

Zephaniah Speaks Again - Part 1

By [Jack Kelley](#)

Zephaniah wrote his three chapter prophecy during the time of King Josiah, who reigned over the Southern Kingdom (Judah) from 640-609 BC. Josiah was only 8 years old when he inherited the throne following the assassination of his father, the evil King Amon. Amon's father King Manasseh had been even worse and between the two of them Judah had suffered through 57 years of apostate leadership. Needless to say, Judah was not in favor with God when Josiah ascended to the throne.

Zephaniah was also very young, probably in his 20's when called to the office of Prophet. And as the great, great grand son of King Hezekiah, he was also of the House of David, a cousin of Josiah's. In fact it might have been Zephaniah's prophecies that inspired Josiah to institute the reforms necessary to bring Judah back into its covenant relationship with God in 621 BC.

But the revival was short lived. After Josiah's death in 609, Judah soon fell into idolatry again. Judgment began soon after with the first siege of Nebuchadnezzar in 605, and by the end of his 3rd siege, in 586, Judah had followed the Northern Kingdom into captivity. Zephaniah's prophecies had come true.

As we'll see, his prophecies were of a much broader scope than was fulfilled in the Babylonian captivity. It's clear that he really had the Day of the Lord in mind.

In fact there are so many references to the Day of the Lord that it's almost like he was writing to us. Like us with the world today, the people of Judah had abandoned God in favor of their idols. Like ours have, their leaders had led them astray and were adamant in their denial of a coming judgment.

Zephaniah warned both the people of Judah in his time and the people of the world in ours that judgment is coming and that it will be personal and intrusive, taking them from complacency to chaos. Because like He did in the days of Zephaniah, God will again intervene catastrophically to judge man's acceptance of and indifference toward sin, which are the last stages of rebellion. As it was then, His purpose now will be to restore the world to the conditions of blessing He's always intended for us. But since man never learns from history, it will once again take a period of devastating judgment before God can bring His marvelous restoration.

Zephaniah 1. Warning of Coming Destruction

The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah:

“I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. “I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. (Zeph. 1:1-3)

Zephaniah's opening statement clearly concerns the whole world. The phrase “heaps of rubble” carries a sense of huge obstacles that will prevent the wicked from accomplishing anything. We can see the beginning of this trend as we look at the world around us. Who is naive enough to believe that any man can solve the problems confronting us today?

Against Judah

“I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests - those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molech, those who turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him. (Zeph. 1:4-6).

Three groups of non-believers are represented here, and they're all still around today. Those who worship the starry host can be compared to people who study astrology and consult their horoscopes before acting. Molech was a god of fire. He demanded that extreme sacrifices be made to him in times of need. Often a live child was required. Today some associate the practice of abortion with Molech. Unwanted pre-born children are put to death to preserve the lifestyle of the parents. The third group consists of those who act as if God doesn't exist. This is by far the biggest one of the three. They think they are in control and have no need of a higher authority.

Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited. On the day of the LORD's sacrifice I will punish the princes and the king's sons and all those clad in foreign clothes. On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit. (Zeph 1:7-9)

In this passage, the people are the sacrifice and God's enemies are the invited guests. Rev. 19:17-18 explains it this way.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.”

Leaders who have deceived the people, and those who've sought a righteousness of their own will be punished. Foreign clothing stands for a counterfeit righteousness that doesn't come from God. Isaiah 61:10 says,

"I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness."

All other spiritual covering is counterfeit.

During the time when Antiochus Epiphanes ruled over Israel, many of those who counseled appeasement with the Greeks took to wearing Greek style clothing and shaved their faces. Some even tried to surgically reverse their circumcisions. The adoption of foreign clothing and appearance was a sign that they were rejecting their covenant relationship with God. Today our official rejection of Christian customs and traditions while bending over backwards to appease others sends Him the same message.

We think of stepping over rather than on a threshold as a harmless superstition. But it originated during the time when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant. They put it in the temple of their god Dagon. When they came back in the morning they found the statue of Dagon on its face before the ark. They put the idol back in its place, but the next morning it was prostrate again and this time its head and arms were broken off and were lying on the threshold of the temple. From that day on they never stepped on the threshold of their temple again, lest they offend their god. (1 Samuel 5:1-5) Other strange and painful things kept happening to them until they finally returned the Ark to Israel.

"On that day," declares the LORD, "a cry will go up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the New Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. Wail, you who live in the

market district; all your merchants will be wiped out, all who trade with silver will be ruined.” (Zephaniah 1:10-11)

Here’s another prophecy that looks as if it’s ripped from the headlines.

Businesses will fail and banks will close. Almost every Biblical mention of the Fish Gate involves either corruption, or its aftermath. The name stems from the fact that fishermen sold their catches there, often on the Sabbath. More and more it appears that the world’s financial problems are the aftermath of corruption in the highest levels of business and government.

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.’

Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. They will build houses but not live in them; they will plant vineyards but not drink the wine. (Zeph. 1:12-13)

The complacent, who think that God can’t or won’t intervene, will be like wine that hasn’t been strained and becomes unfit to drink. They’ll be of no use to the Lord. And here’s another sign we’ve seen recently. The world’s wealth has been plundered. Half of it has disappeared in the last 18 months. Record numbers of people have lost their homes. Many have already been reduced to the status of working solely for the benefit of others, their personal wealth gone. But they’re just the first. Millions more will follow.

The Great Day Of The Lord

“The great day of the LORD is near - near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day

of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers.” (Zeph 1:14-16)

Those who think the Tribulation has already begun don't have a clue. This is something you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. Men whose wealth is currently envied by all will soon wonder where their next meal is coming from. And according to James, they shouldn't expect any sympathy from the Lord.

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. (James 5:1-6)

I spent my last few years of employment managing the sales department of a large domestic auto dealership. Naively I thought I could change the culture of corruption, at least on the local level. I soon learned that the factory stole from the dealer, the dealer stole from his employees and the employees stole from their customers. Everyone lied to everyone else. I'm neither surprised nor saddened by the impending demise of the US auto industry. It's an abomination to the Lord.

I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be

consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth.” (Zeph. 1:17-18)

Even those who survive the Great Tribulation without seeking the Lord’s forgiveness will find they’ve gained nothing. They’ll be denied entrance into the Kingdom and ushered off the planet to the outer darkness. At that time the very richest among them would gladly agree to change places with the poorest, sickest, believing beggar. But they won’t be given the chance. They’ll find that the free gift they will have refused cannot be purchased with all the wealth of the world.

I think you can already see that Zephaniah doesn’t mince words. He’s especially harsh on the leadership. Having lived among them he had a clear insight into their corruption and manipulation. Earlier, the Lord had pronounced the same kind of condemnation on them through Micah.

Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning’s light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellow man of his inheritance.

Therefore, the LORD says: “I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity. In that day men will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song: ‘We are utterly ruined; my people’s possession is divided up. He takes it from me! He assigns our fields to traitors.’ ”

Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot. (Micah 2:1-5)

In effect the Lord is saying, “You lie awake at night dreaming up schemes to defraud your fellow man, so I’m lying awake dreaming up ways to punish you. You robbed my people of their inheritance, now I’m going to make sure you don’t have anything to leave to your offspring either.”

You don’t have to be a prophet to tell what’s ahead for the world, and before Zephaniah is finished, any lingering doubt you may have had about the coming judgment will be long gone. But remember, God’s purpose for the world is restoration, and Zephaniah will be unmistakably clear about that as well. You can almost hear the footsteps of the Messiah.