

Zephaniah 1:7 “Why the Lord doesn’t treat us equally”

(Zephaniah 1:7 NIV)

“Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited.

“(8) On the day of the Lord's sacrifice I will punish the princes and the king's sons and all those clad in foreign clothes. (9) On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit. (10) ‘On that day,’ declares the LORD, ‘a cry will go up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the New Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. (11) Wail, you who live in the market district; all your merchants will be wiped out, all who trade with silver will be ruined.

“(12) At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.’ (13) Their wealth will be plundered, their houses 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—near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. (15) That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, (16) a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers.

“(17) I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth.

“(18) Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth.”

A few years ago, a TV ad showed a group of office people eating tacos in an outer-office area.

They were right outside the manager’s office.

Having a good time.

It was an impromptu feast.

The happy group gobbled sloppy tacos.

The boss arrived.

Saw his people partying.

They were grinning and gulping Mexican.

The boss was crestfallen.

His staff was savoring scrumptious stuff right outside his office.

Why wasn’t he invited?

He meekly said, “I like tacos, too.”

The group had invited him—by text message.

His invitation went out when everyone else’s did.

But his cell phone server was slow; his text message was just coming in.

Most have shared this poor manager’s frustration.

Text and voice mail messages sometimes arrive late.

But there is something worse than not getting a timely text message.

It is friends getting an invitation to a party to which we’re not invited.

Someone significant hosts an event and does not invite us.

It hurts, doesn’t it?

Does God do that?

Is that what this Zephaniah text means?

“The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited.”

Does God host parties, but not invite everyone?

Does he invite straitlaced old ladies and silver-tongued preachers but close his party to all others?

Most people have not heard of Zephaniah.

The name sounds old-time as if he had been a 19th century Nebraska dirt farmer.

If you asked 100 preachers, 99 of them probably could not tell you the century Zephaniah lived.

Your opinion of the matter might be like Rhett Butler’s (Clark Gable’s famous line in Gone with the Wind, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t . . .”

Don’t let the name Zephaniah or his era fool you.

1. Zephaniah was a head’s up guy.

Young when he wrote,

Passionate,

Fiery,

To the point.

2. Second, he was 100% right.

No preacher, professor, parent comes even close to 100%.

3. Zephaniah lived in times like ours.

People faced uncertainty about the economy.

- **Family life was unstable.**
- **The future appeared doubtful.**
- **In late 2011, a TV ad ran regularly featuring a guy who claimed he had accurately predicted the failure of Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and GM?**

In November of that year he was predicting that something terrible would happen in the year 2011.

This unnamed person promised to make people rich, and help them survive. He offered a free on-line video, but bottom line wanted folks to buy his program.

His ads appeared with increasing frequency.

You know why he ramped up his ads.

If the disaster he predicted were to occur in 2011, he was running out of time.

He had barely five weeks left to sell his scheme.

Then he could be off to the Caribbean with your money.

He was correct about one thing:

For most, times were uncertain, if not scary.

Now about Zephaniah.

He predicted the future and it happened-just like he said it would.

Unlike the guy on TV, Zephaniah was not predicting for quick money.

He wanted to save his country.

When I said that there is a likeness to our times, I am not exaggerating.

The times are so similar, it is eerie.

Here is what I mean.

As many are now, people then were stashing silver and gold.

Folks believed in God then.

Today about 85-90% of Americans believe in Him.

In Iowa the numbers might even be higher.

But belief is not the issue.

Verse 12 contains the crux of the matter.

It is what people said and how they acted:

“The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.”

Isn’t that where we are?

We debate whether God exists.

If we conclude that He does exist, we are happy to leave the subject there.

Our concern ends.

The matter is over.

God is out there somewhere.

He is there.

We feel secure.

Happy He loves us no matter what we do.

End of story.

We go our merry way.

Do what we want.

We live how we want to live assured in our minds that God exists.

We are not concerned.

“God never does anything ‘either good or bad.’”

They were just like we are, weren’t they?

To many people, God is like a rich uncle.

We hope he remembers us in his will.

But we are not interested in asking his advice or consulting him.

They believed in God then, but they did not ask God before they made decisions.

Verse 6 says: “They neither seek the Lord, nor inquire of him.”

Here is how it went down in Zephaniah’s day.

They believed in God, but they had a “blended religion.”

They did not like some of God’s laws.

So they found things they liked in other religions and adapted them.

- **Many consulted astrologers.**
 - **Some got advice from public figures and other noted personalities.**
- **Others followed superstitions.**

As Zephaniah said

“They neither seek the Lord, nor inquire of him.”

Of the important decisions you made last year, how many of them did you pray to God about?

We “neither seek the Lord, nor inquire of him.”

When Zephaniah lived, people were enjoying life.

They did not see disaster coming.

They did not believe God would act.

“He’s not going to do anything.”

“The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.”

But this Universe is not an accident.

We are not here by happenstance.

God acts in history.

Nations and people rise and fall as they listen or do not listen to God.

(See also Ezekiel 31)

Exactly as Zephaniah and Ezekiel predicted, Israel fell.

What Zephaniah said about other nations came true as well.

These were not tiny countries like Israel.

They were world powers in the same way that the U.S., China, and Russia are dominating nations now.

Those powerful nations rose and fell just like God told Zephaniah and His other prophets that they would.

Israel had seen God’s actions.

First hand.

God acts in history.

Israel knew that from experience.

God expected Israel to be true to Him.

But they were not.

Israel forgot God faster than Liz Taylor used to dump husbands.

Talk about ingratitude.

You lovingly and unselfishly do things for people.

But they soon forget what you’ve done, and even work against you.

It hurts, doesn’t it?

There is more to this story.

Imagine a married father, who is a high level state department worker.

He has a devoted wife and kids

He sleeps with an enemy spy.

He is not just doing something illegal and immoral.

He has also compromised his nation’s security.

He might contract a disease the spy carries, and bring it home to his wife and kids.

What Israel did was like that but worse.

God had rescued Israel.

But when Israel forgot God, they acted like an unfaithful spouse.

They had slept with the enemy.

They ruined their lives.

Their health.

Their families.

And their future.

They contracted diseases, influenced their families to do wrong, and consorted with the enemy.

God is good.

His laws are just.

He loves you.

Are you “seeking Him, and inquiring of him”?

We might think God will do nothing.

But his judgment will come as it came on those nations and people in the past.

History proves that God punishes evil.

God acts in history toward nations.

Nations rise and fall.

In the last few centuries it has occurred in many nations: Italy, Spain, France, England, Germany, and the Soviet Union.

Individuals rise and fall, too.

Unless we change and submit to God, the Day of the Lord will not be pretty.

(Zephaniah 2:3 NIV) “Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.”

We do not like sad endings and life does not have to end that way.

Let me tell you how God works—if we open our hearts to Him.

Fast forward from Zephaniah to modern times.

Sasha Prokopchuk grew up in the Soviet Union as an atheist.

He and his wife were newlyweds when his government called him to serve in the Red Army.

He later worked in a hospital, drove a truck, and worked in coal mines.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Prokopchuk and his wife lost what little money they had.

He was frustrated and depressed.

One night while he was taking his mind off his problems, he picked up a little black book with a cross that his wife had bought from a beggar woman in a train station.

In that book, he read a passage about a guy who had tried everything but found it all meaningless.

As he continued reading (he was in the *Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes*) he said to himself, “This book is about me.”

He kept reading the Bible and found encouragement in Jesus’ teaching; he also learned about prayer and repentance.

As he applied Jesus’ teaching to his life, his relationship with his family improved.

He even got along with his mother-in-law.

After studying for two years on his own, he met a US missionary in Donetsk, Ukraine.

Prokopchuk was baptized into Christ May 2, 1995.

Denny Kruse, the missionary encouraged him to preach.

He began doing that.

The Lord uses him in a phenomenal way.

He’s recently launched a successful TV ministry that reaches thousands of homes.

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I cannot explain how the Lord works.

But this much is evident.

The Lord invited atheist Sasha Prokupchuk to his feast and Sasha accepted.

The Lord invites you, too.

I pray that you will accept him before it is too late.

I also pray that those of us who believe in Him will daily consult Him and listen to His advice.

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