

Zephaniah 1 - The Day of the Lord

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Zephaniah 1

I. The coming day of divine wrath for Judah and Jerusalem (Zeph 1:1—2:3)

(1) Introduction (1:1)

(A) Author (1:1a)

(B) Date (1:1b)

1 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:

1 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:

1 This message from the LORD came to Cushi's son Zephaniah, the grandson of Gedaliah and great-grandson of Hezekiah's son Amariah, during the reign of Amon's son Josiah, king of Judah:

1 The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

- Zephaniah identifies himself better than any of the other minor prophets—four generations, the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah and thus of royal blood

(2) Universal judgment (1:2-3)

(A) Announcement of universal judgment (1:2)

2 "I will **completely remove** all *things* From the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

2 "I will completely remove all *things* From the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

2 "I'll utterly sweep away everything from the land," declares the LORD.

2 I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.

- "...completely remove" - utterly *scrape* the land. As we move further into this prophecy, we will recognize that this judgment covers more than just the land of Israel. It is a worldwide devastation that is predicted here.

- The Book of Revelation confirms this and places the time of this judgment as the Great Tribulation period. During that period, this earth will absolutely be denuded by the judgments that will come upon it. This will occur right before God brings in the millennial kingdom and renews the earth.

(B) Objects of universal judgment (1:3)

3 "I will remove human and animal *life*; I will remove the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea, And the ruins along with the wicked; And I will eliminate mankind from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

3 "I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea, And the ruins along with the wicked; And I will cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

3 "I'll consume both human beings and animals— I'll consume the birds of the sky, the fish in the sea, and the wicked along with their sin, when I eliminate human beings from the land," declares the LORD.

3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

- Zephaniah blends the near and far prophetic views together
- The immediate judgment of Judah prefigures a far greater worldwide time of trouble to come upon Israel and the nations of the world (Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21; Rev 8:1-20:3; Jer 30:5-7; Joel 3:2-17)
- This would all be preparatory to Israel's final restoration and kingdom blessing (Jer 30:8-9; Joel 3:18-21; Amos 9:11-15; Zeph 3:14-20; Hag 2:20-23; Zech 8:20-21; 14:16-21; Mal 4:1-4; Acts 1:6; Rom 11:25-36; Rev 20:4-6)

(3) Judgment upon Judah (Zeph 1:4—2:3)

- (A) Objects of judgment (1:4-9)
 - (a) Judah and Jerusalem (1:4a)
 - (b) Baal worshipers (1:4b)
 - (c) Idolatrous priests (1:4c)

4 "So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will eliminate the remnant of Baal from this place, *And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the other priests.*

4 "So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, *And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests.*

4 "I will also stretch out my hand against Judah, and upon all inhabitants of Jerusalem. I'll wipe out every trace of Baal from this place, and the name of the pagan priests, along with my own priests.

4 I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;

- Judah and Jerusalem are to be singled out for judgment.
 - The Scriptures, beginning with the Book of Judges, teach a philosophy of human government, which you will find was true of God's people and which has been true of every nation.

- (1) The first step in a nation's decline is *Religious Apostasy*, a turning from the living and true God.
- (2) The second step downward for a nation is *Immorality*.
- (3) The third step downward is *Political Anarchy*.

The Church of Laodicea

This betrayal of Christ in the name of Christianity is one reason for the moral and spiritual malaise with which this country is afflicted. The melancholy fact is that the churches no longer influence the development of national character. People go to church mainly

because of an impulse to participate in a service of entertainment, not because of any spiritual guidance they expect from the clergyman. [Source: McGee, J. Vernon: *Thru the Bible Commentary*. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981, S. 3:865.] Judgment begins with the "household of God" (1 Peter 4:17). Churches no longer influence the development of national character. In our culture, there is no longer any connection between character and destiny.

Five Reasons for the Decline and Fall of Rome

- (1) The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home as the basis of society.
- (2) Higher and higher taxes; the spending of public money for free bread and circuses.
- (3) The mad craze for pleasure; sports and entertainments (ever more violent).
- (4) The building of great armaments, even though the enemy was within.
- (5) The decay of religion, fading into mere form, losing power to guide the people.

[Source: Gibbon (a non-Christian historian)]

- (d) Astral worshipers (1:5a)
- (e) Molech worshipers (1:5a)

5 "And those who bow down on the housetops to the heavenly lights, And those who bow down *and* swear to the LORD, but *also* swear by Milcom,

5 "And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven, And those who bow down *and* swear to the LORD and *yet* swear by Milcom,

5 I'll wipe out those who worship the stars that they view from their housetops, those who bow down and swear to the LORD and who also swear by Milcom,

5 And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham;

Three Forms of Idolatry

After Zephaniah said that God would remove the false priests, he then referred to three forms of idolatrous worship, introducing each of them by the phrase "**those who**."

First, he noted the worshipers of stellar bodies, people who bow down on flat housetops (Cf. Jer 19:13; 2:29) as star-worshipers—through which the powers of nature were supposedly harnessed. The sun, moon, and stars were regarded as deities. Though God had clearly warned against this practice (Deut 4:19), Manasseh led the way in this perversion also (2 Kings 21:3,5; Cf. 2 Kings 23:4-5).

Second, Zephaniah mentioned those who attempted to combine the worship of Yahweh with the worship of Molech, a form of religious syncretism. Molech was the chief god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:33), a people east of the Dead Sea (Cf. Zeph 2:8-9). Jeremiah, a contemporary of Zephaniah, said the Jews were sacrificing children to Molech (Jer 32:35;

Cf. 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). The Hebrew *Malkām* (Zeph 1:5) is a variant spelling of "Molech." To swear by a deity meant to pronounce an oath under the threat of punishment by that deity if one failed to carry out his oath.

Third, the prophet spoke of others who were religiously indifferent and unconcerned about worshiping the true God (v6), though they may not have been worshiping other gods.

Baal (Mars) was the son of El, in the Canaanite pantheon, the god of war. His sister-consort was Anath. *Malcham* is the name of Molech, the god of the Ammonites. Sacrifice of children in Hinom Valley...while they still professed Temple worship.

(f) Apostates (1:6)

6 And those who have turned back from following the LORD, And those who have not sought the LORD nor inquired of Him."

6 And those who have turned back from following the LORD, And those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him."

6 those who turn away from the LORD, don't seek the LORD, and never ask for his help."

6 And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.

- Two groups:

(1) Those who had known the truth and departed; backsliders

(2) Those who are indifferent: the unsaved. *Ecumenical strategies are abhorrent to a jealous God, who puts His Word even above His name* (Ps 138:2)

- It is easy to lose sight of the fact that God's people had been blessed above all other nations. It was their base ingratitude to Him that finally brings down His wrath. Any form of greed or covetousness is regarded by God as idolatry (Col 3:5). We become like the gods we worship (Ps 135:18).

(g) Interlude: announcement of the coming day of the Lord (1:7)

7 Be silent before the Lord GOD! For **the day of the LORD** is near, Because **the LORD has prepared a sacrifice**, He has consecrated His guests.

7 Be silent before the LORD God! For the day of the LORD is near, For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests.

7 Remain silent in the presence of the Lord GOD, because the Day of the LORD approaches, and because the LORD has prepared a sacrifice for those whom he has invited to be consecrated.

7 Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests.

- "...the day of the LORD" - first mention in this book

— It will begin after the Church leaves this Earth

— This is the first of 19 references in Zephaniah to "the day," "that day," "a day," "the day of the Lord's wrath," and similar phrases referring to "the day of the Lord." (Here, there is no definite article; this is but a precursor; Cf. Rev 1:10.)

"...the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice" - biting sarcasm? His guests will be the sacrifice...
Guests (vs. "the called ones" = Zeph 2:3?)

(h) Faithless leaders (1:8)

8 "Then it will come about on the day of the LORD'S sacrifice That I will punish the princes, the king's sons, And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.

8 "Then it will come about on the day of the LORD's sacrifice That I will punish the princes, the king's sons And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.

8 "It will come about during the LORD's sacrifice that I'll punish the officials, the royal descendants, and all who wear foreign clothing.

8 And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.

- Zedekiah's children killed, his eyes put out (2 Kings 24-25; Jer 32:4; Ezek 12:13)

— Huldah the prophetess had intimated that which Zephaniah now more expressly foretells (2 Kings 22:20)

— The Lord had made some stipulations about Israelite dress (Num 15:38; Deut 22:11-12)

In addition to the idolaters, Judah's royalty were also the objects of God's scorn (v4-7); they included princes (Cf. Jer. 36:12; Hosea 8:4) (officers of the king's court), Josiah's sons, and the aristocracy who evidenced their disobedience by wearing the latest fashions from Nineveh and Babylon (foreign clothes). Adopting foreign dress outwardly most likely implied that they also had absorbed foreign values and practices inwardly.

Josiah's sons were certainly punished: His son Jehoahaz reigned only three months and then was captured by Pharaoh Neco II and taken to Egypt (2 Kings 23:31-34). Josiah's wicked son Jehoiakim, who reigned for 11 years (2 Kings 23:36) was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:1-2); Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin reigned only three months in 597 BC and was taken captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:8-16). Judah's last king, Zedekiah, another of Josiah's sons, was blinded by Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:18-25:7).

(i) Threshold jumpers (1:9)

9 "And on that day I will punish all who **leap on the temple threshold**, Who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit.

9 "And I will punish on that day all who leap on the *temple* threshold, Who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit.

9 At the same time, I'll punish every idol worshipper, especially those who are filling their master's temple with violence and deceit.

9 In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

- "...leap on the *temple* threshold" - in imitation of the Philistine fear of not treading on the threshold, which arose from the head and hands of Dagon being broken off on the threshold before the ark (1 Sam 5:4-5, Ezek 9:3; 10:4; 46:2; 47:1)

— This was viewed superstitiously as the abode of demons, thus a place of particular danger

— In Roman times, you find its expression in carrying a bride across the threshold, etc.

(B) Horrors of the judgment (1:10-18)

(a) The wailing people (1:10-11)

10 "And on that day," declares the LORD, "There will be the sound of a cry from **the Fish Gate**, Wailing from the Second Quarter, And a loud crash from the hills.

10 "On that day," declares the LORD, "There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate, A wail from the Second Quarter, And a loud crash from the hills.

10 When all of this happens," declares the LORD, "a loud shriek will come from the Fish Gate, and howling from the Mishneh Quarter, along with great destruction from the hills."

10 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills.

- "...the Fish Gate" - the Damascus Gate

11 "Wail, you inhabitants of the **Mortar**, Because all the people of Canaan will be destroyed; All who weigh out silver will be eliminated.

11 "Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar, For all the people of Canaan will be silenced; All who weigh out silver will be cut off.

11 "Wail, you who live in the market district, because all of the merchants will be crushed and all of their customers will be eliminated.

11 Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off.

- "...Mortar" - deep hollow; a depression where the marketplace was situated; the Tyropean Valley, "cheesemakers' valley," alongside the temple where the Wailing Wall is today

(b) The fierce revenge of God (1:12-13)

12 "And it will come about at that time That I will **search Jerusalem with lamps**, And I will punish the people Who are **stagnant in spirit**, Who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good nor harm!'

12 "It will come about at that time That I will search Jerusalem with lamps, And I will punish the men Who are stagnant in spirit, Who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good or evil!'

12 And it will come about that I will search Jerusalem with candles, punishing the self-satisfied and complacent, who say to themselves, 'The LORD will do neither good nor evil.'

12 And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will **search Jerusalem with candles**, and punish the men that are **settled on their lees**: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.

- "...search Jerusalem with lamps" - Cf. the search for leaven on Passover...

— Josephus wrote about a later invasion in which the city's aristocracy were dragged from the sewer system where they hid for fear of death

- "...stagnant in spirit" - "hardened" or crusted; image from the crust formed at the bottom of wines long left undisturbed (Jer 48:11)

— Thus, indifferent; complacent; oblivious to the coming judgment...

— After grapes are squeezed, wine is allowed to stand in a vat so the accumulation of sediment can settle to the bottom. If it stands too long, it becomes thick, syrupy and unpalatable.

— The people of Jerusalem are compared to the "dregs" proverbially "stagnant in spirit" (Jer 48:11), illustrating their stagnancy and inability to have moved in time

13 "Their wealth will become plunder, And their houses desolate; Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit *them*, And plant vineyards but not drink their wine."

13 "Moreover, their wealth will become plunder And their houses desolate; Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit *them*, And plant vineyards but not drink their wine."

13 Therefore their possessions will be seized as plunder and their homes left in ruins. They may build houses, but they won't live in them. They may plant vineyards, but they won't drink their wine."

13 Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof.

- The Great Tribulation is yet future

- In Zephaniah's day, after Josiah ruled, there never arose another good king—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah: every one corrupt.

[v14-18 goes beyond the local, prefiguring, invasion]

The Judgment Described

The emphasis of this passage (v14-18) is upon the Lord's judgment of the nations when "the whole land shall be devoured." The LORD will judge the nations during the Great

Tribulation/Day of the Lord.

(c) Nature of the judgment (1:14-18)

(i) Imminence (1:14)

14 The great day of the LORD **isnear**, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior **criesoutbitterly**.

14 Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly.

14 "The great Day of the LORD approaches— How it comes, hurrying faster and faster!

The sound of the Day of the LORD there includes the bitter cry of the mighty soldier.

14 The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.

— "...is near" - grammatically this verse stresses the word "near" which is first in the sentence in Hebrew (Cf. "near" in v7, where it also appears in this emphatic position). The fearful wrath of God was to come on the nation quickly.

— Since Zephaniah wrote shortly after 622 BC, the year of Josiah's partial revival, the day of the Lord was in fact imminent

— In 605 BC, only 17 years after Josiah's revival, Judah under Jehoiakim became a vassal of Babylon and many of Judah's best young men were deported

— Under Jehoiakim's equally wicked successor, Jehoiachin, the city was again besieged by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC and some 10,000 Jews were deported

— Under Zedekiah the city was under a long siege by Nebuchadnezzar and was finally *destroyed* in the summer of 586 BC

— "...cries out bitterly" - the concept of the Wailing Wall would come into existence

Verses 14b-16 describe the physical characteristics of that awful day, while v17-18 describe the personal trauma of that judgment.

(ii) Intensity (1:15-17)

15 That day is a day of anger, A day of trouble and distress, A day of **destruction and desolation**, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness,

15 A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness,

15 That day will be filled with wrath, a day of trouble and tribulation, a day of desolation and devastation, a day of doom and gloom, a day of clouds and shadows,

15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

- "...destruction and desolation" - *sho'ah* and *umesho'ah*—similar sounds convey the alliteration of destruction, distress, desolation, and darkness [Feinberg]

16 A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers.
16 A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers.
16 a day of trumpet and battle cry against fortified cities and watch towers.
16 A day of the **trumpet and alarm** against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.
- "...trumpet and alarm" - sound the alarm; but it is *against* the fenced cities, etc. [The trumpets precede the bowls: Rev 8ff]

17 I will bring distress on mankind So that they will walk like those who are blind, Because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust, And their flesh like dung.

17 I will bring distress on men So that they will walk like the blind, Because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust And their flesh like dung.

17 "And I'll bring so much distress to people that they will walk around like the blind. Because they have sinned against the LORD, their blood will be poured out like dust and their intestines will spill out like manure.

17 And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung.

(iii) Unstoppable (1:18a)

(iv) Universality (1:18b)

18 Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to save them On the day of the LORD'S anger; And all the earth will be devoured By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a horrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth.

18 Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the LORD's wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth.

18 Neither their silver nor their gold will deliver them in the Day of the LORD's wrath; but the entire land will be consumed by the fire of his jealousy, for he will bring the inhabitants of the land to a sudden end."

18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the **whole land shall be devoured** by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

- "...the whole land shall be devoured" - the LORD will judge the nations during the Great Tribulation