

Message #2

Zephaniah 1:1-6

We live in a time when people are so gullible to believe things that are not even true. In fact, often times the scientific world will come up with a theory and present it and people believe a theory which is just bizarre.

For example, a few years ago there was a theory that was given to the people that said, “Hot water freezes faster than cold water.” So contrary to the real laws of physics you have a group of theorists telling people that hot water will freeze faster than cold water. What a delusional bunch of nonsense. Logic tells you if you take a glass of cold water and hot water outside, the cold water will freeze much faster because the hot water will have to get down to a freezing point before it can freeze. But regardless of the truth, people believe a theoretical fallacy.

There is a theoretical fallacy that is propagated all over the world and even in many churches. The fallacy is we don’t have to worry about judgment. Everything is good. God is a good, loving God and as one bizarre commercial says, “He gets us.” Everything is fine and the world has nothing to fear.

What a bunch of nonsense. Zephaniah was living in world where most people believed that nonsense. In fact, the political and religious leaders were telling the people that. They were telling the people that they had nothing to fear and worry about, because everything was fine in their relationship with God.

Along comes Zephaniah and he says:

GOD SAYS HE IS GOING TO COMPLETELY DESTROY EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH AS A FEROCIOUS JUDGMENT AGAINST ALL THOSE WHO HAVE DEMEANED GOD AND TURNED AWAY FROM HIM AND HIS WORD.

Zephaniah is a hard hitting book. Right from the beginning, it is a book and warning that is deadly serious. Back in April of 1775, Paul Revere got on a horse and rode 12.5 miles to announce that 700 Red Coats from Britain were coming and they needed to prepare to fight. He did not warn them because he thought riding a horse at midnight would be fun; he did it to warn so action could be taken.

That is what Zephaniah is doing. Metaphorically speaking, he is on a “midnight run” of presenting prophetic truth. The hour is late and judgment is on the way and the only chance people have is to be part of the remnant that is right with God.

From **verse 1**, we see that this is the “word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah.” So the first claim the book makes is that this is the word of God. Now Zephaniah is introduced as one who is the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah, who was a very godly king. But what makes this writing so impacting is not his pedigree; it is “the word of the Lord.”

It is also stated that he got this word “in the days of Josiah” the king of Judah. Now it is specifically mentioned that Josiah was the son of Amon. Amon was the son of Manasseh and he was one of the most evil and corrupt leaders Judah ever had. He was the one who built altars to Baal and promoted idol worship of the sun, moon and stars. He even placed these idols in the Temple in Jerusalem (II Kings 21:4-5). He practiced witchcraft and was deeply involved in the occult (II Kings 21:6).

When Amon succeeded his father Manasseh, he was rotten and evil and did the same things his dad did (II Kings 21:20-22). He turned away from God and there was a conspiracy to assassinate him (II Kings 21:23-24). Amon died and Josiah succeeded him and he did what was right in the sight of the LORD (II Kings 22:2).

The best thing Josiah did was when he promoted the word of God to the nation. Hilkiyah the high priest found the word of God and he reported it to King Josiah, and Josiah once again turned the nation’s focus back on the word of God (II Kings 22-23; II Chron. 34:14-33).

More than likely, Josiah had listened to his counselors who had been telling him what Zephaniah was predicting and it resonated. Zephaniah was like a Paul Revere messenger and Josiah said we had better pay attention to what he is saying.

This opening message of Zephaniah is potent. It is a message from God. In fact, you will see it is filled with many “I” personal pronouns of what God says He is actually going to do. Some of the things would be partially fulfilled with the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC, some 38-39 years after Zephaniah made this prediction. Some of the things in this list will be fulfilled in the Great Tribulation before Jesus Christ returns to set up His kingdom on this earth. Some of the things in the list will be fulfilled when Jesus Christ burns up this world and creates a New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem (II Pet. 3:10-12). All things in the list are prophetic promises of God and will be literally fulfilled. There are twelve prophetic promises:

PROPHETIC PROMISE #1 – God will completely remove all things from the face of the earth. **1:2**

Now to emphasize that God is really going to do this, He says this is declarative, “declares the LORD.” This is going to be a cataclysmic judgment the likes of which has never existed. Isaiah spoke of a massive judgment like this in Isaiah 13:9-13. This would come as a result of the fury and burning anger of God and it will be a judgment of complete extermination.

The “all things” includes things animate and inanimate. This judgment is not going to be like other judgments. This will be a massive, all inclusive judgment. God starts off by saying I am going to pour out an ultimate judgment on the world that will “remove” everything.

The Hebrew verb “remove” (asaph) carries with it the idea of removing by gathering, killing and destroying. This includes the idea of causing something to vanish and perish (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 67).

Zephaniah begins by saying this is what God is going to do.

Now as we gather here right now, we may conclude this has not yet happened. So either this is some prophetic fairytale or fantasy or this is prophetic reality of something yet to happen.

We think there is enough evidence from what did happen to Judah and Jerusalem to prove this is no prophetic fairytale. This is a prediction of what God will literally do to this world and everything in it. As we mentioned in this book of Zephaniah, **the only group who has any hope of survival is the remnant that is right with God.**

Now from studying the book of Revelation we know that God's ferocious judgments will occur over a seven year period during the Great Tribulation, which we think is nearing. During the first 3 ½ years God will do some of the things in this list in various parts of the world other than in Israel in the Middle East.

When God is doing these things, billions of people and animals will die. The death count will be staggering. The description of what God will do is found in Revelation chapters 6, 8, 9 and 16. During that time billions of people and animals will literally die.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #2 – God will remove man, beasts, birds and fish. 1:3a

Again we learn of these judgments during the Tribulation. Human life, Animal life, Bird life and Aquatic life will all perish. All creation has been corrupted by the fall and all creation will be judged.

Now when humans die that would really have no effect on animal life, bird life or aquatic life. But God specifically says when this judgment hits, it will include those other forms of life. God says I will not destroy only man, but I will destroy everything else, too.

What we learn here is that no judgment that has yet occurred has fulfilled this. When Assyria destroyed Israel in 722 BC or when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC or when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, there were still animals and birds and fish.

When this prophecy is ultimately fulfilled they will not exist because God will remove them all. Again we learn from Revelation that God's judgments will destroy human life, animal life, bird life and aquatic life.

We learn, for example, in Revelation 8:8-11 that in just one judgment in the Tribulation, God will destroy 1/3rd of all life in the oceans and 1/3rd of the freshwater supplies in the world.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #3 – God will remove the ruins of everything. **1:3b**

God says He will remove everything that ruined people along with the wicked. In other words, everything that was the cause of people not being right with God, including the wicked people, will be destroyed. There will be no ruins that will remain of anything that caused people to not be right with God.

Now we know that this has not happened yet because you can travel today and see things that have led people astray. For example, that Dome of the Rock Shrine that is in the Temple Area of Jerusalem will one day be long gone.

You will not be able to find any hint of the Mormon religion in Salt Lake City. You won't be able to find one hint of the Muslim religion in Mecca. You will not find one hint of the Buddhist religion in Japan or Taoism in China.

All the ruins of false religion will be gone.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #4 – God will cut off man from the face of the earth. **1:3c**

Once again after making these astounding predictions, Zephaniah says this is a declaration of the LORD. These first prophetic promises of judgment are given against sinful man.

Now here is the promise. The promise is God will cut off every human from the earth and that is exactly what he has done, is doing and will do. It does not matter who we are, one day we will be cut off from the earth.

It may come through our own personal death. It may come through direct judgment of God. For us, it may come through the Rapture. But we will be cut off from this earth.

The only chance we have for survival is to be in the remnant group that is right with God. What that means is we need to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. If we are in a right relationship with Jesus Christ, we have nothing to worry about when we leave this world.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #5 – God will stretch out His hand against Israel. **1:4a**

Jewish people would be very wise right now to understand this point. Before Jesus Christ will come back to establish His Kingdom for you, you are going to experience some very negative things. In fact, the Antichrist will target you and try to destroy you. You would be very wise right now to invite Jesus Christ to take over your life because things are beginning to turn against Israel.

Now what is predicted here is that when God's judgment comes, much of it will turn directly toward Israel. It will hit the world, but not only the world. This judgment will not just hit pagans because of God's anger, but it will also hit Judah and Jerusalem.

He specifically names Judah and its capital city Jerusalem as targets. Again this coincides with the chronology of the book of Revelation.

God will pour out His wrath on a Christ rejecting, Israel hating, God mocking, Bible scoffing world and then after He has done that He will target Israel.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #6 – God will cut off any idolatrous remnant. **1:4b**

Most do not realize how serious it is to worship something other than God. Baal worship was something that came into existence during the time of Ahab and Jezebel (I Kings 16:30-32). Manasseh promoted this. They promoted the idea that Baal brought fertility to the crops and land. It reached horrible levels of depravity that included temple prostitution and orgies and child sacrifices.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #7 – God will cut off all false religious leaders. **1:4c**

Religious leaders who led people away from the word and truth of God are going to be specifically targeted and destroyed.

It is one thing to be a person who worships something false, it is another thing to be a religious leader who promotes the worship of something false and actually invite people to bring their offerings to worship and support that which is false.

We know this judgment has not happened yet because this world is filled with religious leaders who are con men and they are not serious about God and His word. They promote their own agenda. They do not ever teach a congregation the whole counsel of God.

God says there will come a day when I will cut them out of existence and I will cut out their names. False religious leaders won't even be remembered.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #8 – God will cut off all who worship false gods. **1:5a**

Most people don't have a clue as to how seriously God takes worship. Most don't realize that God takes it very serious as to where one worships and what one worships.

Any who say they are gathering for worship are under the scrutinizing observation of God and He will hold them accountable for what they are doing.

Many homes in the Middle East have flat roofs. People would go up on top of their roofs and worship the sun, the moon and the stars. They were into astrology.

I had someone tell me one time, I worship God at home on my own. I said where did you get that idea because you did not get it from the word of God. In fact, I am convinced God does not accept what you do as worship. We aren't the ones who invented the idea of Church. God did. Those who worship apart from true worship will be cut off by God.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #9 – God will cut off all those who worship more than just God.

1:5b

This is a powerful point; if people make some addition to worshipping God other than what He wants, they will suffer His judgment. These people were worshipping God with “divided hearts.”

These people were worshipping God, but they also were worshipping other things, specifically they were swearing to the LORD and also at the same time swearing by Milcom.

Most have concluded that this is a reference to Molech. Those who were involved in this not only were involved in immoral things, but child sacrifice.

There are believers who think they can worship God and also worship the world. God is clear that you cannot serve two masters.

There is only one way to worship God and that is through Jesus Christ. One must have a relationship with Jesus Christ. There is no other name where one may be saved. It is not faith in Jesus Christ plus something else. It is faith alone in Jesus Christ.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #10 – God will cut off those who turn back from following Him.

1:6a

Inevitably, half-hearted commitment to God leads to turning away from God and from truth. These people were no longer interested in following God or His word. It was a religious sham.

Turn away from understanding and applying the word of God and you are turning to a path of judgment. God will cause your world to fall apart.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #11 – God will cut off those who have not sought the LORD. **1:6b**

People are not interested in seeking God’s word or God’s will.

PROPHETIC PROMISE #12 – God will cut off those who do not inquire of Him. **1:6c**

God says I will destroy them all.

Do not turn away from the truth. Turn to Jesus Christ right now. You never need worry about being cut off from God if you will do that.

There are many religious places that will tell you, judgment is no threat. Just keep living your life the way you want. Everything is good. Zephaniah says that is a lie. Hot water does not freeze faster than cold water no matter what any say. Judgment is coming!