

# The Minor Prophets #21

## Zephaniah

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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There is a terrible irony in the prophet Zephaniah; actually he did his prophecy in the days of Josiah, and Josiah was one of the best of the kings of Judah but the prophecy that came down in his days were among the most dire ever handed down by any prophet, here is how Zephaniah starts.

**The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah. I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, the fishes of the sea, the scandals with the wicked; and I will cut off man from the land, saith the LORD.**

Now what on earth can account for such terrible consequence, well to tell that story we have to go back in time?

I've long held that you can't understand the prophets unless you understand the history of the times in which they worked. When he came on the scene the house of Judah was in one of the late stages of their decline. When a man named Amon ben Manasseh came to the throne he was 22 years old.

**Second Kings 21:19 Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign and he reigned two years in Jerusalem his mother's name was Meshullemeth. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD as his father Manasseh had done. And he walked in all the way that his father walked in and served the idols that his father served and worshipped them: And he forsook the LORD God of his fathers and did not walk in the way of the LORD. And the servants of Amon conspired against him and slew the king in his own house.**

Now you know things have to get pretty bad for the household staff to rise up and murder the king, they should have known what a problem they were taking on for themselves. It seems that in the latter stages of the decay of society violence and murder

become much more common as time goes on. In fact in the house of Israel in the north four out of the last 5 kings were assassinated.

Now it's not easy to look back on those times and to understand just how bad it was not from where we are we have it too good. It isn't easy to grasp living in comparative safety of twentieth century America, Great Britain, Canada and Australia just how rare we are in the history of the world. We represent a small island in time, an island of relative peace and safety in the midst of a world that is full of poverty and violence. Our islands are shrinking and we are in the middle to late stages of societal decline so you may live to see a country driven to violence that you have never imagined in your worst nightmares. It's on television all over all the time and it's easy for us to say, well TV is just starting to cover stuff that they didn't cover as much before and there is some truth in that, we hope, just keep watching.

Our only hope is that by some miracle we can find women like a mother of King Josiah. **The people of the land slew all those who conspired against king Amon and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.**

Now it's true that there have been times in history in which the leadership has become so entrenched and so corrupt that the people had to take a hand. In a way it's what happened in the American and French revolutions but the violence of the people in this act had its own consequence, they in turn were killed because they had killed the king.

**Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, they're written in the books of the chronicles of the kings of Judah. He was buried in his sepulcher in the garden of Uzza and Josiah his son reign in his stead. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign and he reign for thirty one years in Jerusalem. And his mother name was Jedidah.**

This young woman deserves to have her name recorded because there is no other influence that can account for the kind of son she brought into the world. His grandmother also has to be named for her responsibility in the terrible reign of his father. Well I don't know if you did the math or not while I was reading it, Amon died at the age of 24 when Josiah was eight, that means he was an old man of 16 when Josiah was born, he was a teenager. Actually this is not as strange as it sounds; girls were commonly married off soon after puberty when they were coming into prime child bearing years.

People are beginning to learn I think that when you postpone bearing your children after you're twenty five or sometimes even after thirty your body is simply not in the kind of condition or really designed to be bearing children that late unless you started earlier. When

we understand this there is somewhat to say for the practice if you have seen any of the video's from spring break. Marry them off while the hormones are raging and let nature tie them down with responsibilities and with kids. But the story goes on.

**And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD and he walked in all of the way of David his father and he did not turn to the side to the right hand or to the left, this was really a steady young man. And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam the scribe to the house of the LORD saying: Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest that he may add the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD which the keepers of the door have gathered from all the people. And give it into the hand of the doers of the work, contractors that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is the house of the LORD to repair the breaches of the house.**

I gather that the temple had come into some disrepair by this time, but what happens next is really shocking and tends to fly in the face of what we think we know about the temple, about Judaism and what the people did.

**2nd Kings 22:8 Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD.**

Well that shouldn't be surprising of course there's a book of the law in the house of the LORD, well yah but listen to the development,

**Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan and he read it. And Shaphan came to the king and brought the king word again and said, we gathered the money and we gave it to the man who is doing the work and look here, Hilkiyah has delivered me a book, and he read it before the king.**

Now the whole structure of this discussion is that nobody involved in this whole rigmarole had read the book of the law in all of their life, it's almost as though the temple had become a museum. No one knew what was in there and when they were doing the work someone say Oh look what I found the book of the law. Well they brought the book of the law to the king, they read it in his presence and **when the king had heard the words of the book of the law he rend his clothes.** This is a sign of great distress, repentance. **And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest and all these men and all the staff saying, Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people and for all Judah concerning the words of this**

**book that is found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do everything in it which is written concerning us.**

Now I think this is tremendous because he didn't repent of some preaching of some guy, he didn't repent because a prophet came up on his doorstep saying thus saith the LORD. He read it in the book, well it was read to him but it's the same thing and when he heard what God said he believed it, he was changed by the reading of God's word.

So go ask God what's going to happen, so **Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor** all these guy's of the staff they **went unto Huldah the prophetess.**

Now have we come to the place in their history when God will no longer speak to the men, he'll only speak with the women, how bad was it in these days? You know, you can kind of understand, there comes a point in time where God isn't talking to anybody, there behavior is so bad. Well they went talked to Huldah.

**And she said to them. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel. Tell the man that sent you to me. Thus saith the LORD. Behold, I will bring evil upon this place and upon the inhabitants of this place, even all of the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. Why? Because they have forsaken me and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; so my wrath shall be kindled against this place and will not be quenched.**

Now you wouldn't think God's anger would be so provoked so much by burning a little incense to another Gods altar would you? Well there is a reason for it.

So what is it about this situation that God is so angry, I mean is it just a matter of people going in to a little idol or a little shrine along the side of the road and putting a little incense up there and lighting a fire on it. I don't know, it seems to me that if that were all that's involved Gods anger would be a little over the top. The problem is we know from history and archeology what these people were actually doing. Throughout the ancient world cult prostitution was common, what you may not realize is that this was not voluntary prostitution by vestal virgin or some temple prostitutes. This was temple slavery, little boys and little girls were sold to the priesthood of these temples for money. Their services were sold to perverts for money and this was happening all over the country. Now that same spirit has not left the world and it's still here and still working. However we now know that infant sacrifice was common in that world as well and some of the stories are hair-raising. The things we now know from archeology and from history about what they were doing and for

all we know the incense they were burning to these Gods was actually a living child. This was awful and if you don't understand what's going on you have no chance of understanding the justice of God or the words of his prophets. You can halfway understand why some people have condemned God for this because they don't know the history of what they were doing. Now why is all this put so euphemistically in the Bible, why didn't they come right out and say what was going on? I don't know, perhaps a holy God won't speak openly about the rotten things being done in that world. Maybe I shouldn't either but it seems necessary to stop the words of people who blasphemy the God of the Old Testament calling him a monster for what he did. In truth he was a judge and he was visiting upon people heads their own works.

Huldah the prophetess went on to say, **But to the king of Judah who sent you to enquire of the LORD tell him this, as touching the words you have heard because your heart was tender because you have humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against the inhabitants thereof that there is going to be a desolation and a curse and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me; I have heard you. Behold I will gather you to your fathers and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace and your eyes shall not see all the evil I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.**

I don't know how comforted he was by this. I don't know how comforted he was by knowing that whatever remained of his reign as a king there would be peace and there was nearly half of his time still to go of his thirty one years that he was there. And during his reign it didn't happen. Josiah went right to work cleaning house with all the energy and zeal of an eighteen year old. I think I may have implied earlier that this was the eighteen year of his reign when this happened but that doesn't work mathematically, he was 18 when they found the book of the law in the temple.

2nd Kings 23:4: **And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and all the rest of the staff to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD.**

Catch this now, where are they bringing this stuff out from, the temple of God.

**All the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the asherah, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them to Bethel. And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places around Jerusalem they were all over the place including the temple of God, them**

**also that burned incense to Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. Burned incense and we know that child sacrifice was practice in the Baal religion. And he brought out the asherah pole from the house of God, outside Jerusalem to the brook Kidron, and he burned it there, and stamped it to small powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. And he broke down the houses of the sodomites that were right there by the house of God these male shrine prostitutes were right there on the temple mount, and where the women wove hangings for the asherah poles. And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba, and broke down the high places of the gates.**

He did a thorough cleaning house of all this pagan worship going on. Somewhere in all of this mess a prophet named Zephaniah spoke and sat down to write.

**Zephaniah 1:4 I will also stretch out my hand upon Judah, upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests. And them that worship the host of heaven on the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham.**

I want you to think about that, they swear by Jehovah and by Malcham out of the same mouth.

**And them that are turned back from the LORD; and them that have not sought the LORD, or even enquired for him.**

I think it's important to understand when you read Zephaniah that you realize that Josiah reforms did not outlast him, oh sure he made a change in society at the time but it was only by force of government that he could keep it in place. There is a point of no return in the corruption of a society and I say to us now, keep your eyes open, you may live to see that point of no return here in our country.

**Zephaniah 1:7 Hold your peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he has bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all of those who are clothed with strange apparel.**

I think he mean by that people wearing apparel that appeal to a pagan God, in particularly when they're supposed to be coming before God dressed in a certain way. What's interesting though this reference to the LORD's preparation for a sacrifice rings all the down through to the book of Revelations to the end times and the battle of Armageddon in its language.

**In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.**

The persistence of pagan worship is really amazing when you think about it. This leap on the threshold thing goes all the way back to the day of the philistines to the battle with Israel. They had taken the ark in combat and took it back with them and placed it the temple of Dagon a long time before Zephaniah. What happen was they came in the next morning and the God dagon the idol had fallen down on its face on the ground before the ark of God, well they put it back up and went away and came in the next morning and the thing had fallen again, this time it fell on the threshold of the room so that the head was broken off, thus the worshiper of dagon would leap over the threshold any time they entered their whatever. And this was still going on in Jerusalem generations later Dagon is still being honored with this custom.

**And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD; there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and a howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills. Howl, you inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off. All the big money guys they're gone. And it shall come to pass at that time, I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, the LORD will not do good, and he will not do evil.**

Don't get to comfortable you atheist, you people who say that, God is dead and you'll hear a lot of that these days, and God says I'm going to come looking for you I'm going to search through the house with a candle looking in every dark nook and cranny and I will find you.

**Therefore their goods shall become booty and their houses desolation: they'll build houses but they won't live in them; they'll plant vineyards but they won't drink the wine from it. The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hastens greatly even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.**

Doesn't matter how strong you are, it doesn't matter how great you are or how well armed you are you're going to cry like a little child in that day.

**That day is a day of wrath a day of trouble a day of wasted desolation, a day of darkness of gloominess thick clouds a day of alarms and trumpets in the fenced city against the high towers. The trumpet is an alarm of war of course. And I will bring distress upon all men that they shall walk like blind men because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust and their flesh shall be like cow chips. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he will make even a speedy riddance of everybody who lives in the land.**

What's really troubling about all this, it all happened, well nearly all, the fact is that the great day of God almighty, did not, a day of the LORD a day of God's judgment did. There is that one time in all of history where there has never been a day before like it and there will never be another one like it again. That is the great day of the LORD and the truth is that day didn't come at that time. There was a day of God's wrath when the Babylonian's took the city but there's too much in Zephaniah description it all happened and it's all going to happen again. Prophecy you know is like a symphony or maybe a Bach toccata en fugue the composer introduces the theme and then he starts introducing variations on the theme, sort of like even an old hymn where you have a theme a verse you sing in a chorus and then you sing a different set of words to it the second time around. The composer will start introducing variations in a complicated theme and then finally take us to a crashing climax. Prophecy is like that and understanding prophecy is a matter of understanding the patterns and the themes, and understanding the theme will occur again and again with variations, but always headed toward a conclusion that the composer has in mind.

Zephaniah Chapter 2: **Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired. Go ahead and pull yourselves together. Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon you. Come on gather yourselves together. Seek you the LORD, all you meek of the earth which have worked his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be you can be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger.**

Right here is a warning you and I can use no matter when this takes place.



Reject arrogant maintain your humility before God work his judgment after all we live in a government of the people for the people. You have a chance to exercise Godly judgment at the ballot box or the jury box so don't treat those responsibility lightly remember it was the people who put King Josiah on the throne. No matter how bad it's going to become, no matter how far down this road of violence we go there are those of us who will try to maintain the meekness of spirit, who will try to work God's judgment, who will try to live according to what God says is righteous and who will seek humility. It is that handful of people who are the ones that may be hid in the day of the Lords anger so may that be where God finds you.

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