

# Zephaniah 3:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant.

## Analysis

**I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate**—God recounts His past judgments as warning to Jerusalem. "Cut off" (hikrati, הִכְרַתִּי) means to destroy, exterminate, execute judgment. "Nations" (goyim, גוֹיִם) refers to surrounding peoples God had already judged: Egypt, Assyria, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, and others. "Towers" (pinnot, פְּנוֹת) means corners or battlements—fortified structures symbolizing military strength and security. Despite impressive defenses, these nations fell before divine judgment.

**I made their streets waste, that none passeth by**—the Hebrew hashamoti chutsotam mibli over (הִשְׁמֹתִי חוּצוֹתָם מִבְּלִי עוֹבֵר) depicts complete urban devastation. Streets once bustling with commerce and activity now lie desolate with no passerby. The phrase emphasizes total depopulation and economic collapse. Archaeological excavations of ancient Near Eastern cities destroyed during this period (late 7th-early 6th century BC) confirm such devastation: Assyrian capitals like Nineveh (destroyed 612 BC), Egyptian cities after Babylonian campaigns, Philistine strongholds.

**Their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant**—the repetition intensifies the completeness of judgment. "No man" (mibli ish, מִבְּלִי אִישׁ) followed by "none inhabitant" (me'en yoshev, מֵעַן יוֹשֵׁב) uses synonymous parallelism for emphasis. God's point is clear: these nations possessed

power, wealth, military might, and fortified cities, yet all fell before His judgment. Jerusalem, witnessing these destructions, should have learned fear and repentance. Instead, she presumed on covenant privilege, assuming immunity while behaving like the judged nations. If God judged nations lacking covenant revelation, how much more would He judge His own people who possessed His law but violated it?

## Historical Context

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The historical context includes multiple national judgments contemporary with or preceding Zephaniah's ministry. Egypt suffered devastating campaigns from Assyria (671, 663 BC) and later from Babylon (605 BC). Assyria, the dominant power for centuries, was collapsing: its capital Nineveh fell to Babylon and Medes in 612 BC—a catastrophic defeat Zephaniah's book addresses (2:13-15). Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Philistine cities faced repeated invasions. These weren't natural disasters but divine judgments using human armies as instruments.

Archaeological evidence confirms the devastation Zephaniah describes. Excavations at Nineveh reveal destruction layers from 612 BC: burned palaces, collapsed fortifications, mass graves. Egyptian monuments show Assyrian conquest and plunder. Philistine cities like Ekron show destruction layers from this period. Judah witnessed this international upheaval—empires rising and falling, mighty cities reduced to ruins, populations deported or slaughtered.

These judgments should have instructed Jerusalem: covenant relationship with Yahweh provided no automatic immunity from judgment. The same God who destroyed pagan nations for wickedness would judge His own people for covenant violation—more severely, because they possessed greater light (Luke 12:47-48). Historical judgments on surrounding nations functioned as prophetic warnings to Judah. Her failure to learn from others' destruction sealed her own fate. Babylon would treat Jerusalem like Nineveh, Thebes, or Philistine cities—no special privilege when covenant had been violated.

## Related Passages

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**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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1. What judgments has God executed in history that should instruct the contemporary church about His holy character and hatred of sin?
2. How might covenant privilege or religious heritage tempt believers or churches to presume immunity from divine discipline?
3. In what ways should observing God's judgments on others produce appropriate fear and repentance rather than self-righteous complacency?

## Interlinear Text

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הִכָּרְתִּי	גוֹיִם	בְּשָׁמוֹ	פְּנוֹתָם	הִחָרַבְתִּי
I have cut off	the nations	are desolate	their towers	waste
H3772	H1471	H8074	H6438	H2717
הוֹצֹתָם	מִבְּלִי	עוֹבֵר	נִצְדָּו	עָרֵיהֶם
I made their streets	H1097	that none passeth by	are destroyed	their cities
H2351		H5674	H6658	H5892
מִבְּלִי	אֵין יָשׁ	יֵמֵאֵין	יֹשֵׁב:	
H1097	so that there is no man	H369	that there is none inhabitant	
	H376		H3427	

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Corinthians 10:6** (Parallel theme): Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

**1 Corinthians 10:11** (Parallel theme): Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

**Zephaniah 2:5** (Parallel theme): Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant.

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