

## The Flood Revisited

Let us read Psalm 73 as an introduction to our study. There is a word contained in verse 19 that is pertinent to our study this morning.

The prophecy of Zephaniah starts in verse 2 and continues until the end of the book. Of the 53 verses of Zephaniah, 52 are prophetic. These prophecies have not happened yet.

**Zephaniah 1:2 “I will completely remove all things From the face of the earth,” declares the Lord.**

**I will completely remove.** This verse, the beginning of the prophecy, starts in a very forceful proclamation. The English translation does little to communicate this forcefulness.

To begin with, this phrase contains two words, both verb forms. The first form is something called an infinitive absolute. It can be used by itself, but is most often used in conjunction with another form of the same root verb. A familiar example of this is found in Genesis:

**Genesis 2:16 The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;**

**Genesis 2:17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”**

## The Flood Revisited Zephaniah 1:2-3

**You will surely die.** This is an infinitive absolute of “die” plus another form of the word for die. The Young’s Literal Translation says: “dying thou dost die.” Herman has translated this as “dying you shall die.” There are two words. This form of the verb provides a great deal of emphasis. Many translations try to indicate this emphasis using words like surely or indeed.

**But**, following the Masoretic text, there is a peculiar and very rare construction that uses the root of one verb for the infinitive absolute and a second verb of a different root.

The first verb is translated as gather (for removal) and the second verb as to sweep away.<sup>1</sup>

The second verb “expresses the cessation of the existence of something” like houses or people. “In the causative stem, it expresses the action of bringing something to an end in some fashion, resulting in meanings such as “snatch away,” or “destroy.””<sup>2</sup> Interesting that the TDOT writer uses the term “snatch away.” That is terminology similar to the Rapture. Except, in the Rapture, Christians, believers, are snatched from the earth to escape the terrible sufferings of the Tribulation. Here, in this case, unbelievers will be snatched from the earth in fire to escape the wonderful blessings of the Kingdom. One “snatch away” will happen before the Tribulation starts, gathering up all believers on earth ending the Church Age, while the second “snatch away” will gather all the unbelievers from the earth at the end of the Tribulation. Different translations give the scope of the meaning of this verb as used in Psalm 73:19: “They have been ended” (YLT), “How suddenly are they destroyed” (NIV), “How desolate they become in a mere moment” (NET).

---

<sup>1</sup> Robertson, O. Palmer, The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Grand Rapids, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, pp 257-258 (footnote)

<sup>2</sup> Botterweck, G. and others, Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament Volume X, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, p189

## The Flood Revisited Zephaniah 1:2-3

So these two words, just two words, are a very forceful way to open this prophecy of judgment on the whole world. The verb form is emphatic; the unusual combination of verb roots and the meanings of the words themselves all point to an impending judgment that the reader must listen to. It is as if you are sitting in your office behind your desk minding your own business and then the prophet runs in, jumps on your desk, jumping up and down and screaming at the top of his voice, “Something very bad is going to happen!” You have to listen to this guy. He seems so animated that you are in fear for your life. You need to listen to find out what is going to happen and how to get out of this. Not only that, but what follows indicates that this judgment will be similar to if not greater than Noah’s flood.

### **Zephaniah 1:2 ...all things From the face of the earth,” declares the Lord.**

**All things.** Literally, “all.” In this context, you could translate as “everything.” Have you seen pictures of Hiroshima after the atom bomb exploded? This will be even worse. Nothing will be left. Everything will be swept away.

**From the face of the earth.** Literally, from the “faces” of the earth.

**Face.** Literally, this is faces, plural. This is the usual Hebrew word used to indicate the “surface” of something. In this case, the surface of the earth. A translation of “face” is fine. But so is “surface.”

As an aside, this word can also mean face to face with someone, like facing God or facing Pharaoh. But here in Zephaniah, it means surface.

**Earth.** There are two important words used for “earth.” One that is used extensively in Genesis chapter 1 and one that is used in the curse in Genesis chapter 3.

## The Flood Revisited Zephaniah 1:2-3

There is the earth that God created, “ha aretz” like the name of the newspaper. There is another word that has “adam” as the root, “ha adamah.” This contrasts Adam with the “ground” (ha adamah) that he will till in Genesis 3:17 which God cursed.

The word used here in Zephaniah is ha adamah, the one associated with the curse in Genesis 3.

So this is a play on words. As in the fall and subsequent judgment, the ground (adamah) will be cursed because of Adam. And here we have all on the face of the ground will be destroyed. Cursed, yet again! Destroyed! But, it will be restored in the Millennium and with great blessing. But we have to wait until Zephaniah chapter 3 for that to happen.

Perhaps it is convenient to take a detour to explain the importance of Genesis chapters 1-11. Others have said this and I repeat it here, without these chapters in Genesis, the Bible would not be comprehensible. That sounds a little strong. But, consider that the Gospel of John could not get started with the Word that created everything. No creation. Or what about Paul’s “first Adam.” Or how would we know about the fall and the need for redemption? Or how did the Angelic Conflict get started. It also points to God as the self-existing One who needs no one else. He created the universe out of nothing! The book of Genesis, the “book of beginnings” is just that, the explanation of the beginnings. And here in the book of Zephaniah, there are clear references to creation and especially the flood. There is an implied contrast with removal of everything from the face of the earth between Genesis 7 and Zephaniah 1:2-4.

**Declares the Lord.** Typically, the phrase “Word of the Lord” is followed by “saying” when it gives a prophet a message.

The Flood Revisited  
Zephaniah 1:2-3

**Isaiah 38:4 Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying,**

**Jeremiah 1:4 Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,**

**Ezekiel 6:1 And the word of the Lord came to me saying,**

**Jonah 1:1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying,**

**Jonah 3:1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, [it took two times for Jonah to get with the program]**

**Haggai 1:3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying,**

I could go on and on. The word of the Lord came to the prophet saying. Certainly, there are different uses and constructions using the word of the Lord. But there is a “pat” phrase in this kind of context.

But here in Zephaniah, The word of the Lord came to Zephaniah... It breaks the pattern. It is perhaps unique (I have not looked at all the uses of word of the Lord in the Hebrew). And here in the second verse there is a declaration which is a different word than “saying.”

Not only is the word different, it is a noun and not a verb! It is more like “proclamation of the Lord.” Here is the Young’s Literal Translation (YLT):

The Flood Revisited  
Zephaniah 1:2-3

**Zephaniah 1:2 I utterly consume all from off the face of the ground, An affirmation of Jehovah.**

God isn't just "saying," He is making a proclamation. This is going to happen because God says it will. Without equivocation.

This phrase, affirmation/declaration/pronouncement/proclamation of Yahweh is frequently used in the prophetic literature.<sup>3</sup> This phrase "often appears abruptly and even intrusively, as if it were a seal suddenly stamped down to validate the divine authenticity of what is being said."<sup>4</sup> And here in Zephaniah it is used six times (1:2,3, 10; 2:9; 3:8, 20) setting apart the major themes of Zephaniah: judgment and mercy.<sup>5</sup> One note here: Zephaniah 3:20 uses "amar" instead of noem. See below for additional details.

For some of us "older" folks, we can remember getting a whippin' from our parents. Each parent might have a different phrase he or she used to announce the immanence of a whipping. Do you remember that feeling of impending doom. That is Zephaniah 1:2. And it only gets more detail as we continue to read in chapter 1.

Do you remember the plaque that adorned the wall of the warden in the Shawshank Redemption? "His Judgment commeth and that right soon." Indeed, Zephaniah says it will happen.

**Zephaniah 1:2 (Revised Translation)  
"Gathering/Sweeping I will snatch away all things from the surface/face of the earth,"  
Proclamation of the Lord.**

<sup>3</sup> Sweeney, Marvin A., Zephaniah: A Commentary, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003, page 62

<sup>4</sup> Motyer, J. A., "Zephaniah," in The Minor Prophets, 3 vols, ed. T. E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 3:

<sup>5</sup> Bailey, Waylon, "Zephaniah," in The New American Commentary, Vol 20 (Nashville:B&H Publishing Group)1998, page 412.

**The Flood Revisited**  
**Zephaniah 1:2-3**

Now that the proclamation is made, here is the content.

**Zephaniah 1:3 “I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea, And the ruins along with the wicked; And I will cut off man from the face of the earth,” declares the Lord.**

**I will remove.** This is from the same root as one of the verbs in verse 1: I will remove. Remember, this has the connotation of ending something, snatching away or destroying. It is used twice in this verse. Repetition. It is like the music to the movie Jaws. These are not just words on a piece of paper. These judgments will happen. And these are the second and third of five uses of this word in the book of Zephaniah. So far, they are associated with judgment.

**Man.** Here the word *adam* is used for man. This contrasts with the word used in both verse 1 and 2 for “earth,” *adamah*.

**Beast, birds, fish.** Many commentators want to compare this with creation. It is true that there are similarities with creation in that this is the destruction of creation. They or some of the commentators want to make this the end of the earth. But it is not. It is judgment and then there will be a “rebirth” into the Millennial Kingdom.

At this point, there is a need to take a side trip to Genesis 6-7.

Take a look at the verbiage of the two passages side by side:

**The Flood Revisited**  
**Zephaniah 1:2-3**

Genesis 7:4, 21-23	Zephaniah 1:2-3
<p>7:4 For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and <u>I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made.</u></p> <p>7:21 All flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; 7:22 of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died. 7:23 Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark.</p>	<p>1:2 "<u>I will completely remove all things From the face of the earth,</u>" declares the Lord.</p> <p>1:3 "I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea, And the ruins along with the wicked; And I will cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the Lord.</p>

**Genesis 7:4 For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made."**

**Seven more days.** Interesting that there yet remain seven years of the Jewish dispensation left. At the end of that time, God will "baptize" the world in fire destroying all.

**Blot out.** This word is different from the ones used in Zephaniah for total destruction. It needs to align with a wiping out by means of a flood of water. In Zephaniah, fire will "sweep" across the surface of the earth.

As a side note, look at 2 Kings 21:13 for a good illustration of this verb, "blot."



The Flood Revisited  
Zephaniah 1:2-3

**2 Kings 21:11** “Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, having done wickedly more than all the Amorites did who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols;

**2 Kings 21:12** therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.

**2 Kings 21:13** I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.

That is what happened to the earth in the flood. Indications in Scripture is that the “Baptism of Fire” at the end of the Tribulation will be more severe than that. It is fire, after all.

Back to Genesis 7.

**Every.** Same word used in Zephaniah, “all.”

**Living thing.** Translation is OK but there is some background to this that may help. The word comes from a root that means to stand up. Although it is used for living things, the word does not mean “living.” It means “standing up.” In that sense, things that can move on their own, perhaps.

**That I have made.** Interesting again. This refers the reader back to creation. God made these things. Now because of the corruption of

**The Flood Revisited**  
**Zephaniah 1:2-3**

mankind, He is going to destroy them. In the case of the flood, some animals are saved in the ark. They are “hidden” from the flood.

Here is a brief comparison of the two events:

	<b>Flood of Water</b>	<b>Sweeping by Fire*</b>
<b>Scope</b>	Worldwide	Worldwide
<b>Saved</b>	Believers	Believers
<b>Animals</b>	Two of each kind saved Others destroyed	Some animals saved Others destroyed
<b>Destruction</b>	By Water	By Fire*
<b>Mankind destroyed</b>	Unbelievers	Unbelievers
<b>Prophecy</b>	Noah & ?Methuselah?	Many OT Prophets and NT Prophecies & Two Prophets of Rev 144,000 Saved Jews
<b>Believers</b>	"Hidden"/Protected in the Ark	"Hidden"/Protected

\*In the final Tribulation judgment

**Ruins.** Odd to have an inanimate object in the midst of living creatures. LXX leaves out “and the ruins along with the wicked” completely. It is a difficult word because it can mean ruins but it can apparently also mean “stumbling blocks” which can be used to refer to people.

2 Chronicles 28:23 uses the verb form of this word:

**2 Chronicles 28:22 Now in the time of his distress this same King Ahaz became yet more unfaithful to the Lord.**

**2 Chronicles 28:23 For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, “Because the gods of the kings of**

The Flood Revisited  
Zephaniah 1:2-3

**Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.” But they became the downfall of him and all Israel.**

Assuming “stumbling blocks” is the correct translation, then Jesus may have picked up this idea from Zephaniah in Matthew chapter 13.

**Matthew 13:40 So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.**

**Matthew 13:41 The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,**

**Matthew 13:42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

As one commentator suggests:

“Quite remarkable is the appearance of this striking combination of stumbling blocks with the wicked in the NT (Matt. 13:41). Jesus interprets to his disciples a parable of universal judgment, which suits precisely the context of Zephaniah’s prophecy. At the end of time God shall send his angels, who will “gather together [*syllego*; Cf. Zephaniah’s *āsōp*] everything that makes stumble and the doers of lawlessness.”

“By this apparent allusion to Zephaniah, Jesus transfers the coming cosmic judgment described by the prophet from the devastation associated with judgment on old covenant Israel to the devastations associated with his final return. Jesus thereby indicates that the ultimate

## The Flood Revisited Zephaniah 1:2-3

application of the prophetic threat of Zephaniah still is outstanding. The cosmic judgment that will reverse the creation is yet to come.”<sup>6</sup>

**Wicked.** This is not the word used so often in the book of Judges. This is the word that Abraham used concerning Sodom and Gomorah. He asked God if he would destroy the righteous with the wicked (our word). So this word has association with the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorah.

**From the face of the earth.** A repetition of wording from verse 2. From the surface of the earth (adamah) contrasting with man (adam).

**Declares the Lord.** This is a repetition of wording from verse 2. Again, this is not a verb but a noun similar to “Declaration or Proclamation of the Lord.” This will happen. And if that isn’t enough it is repeated. This is really going to happen.

Take note of the geometry included here.

**Man and beast.** On the one extreme there is “intelligent” man and on the other is a dumb beast. This could be considered a “merism.” Remember the definition of this word from Wikipedia. A merism “is a rhetorical device (or figure of speech) in which a combination of two contrasting parts of the whole refer to the whole. So here we have man and beast.

Birds of the sky and fish of the sea. Again another merism. Birds way up high in the sky and fish deep down in the sea. But there is a hidden geometry here. On earth there is man and beast, the horizontal dimension. Then there is the sky and the deep sea, the vertical dimension. Kind of a merism squared. Another way of emphasizing that EVERYTHING will be destroyed. That is unless it is hidden by God, Zephaniah’s name.

---

<sup>6</sup> Robertson, O. Palmer, The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Grand Rapids, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Comnay, 1990, pp 259-260

The Flood Revisited  
Zephaniah 1:2-3

**Zephaniah 1:3 (Revised Translation)“I will remove/snatch man and beast; I will remove/snatch the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea, And the stumbling blocks along with the wicked; And I will cut off man from the surface of the earth,” Proclamation of the Lord.**

As alluded to earlier, there is a pattern of repetition. There are five repetitions of the word for “proclamation” plus one “saying.” This gives us a “list” of events that will be carried out at the end of the Tribulation. Verses 2 and 3 are given above. The others are given below.

**Zephaniah 1:10 “On that day,” declares the Lord (Proclamation of Yawheh), “There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate, A wail from the Second Quarter, And a loud crash from the hills.**

On that day refers to the Day of the Lord which will not be explained here. That is for another lesson. Whereas the first two uses indicates the global nature of the destruction, this use gives us time (Day of the Lord) and place (place names in and around Jerusalem). And it gives sound as if you are there witnessing this.

**Zephaniah 2:9 “Therefore, as I live,” declares the Lord of hosts, The God of Israel, “Surely Moab will be like Sodom And the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah— A place possessed by nettles and salt pits, And a perpetual desolation. The remnant of My people will**

The Flood Revisited  
Zephaniah 1:2-3

**plunder them And the remainder of My nation will inherit them.”**

Now the proclamation is against Moab and Ammon. An irony of sorts. They are treated like Sodom and Gomorrah. What are Moab and Ammon? The sons of Lot, a nephew of Abraham and his daughters by incestuous relations. And how did that happen? They escaped the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. So in the end Lot and his daughters escaped Sodom and Gomorrah and their children return to the same type of destruction. Why? Unbelief.

**Zephaniah 3:8 “Therefore wait for Me,” declares the Lord, “For the day when I rise up as a witness. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, To assemble kingdoms, To pour out on them My indignation, All My burning anger; For all the earth will be devoured By the fire of My zeal.**

This proclamation is against the gentile nations. His command to the Jews is to “wait.” Patient faith.

**Zephaniah 3:20 “At that time I will bring you in, Even at the time when I gather you together; Indeed, I will give you renown and praise Among all the peoples of the earth, When I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” Says the Lord. (Here for the blessing, Zephaniah switches from “declaration/proclamation” to “says.”)**

## The Flood Revisited Zephaniah 1:2-3

Here is another proclamation except the text does not employ the word for “proclamation.” Instead it uses a different word, the same verb used when God spoke in creation. This is for blessings. The other proclamations are for cursing.

Summary of God “speaking/proclamations”:

1. Zephaniah 1:2 Total **world** annihilation on the surface of the earth
2. Zephaniah 1:3 Details of total **world** annihilation on the surface of the earth
3. Zephaniah 1:10 Annihilation of **unbelieving Jews** giving time (Day of Lord) and place (in and around Jerusalem).
4. Zephaniah 2:9 Annihilation of the **unbelieving relatives of the Jews**, Moab and Ammon.
5. Zephaniah 3:8 Annihilation of **unbelieving gentiles** with a command to wait on the Lord.
6. Zephaniah 3:20 Yahweh speaks, not a declaration of judgment but speaks as in creation, of **blessing for the believing Jews**.