

The Day of the LORD Is at Hand: Zephaniah 1:7–13

Scriptures for Today:

***Zephaniah 1:7-13** 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. 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. 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. 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. 11 Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off. 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. 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.*

Introduction

We are back in the book of Zephaniah. This is the 36th book of the Bible. There are 66 books total. 27 in the New Testament, 39 in the Old Testament. So we are getting close to the end of the Old Testament scriptures.

If you've been with us for the past weeks, you will know that the topics that we have been covering have been heavy topics that deal with sin, judgement, and chastisement from God. Most people when they go to church, they only want to hear positive things. In 2 Timothy 4 it says...

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears"

So instead of turning to the truth. People would rather listen to lies because it makes them feel good.

Obviously, the overarching theme of the entire Bible is 100% positive. The fact that salvation from eternal punishment in Hell is a free gift that is given to us by God through Jesus Christ.

But the truth is that God's Word is filled with things that are hard for us to hear. The reason why God's Word has a lot of negatives is not because God is negative. God is pure. He is light. There is no darkness in Him at all. But humans are very sinful. We have rebelled against our Creator. In order for us to understand our sinful condition and see our need for a savior, we must hear truth that exposes our unrighteousness and warns us of Judgement.

That's what all the prophets were doing. That's what the book of Zephaniah is doing.

It is sounding the alarm. It is pulling back the curtain on man's sinfulness and reminding us that God is not indifferent to evil. God sees idolatry. God sees compromise. God sees complacency. And God warns before He judges. So when we come to a passage like this, we should not think, "Why so much judgment?" We should think, "Thank God He told us the truth." Because a warning from God is an act of mercy, and the preaching of judgment is often what God uses to bring men and women to place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

What is this book about?

Zephaniah was a prophet that prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (640 – 620 Before Christ)

Josiah was a good King that brought great reform to the land of Judah. But this book takes place during a time when Judah still had serious spiritual corruption and before that reform took place.

Judah had outward religion, but inward corruption

The people still had the temple, sacrifices, and religious structure, but idolatry, compromise, and rebellion were deeply rooted in the nation.

Just like how this nation today is deeply rooted in religion. There are churches on every street corner. Millions of people are in church this morning, not because they want to worship God, not because of the Savior (Jesus Christ), simply because of tradition. Jesus said...

"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me."

You can have as much outward religion as you want. But if you are trusting in those things to save you from hell, you are corrupted and condemned before God. Stop trusting in outward religion and start trusting in Jesus Christ.

That was the spiritual condition of Judah. Outward religion, inward corruption. Just like today. There is nothing new under the sun.

The book shows that God is not indifferent to sin

He sees idolatry, violence, complacency, pride, deceit, and rebellion, and He will not overlook them forever.

The message is severe, but not hopeless

Though much of the book is about judgment, Zephaniah also calls people to seek the Lord and points to hope for a humble remnant.

Recap of verses 1 - 6

Verse 1:

The book opens by identifying **Zephaniah** and placing his ministry in the days of **Josiah king of Judah**.

Verses 2–3:

The Lord announces a sweeping judgment, saying He will **consume all things from off the land**, including man, beast, birds, fish, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked.

Verse 4:

The focus then narrows specifically to **Judah and Jerusalem**, where God says He will stretch out His hand against them and cut off the remnant of **Baal** and the names of the idolatrous priests.

Verse 5:

God condemns those who worship **the host of heaven upon the housetops** and those who try to worship both **the LORD** and **Malcham**.

Verse 6:

He also condemns those who have **turned back from the LORD**, and those who have **not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him**.

Having exposed Judah's sins in verses 1 through 6, Zephaniah now turns in verses 7 through 13 to the nearness and thoroughness of God's judgement. Let's take a look at this next passage...

Verse 7

Zephaniah 1:7 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.

A statement is made here—Hold thy peace. It's time to stop talking. Stop making excuses. Stop justifying yourself. When a judge speaks there is to be silence in the courtroom. God is the ultimate judge, and He is about to speak and hand down judgement upon His people. It's time to show some reverence to the Lord. Just like when someone with importance and authority is about to speak, everyone quiets down. (They should quiet down, but that doesn't happen anymore. People have no reverence or fear of God)

But God commands reverence and He will receive it. "**for the day of the LORD *is* at hand**"

What is the day of the Lord? If we look that phrase up in the King James Bible, we find it 29 times throughout scripture. The day of the Lord is a biblical theme that has multiple historical manifestations as well as a coming future fulfillment.

When you read about the day of the Lord, it's almost always described as a day of God's vengeance. A day of God's wrath and destruction. It is a dreadful day for the wicked. A day when God rises in a notable, public, and decisive way to judge sin and display His authority.

Understand that the nation of Judah had many many years to get things right. They were given warning after warning. But they failed to listen and obey time after time.

In our own lives, God gives us many chances. He is incredibly merciful. We hear things from God's Word all the time and we ignore it. We put it to the side. We prioritize the desires of our flesh. God is very patient. But the time will come when He's had enough.

The day of the Lord described here in Zephaniah is referring to the day when God finally had enough. He finally poured out his wrath on an unrepentant nation. The Babylonians were invited by God to slaughter, to carry away, and leave a once mighty people in desolation and ruin.

That was a very sad day. It's important to understand that not only was that day of the Lord a very notable day in the past, but it also points forward to an ultimate future day of the Lord when God's wrath will be poured out on the entire earth.

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Just like Jerusalem was burned up and destroyed in the past, all the things in this earth will be burned up in the future. It's important to see how these things are a picture of events to come.

Look at the next part of verse 7

"for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests."

God uses a picture that Judah is very familiar with—Animal Sacrifices. It's a very severe picture. What happens during a sacrifice?

Normally:

- God's people would prepare the sacrifice (set apart an animal or many animals)
- The animal was slaughtered and offered unto God on an altar.
- worshippers would gather for a feast
- the occasion was worship and holy fellowship

But here:

- **the LORD** prepares the sacrifice
- **the guests are invited by God** (the instruments of God's judgement—Babylon)
- **Judah itself appears to be the sacrifice**

So things are being turned upside down. God has prepared the victim, God has invited the ones who will consume, and the day of the Lord is the occasion. You don't want to be on the wrong side when God's anger is being unleashed.

Verse 8 - 9

Zephaniah 1:8 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.

So we see that the sacrifice that God was preparing— this day of the Lord's sacrifice is being tied directly to punishment and judgement. And now He's showing us who are the first ones he's going to deal with.

He says "I will punish the princes, and the king's children." These are the leaders, rulers, and those connected to power and influence. This shows us that God does not start at the bottom and overlook the top. God does not excuse sin because you're part of a wealthy family or because you have a certain last name. God is not a respecter of persons.

The people with position and privilege were often the ones leading the nation into corruption.

2 Kings 21:1-2 Manasseh *was* twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Hephzi-bah. **2** And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

2 Kings 21:9 But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel.

2 Kings 21:11-12 Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, *and hath done* wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which *were* before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: **12** Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, I *am* bringing *such* evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle.

The truth is, everyone is leading or setting an example for someone else in this life. You have people that are watching you each and every day. Are you leading people to do that which is good in the sight of the Lord? Or are you leading people to do evil? Do the words that you speak bring glory to God? Does the music that you listen to bring glory to God? Do the things that you watch bring glory to God? People are watching everything that you do. God is watching. Are you leading others into good or evil?

The kings of Judah led people into sin. And now punishment was upon them. Look at the last part of that verse...

Zephaniah 1:8 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.

That phrase "and all such as are clothed with strange apparel." is likely referring to people who had adopted the foreign customs of the people of the land. So this is not just God being angry over choice of clothing or fashion. These people were outwardly identifying with pagan nations and ungodly influences. In other words, their clothing reflected their heart. Judah was supposed to be a people separated unto the Lord, but instead they embraced the wicked nations around them.

Psalm 106:34-36 They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: **35** But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. **36** And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.

In your life, don't mingle among the wrong people. Don't learn the works of the wicked. Stay away from people that want to influence you with evil. When your family wants to drink alcohol get away from them. When your friends want to smoke marijuana, get away from them and find new friends. Don't let those things be a snare to you like they were for Israel. Look where it led them.

Zephaniah 1:9 In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

God is continuing to explain who he is coming to punish. First, He mentions the princes, the king's children, those who are clothed in strange apparel (mingled with the heathen). Now He says He will punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

The phrase "those that leap on the threshold", I believe is talking about those who rush upon people's homes and take things by force through violence and oppression.

We see examples of this in the book of Micah...

Micah 2:1-2 Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. **2** And they covet fields, and take *them* by violence; and houses, and take *them* away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage.

Ezekiel 22:29 The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully.

God hates pride. He hates unjust oppression. He hates violence. He hates taking through deception. You don't want to take part in those types of things in your life because God is storing up His wrath against you. And He will unleash His fury at a time when you least expect it.

Verse 10 - 11

Zephaniah 1:10 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.

Which day are we talking about? The day of the Lord. The day of the Lord's sacrifice that He has prepared. The day when God's judgement is unleashed on a wicked nation. Now God is painting a picture of what that day will be like. He's showing us how the judgement would move through the city.

It starts out with a noise of a cry from the fish gate which was most likely on the outer wall. Then there is howling from the second. Either a second gate or second inner quarters of Jerusalem. There is a great crashing from the hills. Imagine an invading army making its way into the city. Destroying everything in its path. I'm sure it's a very fearful thing to behold, and a horrible thing to hear the cries of destruction.

Zephaniah 1:11 Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off.

The judgement moves to the merchants. All the prosperity of the city is about to be taken away. Notice it says **all they that bear silver are cut off**. This is a reminder that those who trust in riches will come crashing down. All the money in the world will not protect you from God's vengeance.

Think about the billions and trillions of dollars that people spend their entire lives chasing and they will take absolutely none of it with them when they die.

Verse 12 - 13

Zephaniah 1:12 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.

Now God shows us how thorough He will be with His judgement. He says that He will search Jerusalem with candles. God is making the point that this is deliberate and inescapable judgement. No one will be overlooked. No sin will remain concealed. The people may have thought they were hidden, comfortable, and secure, but God says He will search Jerusalem as one who examines every part of a house with light.

Notice it says he will punish the men that are settled on their lees. That is an expression that comes from the imagery of wine that is left sitting undisturbed on its sediment.

Example: *Like when you have a container of juice that has been sitting for a long time untouched...*

These men that God is referring to are settled on their lees. In other words, they are stagnant, undisturbed, and complacent. Complacent – when you are satisfied with your situation, you're okay with living in sin. You don't see a need to change. *Complacent when it comes to going to church, reading Bible*

Look what they said in their heart, "**The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.**"

They were living as though God was completely indifferent towards sin. They had no fear of God. They were completely settled and comfortable with being in rebellion against God.

It reminds me of Ezekiel 8

Ezekiel 8:12 Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.

Understand when you think you are unseen in your sin, just remember who is there watching you. The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

Just like He searched Jerusalem with candles leaving no stone unturned, He will do that in your life. We see that over and over again in scripture, and in this world. *Politicians, Celebrities, Billionaires.*

So what became of those men who were settled on their lees and thought that God would not act? Look at the last verse...

Zephaniah 1:13 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.

So this was the result of their sin and complacency. It says their goods shall become a booty. That means all of their possessions will become spoil for others to take. Their houses will become a desolation. They will build houses but never live in them. They will plant vineyards but never drink from them.

Imagine working hard and building up your wealth thinking that you have everything you'll ever need. Nothing will ever be able to touch you. And then everything is taken away from you in a moment by strangers.

So remember that these prophets that God used, like Zephaniah, teach us many things. They had the warnings back then, but they didn't listen. We have the same warnings today. Will we repeat the same mistakes?

Let's look at some quick application from these verses:

Application

1. When God speaks, our first response should be reverence.

"Hold thy peace" reminds us that there are times to stop talking, stop excusing, and simply submit to what God says.

2. The sins of leaders affect everyone under them.

The princes and king's children being named reminds us that leadership matters. Everyone has someone watching them. The choices you make could cause others to do good, or you could cause others to commit evil.

3. Complacency is a dangerous sin.

The men settled on their lees thought the Lord would do nothing, but God said He would search Jerusalem with candles. Don't become complacent and be okay with things that displease God.

4. The day of the Lord is coming. Will you be ready?

Yes, the day of the Lord came for Judah. God's judgment came down hard on a rebellious people. But there is still a day coming when the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will burn with fervent heat, the earth and the works therein shall be burned up. Will that day be a terrible day of God's wrath for you?

Remember the only thing that can appease the anger of the Lord is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He paid for the sins of all mankind. He died, He was buried, and He rose again for your sins. All you have to do today is put 100% of your trust in Jesus. Believe on Him (not by turning from your sins or praying a prayer) by simply placing all your faith in Him for salvation. Jesus took the complete wrath of God upon himself so you don't have to face eternal judgement. There is no way you will ever go to hell if you simply believe that Jesus is enough. Thank God He made it so easy for us. Let's Pray.