

Zephaniah ~ Part 1

Introduction

One of the Minor Prophets, **Zephaniah**, focuses on the need to live in righteousness before **God**. Of all the prophets, **Zephaniah** probably gave the most forceful description of judgment, yet he also held out the possibility of restoration for those who repented and turned to righteousness. His mission and message were to bring judgment against immorality, injustice, and pagan idolatry. His central theme is the "*coming of the day of the Lord.*"

Preface

1 The word of the Lord that 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 Y'hudah.

The Great Judgment

2 "I will completely sweep away everything off the face of the land," says Adonai. 3 "I will sweep away humans and animals, the birds in the air and the fish in the sea, also the wicked and what makes them stumble; I will wipe humanity off the land," says Adonai.

The prophetic declaration, **God** will completely sweep away everything on earth, is hyperbole. Though no one deserved to be spared, **God** would preserve a small remnant of **Y'hudah** and of other peoples (2:7, 9b; 3:9–10, 12–13). The judgment language - *sweep away humans and animals*, even *the birds of the air* and *the fish of the sea* - is more comprehensive than **Noah's** flood (Genesis 6:7, no fish mentioned). To underscore the gravity of their sins and the intensity of their deserved punishment, **Zephaniah** used prophetic hyperbole (Jeremiah 4:23–29; 9:9–11) in which creation itself is reversed; here the creatures are listed in reverse order from Genesis 1:20–28 (sea creatures, birds, beasts, and man). The **Lord** would destroy those idols and their worshipers.

Y'hudah's Judgment

4 "I will stretch out my hand over Y'hudah and all those living in Yerushalayim. I will wipe every remnant of Ba'al from this place, the idol-serving priests and even their names, 5 those worshipping heaven's army on the roofs, also those who worship and swear by Adonai but swear by Malkam as well, 6 those who turned away from following Adonai, and those who haven't sought Adonai or consulted him at all."

Y'hudah alone remained to serve as God's new humanity since her northern neighbor **Isra'el** was exiled to **Assyria** in 722 BC. Yet the presence of a righteous king such as Josiah (v. 1) was not enough to avert God's judgment from **Y'hudah** when other officials (v. 8; 3:3–5) and the people (1:9–12) were persisting in evil. **Yerushalayim**, **Y'hudah's** capital, represented the entire nation. **Ba'al** (lord, master) is the title commonly designating the **Canaanite** storm god, **Hadad**, whom **Isra'el** was prone to worship (Judges 6:25; 1 Kings 16:31–32; 18). It could also refer to an **Assyrian** god, **Bel**. The term *idol-serving priests* is used only of pagan priests (cf. 2 Kings 23:5; Hosea 10:5).

Malkam is the god of the pagan Ammonites (1 Kings 11:5, 33). The law strictly prohibited mixing worship of God and a pagan deity (Exodus 20:3). The people *turned back*, becoming apostate and leaving their first faith (Isaiah 59:13).

⁷ Keep silent before Adonai Elohim, for the Day of Adonai is near. Adonai has prepared a sacrifice; he has set apart those he invited.

Adonai has prepared a sacrifice; Y'udah is the victim, and the Babylonians are the guests.

⁸ When the time comes for Adonai's sacrifice - "I will punish the leaders and the sons of the king, also those who dress in foreign clothes. ⁹ On the same day, I will also punish all who jump over the threshold to fill the house of their master with violence and deceit. ¹⁰ Also on that day," says Adonai, "a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, wailing from the city's Second Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. ¹¹ Wail, you who live down in the hollow, because all the merchants are destroyed, all who trade with silver are ruined. ¹² When that time comes, I will search Yerushalayim with lamps and punish those who are [smug and thick, like wine] left too long on its dregs, who say to themselves, 'Adonai will do nothing - neither good nor bad.' ¹³ For this, their wealth will be plundered; and their houses will be destroyed. Yes, they will build houses but not live in them; they will plant vineyards but not drink the wine."

Adonai will punish Y'udah for their idolatrous *apparel* and practices, and for their *violence and deceit*. Howls will go up from such various sections of the capital as *the Fish Gate, the Second Quarter, and the hills*, as the invaders slaughter and take *plunder*.

The Great Day of the Lord

¹⁴ The great Day of Adonai is near, near and coming very quickly; Hear the sound of the Day of Adonai! When it's here, even a warrior will cry bitterly. ¹⁵ That Day is a Day of fury, a Day of trouble and distress, a Day of waste and desolation, a Day of darkness and gloom, a Day of clouds and thick fog, ¹⁶ a Day of the shofar and battle-cry against the fortified cities and against the high towers [on the city walls]. ¹⁷ "I will bring such distress on people that they will grope their way like the blind, because they have sinned against Adonai. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their bowels like dung. ¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them. On the day of Adonai's fury, the whole land will be destroyed in the fire of his jealousy. For he will make an end, a horrible end, of all those living in the land." ¹

The **Babylonian** attack on **Yerushalayim** was a portent of the universal judgment ("the whole land," 1:18) that the eschatological **Day of the Lord** will bring. Compare this description of judgment with the description in 2 Peter 3:10.

Imagine brushing off the dust from an old book on a shelf only to discover it's a treasure chest of adventures! **Zephaniah** encourages us to uncover the joys of seeking **God** amidst the serious warnings. It's like the excitement of finding an unexpected gem in life, inviting us to dig deeper into faith and hope. Let's embrace the adventure!

In our next post, we will continue to explore **Zephaniah**.

¹ Zephaniah 1:1-18.