

Zephaniah 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

Analysis

I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea—This verse expands verse 2's universal judgment with specific categories, reversing Genesis creation order. God created in sequence: light, sky, land, vegetation, sun/moon/stars, sea creatures and birds (day 5), land animals and humanity (day 6). Zephaniah announces de-creation in reverse: humanity first, then animals, birds, and fish—undoing God's creative work due to human sin.

The fourfold repetition of **I will consume** (asoph, נסח) hammers home divine judgment's inevitability and totality. **Man and beast** (adam u-behemah, אָדָם וְבָהָמָה) echoes God's declaration before the Flood: "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast" (Genesis 6:7). Human sin corrupts all creation—animals suffer because of humanity's rebellion, anticipating Paul's teaching that creation groans under futility awaiting redemption (Romans 8:19-22).

The stumblingblocks with the wicked (ha-mikhsholot et ha-resha'im, הַמִּקְשְׁלוֹת וְהַרְשָׁעִים)—mikhshol means stumbling block, obstacle, or enticement to sin, often referring to idols (Ezekiel 14:3-4). God will destroy both the idols and the idolaters, the false gods and those who worship them. **I will cut off man from off the land** reverses God's original command to "fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28)—instead of

fruitful multiplication, judgment brings comprehensive removal. Yet even in this dark prophecy, hope remains: Zephaniah later promises God will preserve a humble remnant who trust His name (3:12-13).

Historical Context

This comprehensive judgment language reflects Ancient Near Eastern covenant curses. Deuteronomy 28:15-68 details covenant curses for disobedience, including agricultural devastation, military defeat, exile, and death. Leviticus 26:27-39 similarly threatens that persistent rebellion will result in wild beasts devouring children, cities becoming desolate, and the land enjoying its Sabbaths while they dwell in enemy lands. Zephaniah's prophecy applies these covenant curses to Josiah's generation, warning that despite external reforms, deep spiritual corruption remained.

Archaeological evidence from seventh-century BC Judah reveals widespread syncretism. Excavations at various sites show Asherah figurines, incense altars, and evidence of child sacrifice in the Hinnom Valley (later called Gehenna). The people practiced a hybrid religion—worshiping Yahweh alongside Baal, Asherah, astral deities, and Molech. This syncretism constituted the "stumblingblocks" (idols) Zephaniah condemned. Josiah's reforms attempted to purge these practices, but heart-level transformation remained shallow for many.

The Babylonian invasion fulfilled this prophecy literally. Nebuchadnezzar's armies devastated Judean cities, killed or exiled the population, and left the land desolate. Jeremiah 52:27-30 records specific numbers of exiles; 2 Kings 25 describes Jerusalem's burning and temple destruction. The land's desolation lasted seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11-12, fulfilled 586-516 BC), demonstrating that covenant unfaithfulness brings covenant curses—God keeps His word for judgment as surely as for blessing.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does creation's suffering due to human sin teach about the cosmic scope and seriousness of rebellion against God?
2. How does Zephaniah's reversal of Genesis creation order illustrate sin's ultimate trajectory—returning creation to chaos?
3. In what ways do modern "stumblingblocks" (idols) entangle believers and warrant God's disciplinary judgment?

Interlinear Text

אָזֶן	מִן	בְּאֵד	הַבְּהִתָּמָה	אָזֶן	עַזְבֵּן	בְּשָׁמָן
I will consume	man	and beast	I will consume	the fowls	of the heaven	
H5486	H120	H929	H5486	H5775	H8064	
וְדַגִּים	בְּיַם	וְתַּחַת	וְמַכְשֵׁל	אֶת	בְּרַשְׁעָם	וְלִדְגָּם
and the fishes	of the sea	and the stumblingblocks		H854	with the wicked	
H1709	H3220	H4384			H7563	
וְהַכְּבָתָה	מִן	אֶת	מֵעַל	פְּגִים	בְּאָדָם	נִאֵם
and I will cut off	H853	man	H5921	from off	the land	saith
H3772		H120		H6440	H127	H5002
						the LORD
						H3068

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 4:3 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.

Ezekiel 7:19 (References Lord): They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity.