

SBC – Feb. 6, 2022

Zeph. 1:1-6 (NKJV)

“Coming Judgment on Judah”

1

First we studied Habakkuk that presents the probing question of WHY! And the response comes back, “The just shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4). We don’t always understand the WHY but if we know the WHO behind it all we are to TRUST Him.

Then we studied the book of Esther which has as its theme God’s providential care for His people. There we saw that God is faithful to His covenant promises often in spite of people’s unfaithfulness. And we saw that God providentially places people just where He has them “for such a time as this”.

And that brings us to Zephaniah which has as its theme, “The Coming Day of the LORD”. Most people are oblivious to what is going on in the world. But I know through the prophets such as Zephaniah exactly where we are at. The world is headed straight for judgment – it is headed straight for the coming Day of the Lord judgment!

In this context we as God’s people are to TRUST our all faithful God and realize that we are providentially placed exactly where we are for such a time as this. God’s got a purpose and a plan and it includes you right where you are for such a time as this.

Introduction to Zephaniah.

Author: *Zephaniah*. He appears to have been of noble birth, tracing his ancestry back to king Hezekiah (715-686 BC). He would have been the great-great grandson of Hezekiah. He is the only prophet of royalty (1:1). The current king of Judah (Josiah) that he ministered under would have been a distant relative of his. Zephaniah was a prophet to Judah and it appears from 1:4 that Jerusalem was probably his home. Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Nahum.

Date written: The book of was probably between 635-625 BC – definitely prior to the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC because Nineveh was still standing at the time of this writing (cf. Zeph. 2:13-15). King Josiah found the Book of the Law in 622 BC and implemented reforms in the nation. Because of the nature of the sins that Zephaniah calls out it would seem that he probably ministered prior to 622 – prior to the time of Josiah’s reforms.

Purpose: Zephaniah writes to warn Judah of God’s coming judgment and at the same time to provide a prophetic hope for the faithful remnant.

Slide # 1
Zephaniah

Theme: The Coming Day of the Lord

Outline:

- 1:1-2:3 Warning to Judah of God's coming Judgment
- 2:4-3:8 God's Judgment on specific nations
- 3:9-20 Future Restoration for Israel

Background:

1. King Hezekiah reigned from 715-686 BC and he was a good king. His son Manasseh and grandson Amon were both wicked kings. Amon's son Josiah was only 8 years old when he assumed the throne in 640 BC. Josiah was a good king who began to seek the Lord when he was 16 years old. In the 18th year of his reign (622 BC) the Law of Moses was discovered by Hilkiyah the high priest, and the king upon hearing the law set in motion a whole program of reform (cf. 2 Kgs. 22-23, 2 Chronicles 34-35).
 Under Josiah there was considerable outward reform, but it was largely temporary and superficial because the hearts of the people were largely unchanged (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:26-27). Josiah was the last of the righteous kings. In the context of Josiah's reign we find the prophet Zephaniah, who in his ministry probably helped prepare the way for revival (or better reform) and probably encouraged Josiah in the reformation process.
2. Zephaniah, through divine revelation, saw the coming fall of Jerusalem. It fell in 586 BC to the Babylonians. He speaks of this event in terms of the "Day of the Lord". However, this phrase also has ramifications to a future day involving the whole world (The 7-year tribulation period followed by the millennial reign of Christ). In prophecy we often see aspects of a near- partial fulfillment and distant-complete fulfillment. Often prophecies of judgment have this two-pronged thrust. Zephaniah uses a form of the phrase "Day of the Lord" more than any other prophet (that is about 19 times).
3. Zephaniah, as do most of the minor prophets, has three primary characters. The Lord, God's people (Israel/Judah), and the Gentile nations. Often there are three major themes as well. They are judgment, repentance, and restoration. Zephaniah speaks of judgment involving Judah and the nations, and also of future restoration for God's people.

Slide # 2**Dateline:**

722 BC – Fall of Northern Kingdom

640-609 BC – Reign of king Josiah
(Ministry of Zephaniah)

622 BC – Book of Law Found/Reformation

612 BC – Fall of Nineveh

605/597/586 – Three Sieges of Jerusalem/Babylonian Captivity

Politically it was a tumultuous time. Assyria was losing its grip on power. The Babylonians were quickly ascending to be the major power. King Manasseh (697-642 BC) had previously led the people of Judah deeply into extreme gross idolatry. Josiah was now king of Judah and he would seek to reverse the idolatrous trend set by his predecessors. Again, it seems that Zephaniah probably ministered just prior to this time of temporary reformation.

Slide # 3

“If anyone wishes all the secret oracles of the prophets to be given in a brief compendium [summary], let him read through this brief Zephaniah.” – **Martin Bucer** (1528)

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

The source for this message is shown to be the LORD which is the sacred covenant name for God – namely YHWH. This message came to Zephaniah who traces his genealogy back four generations to king Hezekiah.

Hezekiah, a son of the wicked King Ahaz, reigned over the southern kingdom of Judah for twenty-nine years, from c. 715 to 686 BC. He began his reign at age 25 ([2 Kings 18:2](#)). He was more zealous for the Lord than any of his predecessors ([2 Kings 18:5](#)).
(Gotquestions.org)

This tracing of his lineage back to Hezekiah shows that he had a royal background and he was also a distant relative to the current ruling king by the name of Josiah. There were other men in the OT named Zephaniah, but none other had this royal lineage (cf. 2 Ki. 25:18-21; 1 Chr. 6:36-38; Zech. 6:10, 14).

2 “I will utterly consume everything From the face of the land,” Says the LORD;

Zephaniah comes out firing strong right out of the gate. He tells us who he is and starts firing away. He cut right to the chase and didn't waste any words in getting to what he wanted to say. Again, this message is from YHWH – Zephaniah is just the delivery boy.

In view in verses 2-3 is a coming universal judgment. As we continue on in the book it is clearly describing what the book repeatedly refers to as the day of the Lord judgment.

Many of the prophets mention the coming day of the LORD (cf. Isa. 2:12; 13:6, 9; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel. 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31, 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad. 15; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5), but two books in particular have it as their central or main theme – and that is the book of Joel and also the book of Zephaniah. Zephaniah mentions the day of the LORD about 19 times which is more than any other prophet.

The prophets consistently intermingled what we call near-partial elements of prophecy and distant-complete elements. And we see this often in regard to the theme of the day of the LORD.

We might call the near-partial prophecies “the day of the LORD” with a small “t” and the distant-complete aspects “THE day of the LORD” with a capital – “T”.

Slide # 4

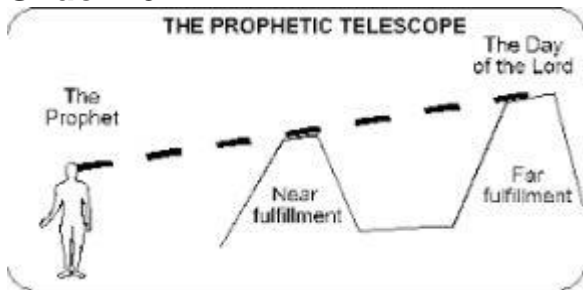
“t”he day of the LORD (Babylonian Captivity) - Near

“T”HE day of the LORD (Tribulation Period...) - Distant

Slide # 5

Perhaps the best solution is to recognize that the “day of the LORD” described in 1:2-3 is indeed the universal end-of-days judgment by the Lord. At the same time the judgment in 1:4-2:3 does describe a historical judgment that also foreshadows the end-of-days judgment.

– ***The Moody Bible Commentary***

Slide # 6

When God says, “I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land” He is referring to the entire world. The word “land” is generally translated as “ground”. It is clearly used in reference to the whole earth in 1:18. The statement here in verse 2 is comprehensive and scholars in our camp are in agreement that the whole world is in view here in verses 2 and 3. So, this is ultimately talking about the Day of the LORD judgment that we commonly refer to at the Tribulation Period with the ultimate and complete fulfillment at the end of the Millennial Reign of Christ.

The word “consume” is intensive and it means to totally destroy (cf. 1 Sam. 15:6; Jer. 16:5). In the final analysis this is what the Day of the LORD Judgment results in.

Slide # 7**2 Peter 3:10 (NKJV)**

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

But again there are various aspects to this broad day of the LORD theme with an ever widening theme of fulfillment.

Slide # 8***Aspects of the Day of the LORD...***

Related to Judah/Jerusalem

Related to 70th Week of Daniel (Tribulation Period)

Related to final destruction following the Millennial Reign

And for emphasis verse two ends with, “Says the LORD” and again, this is the name YHWH.

3 “I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, The fish of the sea, And the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land,” Says the LORD.

The pairing here resembles creation week where on day 6 God made man and beast and day 5 He made the birds and the fish (cf. Gen. 1:20, 24-25, 26-28). Again, in view here is a universal worldwide judgment (cf. Isa. 24:1-6, 19-23).

And God says He is going to remove “the stumbling blocks along with the wicked”. Stumbling blocks refers to any idolatrous thing that serves as an obstacle to God. All religious rites, all objects of idolatry are going to be removed from the face of the earth.

The prevailing sin problem of mankind in the history of the world has always been some form of idolatry. Idolatry places anything in the rightful place of God. Anything that serves as a substitute for God in the heart and affections of a person is an idol. God ALONE demands that He be recognized, worshipped, and served as God for in truth there is no other God. And being God He is ALONE is worthy of our worshipful allegiance.

The world is ever growing more wicked and the idolatry of the world will come to a climax under Antichrist when the entire unsaved world will worship him and his image as God. But at the second coming Jesus Christ is going to put an end to all that! The world will be purged of idolatry.

And then special mention is made that God will cut mankind off from the face of the land. Clearly this refers to the wicked referred to at the end of the previous sentence because 3:9-13 makes it very clear that a remnant will be delivered (cf. Jer. 25:31-33).

Mankind is creations representative and currently the whole of creation suffers under the bondage of corruption because of the fall of mankind. God the Creator will ultimately destroy everything related to this entire world’s system because of the sin of mankind. The only thing that will survive and go into the context of a new heavens and a new earth will be those souls who came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Slide # 9

2 Peter 3:13 (NKJV)

13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The LORD has been speaking generally where the day of the LORD judgments ultimately lead, but now at verse 4 He narrows the scope to a preliminary aspect of the Day of the LORD which is seen in His judgment of Judah in reference to the Babylonian Captivity.

4 “I will stretch out My hand against Judah, And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, The names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests—

When God says, “I will stretch out My hand” it is an image of power – His power displayed in judgment in this context. And the object of His power judgment here is stated to be Judah and Jerusalem which was the capital of the southern kingdom. And then God says why Judah/Jerusalem is targeted.

The issue here again is idolatry which God’s people in the OT were so prone to falling into.

Baal is sometimes used generally in reference to idolatry. The name “Baal” means lord or master. Baal was a Canaanite god who was considered to be a god of fertility and the god of storm and war. Gross immoral rituals were involved in the worship of Baal. God severely warned His people that if they followed the abominable idolatry of the Canaanites they too would be expelled from the land.

Slide # 10

Leviticus 18:25 (NKJV)

25 For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.

Leviticus 18:28 (NKJV)

28 lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

The mention of “idolatrous priests” evidently refers to Levitical priests who had defected from faithfulness to God to embrace idolatry. Pagan priests would refer to non-Levitical foreign priests brought in by wicked kings who propagated idolatry (cf. 2 Kings 23:5).

All semblance of idolatry and all those spiritual leaders who practice and influence God's people in this way were going to be cut off. God says "every trace of Baal" worship is going to be extinguished.

Footnote: The Babylonian Captivity did serve to rid Israel of formal idolatry. Never since that time has Israel fallen into overt formal idolatry – which is amazing.

5 Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops; Those who worship and swear oaths by the LORD, But who also swear by Milcom;

In verses 5-6 we have four categories of sinners that God is going to cut off in His day of the LORD judgment.

First He mentions those who "worship the host of heaven" which they tended to do from flat roof tops. From there they would worship the sun, moon, and stars (cf. Jer. 19:13; 32:29).

Jeremiah emphasizes that Judah was also guilty of worshipping the "queen of heaven" which had many names such as Ashtoreth, Ishtar, Astarte, Aphrodite, and Venus associated with various people groups. She was a goddess of sensual love and fertility often involving immoral rituals. Solomon erected an idol to this goddess in 1 Kings 11:5 and wicked Manasseh promoted her worship (2 Kings 23:13).

Worship of "the queen of heaven" eventually morphed into the idolatrous worship of Mary. The book "Queen of All" notes that throughout the world many are experiencing apparitions of Mary who in these apparitions claims to be the Queen of heaven".

Slide # 11

Today among her followers the title Queen of Heaven is the apparition's most popular name. It comes as a surprise to many people that the Queen of Heaven is found in the Bible, not once but several times. The Scriptures identify this Queen as a false goddess. In Jeremiah chapters 7 and 44, God pronounces judgment on the children of Judah for their idolatrous worship of the Queen of Heaven. ... Certainly, Mary of Nazareth would not assign to herself the name of a pagan goddess – not would she encourage idolatry. This entity must therefore be a demonic impostor. (Queen of All, p. 75).

Idolatry morphs from one form to another over time but the same old sin persists. All forms of stellar worship are condemned in the Scriptures.

Slide # 12

Deuteronomy 4:19 (NKJV)

19 And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you **feel driven to worship them and serve them**, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.

So many people today, including many professing Christians are involved in astrology and horoscopes. Astrology is not to be confused with astronomy. “*Astronomy* is concerned with ‘the study of objects and matter outside the earth's atmosphere,’ while *astrology* is the purported divination of how stars and planets influence our lives.” (Merriam Webster)

The use of a horoscope involves trying to discern a person's future, based on the positioning of the stars and planets relative to the time of a person's birth. All such activity is idolatrous and occultic and condemned by God.

Second, God addressed those who supposedly worship and swear oaths by YHWH but at the same time also swear by Milcom. This is syncretism that tries to serve both the true God and a false god at the same time.

God will have none of it. The very first command says...

Slide # 13

Exodus 20:3 (NKJV)

3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

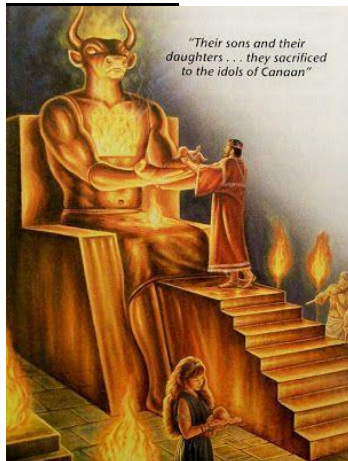
God ALONE is truly God and He demands that HE alone be recognized and worshipped as God. He tolerates none other. To swear by a deity meant the person was recognizing it as a higher power to whom they were accountable. Only the true God is to be recognized as God. He ALONE is the one to whom all are ultimately accountable.

Another name for Milcom is Molech. This was the chief god of the Ammonites (cf. Jer. 49:1-3; 1 Kg. 11:7; 2 Kg. 23:10, 13). It was considered to be the “sun god”. The worship of Molech involved child sacrifice which was an abomination before the true God of Israel (cf. Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5).

Slide # 14**Jeremiah 32:35 (NKJV)**

35 And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, **to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech,** which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.'

It is amazing how Scripture consistently combines sexual immorality and idolatry. I suggest to you nothing has changed. In modern times we are still killing babies because of the sex gods we have. We now do it quietly behind the scenes where no one can see, but in truth the scene is just as ghastly as in the days of Molech. The sin is the same old sin of offering up children in the name of idolatry.

Slide # 15

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

Third God says He will cut off what are described as apostates. These people at one point claimed to be followers of YHWH, but now they have completely turned from Him showing they were never really His to begin with (cf. Isa. 59:13).

Slide # 16

The word apostasy means a falling away – a deliberate and total abandonment of the faith previously professed but not possessed.

– **David Levy**

In the end God is going to cut apostates off. Apostasy is the MAJOR defining trait of the last days of the Church Age.

Slide # 17

2 Timothy 4:3–4 (NKJV)

3 For the time will come when they will **not endure sound doctrine**, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

4 and they will **turn their ears away from the truth**, and be **turned aside to fables**.

And fourthly, those who are indifferent will also be cut off. Some might not overtly be involved in idolatry or apostasy but they are indifferent to the things of God. They too are guilty of terrible sin.

Slide # 18

Hebrews 2:3 (NKJV)

3 how shall we escape **if we neglect so great a salvation**, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

If you want to go to hell – all you have to do is neglect the truth of God and you can slip right into hell.

“A man can slip into hell with his hand on the door-knob of heaven.”
-Billy Sunday

Someone once said, “The safest road to hell is the gradual one, the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.” (C.S. Lewis).

“If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for.”

– Charles Spurgeon

Within a few years of Zephaniah’s prophecy and in effect a call to repentance, within a few short years the Day of the Lord Judgment (small “t”) fell on Judah exactly as predicted and nothing went untouched.

Widespread apostasy as predicted in the Bible and as is evident on the scene today is most assuredly on a collision course with God's climactic last days Day of the LORD judgment.

So many are into one form of idolatry or another; into syncretistic religion that has a form of godliness but at the same time delves into all manner of other kinds of so-called "spirituality"; there are many who have plain apostatized and turned their back on God's truth, and then also many are just indifferent to God and His truth.

This is a formula for the coming Day of the LORD judgment. It was true in Zephaniah's day and it's still true in our day.

Even if they do believe in God, most people don't connect Him in any way with current or future events. The closest we come to involving God in human events is when insurance policies mention "acts of God over which we have no control." – **Warren Wiersbe**

But whether people realize it or not the God of the Bible is still the God with whom we have to do as seen in Heb. 4:13. People are oblivious to past history and how it has been prophetically fulfilled to the letter, and they are oblivious to the fact that such Day of the LORD fulfillment is a foreshadowing of what is yet to come.

Slide # 19

Acts 17:30–31 (NKJV)

30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now **commands all men everywhere to repent,**

31 because He has appointed **a day on which He will judge the world** in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given **assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.**"

God's Day of the LORD judgment is headed for the world just as sure as Jesus is risen from the dead. Therefore, God commands all men everywhere to repent.

We can't say we haven't been warned! The Bible is full of these warning passages regarding coming judgment. Now is the time to repent and get right with God through Jesus Christ.

And as believers now is the time for us to sound the alarm – for such a time as this! God help us to be faithful!

