

Zephaniah

1¹ This is the message that the Lord gave to Zephaniah. He was the son of Cushti, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah.^a This happened when Josiah, son of Amon, was king of Judah.

² I will completely sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the Lord. ³ I will sweep away people and animals, I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will overthrow^b the wicked; I will destroy human beings from the face of the earth. ⁴ I will strike^c Judah and everyone who lives in Jerusalem. I will destroy all that remains of their Baal worship along with their pagan priests so that even their names will be forgotten.^d ⁵ I will destroy those who go up to the rooftops to bow down before the sun, moon, and stars. They also bow down and swear allegiance to the Lord, but then they do the same to Milcom.^e ⁶ I will destroy those who once worshiped the Lord but don't anymore. They don't seek the Lord or ask for my help.

⁷ Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is near: the Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests.^f ⁸ Then on the day of the Lord's sacrifice I will punish the officials and the king's sons, and those who follow pagan ways^g. ⁹ I will also punish those who jump over the threshold.^h On that day I will punish those who fill up their masters' houses using violence and deception. ¹⁰ On that day, declares the Lord, a cry of grief will come from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the Second Quarter, and a loud crash from the

^a**1:1.** Probably king Hezekiah, one of the previous kings of Judah.

^b**1:3.** Literally, “stumbling-blocks,” which makes the meaning unclear.

^c**1:4.** Literally, “stretch out my hand against.”

^d**1:4.** Implied.

^e**1:5.** Or “Molech,” a pagan god.

^f**1:7.** In the context, Israel is the sacrifice, and the Babylonians are the “guests.”

^g**1:8.** Literally, “those who dress in foreign clothes.”

^h**1:9.** The meaning of this is debated. Some think it was a pagan custom (see for example 1 Samuel 5:4-5). Others tie it to the following verse and see it as eagerness to rob the poor.

hills. ¹¹ Those who live in the Market Districtⁱ will wail in sorrow, for all the merchants^j are destroyed, along with those who trade in silver. ¹² At that time I will search through Jerusalem with lamps and I will punish those self-satisfied people, who are like wine left on its dregs, who say to themselves, “The Lord will not do good, nor will he do evil.”^k ¹³ Their possessions will be looted; their houses will be demolished. They will build houses, but not live in them; they will plant vineyards, but not drink the wine.

¹⁴ The great day of the Lord is near and approaching rapidly. It will be a bitter day—even warriors will cry out loud. ¹⁵ It will be a day of anger,^l a day of trouble and distress, a day of disaster and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, ¹⁶ a day of trumpet calls and battle cries against fortified cities and watchtowers. ¹⁷ I will bring trouble on humanity, making them walk like blind people because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be spilled like so much dust; their intestines like dung. ¹⁸ Their silver and their gold won't help to save them on the day of the Lord's anger. The whole earth will be burned up by the fire of his jealous^m anger. He will make sure the end of the people of the world is sudden and complete.

2 ¹ Come together, yes, gather together, you worthless nation—
² before the decree is issued, before you wither and die like a flower,ⁿ before the burning anger of the Lord falls on you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes on you. ³ Look to the Lord, all you

ⁱ1:11. Literally, “the Mortar.”

^j1:11. Literally, “people of Canaan.”

^k1:12. In other words, they dismiss the Lord because they don't think he cares about them.

^l1:15. The expression of God being angry or full of wrath is a frequent image in the prophetic writings, but should not be understood in the same way as human anger. God's anger is not emotional like some kind of unthinking “red mist,” but a principled opposition to all that is evil. God uses this anger to try to convince those who are wrong to do what is right for their own sake, not because he “gets mad” and lashes out. Human anger is self-centered; divine anger is other-centered.

^m1:18. “Jealous” when applied to God is not the same as human jealousy. It means God's strong desire that people follow only him, for he alone can save. He wants an exclusive relationship for he knows that anything else leads to disaster.

ⁿ2:2. Septuagint reading, otherwise “before you are blown away like chaff in the wind.”

people of the land who are humble and who follow his commands. Look to do what is right; look to live in humility. Perhaps you will be protected^o on the day of the Lord's anger. ⁴ Gaza will be abandoned, Ashkelon will become desolate, Ashdod will be emptied by noon, Ekron will be ripped up. ⁵ What disaster is coming to you Philistines, you sea-people who live along the coast and in the land of Canaan! The Lord has passed judgment on you. I will destroy you—there will be no survivors. ⁶ Your seacoast will become pastures, with meadows for shepherds and sheep pens for flocks. ⁷ It will belong to those who remain of the people of Judah. They will graze their flocks there, and the shepherds will sleep in the abandoned houses of Ashkelon. For the Lord their God will be with them and make them prosperous again.

⁸ I have heard the mocking taunts of the Moabites and the scornful derision of the Ammonites who have insulted my people and made threats against their territory. ⁹ Consequently, as I live, declares the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, the Moabites will become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah. Their land will become a place of weeds and salt pits and ruins forever. Those who remain of my people will plunder them and occupy their land. ¹⁰ This is what they will receive for their pride because they mocked and threatened the people of the Lord Almighty. ¹¹ The Lord will make them terribly afraid as he starves to death all the gods of the land. Every nation will worship the Lord wherever they are—all around the world.

¹² You Ethiopians will be killed by the sword. ¹³ The Lord will strike the Assyrians in the north and destroy them. He will make Nineveh desolate, a dry wasteland like the desert. ¹⁴ Herds will lie down in the middle of the city. It will become the home for every kind of wild animal. Eagle owls and screech owls^p will roost on its columns. Their calls will echo through the windows. Rubble will block the doors, and the cedar woodwork will be exposed. ¹⁵ This is what will happen to this triumphant city that thought it was so secure. “Look at me!” it said proudly to itself. “There is no city as great as me!” But it has become a desolate place—just a home for

^o2:3. Literally, “hidden.”

^p2:14. The actual birds mentioned here are uncertain, but are listed in Leviticus and Deuteronomy as unclean.

wild animals. Everyone who passes by will point their finger and laugh in derision.

3¹ What disaster is coming to corrupted, rebellious Jerusalem, you who oppress people!^q ² You ^rdon't listen to anybody, you don't accept correction, you don't trust in the Lord, you don't ask for God's help.^s ³ Your leaders are as greedy as roaring lions; your judges are ravenous wolves that leave nothing behind by morning. ⁴ Your prophets are arrogant, deceitful men who defile what is sacred and who openly break the law.^t

⁵ But the Lord who does right is still among you, he does no wrong. Every morning he gives his judgment, every day without fail. But those who act unjustly have no shame. ⁶ I have destroyed nations. Their fortresses are deserted; their streets are empty; their cities are destroyed—there are no survivors, not one.

⁷ I told myself, “Surely they^u will respect me now and accept my correction. Then their homes would not be destroyed to teach them a lesson.” But instead you're just as eager to go on doing evil.

⁸ You just wait, declares the Lord. The day is coming when I will rise to give evidence. For I have decided to gather together all the nations and kingdoms and to pour out on them my anger, my fury and my rage. The whole earth will be burned up by the fire of my jealous^v anger. ⁹ For then I will give the nations pure speech so they can all pray and worship the Lord together. ¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my scattered people, my worshipers, will come to bring their offerings to me.

¹¹ On that day you won't be ashamed because of what you did in rebelling against me, for I will remove from among you those who are proud and boastful. Never again will you be conceited on my holy mountain. ¹² I will leave among you those who are meek and humble, those who trust in the name of the Lord. ¹³ The people of Israel who remain will not act wickedly nor will they tell lies. They

^q3:1. “Jerusalem”: implied by the context.

^r3:2. Literally, “she,” but using the second person pronoun makes the warning more vivid.

^s3:2. Literally, “you don't draw near to God.”

^t3:4. Or “use the law to their own advantage.”

^u3:7. Referring to the people of Jerusalem.

^v3:8. On jealousy see note on verse 1:18.

will not deceive one another. They will be able to eat in peace and sleep in safety for there will be nothing to frighten them.

¹⁴ Sing out, Jerusalem! Shout aloud, Israel! Jerusalem, be happy and celebrate with all your heart! ¹⁵ For the Lord has turned aside from punishing you, and he has turned back your enemies. The Lord, the king of Israel, is with you, and you will never again have to fear disaster. ¹⁶ On that day the message to the people of Jerusalem will be, “Don't be afraid; don't be discouraged!”^w ¹⁷ The Lord your God is among you as a mighty warrior who saves. He will be so happy with you. He will renew^x his love for you. He will celebrate over you with loud singing. ¹⁸ I will gather those of you who mourn for the religious festivals—you will no longer have to bear the disgrace.^y

¹⁹ Look at what I am going to do! At that time I am going to deal with all those who have oppressed you. I will save those who are helpless and bring back those who were scattered, and I will turn their shame into praise, and all the world will respect them. ²⁰ At that time I will bring you home, gathering you together. I will give you a good reputation, and you will be praised by all the peoples of the earth when I restore your status before your very eyes, says the Lord.

^w**3:16.** “Don't be discouraged”: literally, “don't have limp hands.”

^x**3:17.** Septuagint. Hebrew: “he will be silent in his love” hardly fits the previous or following phrase.

^y**3:18.** This is one interpretation of the Hebrew which is unclear. The meaning is that when in exile the Israelites were not able to celebrate their religious festivals as they wished and this was a cause of disgrace to them.