

Zephaniah 1:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.

Analysis

Them that are turned back from the LORD (ha-nasogim me-acharey Yahweh, הַנִּסּוּגִים מֵאַחֲרַי יְהוָה)—The verb nasog (נָסוּג) means to turn back, withdraw, retreat, apostatize. This describes deliberate abandonment, not mere neglect. The phrase **from the LORD** (me-acharey Yahweh) literally means "from after the LORD"—they once followed but turned away, reversing direction. This is covenant apostasy, the willful rejection of prior commitment and relationship.

Apostasy differs from initial unbelief. These are people who knew Yahweh, experienced His covenant mercies, participated in temple worship, yet deliberately turned away. Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-29 warn of this same danger—those who "fall away" after tasting heavenly gifts or who "trample the Son of God underfoot" after knowing truth face severe judgment. The Old Testament prescribes death for apostates who entice others to idolatry (Deuteronomy 13:6-11), demonstrating covenant abandonment's gravity.

Those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him—This describes passive neglect rather than active apostasy. **Sought** (baqash, בָּקַשׁ) means to search for, seek diligently, pursue eagerly. **Enquired** (darash, דָּרַשׁ) means to investigate, consult, seek guidance from. These people never pursued relationship with God, never consulted His will, never sought His face in worship or prayer. They lived practical atheism—functioning as though God didn't exist, making decisions without reference to His revealed will. Both active apostasy and passive

neglect warrant judgment—sins of commission and sins of omission both violate covenant relationship with the living God.

Historical Context

This verse describes two categories prevalent in Josiah's Judah: those who abandoned former faith (apostates) and those raised in spiritual apathy (neglecters). After Manasseh's long idolatrous reign, some who had known true Yahweh worship during Hezekiah's godly rule (715-686 BC) turned to syncretism and paganism. These were the **turned back**—deliberate apostates who exchanged covenant faithfulness for idolatry's enticing promises of prosperity, fertility, and cultural acceptance.

The second group—**those that have not sought the LORD**—represents the generation raised during Manasseh and Amon's reigns. Growing up surrounded by normalized paganism, temple prostitution, child sacrifice, and astral worship, they never learned genuine covenant faith. Though ethnically Judean and nominally Yahweh worshipers, they had no personal relationship with God, no knowledge of His law, no practice of seeking His will. Josiah's reforms couldn't quickly reverse this generational spiritual ignorance.

Jeremiah, Zephaniah's contemporary, repeatedly condemns both groups. He laments that people "have forsaken me, and have not kept my law" (Jeremiah 16:11)—active apostasy. He also describes generation after generation that "walked in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward" (Jeremiah 7:24)—inherited spiritual apathy. Both patterns persist throughout church history: those who once professed faith but turned away (apostates) and those raised in religious culture who never personally pursued God (nominal believers). Both face identical judgment unless genuine repentance transforms hearts.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What cultural or personal factors tempt believers toward gradual withdrawal "from after the LORD" rather than maintaining pursuit of Him?
2. How does passive neglect (failing to seek God) differ from and yet share guilt with active apostasy (turning away from God)?
3. In what ways can religious upbringing or cultural Christianity substitute for genuine seeking and enquiring after God?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵת	הַנִּסּוֹגִים	מֵאַחֲרַי	יְהוָה	וְאֵשֶׁר	לֹא
H853	And them that are turned back	from	the LORD	H834	H3808
	H5472	H310	H3068		
בְּקִשׁוֹ	אֶת	יְהוָה	וְלֹא	דָּרְשָׁהּ:	
and those that have not sought	H853	the LORD	H3808	nor enquired	
H1245		H3068		H1875	

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 1:4 (References Lord): Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

Jeremiah 2:13 (Parallel theme): For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Jeremiah 15:6 (References Lord): Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting.

Jeremiah 2:17 (References Lord): Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way?

Isaiah 9:13 (References Lord): For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts.

Jeremiah 3:10 (References Lord): And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD.

Hosea 11:7 (Parallel theme): And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

Hebrews 2:3 (References Lord): How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

Psalms 10:4 (Parallel theme): The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

Psalms 125:5 (References Lord): As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.