

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
11-21-18

Zephaniah 1

No Longer Giving God a Thought or a Prayer - Verses 1-13

¹The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah: ²"I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the LORD. ³"I will sweep away both man and beast; I will sweep away the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea—and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble." "When I destroy all mankind on the face of the earth," declares the LORD, ⁴"I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will destroy every remnant of Baal worship in this place, the very names of the idolatrous priests—⁵those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molek, ⁶those who turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him." ⁷Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited. ⁸"On the day of the LORD's sacrifice I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all those clad in foreign clothes. ⁹On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit. ¹⁰"On that day," declares the LORD, "a cry will go up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the New Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. ¹¹Wail, you who live in the market district; all your merchants will be wiped out, all who trade with silver will be destroyed. ¹²At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.' ¹³Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. Though they build houses, they will not live in them; though they plant vineyards, they will not drink the wine."

1:1 Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah king of Judah (640-609 B.C.). Josiah followed God, and during his reign the Book of the Law was discovered in the temple. After reading it, Josiah began a great religious revival in Judah (2 Kings 22:1-23:25). Zephaniah helped fan the flames of the revival by warning the people that judgment would come if they did not turn from their sins. Although this great revival turned the nation back to God, it did not fully eliminate idolatry and lasted only a short time. Just a few years after Josiah's death, Judah was invaded by Babylon and the first wave of Israelite captives were sent into exile.

1:2 The people of Judah were clearly warned by the highest authority of all—God. They refused to listen, either because they doubted God's prophet and thus did not believe that the message was from God, or because they doubted God himself and thus did not believe that he would do what he said. If we refuse to listen to God's Word, the Bible, we are as shortsighted as the people of Judah, and like them, we will be punished.

1:4 When the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land, God had commanded that they completely rid the land of its pagan inhabitants, who worshiped idols. But the Israelites failed to do so, and gradually they began to worship the Canaanites' gods. The Canaanites believed in many gods that represented many aspects of life, and the chief god was Baal, symbolizing strength and fertility. God was extremely angry when his people turned from him to Baal.

1:4-6 The terrain of history is littered with idols and their worship. More than just a stone statue, an idol can be anything revered more than God. Thus, idol worship is prevalent even today as people trust in themselves, money, or power and not in God. But ultimately all idols will prove worthless, and the true God will prevail. Seek God first (Matthew 6:33), and have no other gods before him (Exodus 20:3).

1:5 The people had become polytheistic, worshiping the Lord and all the other gods of the land. They added the "best" of pagan worship to their worship of God. But God commands that he alone be worshiped (Exodus 20:1-5); thus, the people committed a horrible sin. One of these other gods was Molek, the national god of the Ammonites. Worship of Molek included child sacrifice, an abominable sin. From the time of Moses, the Israelites had been warned about worshiping this false god (Leviticus 18:21; 20:5), but they refused to listen. Because of their sins, God would destroy them.

1:7 A day of judgment and great slaughter occurred during the lifetime of these people when Babylon invaded the land. The prophet saw these prophecies as future events, but he could not see when or in what order these events would take place. Many think that these prophecies have a double fulfillment—one for the near future (soon after the prophecy was made) and another for the distant future (possibly during the end times). Some scholars believe that these prophecies of judgment refer to events entirely in the future.

1:8-9 The people had embraced the pagan customs of their neighbors, which included wearing their clothing. This was not just a matter of following the local fashions; it demonstrated their involvement in pagan worship. Leaders who should have been good examples to the people were adopting foreign practices and thus showing their contempt for the Lord.

1:12 God would search the city with lamps and punish those who deserved punishment. Because they did not search their own hearts and because they were content with the moral chaos around them and indifferent to God, God would use the Babylonians to judge them. Within 20 years, the Babylonians would enter Jerusalem, drag people out of hiding, and take them captive or kill them. No one would escape God's judgment; there would be no place to hide.

1:12-13 Some people think of God as an indulgent heavenly grandfather, nice to have around, but not a real force in shaping modern life. They don't believe in his power or his coming judgment. But God is holy, and therefore he will actively judge and justly punish everyone who is content to live in sin, indifferent to him, or unconcerned about justice. When people are indifferent to God, they tend to think that he is indifferent to them and their sin. They will be surprised to find that "the great day of the LORD is near."

A Day of Darkness at Noon - Verses 14-18

The great day of the LORD is near—near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. ¹⁵ That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness—¹⁶a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. ¹⁷ "I will bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like dung. ¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath." In the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.

1:14-18 The "great day of the LORD" was near; the Babylonians would soon come and destroy Jerusalem. The day of the Lord is also near for us. God promises a final judgment, a day of worldwide destruction (Revelation 20:12-15). The Babylonian conquest occurred just as surely and horribly as Zephaniah had predicted. And God's final day of judgment is also sure—but so is his ability to save. To be spared from judgment, recognize that you have sinned, that your sin will bring judgment, that you cannot save yourself, and that God alone can save you.

1:18 Money is not evil in itself, but it is useless to save us. In this life, money can warp our perspective, giving us feelings of security and power. Just as the Israelites' wealth could not save them from the Babylonian invasion, so at the final judgment, our riches will be worthless. Only Christ's redemptive work on our behalf matters for eternity. Christ alone will ransom us if we believe in him. Don't trust money; trust Christ.