I. Historical Background

A. Who is Zephaniah?
1. If the Hezekiah mentioned in verse one, is the king Hezekiah then he is of royal blood and would be kin (probably cousin) to Josiah who is King during Zephaniah’s ministry.
2. Zephaniah means “Jehovah hides” or “Jehovah has hidden” It is going to play a significant role in the theme of the book.

B. Date of writing
1. In the days of Josiah- He became king at the age of 8 in 641-639 B.C and reigned until 609 B.C.
2. Zephaniah reigned during this time and one would speculate it was found before the finding of the “lost book of the law” because of its message. I would go even further to speculate that Zephaniah’s preaching led Josiah to cleanse the temple and such (purely speculation).
3. Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Nahum were prophesying at the same time.

II. Political Background

A. In Judea
1. Hezekiah was succeeded by his son Manasseh (who sought to undo all the good his father did) and also filled Jerusalem with the bloodshed of the innocent.
2. Ammon took the reign after Manasseh and continued in his footsteps.
3. Josiah became king and by the age of 16 he began to seek the lord and the age of 20 when he began to purge the land of idolatry. While having the temple repaired, is when they found the lost book of the law.

B. In the East
1. Assyria had been able to maintain supremacy over the world of that day. At the death of Ashurbanaipal (who Josiah was loyal to) 633 B.C.; who was the last great king of the empire, Assyria began to disintegrate.
2. In 625 B.C. Nabopolassar, king of Babylon declared their independence from Assyria, which led to war between Nineveh and Babylon. In 614 B.C. the Medes captured Ashur, a chief city of Assyria, a Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar and general of his army, led the attack against Nineveh.
3. This was an important date in history, when Nebuchadnezzar perused his enemies and finally destroyed them in 609 B.C.. Egypt came up to assist Assyria in Haran but Josiah intervened during the battle of Meggido, but ended up dying. Judah became a puppet army of Nebuchadnezzar after he defeated Egypt (at the battle of Carchemish) who controlled Judah after Josiah died.
4. Learning of his father’s death, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to assume the throne and took some of Judah’s captives with him, Daniel was a part of this group.

III. Major Lessons

A. The Day of the Lord
1. The Day of the Lord in the Bible refers to destruction that God is sending specifically Babylon.
2. He warns them against an idolatrous Judah, whose religion and morality were at an all-time low.
3. He denounces the sin in such vivid language that his emotion and passion can be felt in every verse.

B. A Future for God’s People
1. Though there was going to be a day of reckoning and judgment against the wicked, the remnant principle and concept is strong in this book.
2. Zeph. 2:1-3
3. Zeph. 3:11-13

C. Universalism
1. Yahweh is the God of the universe. Judgment falls upon all.
2. Zeph. 3:14-20 draws a sublime picture of the Messianic age and how God would save the world.

Conclusion:
1. One thing that we want to recognize as a major lesson for us in the book is that it is going to be the same judgment for us when Jesus returns.
2. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.