

CHAPTER 1

After the title of the book (v. 1) here is,

I. A threatening of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, an utter destruction, by the Chaldeans (v. 2-4).

II. A charge against them for their gross sin, which provoked God to bring that destruction upon them (v. 5, 6); and so he goes on in the rest of the chapter, setting both the judgments before them, that they might prevent them or prepare for them, and the sins that destroy them, that they might judge themselves, and justify God in what was brought upon them.

1. They must hold their peace because they had greatly sinned (v. 7-9). But,

2. They shall howl because the trouble will be great. The day of the Lord is near, and it will be a terrible day (v. 10-18). Such fair and timely warning as this did God give to the Jews of the approaching captivity; but they hardened their neck, which made their destruction remediless.

~~III.~~ ZEPHANIAH 1:1-6

JUDGMENT PREDICTED

Here is,

I. The title-page of this book (v. 1), in which we observe,

1. What authority it has, and who gave it that authority; it is from heaven, and not of men: It is *the word of the Lord*.

2. Who was the instrument of conveying it to the church. His name was Zephaniah, which signifies the *servant of the Lord*, for God *revealed his secrets to his servants the prophets*. The pedigree of other prophets, whose extraction we have an account of, goes no further back than their father, except Zecharias, whose grandfather also is named. But this of Zephaniah goes back four generations, and the highest mentioned is *Hizkiah*; it is the very same name in the original with that of Hezekiah king of Judah (~~2~~ Kings 18:1), and refers probably to him; if so, our prophet, being lineally

descended from that pious prince, and being of the royal family, could with the better grace reprove the folly of the king's children as he does, v. 8.

3. When this prophet prophesied — *in the days of Josiah king of Judah*, who reigned well, and in the twelfth year of his reign began vigorously, and carried on a work of reformation, in which he destroyed idols and idolatry. Now it does not appear whether Zephaniah prophesied in the beginning of his reign; if so, we may suppose his prophesying had a great and good influence on that reformation. When he, as God's messenger, reproved the idolatries of Jerusalem, Josiah, as God's vice-gerent, removed them; and reformation is likely to go on and prosper when both magistrates and ministers do their part towards it. If it were towards the latter end of his reign that he prophesied, we sadly see how a corrupt people relapse into their former distempers. The idolatries Josiah had abolished, it should seem, returned in his own time, when the heat of the reformation began a little to abate and wear off. What good can the best reformers do with a people that hate to be reformed, as if they longed to be ruined?

II. The summary, or contents, of this book. The general proposition contained in it is, That utter destruction is coming apace upon Judah and Jerusalem for sin. Without preamble, or apology, he begins abruptly (v. 2): *By taking away I will make an end of all things from off the face of the land, Saith the Lord.* Ruin is coming, utter ruin, destruction from the Almighty. He has said it who can, and will, make good what he has said: “*I will utterly consume all things. I will gather all things*” (so some); “*I will recall all the blessings I have bestowed, because they have abused them and so forfeited them.*” The consumption determined shall take away,

1. The inferior creatures: *I will consume the beasts, the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea* (v. 3), as, in the deluge, *every living substance was destroyed that was upon the face of the ground,* ^{GEN 7:23} Genesis 7:23. The creatures were made for man's use, and therefore when he has perverted the use of them, and made them *subject to vanity*, God, to show the greatness of his displeasure against the sin of man, involves them in his punishment. The expressions are figurative, denoting universal desolation. Those that fly ever so high, as the fowls of heaven, and think themselves out of the reach of the enemies' hand — those that hide ever so

close, as the fishes of the sea, and think themselves out of the reach of the enemies' eye — shall yet become a prey to them, and be utterly consumed.

2. The children of men: “*I will consume man; I will cut off man from the land.* The land shall be dispeopled and left uninhabited; I will destroy, not only Israel, but *man*. The land shall enjoy her sabbaths. I will cut off, not only the wicked men, but all men; even the few among them that are good shall be involved in this common calamity. Though they shall not be cut off from the Lord, yet they shall be *cut off from the land.*” It is with Judah and Jerusalem that God has this quarrel, both city and country, and upon them he will *stretch out his hand*, the hand of his power, the hand of his wrath; and *who knows the power of his anger?* v. 4. Those that will not humble themselves under God's mighty hand shall be humbled and brought down by it. Note, Even Judah, where God is known, and Jerusalem, where his dwelling-place is, if they revolt from him and rebel against him, shall have his hand stretched out against them.

3. All wicked people, and all those things that are the matter of their wickedness (v. 3): “*I will consume the stumbling-blocks with the wicked, the idols with the idolaters, the offences with the offenders.*” Josiah had taken away the stumbling-blocks, and, as far as he could, had purged the land of the monuments of idolatry, hoping that there would be no more idolatry; but *the wicked will do wickedly*, the dog will return to his vomit, and therefore, since the sin will not otherwise be cured, the sinners must themselves be consumed, even the *wicked with the stumbling-blocks* of their iniquity, ^{244B}Ezekiel 14:3. Since it was not done by the sword of justice, it shall be done by the sword of war. See who the sinners are that shall be consumed.

(1.) The professed idolaters, who avowed idolatry, and were wedded to it. The *remnant of Baal* shall be *cut off*, the images of Baal, and the worshippers of those images. Josiah cut off a great deal of Baal; but that which was so close as to escape the eye, or so bold as to escape the hand, of his justice, God will cut off, even all the remains of it. The Chaldeans would spare none of the images of Baal, or the worshippers of those images. The *Chemarim* shall be *cut off*; we read of them in the history of Josiah's reformation. ^{221B}2 Kings 23:5, *He put down the idolatrous priests:* the word is the *Chemarim*. The word signifies *black men*, some think because they wore black clothes, affecting to appear grave, others because their faces were black with attending the altars, or the fires in which they

burnt their children to Moloch. They seem to have been immediate attendants upon the service of Baal. They shall be *cut off with the priests*, the regulars with the seculars. The very name of them shall be cut off; the order shall be quite abolished, so as to be forgotten, or remembered with detestation. And, among other idolaters, the *worshippers of the host of heaven upon the house-tops* shall be cut off (v. 5), who justified themselves in their idolatry with those that did not worship images, the work of their own hands, but offered their sacrifices and burnt their incense to the sun, moon, and stars, immediately upon the tops of their houses. But God will let them know that he is a jealous God, and will not endure any rival; and, though some have thought that the most specious and plausible idolatry, yet it will appear as great an offence to God to give divine honours to a star as to give them to a stone or a stock. Even the worshippers of the host of heaven shall be consumed as well as the worshippers of the beasts of the earth or the fiends of hell. The sin of the adulteress is not the less sinful for the gaiety of the adulterer.

(2.) Those also shall be consumed that think to compound the matter between God and idols, and keep an even hand between them, that halt between God and Baal, and worship between Jehovah and Moloch, and *swear by both*; or, as it might better be read, *swear to the Lord and to Malcham*. They bind themselves by oath and covenant to the service both of God and idols. They have a good opinion of the worship of the God of Israel; it is the religion of their country, and has been long so, and therefore they will by no means quit it; but they think it will be very much improved and beautified if they join with it the worship of Moloch, for that also is much used in other countries, and travellers admire it; there is a great deal of good fancy and strong flame in it. They cannot keep always to the worship of a God whom they have no visible representation of, and therefore they must have an image; and what better than the image of *Moloch — a king*? They think they shall effectually atone for their sin if they *swear to Moloch*, and, pursuant to that oath, burn their children in sacrifice to that idol; and yet, if they do amiss in that, they hope to atone for it in worshipping the God of Israel too. Note, Those that think to divide their affections and adorations between God and idols will not only come short of acceptance with God, but will have their doom with the worst of idolaters; for what communion can there be between light and darkness, Christ and Belial, God and mammon? She whose own the child is not pleads for the dividing of it, for, if Satan have half, he will have all;

but the true mother says, *Divide it not*, for, if God have but half, he will have none. Such waters will not be long sweet, if they come from a fountain that sends forth bitter water too; what have those to do to swear by the Lord that swear by Malcham?

(3.) Those also shall be consumed that have apostatized from God, together with those that never gave up their names to him, v. 6. I will cut off,

[1.] Those *that are turned back from the Lord*, that were well taught, and began well, that had given up their names to him, and set out at first in the worship of him, but have flown off, and turned aside, and fallen in with idolaters, and deserted those good ways of God which they were brought up in, and despised them. Those God will be sure to reckon with who are renegadoes from his service, who began in the Spirit and ended in the flesh; they shall be treated as deserters, to whom no mercy is shown.

[2.] Those that *have not sought the Lord*, nor ever *enquired for him*, never made any profession of religion, and think to excuse themselves with that, shall find that this will not excuse them; nay, this is the thing laid to their charge; they are atheistical careless people, that *live without God in the world*; and those that do so are certainly unworthy to live upon God in the world.

ZEPHANIAH 1:7-13

JUDGMENT PREDICTED

Notice is here given to Judah and Jerusalem that God is coming forth against them, and will be with them shortly; his *presence*, as a just avenger, *his day*, the day of his judgment and his wrath, are not far off, v. 7. Those that improve not the presence of God with them as a Father, but sin away that presence, may expect his presence with them as a Judge, to call them to an account for the contempt put upon his grace. The *day of the Lord* will come. Men have their day now, when they take a liberty to do what they please; but *God's day is at hand*; it is here called his *sacrifice*, a sacrifice of his preparing, for the punishing of presumptuous sinners is a sacrifice to the justice of God, some reparation to his injured honour. Those that brought their offerings to other gods were themselves justly

made victims to the true God. On a day of sacrifice great slaughter was made; so shall there be in Jerusalem; men shall be killed up as fast as lambs for the altar, with as little regret, with as much pleasure: *The slain of the Lord shall be many*. On a day of sacrifice great feasts were made upon the sacrifices; so the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem shall be feasted upon by their enemies the Chaldeans; these are the guests God has prepared and invited to come and glut themselves — their revenge with slaughter and their covetousness with plunder. Now observe,

I. Who those are that are marked to be sacrificed, that shall be visited and punished in this day of reckoning, and what it is they shall be called to an account for.

1. The royal family, because of the dignity of their place, shall be first reckoned with for their pride, and vanity, and affectation (v. 8): *I will punish the princes, and the king's children*, who think themselves accountable to God, and that, high as they are, he is above them. They shall be punished, and all such as, like them, are clothed *with strange apparel*, such as, in contempt of their own country (where, probably, it was the custom to go in a very plain dress, as became the seed of Jacob that *plain man*), affected to appear in the fashion of other nations and introduced their modes in apparel, studying to resemble those from whom God had appointed them, even in their clothes, industriously to distinguish themselves. *The princes and the king's children* scorned to wear any home-made stuffs, though God had provided them *fine linen and silks* (²³⁰⁰Ezekiel 16:10), but they must send abroad to strange countries for their clothes, which would not please unless they were far-fetched and dear-bought; and even those of inferior rank affected to imitate the princes and the king's children. Pride in apparel is displeasing to God, and a symptom of the degeneracy of a people.

2. The noblemen, and their stewards and servants, come next to be reckoned with (v. 9): *In the same day will I punish those that leap on the threshold*, a phrase, no doubt, well understood then, and which probably signified the invading of their neighbour's rights. Entering their houses by force and violence, and seizing their possessions, they *leap on the threshold*, as much as to say that the house is their own and they will keep their hold of it; and, accordingly, they make all in it their own that they can lay their hands on, and so *fill their masters' houses* with goods gotten *by violence and deceit* and with all the guilt thereby contracted. Nor shall

it suffice them to say that the ill-gotten gains were not for themselves but for their masters, and that what they did was by their order; for the obligations we lie under to keep God's commandments are prior and superior to the obligations we lie under to serve the interests of any master on earth.

3. The trading people, and the rich merchants, are next called to account. Iniquity is found in their end of the town, among *the inhabitants of Maktesh*, a low part of Jerusalem, deep like a mortar (for so the word signifies); the *goldsmiths* lived there (~~NEB~~ Nehemiah 3:32) and the merchants; and they are now *cut down* (they are broken, and have shut up their shops, and become bankrupts); nay, *All those that bear silver are cut off*, in the first place, by the invaders, for the sake of the silver they carry, which is so far from being a protection to them that it will expose and betray them. The conquerors aimed at the wealthy men, and carried them off first, while *the poor of the land escaped*. Or it may be meant of a general decay of trade, which was a preface and introduction to the general destruction of the land. It is the token of a declining state when great dealers are cut down, and great bankers are cut off and become bankrupts, who cannot fall alone, but with themselves ruin many.

4. All the secure and careless people, the sons of pleasure, that live a loose idle life, are next reckoned with (v. 12); they come from all parts of the country, to take up their quarters in the head-quarters of the kingdom, where they take private lodgings, and indulge themselves in ease and luxury; but God will find them out, and punish them: *At that time I will search Jerusalem with candles*, to discover them, that they may be brought out to condign punishment. This intimates that they conceal themselves, as being either ashamed of the sin or afraid of the punishment of it; when the judgments of God are abroad they hope to escape by absconding and getting out of the way, but God will *search Jerusalem*, as search is made for a malefactor in disguise, that is harboured by his accomplices. God's hand will *find out all his enemies*, wherever they lie hid, and will punish not only the secret idolaters, but the secret epicures and profane; and those are the persons that are here described, and marks are given by which they will be discovered when strict search is made for them.

(1.) Their dispositions are sensual: They *are settled on their lees*, intoxicated with their pleasures, strengthening themselves in their wealth and wickedness; they are secure and easy, and, because they have had no

changes, they fear none, as Moab, ^{<2481>}Jeremiah 48:11. They *have not been emptied from vessel to vessel. They fill themselves with wine and strong drink*, and banish all thought, saying, *To-morrow shall be as this day*, ^{<2580>}Isaiah 56:12. Their being *settled on their lees* signifies the same with being *enclosed in their own fat*, ^{<3970>}Psalms 17:10.

(2.) Their notions are atheistical. They could not live such loose lives but that they say *in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil; that is, He will do nothing*. They deny his providential government of the world: “What good and evil there is in the world comes by the wheel of fortune, and not by the disposal of a wise and supreme director.” They deny his moral government, and his dispensing rewards and punishments: “*The Lord will not do good to those that serve him, nor do evil to those that rebel against him; and therefore there is nothing got by religion, nor lost by sin.*” This was the effect of their sensuality; if they were not drowned in sense, they could not be thus senseless, nor could they be so stupid if they had not stupefied themselves with the love of pleasure. It was also the cause of their sensuality; men would not make a god of their belly if they had not at first become so vain, so vile, in their imaginations, as to think the God that made them *altogether such a one as themselves*. But God will *punish them; their end is destruction*, ^{<3089>}Philippians 3:19.

II. What the destruction will be with which God will punish these sinners, and what course he will take with them.

1. He will silence them (v. 7): *Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord*. He will force them to hold their peace, will strike them dumb with horror and amazement. They shall be speechless. All the excuses of their sin, and exceptions against the sentence, will be overruled, and they shall not have a word to say for themselves.

2. He will *sacrifice* them, for it is *the day of the Lord's sacrifice* (v. 8); he will give them into the hands of their enemies, and glorify himself thereby.

3. He will fill both city and country with lamentation (v. 10): *In that day there shall be a noise of a cry from the fish-gate*, so called because near either to the fish-ponds or to the fish-market. It belonged to the city of David (^{<4534>}2 Chronicles 33:14; ^{<4088>}Nehemiah 3:3); perhaps the same with that which is called the *first gate* (^{<3840>}Zechariah 14:10), and, if so, it will explain what follows here, *And a howling from the second*, that is, the second gate, which was next to that *fish-gate*. The alarm shall go round the

walls of Jerusalem from gate to gate; and there shall be *a great crashing from the hills*, a mighty noise from the mountains round about Jerusalem, from the acclamations of the victorious invaders, or from the lamentations of the timorous invaded, or from both. The inhabitants of the city, even of the closest safest part of the city, shall *howl* (v. 11), so clamorous shall the grief be.

4. They shall be stripped of all they have; it shall be a prey to the enemy (v. 13): *Their household goods, and shop-goods, shall become a booty, and a rich booty they shall be; their houses shall be levelled with the ground and be a desolation;* those of them that have *built* new houses *shall not inherit them*, but the invaders shall get and keep possession of them. And the *vineyards* they have planted they shall not *drink the wine of*, but, instead of having it for the relief of their friends that faint among them, they shall part with it for the animating of their foes that fight against them, ^{<4580>}Deuteronomy 28:30.

^{<3114>}ZEPHANIAH 1:14-18

JUDGMENT PREDICTED

Nothing could be expressed with more spirit and life, nor in words more proper to startle and awaken a secure and careless people, than the warning here given to Judah and Jerusalem of the approaching destruction by the Chaldeans. That is enough to make the sinners in Zion tremble — that it is *the day of the Lord*, the day in which he will manifest himself by taking vengeance on them. It is *the great day of the Lord*, a specimen of the day of judgment, a kind of doom's-day, as the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is represented to be in our Saviour's prediction concerning it, ^{<4627>}Matthew 24:27.

I. This *day of the Lord* is here spoken of as very near. The vision is not *for a great while to come*, as those imagine who *put the evil day far from them*. Those deceive themselves who look upon it as a thing at a distance, for *it is near — it is near — it hastens greatly*. The prophet gives the alarm like one that is in earnest, like one that awakens a family with the cry of *Fire! fire!* when it is at the next door that the danger is: *“It is near! it is near!”* and therefore it is high time to bestir yourselves, and do what you

can for your own safety before it be too late.” It is madness for those to slumber whose *damnation slumbers not*, and to linger when it hastens.

II. It is spoken of as a very dreadful day. The very *voice* of this *day of the Lord*, the noise of it, when it is coming, shall be so terrible as to make *the mighty men cry there bitterly*, cry for fear as children do. *It shall be a vexation to hear the report* of it. In the last great day of the Lord the mighty men shall cry bitterly to rocks and mountains to shelter them; but in vain. Observe how emphatically the prophet speaks of this day approaching (v. 15): It is *a day of wrath*, God's wrath, wrath in perfection, wrath to the utmost. It will be a day of *trouble and distress* to the sinners; they shall be in pain, and shall see no ways of easing or helping themselves. The miseries of the damned are summed up (perhaps with reference to this) in the *indignation and wrath of God*, which are the cause, and the *tribulation and anguish* of the sinner's *soul*, which are the effect, ⁴¹²⁸Romans 2:8, 9. It will be a day of *trouble and distress* to the inhabitants, and a day of *wasteness and desolation* to the whole land; that fruitful land shall be turned into a wilderness. It shall be *a day of darkness and gloominess*; every thing shall look dismal, and there shall not be the least gleam of comfort, or glimpse of hope; look round, and it is all black. It is *a day of clouds and thick darkness*; there is not only nothing encouraging, but every thing threatening; the thick clouds are big with storms and tempests.

III. It is spoken of as a destroying day, v. 16, 17. It shall be destroying,

1. To places, even the strongest and best fortified: *A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities*, to break into them, and against the *high towers*, to bring them down; for what forts, what fences, can hold out against the wrath of God?

2. To persons (v. 17): *“I will bring distress upon men*, the strongest and stoutest of men; their hearts and hands shall fail them; they shall *walk like blind men*, wandering endlessly, *because they have sinned against the Lord.*” Note, Those that walk as bad men will justly be left to walk as blind men, always in the dark, in doubt and danger, without any guide or comfort, and falling at length into the ditch. Because they have *sinned against the Lord* he will deliver them into the hands of cruel enemies, that shall *pour out their blood as dust*, so profusely, and with as little regret, and *their flesh* shall be thrown *as dung* upon the dunghill.

IV. The destruction of that day will be unavoidable and universal, v. 18.

1. There shall be no escaping it by ransom: *Neither their silver nor their gold*, which they have hoarded up so covetously against the evil day, or which they have spent so prodigally to make friends for such a time, *shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath*. Another prophet borrowed these words from this, with reference to the same event, ^{<3179>}Ezekiel 7:19. Note, Riches profit not in the day of wrath, ^{<3119>}Proverbs 11:4. Nay, riches expose to the wrath of men (^{<3183>}Ecclesiastes 5:13.), and riches abused to the wrath of God.

2. There shall be no escaping it by flight or concealment; for the *whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy*, and where then can a hiding-place be found? See what the fire of God's jealousy is, and what the force of it; it will devour whole lands; how then can particular persons stand before it? He shall make riddance, *a speedy riddance, of all those that dwell in the land*, as the husbandman, when he rids his ground, cuts up all the briars and thorns for the fire. Note, Sometimes the judgments of God make riddance, even utter riddance, with sinful nations, a speedy riddance; their destruction is effected, is completed, in a little time. Let not sinners be laid asleep by the patience of God, for when the measure of their iniquity is full his justice will both overtake and overcome, will make quick work and thorough work.