



ZEPHANIAH

Read Zephaniah 1:1–6

This book begins with a dramatic announcement of universal judgment: humanity, animals, birds, and fish are all doomed. As in the days of Noah, the sins of humans bring judgment on the whole of creation. The sin Zephaniah condemns is the worship of false gods to the neglect of the Lord. When humanity fails to worship the God of all creation, the entire created order is affected.

Reflect: How is human sinfulness affecting our world? What is my part in such human sinfulness? Does my neglect of God disrupt my personal relationships and distort my obligations to the created world?

Pray: In prayer, I will ask God to be the center of my life and my world. I will ask for the grace to turn wholeheartedly to the Lord.

Act: Today I will identify one thing that distracts me from God and I will change or eliminate that.

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 King Josiah son of Amon of Judah.

The Coming Judgment on Judah

- 2** I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the LORD.
- 3** I will sweep away humans and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will make the wicked stumble.^a I will cut off humanity from the face of the earth, says the LORD.
- 4** I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests;^b
- 5** those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens; those who bow down and swear to the LORD, but also swear by Milcom;^c
- 6** those who have turned back from following the LORD, who have not sought the LORD or inquired of him.
- 7** Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is at hand;

^a Cn: Heb sea, and those who cause the wicked to stumble

^b Compare Gk: Heb the idolatrous priests with the priests

^c Gk Mss Syr Vg: Heb Malcam (or, their king)

Read Zephaniah 1:7–18

The “great day of the LORD” is the day on which the wicked are judged. God will punish corrupt rulers and dishonest merchants who use their wealth to support an indulgent lifestyle. Because of their lives of ease, the wicked conclude that God, like them, is unconcerned and will not act, either to do good or to punish the wicked. The day of the Lord will prove them wrong.

Reflect: Do I so rely on God’s love and mercy that I cannot conceive of a God who judges and punishes? What does “judgment” add to my understanding of God and of God’s justice?

Pray: I will pray for the grace to judge my life aright: to be honest about my faults and humble about my strengths.

Act: I will refrain from judging others and turn my critical eye towards my own life.

the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,
he has consecrated his guests.

- 8 And on the day of the LORD’s sacrifice
I will punish the officials and the king’s sons
and all who dress themselves in foreign attire.
- 9 On that day I will punish
all who leap over the threshold,
who fill their master’s house
with violence and fraud.
- 10 On that day, says the LORD,
a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate,
a wail from the Second Quarter,
a loud crash from the hills.
- 11 The inhabitants of the Mortar wail,
for all the traders have perished;
all who weigh out silver are cut off.
- 12 At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish the people
who rest complacently^a on their dregs,
those who say in their hearts,
“The LORD will not do good,
nor will he do harm.”
- 13 Their wealth shall be plundered,
and their houses laid waste.
Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them.

The Great Day of the LORD

- 14 The great day of the LORD is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter,
the warrior cries aloud there.
- 15 That day will be a day of wrath,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
- 16 a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.
- 17 I will bring such distress upon people
that they shall walk like the blind;
because they have sinned against the LORD,
their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.
- 18 Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the LORD’s wrath;

^a Heb *who thicken*

in the fire of his passion
the whole earth shall be
consumed;

for a full, a terrible end
he will make of all the inhabitants
of the earth.

Read Zephaniah 2

God's just rule is not limited to Judah but extends over other peoples and nations, many of whom the prophet catalogs by name. The day of the Lord shall come against all who oppress, exploit, and degrade God's chosen people. The Lord, the universal ruler over all peoples, will rise against the wicked of whatever nation.

Reflect: It is common to think of God as my God or the God of my life. How does this passage challenge me to appreciate the sovereignty of God over all peoples and nations? How does this affect my worship of so great a God?

Pray: As I pray with a greater sense of awe and reverence, I will praise the greatness and majesty of God.

Act: Because God is the God of all people, my relationship with God links me to every other person. Today I will show greater respect for others.

Judgment on Israel's Enemies

- 2** Gather together, gather,
O shameless nation,
2 before you are driven away
like the drifting chaff,^a
before there comes upon you
the fierce anger of the LORD,
before there comes upon you
the day of the LORD's wrath.
- 3 Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land,
who do his commands;
seek righteousness, seek humility;
perhaps you may be hidden
on the day of the LORD's wrath.
- 4 For Gaza shall be deserted,
and Ashkelon shall become a desolation;
Ashdod's people shall be driven out at noon,
and Ekron shall be uprooted.
- 5 Ah, inhabitants of the seacoast,
you nation of the Cherethites!
The word of the LORD is against you,
O Canaan, land of the Philistines;
and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left.
- 6 And you, O seacoast, shall be pastures,
meadows for shepherds
and folds for flocks.
- 7 The seacoast shall become the possession
of the remnant of the house of Judah,
on which they shall pasture,
and in the houses of Ashkelon
they shall lie down at evening.
For the LORD their God will be mindful of them
and restore their fortunes.
- 8 I have heard the taunts of Moab
and the revilings of the Ammonites,
how they have taunted my people
and made boasts against their territory.
- 9 Therefore, as I live, says the LORD of hosts,
the God of Israel,
Moab shall become like Sodom
and the Ammonites like Gomorrah,
a land possessed by nettles and salt pits,
and a waste forever.
The remnant of my people shall plunder them,
and the survivors of my nation shall possess them.

^a Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb *before a decree is born; like chaff a day has passed away*

- 10 This shall be their lot in return for their pride,
because they scoffed and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts.
- 11 The LORD will be terrible against them; he will shrivel all the gods of the earth,
and to him shall bow down, each in its place,
all the coasts and islands of the nations.
- 12 You also, O Ethiopians,^a shall be killed by my sword.
- 13 And he will stretch out his hand against the north,
and destroy Assyria;

- and he will make Nineveh a desolation,
a dry waste like the desert.
- 14 Herds shall lie down in it, every wild animal;^b
the desert owl^c and the screech owl^c shall lodge on its capitals;
the owl^d shall hoot at the window,
the raven^e croak on the threshold;
for its cedar work will be laid bare.
- 15 Is this the exultant city that lived secure,
that said to itself,
“I am, and there is no one else”?
What a desolation it has become,
a lair for wild animals!
Everyone who passes by it
hisses and shakes the fist.

Read Zephaniah 3:1–7

The rebellious city of this passage is Jerusalem. Though it is God’s chosen dwelling, it will not be spared on the day of judgment. Corruption is evident everywhere: among princes, judges, prophets, and priests. Though the city should have taken warning from God’s punishment of other nations, it did not. Now judgment comes. Jerusalem’s special status will not save it.

Reflect: In my relationship with God and others whom I love, do I presume that our shared love excuses my faults and failings?

Pray: I will pray that I may always safeguard my special relationship with God and live in a manner worthy of God’s love for me.

Act: Just as God acts to remove corruption from Jerusalem, I will take concrete steps to change any behavior of mine that is not in keeping with my relationship with God.

The Wickedness of Jerusalem

- 3** Ah, soiled, defiled,
oppressing city!
- 2 It has listened to no voice;
it has accepted no correction.
It has not trusted in the LORD;
it has not drawn near to its God.
- 3 The officials within it
are roaring lions;
its judges are evening wolves
that leave nothing until the morning.
- 4 Its prophets are reckless,
faithless persons;
its priests have profaned what is sacred,
they have done violence to the law.
- 5 The LORD within it is righteous;
he does no wrong.
Every morning he renders his judgment,
each dawn without fail;
but the unjust knows no shame.
- 6 I have cut off nations;
their battlements are in ruins;
I have laid waste their streets
so that no one walks in them;
their cities have been made desolate,
without people, without inhabitants.
- 7 I said, “Surely the city^f will fear me,
it will accept correction;
it will not lose sight^g
of all that I have brought upon it.”

^a Or Nubians; Heb Cushites

^b Tg Compare Gk: Heb nation

^c Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Cn: Heb a voice

^e Gk Vg: Heb desolation

^f Heb it

^g Gk Syr: Heb its dwelling will not be cut off

Read Zephaniah 3:8–20

After a message of unrelenting judgment, the prophet offers words of hope. The humble and lowly who follow God's commands will be forgiven their sins. God, Jerusalem's mighty savior, will protect them from all harm and restore their fortunes. Jerusalem and its people will rejoice because God will dwell in their midst. God, too, will rejoice over the people God loves.

Reflect: God "will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing," (v. 17). When God looks at me, what makes God rejoice over me? What is the goodness God sees in me?

Pray: I will pray for the humility and lowliness to hear God's word and obey God's commands.

Act: Today I will do for someone one thing I know will cause God to rejoice over me.

But they were the more eager
to make all their deeds corrupt.

Punishment and Conversion of the Nations

- 8 Therefore wait for me, says the LORD,
for the day when I arise as a witness.
For my decision is to gather nations,
to assemble kingdoms,
to pour out upon them my indignation,
all the heat of my anger;
for in the fire of my passion
all the earth shall be consumed.
- 9 At that time I will change the speech of the peoples
to a pure speech,
that all of them may call on the name of the LORD
and serve him with one accord.
- 10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia^a
my suppliants, my scattered ones,
shall bring my offering.
- 11 On that day you shall not be put to shame
because of all the deeds by which you have
rebelled against me;
for then I will remove from your midst
your proudly exultant ones,
and you shall no longer be haughty
in my holy mountain.
- 12 For I will leave in the midst of you
a people humble and lowly.
They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD—
- 13 the remnant of Israel;
they shall do no wrong
and utter no lies,
nor shall a deceitful tongue
be found in their mouths.
Then they will pasture and lie down,
and no one shall make them afraid.

A Song of Joy

- 14 Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
- 15 The LORD has taken away the judgments against
you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.
- 16 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.

^a Or Nubia; Heb Cush

- 17 The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
 a warrior who gives victory;
 he will rejoice over you with gladness,
 he will renew you^a in his love;
 he will exult over you with loud
 singing
 18 as on a day of festival.^b
 I will remove disaster from you,^c
 so that you will not bear reproach
 for it.
 19 I will deal with all your oppressors
 at that time.

- And I will save the lame
 and gather the outcast,
 and I will change their shame into
 praise
 and renown in all the earth.
 20 At that time I will bring you home,
 at the time when I gather you;
 for I will make you renowned and
 praised
 among all the peoples of the earth,
 when I restore your fortunes
 before your eyes, says the LORD.

^a Gk Syr: Heb *he will be silent*

^b Gk Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Cn: Heb *I will remove from you; they were*