

The minor prophets are probably the most ignored part of the entire Bible. We call them minor prophets because these 12 books are short, but for most of us they play a very minor role in our lives. These are the books of the Bible that most people are scared of. Part of it is we don't know what to do with poetry. Part of it is that you feel like you need to understand all of the Near Eastern religions or historical context. And a lot of people just feel ill-equipped. Knowing those things are helpful. But my hope as we look at this series in Zephaniah is to show you that you can understand this book. It might take more effort than the Psalms or Paul's letters. But it is something every one of you can do. I hope this series will help give you the tools you need to feel like you can study the book in the future.

Why study this book? Partially because it is very similar to Revelation. Zephaniah is continually talking about the coming Day of the Lord, which is at least partially fulfilled in Revelation. Much of this book will feel familiar and goes along with what we have been studying. That Day of the Lord is fulfilled in Christ's coming. And in Zephaniah it is both a day of wrath and a day of hope. As we go through the book we will see both.

But I want you to see that this book does not just tell us a bit of what God will do in the future. It actually has something to say to us in our current moment. What we will see is that Zephaniah's day is very similar to our own. And that His words, like all of God's Word, are always relevant. this morning we are going to look at the kind of sin God will judge. And we will find the sin of Israel and the world thousands of years ago is not that different from the sin today.

So, lift up your sleeves, turn with me to Zephaniah 1, and let's dig into God's Word together.

## **I. God will judge those who worship both Jesus and other things (v. 1-6).**

Before we unpack this statement me, we need to get a little more context. I want to tell you a little bit about who Zephaniah is.

Verse 1, **"The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah."**

The book begins with some background information.

Zephaniah is a prophet who speaks for God.

When we think about prophets we usually think of them as people who tell us about the future.

But it might be more helpful to realize the prophets are like referees.

They are the enforcers and messengers of God.

They show up to speak to the nations when people are no longer following God's laws, His rules, or the covenant.

And so the prophets appear to give warnings like a yellow card in soccer, and then hand out penalties and punishments that are coming.

This is the way every prophet generally functions, and Zephaniah is no different.

So if the minor prophets scare you, picture Zephaniah is a stripped shirt throwing penalty flags on Israel and the nations.

Each prophecy is like when the ref announces what the penalty is and what the punishment will be.

Foul on Israel for idolatry; the punishment is exile to Babylon.

But God tells us a little who Zephaniah is.

First, we see he is a Cushite.

His is biracial, part Israelite and part Cush, which is Ethiopian.

During most of the Bible it was typically listed with Egypt as one of God's frequent enemies.

And yet there are a few Ethiopians throughout the Bible who follow God.

This is a unique perspective he must have had to be chosen as a prophet.

We also get four generations of his genealogy, which is the longest genealogy of any prophet in the Old Testament.

Part of this I think is to show that he is a descendent from King Hezekiah.

Who was one of the last righteous kings of the land.

But the Bible does tell us when Zephaniah prophesied.

Which it does not always do.  
And he prophesied during the days of Josiah.  
He was the man who became king at 8 years old.  
And during his reign, he rediscovered the Bible and law.  
And he tried to reform the country and turn people back to God.

Zephaniah prophesies during his reign as king.  
Now, we don't know exactly when this was written.  
Some say it was before the reforms happened and God's Word found.  
Some say during and others afterwards.  
The Bible does not tell us, but I think we are to connect Zephaniah with the days of Josiah's reforms.  
I think he is talking during the days of revival when everyone is excited.  
It is not when there is finally a righteous leader.  
Laws and being changed and official policy is falling in line with God's Word again.  
Everyone is excited and believes revival is breaking out.  
But if you look under the surface, there are still problems.

Verse 2, **"I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the Lord.**

Here is where the judgment begins.  
Zephaniah is proclaiming that God's judgment is coming.  
And it is coming over all the earth.  
This judgment already sounds like the end times judgment.  
It isn't like sweeping with a broom.  
This is actually harvest language.  
It is gathering everything together in the final harvest.  
This same language is used much later in the Bible by Christ and the gospels and by John to describe the harvest in Revelation.

Verse 3, **"I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth," declares the Lord.**

Everything from man and beast will be harvested on that last day.  
They will all be gathered together for judgment.  
And the wicked will finally be punished.  
Mankind will be cut off, which means death.  
It is the final judgment.  
When everyone will pass before the throne to be judged by God.

Verse 4 gives us why they will be judged.

Verse 4, **"I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests,"**

This judgment comes first for God's people.

Judgment always begins in the house of God.

The people who should know the best.

The people who have read the Bible the most, who have heard the gospel proclaimed the most.

They are judged first.

Because the people who claim to worship Jesus will be judged first.

So, Jerusalem and Judah will be judged.

And the people of God still have plenty of false religion.

There is the remnant of Baal.

The gods of Babylon are still being worshipped.

Josiah may have said they need to turn back to God.

Most people may have even done so.

But there is still a remnant of people worshipping other gods.

And there are priests who have not been removed.

There are priests serving in the temple of YWH, who also say some prayers to Baal.

Who make sacrifices to God, and then also to other gods.

And it seems like the idolatrous priests and the priests who allow this idolatry will be judged and removed.

Verse 5, **“those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom,”**

This verse might seem strange.

And I will explain it in a moment.

At the heart, it is saying that you cannot worship both.

You cannot claim to worship Jesus.

Or claim to worship the God of the Bible, and then worship something else as well.

God demands all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, all our strength.

He is a jealous God who wants all of our hearts.

But the people here think they can just kind of worship God.

Maybe they worship God and they worship other gods too.

Those who believe they can worship in their own ways.

This is what it means by those who bow down on the roofs.

It is talking about those who are bowing in worship.

And they even claim to be worshipping the God of hosts.

Just like Israel who worshipped the golden calf while calling it YWH.

But there is problem.

Their roofs are not the proper place of worship.

God has commanded them to worship in His temple.

That is the only place for sacrifices.

That is the place they are to gather to worship Him.

God has explained what proper worship looks like.

But they want to do their own thing.

They would rather worship on their roofs instead.

After all, isn't it more natural and easy to worship God in nature?

Doesn't God just care about my heart?

I can worship God right here when I look high at the heavens instead of in that temple with all the crowds and hubbub.

That sounds familiar.  
I don't need to go to church.  
I can just watch it at home.  
I can worship online or just catch up on some sermons whenever I want.  
Or I can go outside into the woods or the mountains.  
I don't need the body of Christ to bow in worship.

It isn't wrong to worship that way.  
But it is wrong when we ignore God's commands.  
When we think we can just claim to worship Jesus and do what we want.  
When we think we can follow Jesus however we please.

They are also judged because they are worshipping Jesus and other gods.  
They swear by God.  
They claim to love and worship YWH.  
But then they also swear by other gods as well.  
They are mixing religions.  
They believe they can take some stuff from God and stuff from others.  
This is like those who believe they can pick and choose from the Bible what they like.

This is a lot of people in our community.  
We live in a state and community filled with churches.  
It is filled with non-profits.  
It is filled with thousands of people who swear by the name of Jesus.  
But they mix this Jesus in with other things.  
Or they think they can just claim the name of Jesus.  
Claim to be a Christian, and then do whatever.

This would be like if I went to my wife and said I loved her.  
I meant all of my wedding vows and all the promises I have made.  
But I also love another woman.  
I am going to swear some vows to her to.  
But don't worry I still love you and will keep my promises.

NO! That is a violation and a lie.

We can't do that anymore than we can worship God and other gods.

Even though our world believes you can have covenant relationships with as many people as you want.

God I will worship you, but I also want to get drunk as much as I want.

God I will worship you, but I also want to sleep around as much as I want.

God I will worship you, but I also will agree with whatever my political party says even if it contradicts your word.

God I will worship you, but really only when it is convenient.

Listen, an idol is anything we will sin to get or sin when it gets taken away.

These are things that turn our attention and our affections away from God.

Verse 6, **"those who have turned back from following the Lord, who do not seek the Lord or inquire of him."**

This is what happens.

When we mix worship of God with the worship of other things.

When we have idols or other gods.

We ultimately are turning our back from following God.

It means we are not really worshipping him.

And it often means we are not seeking and praying.

When we worship Jesus and other things we no longer seek after Jesus.

We just start seeking experiences.

Or we start seeking our own comforts and affections.

We just want to see what makes us happy and complete.

And we stop praying.

We no longer pray just to be near God.

No longer just to hear His voice.

We may give Him a list every now and then.

But we don't seek God alone.

We start asking our money, our power, our political leaders, our addictions.

We start to ask those things to help us more than Jesus.

And those who do so, will face God's judgment.

We cannot worship God and other gods.  
We must worship Him alone.

This is happening in Zephaniah's day.  
Those who love Josiah's reforms.  
but they don't actually change their hearts.  
This happens in our day as well.

## II. God will judge those who ignore Jesus (v. 7-13).

God will also judge those who don't even pretend to worship Jesus.  
Those who believe they don't have to even claim the name of God.  
These people will be judged.

Verse 7, **"Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is near; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests."**

I love that he tells them all to hush.

To be quiet and stop the noise.

Because the day of judgment is coming for them.

God is preparing the judgment and getting everything ready.

And this is the great feast we read about in the end of Revelation.

Verse 8, **"And on the day of the Lord's sacrifice— "I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire."**

The day it comes, God's people will be punished.

And this is not just about the clothes they are wearing.

It is about the fact that they deny God.

Part of the law was about clothing and what Israel should wear.

It often gets mocked like the parts about not mixing fabrics.

People can make a lot of hay over it.

But the primary idea behind it, is that the very clothes God's people wore on that day should mark them as separate.

What they chose to wear in the morning would mark them as people who obeyed God.

People who read His word and would do what He asked.

This is why the NT uses this same language of clothing.  
How often we are told to put on Christ and take off our garments of sin.  
We should not be wearing the sinful garments of the world, but the garments of heaven which are good works and faith.

But the kings and the officials and the leaders are not doing that.  
They are not wearing the clothes they should.  
They are wearing foreign clothes instead.  
And this is not about nationalism or like God wants them to just have a local clothing industry.  
This is about worship.  
They care more about appeasing other nations than God.  
They want to be like other nations.  
They do not want to be a holy and chosen nation anymore.  
They are ignoring God not just with their hearts but with the clothing.  
It is obvious on their bodies.

Verse 9, **"On that day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold, and those who fill their master's house with violence and fraud."**

These are the people who are priests.  
The threshold is probably describing the inner temple.  
It is the place only the priests are supposed to go.  
The average Israelite cannot go over the threshold.  
Yet these people have no reverence for God.  
They leap over it probably out of superstitions.  
And they fill the house of God with violence and lies.  
The church is now a place of sin.

Verse 10, **"On that day," declares the Lord, "a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter, a loud crash from the hills."**

This is a judgment coming for Israel.  
It will come in the years ahead.

There will be wails and cries from these places in the city.  
The very city of Jerusalem shall be attacked.  
This will be fulfilled soon in Zephaniah's lifetime by the Babylonians.  
But it will also be fulfilled when Christ returns.  
And not just Jerusalem, but the whole world is judged.

Verse 11, **"Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar! For all the traders are no more; all who weigh out silver are cut off."**

And all of their commerce and industry.  
All of the things they found comfort and security in.  
They will all fade away and disappear.  
Because God will send the nation of Babylon to conquer them and destroy them.  
God's judgment is going to come in the future in the final days.  
But sometimes God sends His judgment in the here and now.  
For Israel, they will be sent into exile and out of their homes.  
And one day all of the things we trust in will pass away.

Verse 12, **"At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.'"**

This the main idea I think.  
These are the people who believe they can ignore God.  
These are the people today who say, "a good God can't let bad things happen."  
Or who say believing in God has no logic.  
Or who believe the Bible is a bunch of myths and lies mistranslated.  
Or who believe God is love and there is no hell.  
Those who tell you that really everything in the universe is up to us.  
  
Or those who do say they are Christians.  
But they think God does not actually care about how we live.  
Or that He does not actually get involved.

And we can just do whatever we want and not worry about it.

These people are wrong.

And one day they will stand before the God whose existence they completely deny.

They will have to answer for their sins and their words.

Verse 13, **"Their goods 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."**

People spend a lot of time building their lives.

Zephaniah is telling them that everything they build instead of worshipping God will fade.

Their great plans for their future have forgotten God's plan.

They have forgotten to live in light of the judgment of God.

And we do this today.

People believe they can build a life without God.

They build the perfect dream house.

Work hard to have a great job and climb the ladder of success.

Maybe they build a great family and have lots of kids.

And work to leave a legacy filled with achievements.

All those things are good, but without God they are empty.

And you will never be able to fully enjoy them.

It is like building your life on the sand instead of on Christ.

The greatest life you can imagine, without Jesus is not worth living.

And it will only end in regret.

### **III. God will judge all sin (14-18).**

All sin is going to be judged one day.

Nothing will be overlooked.

No one will be able to escape.

Verse 14, **"The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there."**

This is the final day of judgment.  
It is near and coming soon.  
It is not a day we should look forward to.  
It is a day that should fill people with fear and trembling.

Verse 15, **"A day of wrath is that day, 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,"**

It is the day of wrath.  
When God's judgment and justice will be poured out on sin.  
When sinners will be distressed and in anguish.  
It will be a day of ruin and darkness and gloom.  
It will be a day like the bowls of wrath.  
It will be like the trumpets of judgment.  
All of the things we read in Revelation.  
Those are the wrath of God and the judgment against sin.

Verse 16, **"a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements."**

And the cities and strongholds will not stand.  
No skyscraper or engineering achievement will stand against God's wrath.  
He will conquer and all will have to bend the knee.  
From Jerusalem to Washington D.C.  
Every strong place is not strong enough to protect us from God.

Verse 17, **"I will bring distress on mankind, so 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."**

This is again the extreme language of God's judgment.  
They will be made blind, their blood poured out.  
And their flesh is like dung.  
Look close at what kind of sin is listed here.  
Because we could understand this this language is used against child sacrifice, or pedophiles, or witchcraft, or something extremely bad.

But God uses this language just against those who sin.  
This is what will happen to those who sin against God.

That should make us stop in our tracks.  
Because the Bible takes sin far more seriously than we do.  
We like to rank sins.  
Other people's sins are the worst.  
Especially those people we hate or are our enemies.  
Sexual sins rank at the top of the list.  
Unless they are the sexual sins we are secretly engaging in.  
But God doesn't talk this way about sin.  
Some sins are punished more harshly than others.  
But it usually doesn't go how we think.  
Villages that rejected Jesus and the gospel are judged more harshly than  
Sodom and Gomorroah.

Some sins may be judged more harshly at the end.  
But all sin is judged.  
And the things we think are small are not.  
All sin is rejection and rebellion against God.  
All of it is a sin against creation and God's people.  
Our sin is so much worse than we think.  
And the judgment we deserve is worse than we imagine.

Verse 18, **"Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth."**

Nothing can deliver from God's judgment.  
You cannot pay your way out of this.  
We see this all the time in our world.  
Convicted felons suddenly get pardons after donating to politicians.  
Young men get house arrest instead of prison time after someone helps out the judge.

Or the rich and massive companies are able to escape punishment because they have enough lawyers and money to waste everyone's time until they have to give up.

But those tricks will not work on the last day.

On the day of the wrath and judgment of God, no money can buy an escape.

His fire will come and consume the entire world.

A full and complete judgment will come for the world in fire.

This sounds like what we read about in Revelation.

And our question as we read it is how can we escape?

There is only one escape.

And the only way out is through Jesus Christ.

He is willing to deliver us.

There is a judgment and justice coming.

All sin will be judged one day.

And there is no fancy talk or way we can excuse our way out of it.

But Jesus offers an escape.

He is willing to pay our penalty,

He is willing to take the punishment in our place.

He went to the cross in order to set us free.

And in order to pay the price of our sins.

There is an escape from the judgment to come.

And instead of fire and punishment.

That day can be a day of joy.

It can be a day of rejoicing.

It can be a day of reward.

Not because you have been awesome and accomplished a lot.

But because Jesus has taken your place.

Come to Jesus.

Find salvation and deliverance that you may be whole.

Our sin is worse than we recognize.

But God's grace is more abundant than we can imagine.