

Message #7

Zephaniah 3:1-7

We are living in a time when very few people think seriously about the judgment of God. For most people the judgment of God is not a real factor of how one chooses to live life. But Zephaniah says the judgment of God is something you better take seriously.

In fact, Zephaniah says if you have certain qualities in your life, you right now are the target of the judgment of God, even though to this point He has not poured out His judgment.

People would be very wise to take a serious look at this text and a serious honest look at themselves.

GOD CAREFULLY DESCRIBES THE KIND OF PEOPLE THAT HE SPECIFICALLY TARGETS WITH A WOE JUDGMENT.

When God begins the process of some sort of judgment, all kinds of negative things hit. God seems to operate in phases. He does negative things to get people's attention and if they respond to that, things change. If they don't, things get worse.

There are three simple parts to this that are as clear as can be:

PART #1 – Zephaniah lists the qualities in those who become the target of God's judgment.
3:1-7

More than likely the specific qualities are things God spotted in Jerusalem and with Judah with His own people. In other words, the one city that should be a place where God is revered had become a place of evil and sin. What was taking place there was not good.

Now believers in Jesus Christ cannot ever receive the wrath of God (Romans 8:1; I Thessalonians 5:9), but they can receive the disciplinary chastisement of God.

God will discipline His people and in this text He specifically says why He will do it.

However, it is more than just dealing with His people because in **verse 6**, Zephaniah mentions "nations" plural and "cities" plural. So God can target nations and cities and send His wrath judgments.

There are 15 qualities that Zephaniah specifically mentions that indicate God will target the nation, city, power or the person with his negative woe judgment. We certainly want to stay far away from this list of things in our own lives but we may expect to see these kinds of things escalate as this world catapults toward the wrath of God:

Quality #1 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God are rebellious. **3:1a**

The word “rebellious” (mara) in Hebrew means this is a bitter rebellion that lashes out against God and His Truth (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 505-506).

Quality #2 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God are defiled. **3:1b**

The Hebrew word “defile” refers to one that is impure and has a sin-stained defilement (*Ibid.*, p. 157).

Now this particular verb is in the Niphal stem. What that means is this is reciprocal action. What that means is the person is not just defiled and impure, but actively pursues this in and of themselves.

Quality #3 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God are tyrannical. **3:1c**

The word “oppress” (yanah) is one that refers to violent oppression (*Ibid.*, p. 352). These people do things that are tyrannical and violent to get what they want.

Quality #4 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God refuse to heed those communicating God’s word. **3:2a**

These people would not listen to the men of God communicating the word of God. God sent His men and His prophets to communicate His word and they would not listen no matter who the voice was communicating the word of God.

Quality #5 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God will not accept instruction. **3:2b**

When given true instruction, these people would not accept it. Now the instruction assumes that people need to hear and heed the instruction because they are not moving in the way God desires.

Quality #6 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God do not trust in the LORD. **3:2c**

Not only did people not accept God’s word, they did not trust God. They trusted in themselves and in other people more than in God.

Quality #7 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God do not draw near the LORD. **3:2d**

In chapter 2:3, God invited people to “seek the LORD” and here He gives people an opportunity to “draw near to her God.” But she didn’t do it and wouldn’t do it.

God is the One who can give guidance and direction and blessing to people and they would not draw near to Him to do it.

Quality #8 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God have ruthless leaders. **3:3a**

Those specifically mentioned here are four different classes of leaders. The princes (sarim) refer to the political leaders in the royal line. These would be the top political leaders of their time.

The leaders of the people were wicked. When people just elect and applaud godless leaders, they are sentencing themselves to the judgment of God.

Quality #9 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God have ravenous judges. **3:3b**

The judges were evil and corrupt. The judges (sopetim) were civil judges and magistrates. They were not interested in truth or justice. They used their office as a basis for doing ruthless things against people. Judges need to realize that God is a just judge and if a judge does not do his or her best to give a just judgment, that judge will face a judgment from God.

Now the comparison that Zephaniah makes about these judges is a comparison to “wolves at evening.” Wolves prowl around in the dark and do their destructive work not out in the light, but at night. Usually wolves are in packs.

What God is saying about these judges is that they meet in dark secret and operate as a pack. Instead of them making right true judgments that are consistent with what God’s word would want them to do, they use their power for their own purposes and rip people to shreds in the process. The court system had become dark and dirty and depraved.

Quality #10 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God have reckless prophets. **3:4a**

The prophets (nebieya) were not communicating the truth which they were to communicate. There were many ministers who were reckless in the way they handled God’s word. They communicated things they wanted to communicate. They did not communicate the whole counsel of God. These teachers were not teaching the truth.

Quality #11 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God have treacherous leaders. **3:4b**

The leaders at all levels were treacherous. They were not leaders of integrity.

Quality #12 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God have profaning priests. **3:4c**

The priests (koneyha) were profaning the sanctuary and sacred places. These were the leaders who were responsible for leading the people into reverent worship but were leading the people in just the opposite way. Worship was loose and irreverent. These leaders were leading the people into ways of judgment.

I am convinced that what is happening today in many churches is leading people to the judgment of God. It is shallow, irreverent and designed to entertain and not worship God.

Quality #13 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God do not reverence God's law. **3:4d**

The leaders were supposed to carefully teach the law of God and they were not doing that. They were leading people the way they wanted, not the way God wanted. People who are headed to the judgment of God do not care about God's word or how they butcher it.

Quality #14 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God do not know shame. **3:5c**

People heading to the judgment of God are not ashamed of their sin. They do not blush or feel bad about their sin. They flaunt it. They parade it. They promote it.

Quality #15 - Those who receive a woe judgment of God are eager for corrupt deeds. **3:7**

These people are not threatened by the thought of judgment and they will not heed warnings to turn to God and turn from sin; in fact, they are eager to pursue their sin.

PART #2 – The qualities that God reveals about Himself concerning woe judgments. **3:5-7**

There are nine qualities about God that are revealed here.

Quality #1 - God is a God who is to be trusted. **3:2c**

God wants people to trust Him and have faith in Him.

Quality #2 - God is a God who desires people to draw near. **3:2d**

Quality #3 - God is a God who is righteous. **3:5a**

Get this in our minds. God is righteous and to have a right relationship with Him, we must pursue that which is righteous. If we are not doing that we are heading to a righteous judgment. In total contrast to the way the religious and political leaders were operating, God is righteous.

Quality #4 - God is a God who will not do any injustice. **3:5b**

This is very important to grasp about God. God will never do anything unjust. What He does will always be just and right.

Quality #5 - God is a God who offers opportunity every day. **3:5c**

God does His work out in the open in the day. He does not sneak around in the dark. Every day He gives people opportunities to get things resolved with Him.

Quality #6 - God is a God who does not fail. **3:5d**

God does not fail at anything ever. His will and His program always succeed.

Quality #7 - God is a God to be reverenced. **3:7a**

Most religious places are not promoting a reverence for God and His word these days.

Quality #8 - God is a God who wants His instruction received. **3:7b**

This is so simple; if people would accept instruction from the word of God, they would never face the just judgment of God, but would receive the great blessings of God.

Quality #9 - God is a God who offers grace before judgment. **3:7c**

If people would take God's word seriously and respond to it, He will turn things around for them. Instead of cutting them off in judgment, He will shower them with blessings.

PART #3 – The judgment that God reveals that He will justly execute. **3:6**

Most people have no idea as to how serious the threat of God's judgment actually is. Most have no idea about the devastation God's judgment brings.

There are six judgment facts brought out here:

Judgment Fact #1 - God will cut off the nations. **3:6a**

There is a judgment that is going to come from God in which all nations will be cut off from His blessings.

Judgment Fact #2 - God will destroy the strong towers. **3:6b**

No military, no matter how big or technological, will be able to stop God from what He decides to do. There will be no defense against the sovereignty of God.

Judgment Fact #3 - God will make streets desolate. **3:6c**

God is going to destroy cities, including the streets of cities.

Judgment Fact #4 - God will remove all people. **3:6d**

All godless people will be gone. There are godless people all over in every area, but there is no question that big cities feature many godless people who are dedicated to godless things. God will remove them all.

Judgment Fact #5 - God will destroy all cities. **3:6e**

When we read this, we cannot help but think of the specific prediction that God makes in the Tribulation in Revelation 16:19. In that verse we read that "the cities of the nations fell." This specifically happens near the end of the Great Tribulation.

Judgment Fact #6 - God will leave no inhabitants. **3:6f**

God will literally destroy all God mocking, Christ rejecting, Bible hating people who did not reverence Him or His word. He will clear the world of these kinds of people and the only ones left will be the remnant who loved Him and His word.

God is going to judge, but notice verse 12; He will leave a humble and lowly people who take refuge in the name of the LORD.

Our refuge, Israel's refuge, the Nation's refuge is Jesus Christ. Come to Him, take refuge in Him and you will escape God's wrath.