

Zephaniah 1:7-13 - You Can't Hide From God's Judgment

Handfuls, Calvin, TSK, HebrewLexicon, JFB, Geneva, Clarke, Trapp, Delitzsch, Barnes, Poole, Henry, Gill, Hendrickson

Beloved in the Lord Jesus: God came as a **consuming fire on Judah because he worshipped idols and embraced apostasy**. In the past God was a **good fire** to his covenant people. He was the **pillar of fire by night** to help them as they traveled from Egypt to Canaan. He was the **fire that passed through the animals for us** –the animals that were cut in two by Abraham at twilight. But in Zephaniah's day, what was once a fire for protection became a fire for judgment. **Today you will hear more about God's fiery judgment on the Jews.**

Our headings are:

Sacrifice: God would sacrifice the Jews on his altar

Suffering: God would make them suffer grievously

Search: God would search for every wicked Jew

Or goals are: **That you will remember that being a member of the church does not preclude you from judgment, and that you will therefore work hard to remain faithful to the Lord and not become complacent in your life.**

Sacrifice: God would sacrifice the Jews on his altar

7 **Be silent in the presence** of the Lord GOD; For **the day of the LORD** is at hand, For the LORD has **prepared a sacrifice**; He has **invited His guests**.

1. God told the Jews to be silent in his presence. Why?

They could not answer because they were guilty: They had embraced idolatry and apostatized.

Habakkuk 2:20 But the LORD is in His holy temple. **Let all the earth keep silence** before Him."

On the "Day of the Lord" (the Day of Judgment) no one will be able to contradict the Lord.

2. God would sacrifice the Jews because they refused to make sacrifices to him but made sacrifices to pagan gods.

So instead of the animals being sacrificed for the people, God would sacrifice the people...for the animals. Look...

Ezekiel 39:17 "And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, '**Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field**: "Assemble yourselves and come; Gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal Which I am sacrificing for you, **A great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, That you may eat flesh and drink blood.**

3. God would invite and use the pagan Babylonians to sacrifice his people.

God called the Babylonians his "sanctified ones," the ones set apart for this work. (They were not sanctified in their souls; they were just set aside for God's purposes.)

Isaiah 13:3 I have commanded **My sanctified ones; I have also called My mighty ones for My anger** — Those who rejoice in My exaltation."

Jeremiah spoke more specifically of how God would use Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah 25:9 'behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and **Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant**, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and **will utterly destroy them**...

God's people would no longer share the sacrificial meat. Instead, Judah would become the meat!

Even after restoration from Babylonian captivity, the Israelites did the same thing and God called the animals again to eat the flesh of his people that he would sacrifice!

Revelation 10:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "**Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, 18 "that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men,** the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great."

4. God would call witnesses to see his justice and to give future warnings to those who might be tempted to sin against him.

Obadiah, for instance, described how the Edomites watched and laughed as God's people were sacrificed to Egypt and Babylon.

8 "And it shall be, 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 foreign apparel.**

5. God would sacrifice even those in high positions, kings and their children.

Judgment would start in the leadership. These kings and the princes ought to have set a good example for the people to follow, but they didn't, so they had to be killed. So soon Josiah's son, **King Jehohaz was imprisoned by the Egyptians.** Josiah's son, **King Jehoiakim (Eliakim) became king but he was enslaved by the Babylonians.**

Jehoiakim's son, **King Jehoiachin, was taken to Babylon and enslaved.** Josiah's third son, Zedekiah, became king but was enslaved and taken in chains to Babylon and his sons killed in front of him. Read about this in 2Kings 23-24.

God would sacrifice these kings because they were clothed in foreign clothes. But they weren't killed for simply wearing foreign clothes. There was nothing wrong with wearing foreign clothes. They were killed because these clothes had associations with foreign gods and pagan worship. They were repulsive to God— especially when the leaders wore them.

Ezekiel 23:14 But she increased her harlotry. She looked at men portrayed

on the wall, Images of Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, 15 Girded with belts around their waists, Flowing turbans on their heads, All of them looking like captains, In the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, The land of their nativity.

9 In the same day I will punish All those who leap over the threshold, Who fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

6. God would destroy those who leaped over the threshold (of the temple) eager to worship their pagan gods.

They filled their Lord's house (not their bosses' houses) with wrongs, treachery. So this was likely referring to the priests who ran to worship idols. (The context requires this to be about violence to God's worship!)

7. Lessons:

a. Worship God properly. He expects it. He demands it. Show that you understand what he has done for you and that you are thankful for it by doing what he wants! Those who promote themselves at the expense of God's worship will have to answer!

b. Learn what happens when you don't worship God properly. The world is watching. Your worship is evangelistic. How you worship God tells the world who your God is. If you are careless, you would be telling the world that God is not that holy. If you are passionate, people would want to know why and you might get a chance to speak of Christ.

c. Don't follow the ways of the world. Some things aren't neutral! Beware not to adopt pagan ways! (You see this warning from the way the Jewish leaders dressed.) **A real example of this is how people compromise to get government aid. They allow the government to control them for tax breaks and some signed a pro-abortion statement to get government grants.**

Suffering: God would make them suffer grievously

10 "And there shall be on that day," says the LORD, "The sound of a **mournful cry** from the Fish Gate, A wailing from the Second Quarter, And a **loud crashing** from the hills. 11 Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh! For all the merchant **people are cut down**; All those who handle money are **cut off**.

1. As a result of God's judgment Judah would suffer greatly, so much so that the cry would be "mournful."

2. This cry would be heard throughout the city – all 3 parts.

From the Fish Gate. This was the spot (from the east) from where Nebuchadnezzar entered when he captured Jerusalem.

From the Second Quarter. This was south. From here they could see the enemies attacking.

From the Hills. Seeing the enemy and their cries go unanswered, then ran to the hills (hills within Jerusalem).

3. Those who were the great businessmen of the time – who likely traded in idolatry – would be cut off also.

The business men would meet in Maktesh, a valley, on the east side of Jerusalem but they would not be able to do business any more. Idols and necessities would then come in short supply.

4. I am sure you notice that expression “cut off” again.

Historically, God said **he had “cut” a covenant with his people**. In God’s covenant with Abram, **Abram had cut the animals in two** and Jesus passed through the cut meat (Genesis 15), fulfilling the covenant for Abram. **Then the foreskin was cut off from the male children, incorporating them in the covenant.** But in Zephaniah’s time **the Jews would be cut off** because they broke the covenant. **They had to be cut off for the land to be clean!** God used the same language!

5. Lessons:

a. There will be great suffering for the church that has closed its eyes to idolatry and not spoken against them:

b. There will be no escape for anyone. God is just! The only way out is weeping (outward) and mourning (inward) for sins!

James 4:9 Lament and **mourn and weep!** Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

James 5:1 Come now, you rich, **weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!**

But sadly, praying in the church is not a focus as it should be anymore. So weep and mourn for the church.

Searching: God would search for every wicked Jew

12 "And it shall come to pass at that time That I will **search Jerusalem with lamps**, And punish the men Who are settled in complacency, Who say in their heart, '**The LORD will not do good**, Nor will He do evil.' 13 Therefore their **goods shall become booty**, And their **houses a desolation**; They shall build houses, but not inhabit them; They shall **plant vineyards, but not drink their wine.**"

1. No one will be able to escape God’s judgment as God would search out for every guilty person who worshipped idols and those who worshipped idols alongside of the one true God (which was worse).

God would use lamps (candles) to expose every dark place. Of course nothing is hidden from him. (Psalm 139) God used language people could understand.

2. On the other hand, some wouldn’t try to hide from God because they were complacent!

These thought that God was too good to punish them. The word for complacent was often translated “lees” and implies excessive drinking of alcohol or excessive accumulation of wealth. **These arrogant fools thought that they controlled the circumstances and not God.** But to deny providence was to deny morality...God’s law.

They sounded quite like the government of Alberta who doesn’t want Christian schools to teach that God’s authority was greater than man’s authority! What is the NDP’s goal? Their goal is to drive out God’s authority. But whoever makes the law is God...and the NDP wants to be God. They too are destined, like anyone who rejects God’s law, to destruction.

3. God would find the “hidiers” and the complacent and take away everything they treasured.

a. Their wealth would disappear. It would be like putting their wealth in their pockets but God would put holes in them.

b. Their home would be empty. The trusted that they would be safe and could live out their lives in ease, but God would send Nebuchadnezzar to destroy everything in his path. Initially, in 605BC, it looked like Nebuchadnezzar was going to leave some things in place, but there was rebellion and he sent his forces in full 586BC, crushing every last hope of the Jews surviving!

c. Their vineyard would be destroyed and they would not be able to drink its wine. Pleasure had become their idol (along with Baal and Molech). Pleasure was part of their worship! They ignored the God who gave them pleasure. So God stopped them. But he had warned them before of what would happen if they rejected the covenant.

Deuteronomy 28:30 "You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall lie with her; **you shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but shall not gather its grapes.** 39 **"You shall plant vineyards and tend them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes;** for the worms shall eat them.

And God’s word always comes true.

4. Lessons:

a. Don’t feel comfortable in your lifestyle if you are not serving the Lord faithfully. Your wealth could be blowing in the wind before you know it! Being on the lees – a safe side of the mountain won’t protect you. Your home can burn down...or the property value can disappear. Ask those people in the Panhandle of Florida! You can lose your job or your high position without notice! Yes, **prosperity can harden you in your sins...just as it did to Judah.**

b. You personally would not be able to hide from God’s judgment! No one can hide from him.

c. Don't deny God's providential involvement in the world. To deny God's providence is also to deny his morality!

Conclusion:

God would make Judah the sacrifice because Judah did not make sacrifice to God. Indeed, Judah would suffer at God's hands and God would use his enemies to carry out his justice, even while other enemies watched. No one escapes God's judgment, no one!

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Being a member of the church does not mean you are safe. You have to actively and faithfully commit yourself to the Lord's Word and live in obedience. Furthermore, you need to guard yourself against becoming complacent – thinking that life is eat, drink, be merry, and having financial security. All of these things can disappear in a hurry. Let this memorandum sink in.

2. Bring this warning to the church as well. The church seems to be coasting, adopting new ideas and policies as they wish, and making idols of their numbers...and preachers... but the church too is open to judgment when it embraces idols.

3. Announce the reality of judgment of all men by God so the world might be prepared to meet him...covered with the blood of Jesus.

Finally, if you are not a Christian and you want to be safe from God's judgment, ask him to make you safe by substituting Christ's death as your death.