

Zephaniah 1:7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/zeph/zeph-1/zephaniah-17/>

Zephaniah admonishes the people of Judah to be silent before the LORD because the day of His judgment is imminent.

The prophet Zephaniah pronounced the LORD's decision to judge the people of Judah for their wickedness (vv. 4-6). He communicated that the Suzerain God was angry at Judah, who had broken its vow under their covenant agreement with Him. Recognizing the certainty and severity of the judgment, he issued a wise counsel to his listeners: *Be silent before the Lord God!* (vs 7).

To *be silent* in the presence of *God* means to show reverence to Him, to stand in awe of Him. It is preparation to listen and hear. This act describes the appropriate response of someone who has recognized the LORD's power and awesomeness (Habakkuk 2:20; Zechariah 2:13). The prophet placed the word *Be silent* at the beginning of the sentence to emphasize the importance of the advice, which he reinforced by using two words for God: *Lord* and *GOD*.

The commandment Jesus pronounced as the greatest of all is preceded with the command "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Then follows the greatest command:

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."
(Deuteronomy 6:5)

This statement by Zephaniah to *Be silent before the Lord God* is similar, in that it alerts Israel to the urgent importance to hear and heed what follows.

The phrase *Lord GOD* is a combination of the Hebrew word "Adonai," which means "master" or "ruler," and the Hebrew word "Yahweh," the covenant name of God (Exodus 3:14-15). Zephaniah used the two terms together to show that *the LORD* was the master (ruler) and the covenant God of Judah, not Baal or Milcom (vv. 2-6). As such, the people of Judah needed to submit to God alone. This is the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-39).

Zephaniah asked the people of Judah to *be silent* before their Suzerain God because *the day of the LORD is near* (vs 7). The phrase *day of the LORD* refers to a time of divine intervention and judgment (Joel 2:1; Amos 5:18; Zechariah 14:1; Acts 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:2). It is a time when the LORD moves in a mighty way, a way that substantially alters the status quo. In a sense, every day is the Day of the Lord, because all things exist because He sustains all things (Colossians 1:17). The *day of the LORD* spoken of in Zephaniah will be a day of judgement, when God changes the fundamental political structure of Israel. It refers to God's imminent judgment on the people of Judah.

In the balance of Zephaniah 1:8-18, the prophet describes the judgment God will pour out upon Judah, as well as the entire earth. With the benefit of history, we see that these verses describe the invasion, captivity, and exile of Judah by Babylon. Verse 7 describes the imminent *day of the LORD* as a day of feast. God has invited His guests, and they will “come to the festival.”

Zephaniah told his audience that the LORD had *prepared a sacrifice and had consecrated His guests* (vs 7). The term *sacrifice* (“zevah” in Hebrew) is a specific ritual, namely, animal sacrifice (especially sheep or goat). During this ritual, the worshiper would bring the animal to the sanctuary, lay his hands on it, and slaughter it at the opening of the “tent of meeting” (Leviticus 9:23-24). Then, the priest would toss the blood, burn the animal, and dispose of the remains (Leviticus 1).

In our context, however, the term *sacrifice* does not refer to an animal but is used ironically for the people of Judah. The *guests* were the Babylonians, the enemies of Judah (Habakkuk 1 and 2). Judah is about to get slaughtered by Babylon. As God told Habakkuk “For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans” to discipline Judah for its immorality and injustice (Habakkuk 1:6).

In the Bible, *guests* were to witness and celebrate an event. For instance, Haman and King Xerxes spring to mind as those for whom Esther planned her banquet (Esther 7:1-6). Similarly, the psalmist David celebrated the banquet that the LORD had prepared for him (Psalm 23:5).

Here in Zephaniah, the *LORD consecrated His guests for a sacrifice*. That is, He had set apart the adversaries of Judah (namely, the Babylonians) as His tool to carry out His judgment upon His covenant people, Judah. Such a celebration would not entail rejoicing for the people of Judah because the enemy would slaughter them like animals.

This would be the unfortunate but clearly spelled out corrective provisions of Israel and Judah’s covenant with God if they broke their covenant vow to follow His commands (Exodus 19:8):

“The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.”
(Deuteronomy 28:49-50)

This is a clear covenant in the contract between the Suzerain (Ruler) God and His people. The Jewish people had ample notice from God’s prophets. Fortunately for Judah, during Zephaniah’s ministry, the people did repent, and God stayed His hand of judgment as a result (2 Chronicles 34:33). God delayed the judgement during that time, then enforced His judgment when Josiah’s sons led Judah to resume the wicked ways of their grandfather Manasseh.

Biblical Text

**⁷ Be silent before the Lord GOD!
For the day of the LORD is near,
For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,
He has consecrated His guests.**