

Zephaniah 1:1

All the prophets have a special relationship with God. There is a verb in the Old Testament that indicates closeness. It will be used in chapter 3.

Zephaniah 3:15 ...The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;...

Zephaniah 3:17 “The Lord your God is in your midst...”

That is talking about the Millennium.

Zechariah 1:2 “The Lord was very angry with your fathers.

Zechariah 1:3 Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Return to Me,” declares the Lord of hosts, “that I may return to you,” says the Lord of hosts.

Fellowship. God wants fellowship with mankind.

We, now in the Church Age, have fellowship through faith dependence on the Holy Spirit who takes us to fellowship with Jesus in whom we have position who takes us to God the Father for continual fellowship as long as we walk by faith.

This week we start an in-depth overview of Zephaniah chapter 1.

Why study prophecy?¹

- It is profitable like all Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

¹ Points taken from slide 1 of Hixson, J. B., NBW Book of Theological Charts, Diagrams, & Illustrations, www.NotByWorks.org

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2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

2 Timothy 3:17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- It provides hope for the future (Romans 8:23-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:13)

1Thessalonians 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

1Thessalonians 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

1Thessalonians 4:15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

1Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

1Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with

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**them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,
and so we shall always be with the Lord.**

1Thessalonians 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- It Provides motivation for the present (1 John 2:28; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; Revelation 22:12)
- It puts life in perspective (Colossians 3:1-4)
- It authenticates Scripture by acknowledging the prophecies that have already been fulfilled.
- It inspires worship in the sovereign Creator who is in complete control of human history.

Here is something else to consider. Two thirds of the Bible is composed of Old Testament books. Much of the Old Testament is prophecy. Also, there are many New Testament quotes of Old Testament prophecy.

Brief Outline:

Introduction 1:1 (1 verse)

Tribulation 1:2-3:8 (40 verses)

Kingdom 3:9-20 (12 verses)

Today's lesson does not attempt to go beyond the first verse. It is packed with a lot of information that is not always approached with insight.

The first verse introduces Zephaniah, his genealogy and the context of his life and writing.

Zephaniah 1:1 (NASB 1995) The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of

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**Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon,
king of Judah:**

The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah. This part of the sentence has two phrases that will be dealt with individually.

The word of the Lord. The word of the Lord is often used as a title or credential of a man being a prophet of God/Yahweh. But it is more than that. The lessons taught in 2015 included a chart which showed three aspects of the “Word of the Lord.”

Usages of the Word of the Lord

- Source: Word of the Lord is the Lord (Pre-Incarnate Christ/Son of God)
- Content Word of the Lord is the Message of the Lord (including gospel information)
- Authority: Word of the Lord is Authority from the Lord

The phrase, "the Word of the Lord" is used 242 times in the Old Testament, 225 of these being a technical term for prophetic verbal revelation. (Barker)²

Since this term is not fully developed in most references on prophets and prophecy, each category will be expanded here: Source, Content and Authority.

Source: The Word of the Lord is the 2nd person of the Trinity

The import of this point is to show that in some contexts, the Word of the Lord is the 2nd person of the Trinity. I am in the minority here in identifying the Word of the Lord as the Lord. But let me provide some logic to back up my suggestion.

² Barker, Kenneth L. & Bailey, Waylon, The American Commentary vol 20, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Nashville, 1998, page 406

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First, the 2nd person of the Trinity is the manifest person of the Bible. As John Walvord said, “Neither the Father nor the Spirit is characteristically revealed in bodily and visible form. While the Father’s voice is heard from heaven, and the Holy Spirit is seen descending in the form of a dove, Christ, the second Person, is the full manifestation of God in visible form. It is logical that the same Person of the Trinity should appear in bodily form in both Testaments.”³ He has a section on the Angel of the Lord which is one of these manifestations of the 2nd person of the Trinity. He does not specifically say anything about “the Word” as the 2nd person of the Trinity. And, he is focused on the visible form not the heard form.

Yet, the Gospel of John specifically says:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:2 He was in the beginning with God.

John 1:3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

John can use the term “the Word” because it is used throughout the Old Testament. Here is D. A. Carson expanding on that thought:

“However the Greek term is understood, there is a more readily available background than that provided by Philo or the Greek philosophical schools. Considering how frequently John quotes or alludes to the Old Testament, that is the place to begin. There, ‘the word’ (Heb. *dābār*) of God is connected with God’s powerful activity in creation (cf. Gn. 1:3ff;

³ Walvoord, John F., Jesus Christ Our Lord, Chicago, Moody Publishers, 1969, page 45

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Ps 33:6), revelation (Je 1:4; Is 9:8; Ezk. 33:7; Am 3:1,8) and deliverance (Ps. 107:20; Is. 55:1). If the Lord is said to *speak* to the prophet Isaiah (e.g. Is. 7:3), elsewhere we read that ‘the *word of the Lord* came to Isaiah’ (Is. 38:4; cf. Je 1:4; Ezk. 1:6). It was by ‘the word of the Lord’ that the heavens were made (Ps. 33:6): in Gn. 1:3, 6, 9, *etc.* God simply speaks, and his powerful word creates. That same word effects deliverance and judgment (Is. 55:11; cf. Ps 29:3ff.). When some of his people faced illness that brought them to the brink of death, God ‘sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave’ (Ps. 107:20). This personification of the ‘word’ becomes even more colourful in Jewish writing composed after the Old Testament (e.g. *Wisdom* 18:14, 15). Whether this heritage was mediated to John by the Greek version of the Old Testament that many early Christians used, or even by an Aramaic paraphrase (call a ‘Targum’), the ultimate fountain for this choice of language cannot be in serious doubt.”

Carson mentions the personification of the ‘word.’ It seems obvious from Genesis 15 that the word of the Lord/Yahweh is God/Yahweh Himself.

Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.”

Note that the “word of the Lord” used *dabar* for the “word” here which is used for communication. But it also uses a different word for speaking *amar*, “saying.” So the word of the Lord is a person. Who speaks. In the very next verse Abram addresses the Word as Lord (Yahweh) God.

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Genesis 15:2 Abram said, “O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

Now in this verse, Abram understands that he is speaking to “Lord God.” The previous verse personified the Word of the Lord. Now we learn He is the Lord God Himself.

Genesis 15:3 And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.”

Genesis 15:4 Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.”

Genesis 15:5 And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

Genesis 15:6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:7 And He said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.”

And finally, the person Abram is talking to confirms that “I am the Lord...” The word “Lord” is the name of God, “Yahweh.”

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1 Samuel chapter 3 contains the call of Samuel to be a prophet.

1 Samuel 3:19 Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail.

1 Samuel 3:20 All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord.

1 Samuel 3:21 And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. The Lord had several methods of communicating with individuals. In this particular instance, God communicated to Samuel by means of the word of the Lord, the personification of the 2nd person of the Trinity.

The Jews are loath to pronounce the name of God, Yahweh. So they use the word Adonai or as Vincent says:

“After the Babylonish captivity the Jewish doctors combined into one view the theophanies, prophetic revelations and manifestations of Jehovah generally, and united them in one single conception, that of a permanent agent of Jehovah in the sensible world, whom they designated by the name Memra (word, logos) of Jehovah. The learned Jews introduced the idea into the Targums, or Aramean paraphrases of the Old Testament which were publicly read in the synagogues, substituting the name the word of Jehovah for that of Jehovah, each time that God manifested himself. Thus in Gen. 39.21, they paraphrase, “The Memra was with Joseph in prison.” In Ps. 110 Jehovah addresses the first verse

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to the Memra. The Memra is the angel that destroyed the first born of Egypt, and it was the Memra that led the Israelites in the cloudy pillar.”⁴

So, after the Babylonian captivity, Jews used the term Memra (Aramaic word for “word”) of the Lord.

Which came to Zephaniah. The English gives the sense that the Word of the Lord traveled some distance until He arrived at Zephaniah. The Hebrew word is not one that indicates travel. The Hebrew word is close to “became.” I don’t think translators understand the miraculousness of this verb. It is closer to “all of a sudden it existed in front of Zephaniah.” If you are a Star Trek fan, this might be similar to a transporter. One second you are in one place; the next you are in another. A person from a primitive tribe might think of it as magic. It is a demonstration of God’s omnipresence and his omnipotence. But as said above, this is not so much a visual manifestation of the 2nd person of the Trinity as an aural manifestation.

In several instances, the complete phrase is “the word of the Lord came to me/prophet saying. So here the second portion of the phrase is not given until verse 2.

The combination, “the word of the Lord came to Zephaniah” is a credential as a prophet. God gave Zephaniah the gift of prophecy. More than that, He gave Zephaniah inspired Scripture which was to be written down and which will last for the rest of eternity.

Content: Word of the Lord is the Message of the Lord

Not only is the Word of the Lord used for the 2nd person of the Trinity in a communication with a prophet, it can also be the content of that communication.

⁴ Vincent, M.R., Word Studies in the New Testament, MacDill AFB, Mac Donald Publishing Company, (publishing date unknown) but it is a version that was originally published in 1888/9.

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During the days of king Ahaziah in Israel (the northern kingdom) when Elijah was a prophet, the king was under a curse/discipline from God because he abandoned God and sent to Ekron to determine his fate from pagan gods made of wood and stone instead of going to the living God, Yahweh. So...

2 Kings 1:16 Then he said to him, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron—is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word?—therefore you shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die.’”

2 Kings 1:17 So Ahaziah died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken. And because he had no son, Jehoram became king in his place in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. 18 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

You may want to read the entire chapter. It is interesting the reactions of the various messengers to Elijah and what happens to them.

Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah.

Isaiah is speaking the content of revelation he received from the Lord.

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This usage of the word of the Lord is not limited to the Old Testament. The disciples like Peter used it because of his familiarity with Old Testament Scripture:

Acts 8:25 So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

And Paul and Barnabas:

Acts 13:46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

Authority: Word of the Lord is Authority from the Lord

2 Samuel 7:4 But in the same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying,

2 Samuel 7:5 “Go and say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?’

On whose authority did Nathan approach David? God’s authority.

Isaiah 38:4 Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying,

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Isaiah 38:5 “Go and say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of your father David, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.

Again, it was God’s authority communicated through “the word of the Lord.”

There are similar phrases used in the New Testament that provide the authority for Paul, Peter and others to proclaim Scripture.

Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

Apostle is literally “one sent on a mission.” As the Blue’s Brothers said, they were “on a mission from God.”

Zephaniah 1:1 (NASB 1995) The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah:

Zephaniah. Interesting that it says to” Zephaniah,” not “to me.” This names the prophet. As many commentators say, Zephaniah means ““Yahweh Hides [or Has Hidden],” "Hidden in Yahweh," "Yahweh's Watchman," or "Yahweh Treasured." Certainly Zephaniah is hidden from

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the history contained in Chronicles and Kings. No mention. Yet, a contemporary, Jeremiah is mentioned. During the Tribulation, Jews that survive will have been hidden. Those that make it to the Kingdom will treasure their relationship to Yahweh, their God.

Now we have the four generation genealogy of Zephaniah. That is unique in the prophets. No other prophet has four generations mention. It is unique.

Cushi. This literally means “Cushite.” Cush is sometimes translated “Ethiopia.” This can lead to confusion. The simplest way to identify the land of Cush is that it was bordered to the north by ancient Egypt, specifically, “Upper Egypt” and bordered on the east by the Red Sea in what is today northern Sudan and Southern Egypt. Remember that “Upper Egypt” is Southern Egypt and Lower Egypt was Northern Egypt. This is not based upon a map but upon the elevation of the Land. Lower Egypt includes the Nile Delta which is near sea level. Upper Egypt includes mountains in Sudan.

A question that is often asked, is “What does Cushi actually mean?” It means “black” or “Cushite.” But, is there a “hidden” meaning behind this? Perhaps.

Let me speculate based upon some history. Prior to Josiah becoming king, his father Amon and his grandfather Manasseh were kings in the southern kingdom. They were very bad kings perhaps having people they didn’t like put to death. That would apply doubly to anyone with royal blood like Zephaniah’s ancestors. And there is precedent for people leaving Israel during bad times. Look at the book of Ruth.

Ruth 1:Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in

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**Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab
with his wife and his two sons.**

So it is possible that Cushi's father left Israel to live far away where he wouldn't be assassinated by king Manasseh. He named his son Cushi as a reminder of where he had to hide. When Josiah came to power, the family moved back to Israel. It is in line with "hidden."

Gedaliah. You notice there are many names in the Bible that end with "iah." This is a reference to a shortened form of God's name, "Yahweh." The technical term for this kind of name is "theophoric." This means theo (god) phoric (bearing/carrying). It is a way of celebrating God in childrens' names. Gedaliah means "Made great by Jehovah/Yahweh).

Amariah. Means "Said (or promised) by Jehovah/Yahweh."

Hezekiah. Means Jehovah/Yahweh is strength. Although the text does not say that this Hezekiah was a king in Judah, the context suggests this. Indeed, conservative commentators agree on this.

Amon. Good church-going people (commentators) would never even consider that a Jewish king would name his son after an Egyptian, pagan deity. Yet, consider that Manasseh was very anti-God and that he was under the thumb of a foreign ruler and you may come to the same conclusion as Dominic Rudman. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42614286> summarizes: "Manasseh's son Amon has what appears to be an Egyptian name. This article argues that Manasseh, who fought alongside Ashurbanipal on his first campaign in Egypt in 667 BCE, named the son born to him during Ashurbanipal's second campaign in 663 BCE as a flattering commemoration of his overlord's capture of the rebel capital Thebes in that year." [Hebrew text removed]. The church-going commentators suggest that Amon means faithful and that Manasseh, the

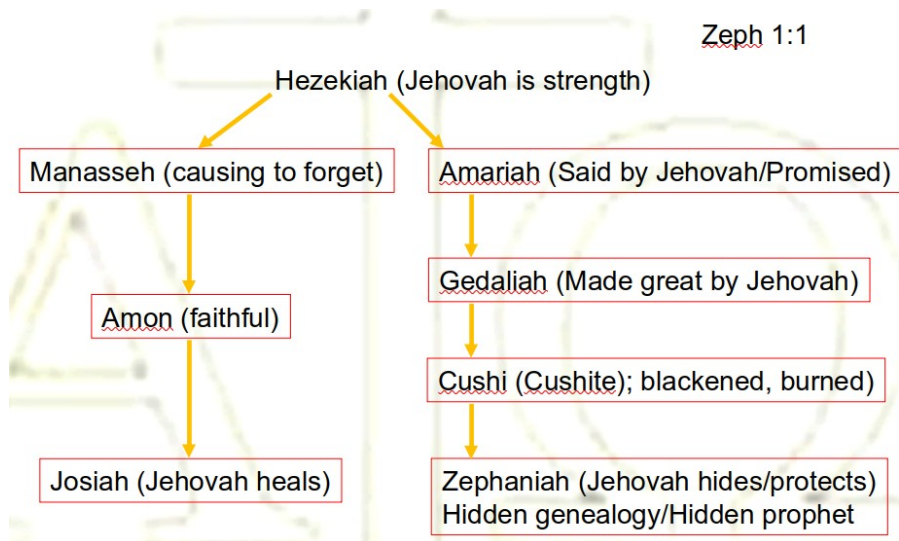
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evil anti-God king named his son that. So his name could mean one of two things: “faithful” or Amon, a god in the Egyptian pantheon. How could any king of Israel name his son after an Egyptian god? Because he was extremely evil.

Josiah. Means Jehovah/Yahweh heals.

Looking at the chart below, you may ask the question, Why does Zephaniah have four generations from Hezekiah whereas Josiah only has three? Manasseh was born in the “15-year extension” God gave Hezekiah. He likely had other sons prior to that. From my perspective then, is the question, why was Manasseh chosen as king and not an older son? Did Manasseh kill any pretenders to the throne?

Summary: The four generation genealogy makes this unique. Amon, Zephaniah’s father has a unique name in the list of Israelite kings because it is the name of a foreign deity. Cushi is not a unique name in the Bible but it is certainly unusual. It suggests a possible sojourn in the land of Cush. The plethora of theophoric names brings to mind that God is always in the background, even when evil people are ruling the nation.



This chart based upon multiple sources