

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*THE ROYAL ANCESTRY OF ZEPHANIAH.*

IN discussing the genealogy of the prophet Zephaniah, Prof. G. A. Smith says, "Zephaniah's great-great-grandfather Hezekiah was in all probability the king."<sup>1</sup> This is to state the case more strongly than has been usual, but not more strongly than is reasonable. I return to the subject because it is possible in one respect to strengthen Prof. Smith's argument,<sup>2</sup> and to maintain the probability of the royal ancestry of the prophet even in view of a less favourable chronology than that adopted by Prof. Smith.

The present state of opinion on the subject may be briefly summarized thus: that the Hezekiah who, according to Zephaniah i. 1, was the great-great-grandfather of the prophet, was identical with the king of Judah of that name, seems to some<sup>3</sup> impossible or improbable, to many<sup>4</sup> at least possible and not improbable, to many<sup>5</sup> probable.

There are several more or less weighty reasons for accepting the identification; there are no valid objections; for my main purpose in this note is to show that what is generally regarded as the most serious objection—the chronological—is invalid.

It will be well first of all briefly to recapitulate the reasons for the identification. (1) The genealogy of Zephaniah is, quite exceptionally, carried back four generations. In the titles of the remaining prophetic writings we find either only the name of the prophet;<sup>6</sup> or the names of the prophet

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40 f., 47, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Cornill, König: cf. earlier also De Wette-Schrader, *Einleitung* (Eighth Edition), § 299a.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Reuss, Driver, Davidson.

<sup>5</sup> Hitzig, Wellhausen, Kuenen, Kautzsch.

<sup>6</sup> Amos i. 1; Obad. i. 1; Mic. i. 1; Nah. i. 1; Hab. i. 1; Hag. i. 1.

and his father;<sup>1</sup> or, in one instance,<sup>2</sup> the names of the prophet, his father, and his grandfather. The case is similar with other persons mentioned in the Old Testament narratives: to add to the name of a man that of his father is common, to add those both of his father and of his grandfather not uncommon,<sup>3</sup> but to carry the genealogy further back is quite exceptional. The reasons for so doing in 1 Samuel 9. 1, 14. 3 are obvious. In the former case the narrator is for the first time introducing the name of the future king of Israel; in the second the object is to bring out the connection of Ahijah with the famous priestly house of Eli. But what reason can be given for so exceptionally long a genealogy of Zephaniah, unless the most remote ancestor mentioned be a person of distinction, and what person of distinction can this Hezekiah be but the king? (2) Hezekiah was in pre-exilic times a rare name. It is probable that no pre-exilic person of the name is known except the king and the prophet's ancestor. (3) The number of compounds with the Divine name Yah in the genealogy is exceptionally great. This is most naturally accounted for in a person of royal descent. The last two reasons I have already drawn attention to and discussed somewhat more fully elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

The objections to the identification are two: (1) Why, it is asked, is not Hezekiah described as king of Judah? (2) How could a great-great-grandson of king Hezekiah be old enough to prophesy in the early part of the reign of Josiah, who was but the great-grandson of the same king, and who, moreover, was very young when he came to the throne? The first objection has been often enough sufficiently answered. "To designate him [Hezekiah] king

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 1. 1; Jer. 1. 1; Ezek. 1. 3; Hos. 1. 1; Joel 1. 1; Jonah 1. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Zech. 1. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. 41. 1 f.; 2 Kings 22. 3, 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names*, p. 262.

was unnecessary for the contemporaries who knew the genealogy.<sup>1</sup> "The omission of the phrase *king of Judah* after Hezekiah's name proves nothing; it may have been of purpose, because the phrase has to occur immediately again."<sup>2</sup>

Now as to the chronological difficulty. No weight can be attached to the fact that there are four generations from Hezekiah through Amariah to Zephaniah, and only three through Manasseh to Josiah. For Manasseh's son Amon was not born till his father was forty-five years old (2 Kings 21. 1, 19). It would be absurd to insist that Amariah must have been equally old, or nearly as old, when his first son was born to him.

Everything turns on the natural possibility, and, let us add, on the natural probability, of four successive generations within the given time.

In the first place we must consider what is the given time; and here the crucial point is the date of Hezekiah's death. This unfortunately is uncertain. Prof. Smith puts it at 695. Others,<sup>3</sup> however, fix it as late as 686; the latest writer<sup>4</sup> on Hebrew chronology at 692. As least favourable to the theory of Zephaniah's royal descent, I accept, for purposes of argument, the latest of these dates.

If Hezekiah died in 686, Manasseh was born in 698 (2 Kings 21. 1). Manasseh was presumably, though not certainly,<sup>5</sup> Hezekiah's eldest son. And, therefore, if Zephaniah's great-grandfather Amariah was Manasseh's brother, it is unlikely that he was born before 697. But there is no reason why he should not have been born in

<sup>1</sup> Wellhausen, *Kleine Propheten* (Ed. 1), p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, *Twelve Prophets*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Wellhausen, Kamphausen. Cf. W. R. Smith, *Prophets of Israel* (Second Edition), pp. 415-421, especially 421.

<sup>4</sup> Marti in *Encyclopædia Biblica*, 797-8.

<sup>5</sup> It was not always the eldest son that succeeded to the throne: see 2 Kings 23. 31, 36.

that year. Let us, however, assume the year 696 as the date of Amariah's birth.

The date at which Zephaniah prophesied is usually placed at about 625; in all probability he prophesied before, but not necessarily much before, 621.<sup>1</sup>

Assume that Zephaniah prophesied at about two or three and twenty—an age at about which it is likely that both Isaiah and Jeremiah began to prophesy—and the year of his birth must be fixed at about 648.

The question is—Is it possible, is it probable that Zephaniah was born when his great-grandfather Amariah was only forty-eight years old? The best answer to this is that the history of the same century furnishes us with facts that would constitute exact parallels.

Thus :<sup>2</sup>

Josiah was born when his father Amon was 16 years old.

Jehoahaz was born when his father Josiah was 16 years old.

Jehoiakim was born when his father Josiah was 14 years old.

Jehoiachin was born when his father Jehoiakim was 18 years old.<sup>3</sup>

Whence it follows that Jehoiachin was born when his great-grandfather was forty-eight.

In view of these facts, how can the chronological objection

<sup>1</sup> Driver, *Introd.* (Sixth Edition), p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> The references for the several facts are 2 Kings 21. 19, 22. 1; 22. 1, 23. 30 f.; 22. 1, 23. 34-36; 23. 36, 24. 6-8.

<sup>3</sup> It is true that according to 1 Chronicles 36. 9 in the Hebrew text and the Vatican Codex of the LXX. Jehoiachin was not born till his father was 28. But the reading in Chronicles, which makes Jehoiachin only 8 at his accession, is probably a mere transcriptional error. The Alexandrine Codex of the LXX., the Lucian recension, and the Peschito read (as in Kings) "18 years," and in any case the age of eight is most improbable. The references to Jehoiachin (=Coniah) in Jeremiah 22. 24-29 and Ezekiel 19. 5-9 imply that he was no mere child, but had attained maturity.

to the theory of Zephaniah's royal descent deserve any further consideration?

The fact is the chronological objection is based on disregard of the early age of maturity<sup>1</sup> in Syria.

It is unlikely that the royal ancestry of Zephaniah will ever become a matter of certainty; but the high probability of it rests on the fact that there are good reasons for it, and no valid objections against it.

G. BUCHANAN GRAY.

<sup>1</sup> See Nowack, *Arch.* i. 156; and on early marriages at the present day in Syria, Baldensperger in *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, 1899, pp. 131 f.