

Zephaniah 1:1-6 – God’s is a Consuming Fire

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

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord: **Zephaniah means “Hidden One.”** But in an interesting twist, Zephaniah **revealed what was hidden.** His name was similar to Joseph’s name – Zaphnathpaaneah, the one who revealed the secrets of the Lord to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. **Zephaniah revealed that the Lord was coming in severe judgment on Judah for her idolatry and apostasy.** You will start to see this today.

Our headings are:

The man: Who was Zephaniah?

The message: God will destroy you

The motive: You love idolatry and apostasy

Our goals are: **That you will wake up Christ’s church knowing the danger it is in for loving idolatry and embracing apostasy.**

The man: Who was Zephaniah?

1 The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

1. Zephaniah identified himself.

2. Zephaniah did not speak what *he* wanted; he spoke the word of the Lord, the word the Lord revealed to him.

3. Zephaniah spoke during the days of Josiah, the one who brought a great spiritual reformation to the land.

Because Josiah’s reformation faded away quickly, God sent Zephaniah to give these warnings to Jerusalem and Judah.

Soon after these warnings **Judah and Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, first in 605BC and totally destroyed in 586BC.** Zephaniah was a contemporary of Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

4. Lessons:

a. When you say “thus says the Lord,” be sure you are speaking what God’s Word says. Know God’s Word. You are representing the God of truth. Always know the context so God’s word is not misrepresented!

b. Reformations don’t last long. They must be sustained by faithful preaching and consistent living of the Word of God.

The message: God will destroy you

2 "I will **utterly consume everything** From the face of **the land,**" Says the LORD;

1. God threatened to destroy everything from the face of the land.

a. “Land” could refer to “earth” or “country.” Both are possible translations. Here it refers to country, like it should be translated in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, where God pronounced curses on Jerusalem. Context determines the meaning. In both cases the Lord was speaking of the destruction of his people...in the country where his people lived! Look at Verse 4.

b. God used Babylon to consume everything (of value)! Babylon ravished the temple and removed the healthy people.

3 "I will **consume man and beast**; I will **consume the birds of the heavens**, The **fish of the sea**, And the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will **cut off man from the face of the land**," Says the LORD.

2. God threatened to destroy people, animals, birds of the air and fish of the sea.

a. Why would God bring judgment against animals: birds, and fish? God would remove Judah’s source of food. These things were made for God’s children’s, but God would remove them because of his people’s unfaithfulness.

b. Notice that the land, the air, and the sea would all be destroyed...all 3 spheres...so this speaks of total destruction.

c. This was exaggeration but that was how God showed how much he hated the lifestyle of his covenant people.

d. God’s repetition was for emphasis. Three times he would “consume,” and one time he would “cut off.”

3. God threatened to destroy the stumbling blocks and the wicked.

What were the **stumbling blocks** that God would destroy? Idols...and those who encouraged idolatry! These people lured God’s people into worshipping idols! They had to be destroyed.

Ezekiel 14:7 "For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him **what causes him to stumble into iniquity**, then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me, I the LORD will answer him by Myself.

4 "I will **stretch out My hand against Judah**, And against all the **inhabitants of Jerusalem**. I will **cut off every trace of Baal from this place**, The names of the **idolatrous priests with the pagan priests** —

4. God threatened (a repetition with more detail) to destroy every trace of Baal and everyone that represented Baal in Judah.

a. The place where the temple was, Jerusalem, had become a place of pollution. Baal, the “dung, fly god” was there. Baal was the filthy Phoenician god. And this image was even set up in the temple of God.

b. Who were the remnant (or trace) of Baal? The ones who had resurfaced after the cleansing and reformation of Josiah!

c. God “stretching out his hand” was a picture of remarkable punishment.

Isaiah 5:25 Therefore the anger of the LORD is aroused against His people; **He has stretched out His hand** against them And **stricken them, And the hills trembled.** Their **carcasses were as refuse** in the midst of the streets. **For all this His anger is not turned away,** But His hand is stretched out still.

The Lord had stretched out his hand to save Israel from Egypt, but now he had to stretch out his hand and discipline his own! The Lord had stopped Satan’s hand from touching Job, but God would now let Satan have full reign against his people.

5. Lessons:

a. God’s judgment is likely coming on our generation that has embraced idolatry and apostasy and spurned his worship. There was hardly a time in the last 500 years when the church has treated worship with such contempt! And what makes it worse is that we have a lot more knowledge and history – and should know better. And yet, the lust to worship gods as wealth, health, pleasure, and independence are in many, many homes! And we think we are doing well! Such apostasy!

b. God will more specifically target **those who cause people to stumble by introducing ungodly worship.**

Mark 9:42 **“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble,** it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

Pastors, elders, and fathers had better pay attention. Don’t sacrifice worship for personal things cravings. And don’t change worship. Yes, it is way too easy to see wickedness in the state and society. But the church must look at herself!

1 Peter 4:17 For the time has come **for judgment to begin at the house of God...**

Don’t think you are so special that God will not judge you. That’s was Jerusalem’s mistake! God will judge!

c. Remember God’s covenant with you that was cut with Jesus so that you don’t fall into idolatry and apostasy! Yes, you deserve to be cut off, but Jesus was “cut off” for you. You see that in his circumcision...and his circumcision on the cross. This is why God said he would “cut” a covenant with you. Instead of you being cut-off, Christ was cut-off for you!

The motive: You love idolatry and apostasy

5 Those who worship the host of heaven **on the housetops;** Those who

worship and swear oaths by the LORD, But who also swear by Milcom;

1. God would destroy Judah and Jerusalem, his beloved city, because of his people's clear idolatry and apostasy.

a. Judah was a dog returning to its vomit! They **abandoned the reformation from a few years before**. They worshipped idols on their roofs. They worshipped Milcom (Molech) and Baal. They abandoned what they were taught for 800 years!

Leviticus 20:2...Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be **put to death**. The people of the land shall stone him with stones.

b. Specifically, they used trees adorned with round balls (picturing the planets) and stars. Just before Babylon came, Jeremiah confirmed their idolatry. This was public idolatry. They were proud and wanted the world to see their sin.

Jeremiah 19:13 "And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Tophet, because of **all the houses on whose roofs they have burned incense** to all the host of heaven, and **poured out drink offerings to other gods.**"

When they looked at the stars it should have been to worship God who made the stars...not worship the stars!

Psalms 8:3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained.

Do you see how many today are taken up by horoscopes, as if the stars controlled their destinies? How insulting!

c. Judah went after other gods that could do nothing!

Jeremiah 2:11 **Has a nation changed its gods, Which are not gods?** But My people have changed their Glory For what does not profit.

Romans 1:25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and **worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator**, who is blessed forever. Amen.

2. God would destroy Jerusalem, his beloved city, because the Jews took oaths to other gods alongside the only true God.

This was more dangerous than the straight idolater! This was wicked. They pretended to serve the true and living God but changed his worship by incorporating sinful practices.

Zephaniah 3:4 Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; **Her priests have polluted the sanctuary**, They have done violence to the law.

God's people wanted to fit in with the popular social activities of the times so they **brought in some of the world's way of worship into the church!** But God is a jealous **God and he does not entertain his rivals!**

The Devil doesn't mind dividing worship...(like the lady of Solomon's day who wanted the living baby divided and shared)...but God does! But consider where we are today: *Dr. Nate Collins of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: "Is it possible," he asked, "that gay people today are being sent by God, like Jeremiah, to find God's words for the church [and] shed light on contemporary false teachings and even idolatries?"* He and the PCA didn't bother to carefully read Jeremiah of people making gods of their own health, wealth, pleasure, and independence. He thinks homosexuals are acceptable to God.

6 Those who have **turned back from following the LORD,** And have not sought the LORD, **nor inquired of Him."**

3. God would destroy Judah and Jerusalem, his beloved city, because they turned their backs away from serving the Lord.

They had repented earlier, but they abandoned that reformation. Look at that earlier reformation with Josiah!

2 Kings 23:5 Then he **removed the idolatrous priests** whom the kings of Judah had ordained to **burn incense on the high places** in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who **burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven.**

4. God would destroy Judah and Jerusalem, his beloved city, because they rejected his Word.

The leaders did not condemn God's Word, but it was not "a lamp to their feet and light to their path." God's Word was just like an ornament like it was before the reformation!

5. Lessons:

a. You must value the Word of God and you must value God. Is your Bible collecting dust at home? Worse, do you read the Bible as a ritual without reflection? Ritual reading of the Bible without reflection is worse than not reading the Bible at all.

b. You must not rest in the knowledge of faithfulness in the past. Each generation must believe in and live for God. Traditionalism never saved anyone! **Reformation of the church does not run on cruise control. We must constantly be reforming or we would become like the world.** Personally, you have to be determined in your service of the Lord...Don't let issues – sickness, disgust, exhaustion- distract you.

c. Guard yourself lest you might be drawn away by your own lust and begin to worship other gods. Other gods can be your belly, your emotional gratification, status, and financial security. Yes, **we think of all the adultery around...the lust for wealth...the legal theft by the government...and the deceitful politicians and scientists and we are disgusted.** But the danger is much greater. Idolatry is the greatest danger!

d. Satan is glad for half your heart. The Lord rejects half your heart. He wants you whole undivided attention! Worship him alone!

Conclusion:

Who spoke? God spoke through Zephaniah. **What did God say?** He would destroy his people. **Why did God say it?** They violated the 1st table of the law – promoting idolatry that led to apostasy.

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ:

a. God is not indifferent to sin. Take this as a warning. His holiness and justice would not allow him to be indifferent!

b. Deal with sin in your life and in the life of the church, particularly the sin of idolatry, which inevitably leads to apostasy.

c. Worship God as he has commanded not the way you might like! Urge others to worship God by taking the Gospel to them and proclaiming it clearly. Let them see who God is and how he demands that we worship him!

Finally: If you are not a Christian you might think that this does not apply to you – this is about Christians and their God. But whether you believe in God or not you are still obligated to obey him. Thinking God doesn't exist doesn't mean he doesn't exist. So what should you do? Learn who God is. Learn what he expects of you. If you do, you will ask him to count Christ's life and death as yours.