

ZEPHANIAH: GOD'S JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION

I: God's Worldwide Judgment Of Idolaters

(Zephaniah 1:1-3)

I. Introduction

- A. Unlike the other Old Testament prophets, Zephaniah had a genealogy of four generations, so he was a man "of prominence and even of royalty." (B. K. C., O. T., p. 1523) He offered the prophetic view of the upper class.
- B. However, upper and lower class prophets **both** wrote of judgment and blessing for God's people in "the day of the Lord," a phrase Zephaniah used more often than any other prophet. (Ibid., p. 1524)
- C. Zephaniah 1:1-3 opens with God's worldwide judgment that is yet to occur, what we study for our application:

II. God's Worldwide Judgment Of Idolaters, Zephaniah 1:1-3.

- A. Though Zephaniah's genealogy is unique in that it traces his line for four generations back to king Hezekiah, meaning he was of the upper class and likely of the royal line of king Hezekiah (Zeph. 1:1b,c; Ibid., p. 1525), his introductory words, "The word of the Lord that came . . ." (v. 1a) were also used by the prophets Hosea, Joel, and Micah at the beginnings of their books, Ibid., p. 1524. Thus, men of God, be they of lower or upper class, were still men of God, so their message was from God and bore His divine authority, Ibid., p. 1525.
- B. Remarkably, though he was a man of nobility in Judah's upper class, Zephaniah began his prophetic message by abruptly predicting God's final devastating judgment of the whole world, Zephaniah 1:2-3b; Ibid.:
 1. Though the upper class in Judah would be particularly concerned about maintaining the nation's structure and social order that sustained their way of life, Zephaniah began his prophecy by predicting that the Lord would utterly sweep away everything from off of the face of the whole earth, Zephaniah 1:2.
 2. This divine destruction would extend to life on the land, involving men and animals, life in the air, involving birds, and life in the sea, involving fish, Zephaniah 1:3a. Notably, this is the reverse order of the creation in Genesis 1 where God created the fish in Genesis 1:20a, the birds in Genesis 1:20b, livestock and wild animals in Genesis 1:24 and man in Genesis 1:26. (Ibid.)
 3. God's purpose in destroying all these life forms was His desire to judge the "stumblingblocks with the wicked," what as the Zephaniah 1:3b ESV footnote puts it, "that is, the idols," the "things that entice a man to sin" along with wicked man himself. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Zephaniah 1:3)
- C. Romans 1:18-32 ESV thus explains the theology behind this divine worldwide judgment (as follows):
 1. Though the invisible things of God regarding His eternal power and divine nature are clearly evident from the creation of the world and all of its life forms, sinful men still did not glorify God as the Creator, nor were they thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, falling into spiritual darkness, Romans 1:18-21.
 2. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles in idolatry, Romans 1:22-23.
 3. God then gave men over to the impurity of immorality and to the debauchery of unnatural immorality of homosexuality and eventually to all forms of great wickedness, Romans 1:24-32.
 4. Accordingly, God's coming worldwide judgment predicted by Zephaniah 1:1-3 will sweep away the idolatrous animal forms man used as a replacement for God along with sinful man himself, a demolition of creation since man had come to worship what was created in place of the Creator Himself, Romans 1:25.
- D. Thus, God finally predicted that He would cut off sinful man himself, Zephaniah 1:3c. [Since God will save the godly remnant and create a new heavens and a new earth populated by this remnant (Revelation 21:1-22:5), this cutting off of man is not an annihilation of all people, but the destruction of many men on earth.]

Lesson: *Though Zephaniah was of the upper class and likely of royal lineage in Judah, a group of people most concerned about the sustainment of the nation's status quo for the preservation of their privileged way of life, being a man of God, Zephaniah still ABRUPTLY began his prophecy by announcing God's coming worldwide devastation of the status quo in punishment for man's rebellion against God and his abuse of creation in idolatry.*

Application: *(1) May we realize that God's true messengers regardless of class in society all give the same level of truth from the Lord whether doing so leaves their own class protected or doomed, for God's messengers speak God's unbiased truth. (2) May we depart from all forms of idolatry, what involves using anything in creation as a crutch in place of the Creator. (3) May we NOT view anything in creation as God, but what it is intended to be by the Creator – God's handiwork that gives evidence of His eternal power and divine nature – that we might honor and glorify HIM as God versus honoring and glorifying what He has CREATED as God.*