

ZEPHANIAH: GOD'S JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION

II: The Targets Of God's Judgment In Judah

(Zephaniah 1:4-13)

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 1:4-13 predicts God's targets of judgment in Judah, what we view for our insight and application:

II. The Targets Of God's Judgment In Judah, Zephaniah 1:4-13.

- A. Having predicted eventual worldwide judgment in Zephaniah 1:1-3, the Lord announced that He would punish the Southern Kingdom of Judah for her sins in Zephaniah 1:4a.
- B. The targets of that judgment are named and explained in Zephaniah 1:4b-13 with a lesson for us today:
 1. First, God would punish all of Judah's idolaters, Zephaniah 1:4b-6:
 - a. God would remove every element of the worship of the Canaanite fertility god of Baal, a religion with "terrible sexual acts" that had afflicted the nation since the time of the judges, Zeph. 1:4b; Ibid., p. 1526.
 - b. God would then cut off the *kemanim*, the pagan priests that had been appointed by Judah's kings along with the Levitical priests who had defected from the worship of God to worship Baal, Zeph. 1:4c; Ibid.
 - c. God would also punish those involved in three other forms of idolatrous worship, Zephaniah 1:5-6:
 - i. God would punish the overtly pagan worship of the stars where people bowed down on flat housetops to the hosts of heaven to try to harness the powers of nature, Zephaniah 1:5a; Ibid.
 - ii. God would punish the syncretistic worship that mixed the worship of God with Molech, the chief god of the Ammonites, a worship that involved abominable child sacrifice, Zeph. 1:5b NIV; Ibid.
 - iii. God would punish "others who were religiously indifferent and unconcerned about worshiping the true God (v. 6), though they may not have been worshiping other gods," Zephaniah 1:6; Ibid.
 2. The Lord then called on people to be silent before Him due to His coming judgment, Zeph. 1:7a. God had prepared Judah to be the sacrifice, and invited the Babylonians as His guests to the sacrifice, v. 7b; Ibid.
 3. Second, God would punish the political leaders "who evidenced their disobedience" to Him "by wearing the latest fashions from Nineveh and Babylon (foreign clothes). Adopting foreign dress outwardly most likely implied that they also had absorbed foreign values and practices," Ibid., p. 1527; Zephaniah 1:8.
 4. Third, God would punish all oppressors who plundered the vulnerable for material gain, Zephaniah 1:9. Their avoiding stepping on the threshold of the door likely alluded to their leaping into homes "to pillage and steal," for the idea of avoiding the threshold is parallel to the words "violence and deceit," Ibid.
 5. Fourth, God would punish wickedness in every part of the society in Jerusalem, Zephaniah 1:10; Ibid.
 6. Fifth, God would punish the wicked merchants who grew wealthy by abusive financial practices, v. 11.
 7. Sixth, God would make a "diligent, comprehensive search throughout Jerusalem so that none would go unpunished," Zephaniah 1:12a. In particular, He would punish the men who were like wine that had been left on its dregs, wine that was allowed to ferment "for a long time" so that it had formed a "hard crust and the liquid" had become "syrupy, bitter, and unpalatable," Ibid. "Instead of removing the dregs of daily pollution, Judah had become hardened and indifferent to God" to where "the people did not even believe that" God did as much "as their self-made images," Ibid. Consequently, they had ceased to believe His promises, claiming, "He will do nothing, either good or bad. Their own spiritual complacency led them to think the Lord was complacent," Ibid. In judgment, their goods would be looted, their houses destroyed, and they would plant vineyards but not drink of the wine, Zephaniah 1:13; Ibid., p. 1527-1528.

Lesson: God would punish not only the obviously wicked like idolaters, worldly political leaders, oppressors, and greedy merchants who abused people financially, He would also punish those who might not have been idolatrous but who were uncaring about its existence in Jerusalem as well as the complacent who ceased to trust in the Lord.

Application: (1) May we avoid not only obvious evil practices like idolatry, worldliness, oppressiveness and abusive greed, but also the less obvious sins of indifference to big evils in society and a complacent lack of faith in the Lord. (2) Since God is thus not only concerned about flagrant, obvious and abusive evil around us, but about our reactions to it, may we abound in holiness, that is, separation from sin, in thought and in deed, cf. 1 Peter 1:13-16.