

# A Word From Zephaniah for Our Times

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon warns of the dangers of compromise and idolatry in the church, and calls for a return to humility and a focus on Jesus.*

**Scripture:** Zephaniah 1:8

**Topics:** "Spiritual Decline", "Worldly Influences"

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## Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the dangers of being dragged down to worldly practices, whether through cultural influences, unequal yokes in relationships, or compromising leaders in the church. He emphasizes the importance of standing against corruption, pride, and love of money, especially among religious leaders, as seen in the Old Testament prophets' confrontations. Poonen warns against spiritual decline leading to luxury, indifference, and prayerlessness, urging believers to seek humility and avoid comparing themselves to others to prevent becoming like the corrupt religious systems of Babylon.

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## Transcript

In Zephaniah 1:4,5 The Lord said, "Not only the other nations, but I will crush Judah and Jerusalem too with My fist and destroy every last trace of their Baal worship, because they go up to the roof and bow down to the sun, moon and stars. They claim to follow the Lord, but worship Molech". The Canaanites had succeeded in dragging Israel down to their level. Israel went to Canaan to manifest the true God to them, but they dragged Israel down to their level.

If you stand on a table and try to pull a person who is standing on the ground to the table-top, while he tries to pull you down, it will be easier for him to pull you down. This was what happened to Judah. The Lord warned Judah not to have any dealings with the Canaanites; but they did not listen. What was the result? Judah could not make the Canaanites worship Jehovah. But the Canaanites pulled Judah down to their level - and Judah started worshipping Baal, the sun, the moon and the stars.

This is what happens when a Christian church tries to "Indianise" their worship. They end up very often with idolatrous non-Christian practices. I saw a book written by a "Christian" priest that had a picture on its cover of Jesus sitting under a seven-hooded snake - the snake was supposed to symbolise the seven fold Holy Spirit!! That is the result of "Indianisation". In other churches, it may be worldliness that is dragging Christians down.

The same thing happens when a believer marries an unbeliever. The unbeliever drags the believer down to his/her level. Asking for a dowry at the time of marriage is another heathen custom that most Christians practice. God hates the dowry system because it treats women as commodities to be sold. The prophets stood against such things and the religious leaders of Israel hated them for it. It is the same today. And so there is hardly a church in India today that takes a bold stand against dowry. Christians have been dragged down to the level of the world! They take the name of Jesus, but live like the rest of the world around them!

"On that day I will punish the leaders and all those following pagan customs and those who fill their homes with loot. (Zeph. 1:8,9). The leaders were the ones who followed the pagan customs and loved money and filled their houses with it. The Old Testament prophets always spoke against the leaders of God's people and their love of money - because they were the ones who were primarily at fault. And so, those leaders called the prophets "heretics" and persecuted them. If God sends a prophet to the church today, he too will speak against the pastors and the bishops and their compromises and their love of money. And the pastors will call such a prophet a "heretic", close their pulpits to him and persecute him. Every single prophet in the Old Testament was persecuted. Not one escaped. Stephen asked the Jewish leaders, "Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute!" (Acts 7:52). They could not name one. Why were all the prophets persecuted? Because they exposed the sins of the leaders.

When Jesus preached, do we see Him preaching against drunkards and adulteresses and murderers or even against the cheating tax collectors of His day? No. He never said a word against them. He said, "I came to seek and to save those sinners." But He lashed out mercilessly at the religious leaders who held their Bibles, preached in the meeting-halls, loved money, and lived hypocritical lives. So they killed Him. Do you follow this real Jesus and the true prophets or do you follow the false prophets and "another Jesus" who are friendly with worldly Christian leaders, and feast with them? Judgement is coming upon the leaders first.

The Lord said, "I will search with lanterns in Jerusalem's darkest corners to find and punish those who are content in their sins, indifferent to the Lord, thinking He will do nothing" (Zeph. 1:12). In the church today also there are leaders living in luxury, who have become rich through their preaching and are indifferent to the Lord's commands. They love their titles and positions as "Director", "Chief Pastor", "Bishop" etc. The Lord is going to expose all of them.

Whenever a church declines spiritually, it always moves towards a life of luxury, ease, comfort, indifference to people's needs and prayerlessness. Many young people started serving the Lord with zeal, sacrifice, prayer and serious study of God's Word. But 30 years later, they have cooled off, "choked by the deceitfulness of riches". If you are not faithful to fight against the desires of the flesh and to stand against the corruption in Christendom, you will become like the corrupt leaders around you. You will be a professional preacher dishing out sermons on Sunday mornings, accumulating more and more money, living in luxury and with no anointing upon you - even though you may have started out with great sincerity. This happened in the time of Zephaniah and it is happening today.

The Lord describes those who sin like "blind men searching for a path" (Zeph. 1:17). And when the leaders themselves are blind, all their followers can only expect to fall into a ditch.

Then Zephaniah says, "Beg the Lord to save you. All of you who are humble, seek for more humility" (Zeph. 2:3). What a word - "Seek for more humility". Zephaniah understood that God blesses the humble.

On one side was the pride of Babylon and on the other the humility of the remnant in Jerusalem.

We observe from the time of Cain and Abel, there have been two streams in humanity - Babylon and Jerusalem. Babylon is a corrupt, religious system. Jerusalem is the true church of God. This church is characterised not by miracles, signs and wonders, but by humility. They are never tired of seeking for more and more humility.

What then is the danger that faces those who belong to the remnant? It is the danger of comparing themselves with other churches and glorying in being superior. That is exactly how the devil wants you to think, because he knows that the moment you start thinking like that, God will become your enemy, and then you will also become like those whom you despise. You see how quickly the remnant can themselves become a part of Babylon. So pursue humility. Keep your face in the dust always. Never compare yourselves with the other people. Compare yourself only with Jesus. That is my advice to all who belong to the remnant of God's people today.

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