Direct Fulfillment: Literal prediction and literal direct fulfillment.

Typical Fulfillment: A literal, historical event applied typologically.

Applicational Fulfillment: An historical event is used to draw out an application with reference to a future event.

Summary Fulfillment: No actual event is prophesied, but the fulfillment represents a summation of Old Testament prophecies.

Quoted from Dean's Lessons 15 & 16 of God's Plan for the Ages - Dispensations (2014)

About a year ago, I taught these categories in a series of lessons I called "Fulfillment." Those lessons are posted in the springvalleybiblechurch.org website.

Introduction to Zephaniah
Zephaniah 1:1

Day of the Lord

Points from Herman:

- A close study of Zephaniah 1:14-18 will reveal that the judgments included in ‘the Day of the Lord’ extend throughout the tribulation and include the events just prior to the ‘return of the Lord’ to this earth. **Therefore, ‘the Day of the Lord’ includes the tribulation.**
- Zechariah 14:1-4 **clearly include the events of the Second Advent in ‘the Day of the Lord.’**
- A study of 2 Peter 3:10 **extends the period covered in ‘the Day of the Lord’ into the new heavens and new earth. Therefore including the entire millennial period**

The emphasis in Zephaniah is on the Tribulation as part of the Day of the Lord.

Baptism of Fire

Per Herman, “...the Baptism of Fire is the removal of all unbelievers from the earth.” <https://www.springvalleybiblechurch.org/Audio/Matthew/notes/2015-05-31-Sunday.pdf>