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Zephaniah

1 This is the message that the Lord gave to Zephaniah. Zephaniah received this message during the time that Josiah son of Amon was king of Judah. Zephaniah was the son of Cush. Cush was the son of Gedaliah. Gedaliah was the son of Amariah. Amariah was the son of Hezekiah.

The Lord's Day for Judging the People

2The Lord says, "I will destroy everything on earth!*" **3**I will destroy all the people and all the animals. I will destroy the birds in the air and the fish in the sea. I will destroy the evil people and all the things that make them sin. I will remove all people from the earth." The Lord said those things!

4The Lord said, "I will punish Judah and the people living in Jerusalem. I will remove these things from that place: I will remove the last signs of Baal worship. I will remove the priests and all the people that **5**go on their roofs* to worship the stars.* People will forget about those false priests. Some people say they worship me. Those people promised to worship me, but now they worship the false god Milcom.* So I will remove those people from that place. **6**Some people turned away from the Lord. They quit following me. Those people stopped asking the Lord for help. So I will remove those people from that place."

7Be silent before the Lord my Master! Why? Because the Lord's day for judging the people is coming soon! The Lord has prepared

his sacrifice and he has told his invited guests to get ready.*

8The Lord said, "On the Lord's day of sacrifice, I will punish the king's sons and other leaders. I will punish all the people wearing clothes from other countries. **9**At that time, I will punish all the people that jump over the threshold.* I will punish the people that fill their master's house* with lies and violence."

10The Lord also said, "At that time, people will be calling for help at Fish Gate in Jerusalem. People will be crying in the other parts of town. And the people will hear loud noises of things being destroyed in the hills around the city. **11**You people living in the lower part of town will cry. Why? Because all the businessmen and rich merchants will be destroyed.

12"At that time, I will take a lamp and search through Jerusalem. I will find all the people that are satisfied to live their own way. Those people say, 'The Lord does nothing. He does not help and he does not hurt!' I will find those people and I will punish them! **13**Then other people will take their wealth and destroy their houses. At that time, people that built houses will not live in them and people that planted fields of grapes will not drink the

prepared ... get ready Literally, "prepared his sacrifice. He has made holy his called ones." Here this time of judgment is compared to a fellowship meal when priests offered a sacrifice to God and had the guests get ready for this special meal with God.

people wearing ... threshold This probably means the priests and people that worshiped foreign gods, such as Dagon, or people that copied their ways of worshiping. See 1 Sam. 5:5.

master's house This means the temple where the people worshiped God or their false gods.

earth Or, "the land," or "the country."

roofs In ancient Israel, houses had flat roofs that were used like an extra room.

stars Literally, "army of heaven." This might mean the stars and planets or the angels.

Milcom The god of the Ammonite people.

wine from those grapes—other people will get those things.”

¹⁴The Lord’s special day for judging is coming soon! That day is near and coming fast. People will hear very sad sounds on the Lord’s special day of judgment. Even strong soldiers will cry! ¹⁵God will show his anger at that time. It will be a time of terrible troubles. It will be a time of destruction. It will be a time of darkness—a black, cloudy, and stormy day. ¹⁶It will be like a time of war when people hear horns and trumpets in the defense towers and protected cities.

¹⁷[The Lord said,] “I will make life very hard on the people. People will walk around like blind men that don’t know where they are going. Why? Because those people sinned against the Lord. [Many people will be killed.] Their blood will be spilled on the ground. Their dead bodies will lie like dung on the ground. ¹⁸Their gold and silver won’t help them! At that time, the Lord will become very upset and angry. The Lord will destroy the whole world!* The Lord will completely destroy everyone on earth!***”

God Asks People to Change Their Lives

2 Shameless people, change your lives ²before you become like a dry and dying flower. In the heat of day, a flower will wilt and die. You will be like that when the Lord shows his terrible anger. So change your lives before the Lord shows his anger against you! ³All you humble people, come to the Lord! Obey his laws. Learn to do good things. Learn to be humble. Maybe then you will be safe when the Lord shows his anger.

The Lord Will Punish Israel’s Neighbors

⁴No one will be left in Gaza*. Ashkelon* will be destroyed. By noon, the people will be forced to leave Ashdod*. Ekron* will be empty!* ⁵You Philistine people, you people

living by the sea, this message from the Lord is about you. Land of Canaan, land of Palestine,* you will be destroyed—no one will live there! ⁶Your land by the sea will become empty* fields for shepherds and their sheep. ⁷Then that land will belong to the survivors* from Judah. The Lord will remember those people from Judah. Those people are prisoners in a foreign country. But the Lord will bring them back. Then the people from Judah will let their sheep eat the grass in those fields. In the evenings, they will lie down in the empty houses of Ashkelon.

⁸The Lord says, “I know what the people of Moab and Ammon did! Those people embarrassed my people. Those people took their land to make their own countries bigger. ⁹So, as sure as I am alive, Moab and the people of Ammon will be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah.* I am the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel. And I promise those countries will be completely destroyed forever. Their land will be overgrown with weeds. Their land will be like the land covered with salt by the Dead Sea. The survivors of my people will take that land and all the things left in it.”

¹⁰Those things will happen to the people of Moab and Ammon because they were so proud and because they were cruel to the people of the Lord All-Powerful and they humiliated them. ¹¹Those people will be afraid of the Lord! Why? Because the Lord will destroy their gods. Then all the people in all the faraway lands will worship the Lord. ¹²People of Ethiopia, this means even you! The Lord’s sword will kill your people. ¹³And the Lord will turn north and punish Assyria. He will destroy Nineveh—that city will be like an empty, dry desert. ¹⁴Then only sheep and wild animals will live in that ruined city. Owls and crows will sit on the columns that are left standing. Their calls will be heard

world Or, “land” or “country.”

earth Or, “the land” or “the country.”

Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron Philistine cities. In Hebrew, Zephaniah is making word plays on the names of these cities.

empty In Hebrew, this word is like the word meaning “Philistine people.”

Palestine Or, “the Philistines.”

survivors People that escaped some disaster. Here this means the Jewish people that survived the destruction of Judah and Israel by its enemy armies.

Sodom and Gomorrah Two cities that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

coming through the windows. Crows will sit on the doorsteps. Black birds* will sit in those empty houses. ¹⁵Nineveh is so proud now. It is such a happy city. The people think they are safe. They think Nineveh is the greatest place in the world. But that city will be destroyed! It will be an empty place where only wild animals go to rest. People that pass that place will whistle and shake their heads _{when they see how badly the city was destroyed.}

The Future of Jerusalem

3 Jerusalem, your people fought against God! Your people hurt other people, and you have been stained with sin! ²Your people didn't listen to me! They didn't accept my teachings. Jerusalem didn't trust the Lord. Jerusalem didn't go to her God. ³Jerusalem's leaders are like roaring lions. Her judges* are like hungry wolves that come in the evening _{to attack the sheep}—and in the morning nothing is left. ⁴Her prophets* are always making their secret plans to get more and more. Her priests have treated holy things like they are not holy. They have done bad things to God's teachings. ⁵But God is still in that city. And he continues to be good. God does not do anything wrong. He continues to help his people. Morning after morning he helps his people make good decisions. But those bad people are not ashamed of the bad things they do.

⁶_{God says,} "I have destroyed whole nations. I destroyed their defense towers. I destroyed their streets and now no one goes there any more. Their cities are empty—no one lives there any more. ⁷I tell you these things so you will learn a lesson. I want you to fear and respect me. If you do this, then your home won't be destroyed. If you do this, then I won't have to punish you the way I planned." But those bad people only wanted to do more of the same bad things they had already done!

Black birds Or, "cedar beams."

judge(s) A person that decides matters in court.

prophet(s) A person called by God to be a special servant. God used dreams and visions to show them things to teach the people.

⁸The Lord said, "So just wait! Wait for me to stand and judge you. I have the right to bring people from many nations and use them to punish you. I will use those people to show my anger against you. I will use them to show how upset I am—and the whole country will be destroyed! ⁹Then I will change people from other nations so they can speak the language clearly and call out the name of the Lord. They will all worship me together, shoulder to shoulder, as one people. ¹⁰People will come all the way from the other side of the river in Ethiopia. My scattered people will come to me. My worshipers will come and bring their gifts to me.

¹¹"Then, Jerusalem, you will no longer be ashamed of the bad things your people do against me. Why? Because I will remove all of those bad people from Jerusalem. I will take away all of those proud people. There won't be any of those proud people on my holy mountain.* ¹²I will let only meek and humble people stay in my city (*Jerusalem*). And they will trust the Lord's name. ¹³The survivors* of Israel won't do bad things. They won't tell lies. They won't try to trick people with lies. They will be like sheep that eat and lie down in peace—and no one will bother them."

A Happy Song

- ¹⁴ Jerusalem, sing and be happy!
Israel, shout for joy!
Jerusalem, be happy and have fun!
- ¹⁵ Why? Because the Lord stopped
your punishment!
He destroyed your enemies'
strong towers!
King of Israel, the Lord is with you.
You don't need to worry
about anything bad happening.
- ¹⁶ At that time, Jerusalem will be told,
"Be strong, don't be afraid!"

holy mountain Mount Zion, one of the mountains Jerusalem was built on.

survivors People that escaped some disaster. Here this means the Jewish people that survived the destruction of Judah and Israel by its enemy armies.

17 The Lord your God is with you.
 He is like a powerful soldier.
 He will save you.
 He will show how much he loves you.
 He will show you how happy he is
 with you.
 He will laugh and be happy about you,
 like people at a party.”

18 The Lord said,
 “I will take away your shame.
 I will make those people stop hurting you.*

19 At that time, I will punish the people
 that hurt you.

I will save my hurt people.
 I will bring back the people
 that were forced to run away.
 And I will make them famous.
 People everywhere will praise them.

20 At that time, I will bring you back.
 I will bring you back together.
 I will make you famous.
 People everywhere will praise you.
 That will happen when I bring back the
 prisoners before your very own eyes!”
 The Lord said those things.

I will make ... stop hurting you This verse is hard to understand in the Hebrew.