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The Judgment Of Judah

We're working in the OT, which hardly anyone wants to work with anymore, but which is a great tragedy because the NT presupposes you know the Old. People today think that they are NT Christians and therefore they don't need the OT, but if you are a student of the NT you discover that it quotes the OT over and over and over, and so clearly Jesus and the apostles built their understanding of NT events on the OT. And therefore if you don't know the OT then I have to really question whether you understand what you're reading in the NT.

The OT book we're working with is Zephaniah. And Zephaniah is just as much a part of the word of God as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Therefore Zephaniah is just as important as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We have to realize this because Christians have often, consciously or unconsciously, created a canon within the canon, and yet each and every book of the Bible is an essential part of the canon, each and every book is essential to a life of Godliness, each and every book is essential to seeing the plan of God correctly and each and every book is essential to seeing God correctly. So that's why we try to teach the whole counsel of God here. It may not all be written *to* us but it is all written *for* us. And there is always something more to learn about God. The primary thing you learn about God from Zephaniah is that God is holy. This is an aspect of God that is not understood very well at all today. I would venture to say it is the least well understood attribute of God. God is holy means that His character is the unchanging standard for what is right and wrong and He judges equally no matter who might be involved. And when we are weak on God's holiness, the practical outworkings of that are that sin is trivialized as ethics; you know, things like drug use, lying, cheating, homosexuality, etc...and while those are sins they are only the tip of the iceberg, sin is epistemological, it gets into how we know, the reasoning

processes that we are using. Sin is ontological, it gets into who we are by nature, we are rebels by nature and this is the dark side of sin that no one wants to talk about, this is stepping on people's toes. But the prophets didn't care what people's toes felt like, it was their job to step on people's toes and because man tends to trivialize sin they argued, for example, that rebellion against God's authority is as the sin of witchcraft. So just to rebel against a command of God is according to God's holiness as bad as sorcery. But the point we want to make is that we're real weak on God's holiness and it's books like Zephaniah that present God's holiness with such power and splendor that it exposes the utter vile nature of our sin and it's shocking to see our own hearts and realize how offensive we really are to Him.

So keep God's holiness in mind as we work through the text. Tonight what we want to do is start with a systematic overview of the theme of Zephaniah, which is the day of the Lord. Then we will come back and look at the theme from the standpoint of the Israelites in Zephaniah's day and finally what impact it should have had upon them and what impact it should have upon us.

First a systematic treatment, taking into account all of Scripture. The theme that is so central for us to understand in Zephaniah is first mentioned in 1:7, "Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the LORD is near." The day of the LORD or the day of YHWH is a major theme of Scripture and yet sadly most Christians never heard of it. It is mentioned over 80 times in the Old and New Testament ... (e.g. Isaiah 13:6, 9; 58:13; Lam 2:22; Ezek 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad 15; Mal 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Pet 3:10). 24 of those references are by Zephaniah. So almost a third of the uses are in this book. He refers to it as "the day of the Lord" (1:7, 14), "a day" (1:15, 16), "the day," (2:2; 3:8), "that day" (1:9, 10, 15; 3:11, 16), "the time" (3:20), "that time" (1:12; 3:19, 20), "the day of the LORD's sacrifice" (1:8), "the day of the LORD's wrath" (1:18) and "the day of the LORD's anger" (2:2, 3).

Being that we have come to verse 7 we want to define it so we know what we're talking about. We've been talking about it in general terms in prior weeks as a day that stands in contrast to the day of man. So you already know that history unfolds as a sequence of rather long periods of boredom where man seemingly is in control followed by rather short periods of stark

terror where the Lord is obviously in control. But we want to be more precise. The background of the term “the day of the Lord” seems to have arisen from the popular concept in the ancient Near East that a really great warrior king could consummate an entire military campaign in one single day. So the profane use is simply that you have a great king, he is a brilliant military strategist, he has a well-trained army and in a single day the king can defeat his enemy. That’s the basic idea. It came in Scripture to refer to YHWH as a great warrior King who could consummate an entire military campaign against His enemies in a single day and in some cases deliver His own. So it’s the theme of judgment/salvation.

And when we study the uses of the expression “day of the Lord” and it’s abbreviations throughout Scripture we find four different uses that fall in two categories. The first category is Past Days of the Lord, meaning Past from our perspective. Let’s turn to Amos 5:18. Amos was a rancher and this man was chosen by God to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel even though he was from the southern kingdom of Judah. And this man had a way of communicating, like most ranchers he was rougher than a cobb, but let me tell you something, it communicates. And these people needed to hear the word of God real rough, it was the only way God could get through to these people. So verse 18, “Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, For what purpose *will* the day of the LORD *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light; ¹⁹As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him, Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall And a snake bites him. ²⁰*Will* not the day of the LORD *be* darkness instead of light, Even gloom with no brightness in it?” Now he’s predicting the destruction of the capital of Israel, which was Samaria, that came in 721BC. The Assyrians were going to surround them and defeat them. And we know the Assyrians were inventors of evil, they invented some of the nastiest ways of killing people, some of the things they did will frighten the bejeebers out of you, which is why Jonah had a hard time going to preach the word of God to them, he didn’t want them to repent, he wanted God to judge them. But this prophecy of the day of the LORD here in verse 18 is of the judgment of Israel. Notice how he addresses certain Israelis who wanted the day of the LORD to come. If you didn’t know the Scriptures you’d wonder, why would Israeli’s want the day of the Lord to come? The answer is because Obadiah had taught that the day of the Lord would come upon Gentiles. So they concluded, wrongly, but they did conclude that Jews were excluded. Amos says no, there is another dimension to the

day of the Lord, Jews are also going to have a day of the LORD and it's going to be a disaster, there's no escaping it, you can run but you can't hide. So this is a Past Day of the Lord, Amos 5 was fulfilled in 721BC. Now we could show other Past Days of the Lord, but the point is simply to demonstrate that this is one category of day of the Lord passages. In those days the LORD judged in order to give a preview of future judgment. So these are important signposts in history where God says, don't forget, I am righteous and just, I do judge, I let evil develop for awhile because I'm patient, but finally I do judge because I am holy.

The second category is the Future Day of the Lord and this use has three phases. The first phase is judgment. This is the most common use of the day of the Lord in the Bible. To see it turn to 1 Thess 5. The reason we're jumping all the way to the NT is because we want to clear the air of Past Days of the Lord. There are a lot of uses of the Future Day of the Lord judgment in the OT. But I want to accelerate down through history in order to get past all those so we can show that this has not yet been fulfilled. You could argue that some of them in Isaiah and Zephaniah were fulfilled in the OT period, but by turning to Thessalonians you can't say that because what is described in 1 Thess 5 has never happened. Verse 1, "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren," that's a change in kingdoms, the subject is a major change in national supremacy, concerning them he says "you have no need of anything to be written to you." All Christians should know what's coming in world history; the Gentiles are going to be removed from world supremacy, Israel is going to take the supremacy. Verse 2, what initiates this change? "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." What always brings about a change in kingdoms? A day of the Lord. So here's a day of the Lord that is coming and when it comes Paul says it will come just like a thief in the night, that is, it will come when the world least expects it. Verse 3, "While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then" literally, at that time, "destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape." There will be no escape, there is no escape. And the reason is verses 4-5, the only escape has already happened, it will have already taken place! And that escape is the rapture. There's no question, believers will be snatched away from the earth *before* this Future Day of the Lord Comes (also cf 2 Thess 2:1-3). Most people would call this the Tribulation. So first we have seen Past Days of the Lord when God catastrophically intervened to judge on a local

scale, they illustrate or preview this Future Day of the Lord when God will catastrophically intervene to judge on a global scale. That's the first phase of the future day of the Lord but it's followed by a second phase of Blessing.

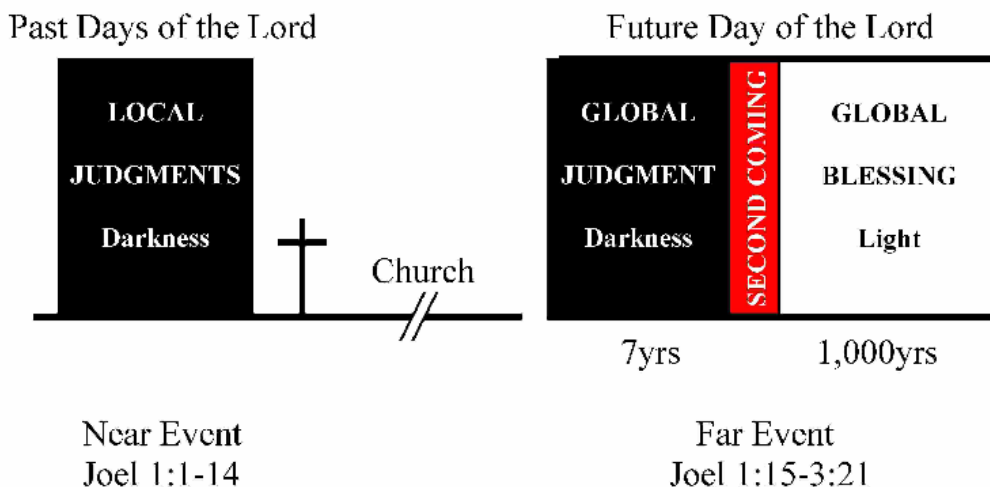
The second phase is the blessing phase, also an aspect of the Future Day of the Lord. And this is the most controversial use. Some claim this use doesn't exist but I think it does so turn to Zeph 3:11. "In that day" okay, there's one of the shortened expressions for the day of the Lord, "In that day you [Israel] will feel no shame Because of all your deeds By which you have rebelled against Me; For then I will remove from your midst Your proud, exulting ones, And you will never again be haughty On My holy mountain." so there's a judgment, but following it is a day of blessing, no sin. Verse 16, "In that day," same expression, "In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: "Do not be afraid, O Zion; Do not let your hands fall limp." So there's peace and security for God's city, a day of blessing. Verse 19, "Behold, I am going to deal at that time," there's another expression, "at that time" I'm going to deal "With all your oppressors, I will save the lame And gather the outcast, And I will turn their shame into praise and renown In all the earth."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." So it's a time of salvation for Gentiles and a gathering of the nation Israel. Israel will be at the center of the world stage, it's all a day of blessing and we would identify this blessing phase as the Millennial Kingdom.

Finally the third phase is the Future Day of the Lord Second Coming. Of course OT saints didn't understand two comings of the Messiah in the OT, that wasn't clear to them, it's clear to us now, so I'm looking at it from our standpoint now. This day is a 24 hour period, whereas the other uses are far longer than a 24 hour day. This is a day of judgment, indeed of the single greatest day of judgment so far as history is concerned. To see this turn to Joel 2. Joel is really the first book in the Bible to give a systematic treatment of the day of the Lord. So Joel and Zephaniah go together, they share the same theme and give us the most insight into the day of the Lord. Now when you see "the day of the Lord" prefaced by adjectives like great or terrible or awesome, those adjectives single out the exact day that the Messiah comes. That's what we're interested in seeing here. In verse 1 we see "the day of the LORD," no adjectives there, so this is just the day of the LORD judgment

phase. But if you come down to verse 28, “It will come about after this” that is after the Messiah’s return if we were to go into the prior context, so after the Messiah’s return “I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. ²⁹“Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.” This is all blessing; this is in the blessing phase of the day of the LORD. Then He says in verse 30, and you have to follow Joel’s timing words, before, after, all of that is very specific, verse 30, “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. ³¹“The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood *Before* the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” So before the great and awesome day of the LORD, there are your two adjectives and he’s saying what? He’s saying you’re going to be having massive judgments, cosmic in scale before “the great and awesome day of the LORD. So what’s the great and awesome day of the LORD? It’s the day that the Messiah returns to earth, it’s the culmination of the day of the LORD, and it’s the day of the Second Coming.

So let’s put this together, here is a helpful chart that comes from our study on Joel, you can disregard the Joel references for the time being. And remember, this is from our vantage point today, in 2011, now that all the Scripture has been written and centuries of study of this have taken place we can say this. The OT saint couldn’t say this, they didn’t have all the information we have available to us, Scripture was still being written, but now Scripture is written, it’s done, we can start to put it all together in this grand picture.

JOEL: DAY OF THE LORD



So first there have been Past Days of the Lord, they are local in scale, we gave one example of the destruction of Israel by Assyria in 721BC. They all took more than one day, they often extended for years. And these are foreviews, they're previews of the Future Day of the Lord. The Future Day of the Lord is global in scale, it begins with a judgment phase that lasts a bit more than 7 years, and it culminates with the Day of the Second Coming and is then followed by a blessing phase that lasts a thousand years. Some people think it extends into eternity, but this diagram sums up what we've said.

Having said that, that's a systematic analysis of the day of the LORD, after all the data in Scripture has come in. But all the data was not in in Zephaniah's day. That data was still coming. So now we want to shift and get into their shoes. Try to look at it from their vantage point. They had Obadiah, they had Joel, they had Amos, they had Isaiah but this doctrine was still in development. That's what we call progressive revelation, that is, the word of God was revealed over a long period of time, it didn't just drop out of heaven complete, it took centuries to write. So if you lived in Zephaniah's day and you talked about the Bible, our Bible, what's our Bible? It's every book revealed up to Zephaniah. It didn't include Daniel or Ezekiel or Zechariah or Malachi, those books hadn't been revealed yet. So they had their Bible, which was a shortened version of what we have, and we're just trying to understand from their vantage point what could they have understood? And if we can understand that then we can understand the impact it was supposed to have on them.

So here they are, they have some revelation about the day of the LORD in Obadiah, Obadiah taught that the day of the LORD was coming on Gentile nations and that the Jews would be rescued in that day. So the Jews took that as an indicator that they would be rescued from the day of the LORD. But Amos denied that and told the northern kingdom of Israel that they would also face the day of the LORD and that happened in 721BC. We already saw that. Now we're in Zephaniah's day and this is addressed to the southern kingdom of Judah, the northern kingdom was already in Exile. What was the thinking of the average Judean on the streets? Well, they were pretty stupid, spiritually speaking, remember, they just found the word of God, it had been thrown in a pile of trash in the back of the Temple. So they weren't exactly great Bible students. But with Josiah's reforms surely some of the word of God was getting out. The other factor to consider is that they

were of the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Judah had the Davidic dynasty. So surely we'll be protected from any kind of day of the LORD judgments. That was their mentality. They were a bunch of spiritual morons that believed God would never judge us in that way, we're the house of Judah and our central headquarters are Jerusalem, the city of God. But now Zephaniah shows they were mistaken starting in verse 7.

Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near, For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests.

⁸“Then it will come about on the day of the LORD’S sacrifice That I will punish the princes, the king’s sons And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments. ⁹“And I will punish on that day all who leap on the *temple* threshold, Who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit. ¹⁰“On that day,” declares the LORD, “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. Verse 10 is chock full of clear references to Jerusalem, so it is obvious that the LORD has a day of judgment for Judah and Jerusalem. But here’s the question. The “great” day of the Lord is mentioned in verse 14 and it is also said to be “near.” Notice “near” in verse 7, **the day of the LORD is near and near in verse 14, **Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly**, same Hebrew word. So from the vantage point of a Judean in Zephaniah’s day, how do you think they saw this passage? Do you think they saw it as one event or as two events? They probably were not able to dissect and see there are two events. From a Judean’s perspective it would appear at first to be one event. Now that’s an important observation so far as understanding the text in the way they would have probably understood it.**

I think it would have been hard to separate out vv 7-13 as a day of the LORD coming upon Judah from vv 14-18 coming upon the whole world. So let me point some things out about prophecy. Prophecies are strange in the way they unfold. Sometimes you will read a prophecy and it will look like a single picture, but as history unfolds you see after the fact that, hey, there was a gap of time between two verses. So it’s not one event, there are two events in there. And if we look close, in hindsight, hindsight is always 20-20, so if we look close at the text we can see some indications that there are two days of the Lord being spoken of here, the day of the Lord coming upon Judah and Jerusalem in vv 7-13 and the day of the Lord coming upon the whole world in

vv 14-18. Now one of those observations is that in v 7 it merely says “the day of the Lord” while in verse 14 it says what? “the great day of the Lord.” Another observation is that Jerusalem is clearly in view in verses 7-13 while in verses 14-18 the whole earth is in view and all the inhabitants of the earth. They may have been able to reconcile verse 18 by saying well, the Hebrew word for “earth” can also be translated “land.” But a third observation is that the overall impression you get from vv 7 -13 is that it’s Jewish while the impression of vv 14-18 is not Jewish, it seems to just be all men including Gentiles. So on close observation you can see there might be a break between vv 13 and 14. But if you were a Jew living in Zephaniah’s day, I don’t think it very likely you would see that. History would have to unfold to see this.

After the fact we see that this prophecy is actually two prophecies, we know that from hindsight and from observing the text very closely. But that leaves us with a problem because another observation is that in verse 7 it says the day of the Lord is near on Judah and in verse 14 it says the Near is the great day of the Lord and that’s the world. And yet how can they both be near if one happened 2500 years ago and the other one hasn’t happened yet? Now that introduces one of the most difficult Bible problems down to our own day. What does near mean? How can you say something is near in time and yet 2500 years has passed and it still hasn’t happened?

There have been several solutions. One is to say that all this is describing one event and it has all been fulfilled in 586BC. The problem with that view is what? The fact that vv 14-18 seem to describe something much larger in scale, something that is not really Jewish but Gentile. So while that would solve the nearness problem it would not solve some of these other problems. So another solution is to say that near refers to the manner of coming, not when in time it will come but the manner of coming when it does come. In other words, the word in this context really refers to the rate of an event coming. So people who hold to this idea would say we need to translate it as something like “fast or rapidly,” fast is the day of the Lord, taken that way it could be 2500 years before it comes but when it does come it’s going to come suddenly, like a bolt of lightning. And the word can be used that way, that’s not violating a possible usage, so that is a possibility and verse 14 might give you that idea, “Near is the great day of the LORD; Near and coming very quickly;” so there are two words used to describe it, “near” and “quickly” they

would say, is all the same idea and the author is repeating it for emphasis, to emphasize the rapidity of the event, whenever it comes. So that's a second solution and it has some validity. You could easily argue from this that there are two events spoken of here, both as near in the sense that whenever they do come, they will come rapidly, but not necessarily anytime soon. Now the third idea, and the one that I think is best is this, they are both words referring to imminency. That is, an event that has no signs preceding it. Here we see two OT Hebrew words and in the NT Greek there are two corollary words that are the same two words used in the LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT. So in the Hebrew OT, the two words in verse 14 translated "near" and "quickly" are *qarob* and *mahar*. If we were to look at the Greek translation of verse 14 the two words are *eggus* and *taxus*. And when we come to the NT we find *eggus* and *taxus* and I'll show you some of these, but let's understand this passage first. These words, wherever they are used in these kinds of contexts refer to imminency. God is in effect saying, I'm not going to tell you when these events are coming, I don't want you to know that, they may come today, they may come tomorrow, they may come next week, they may come a thousand years from now, the point is not to give any indication of when they will come, the point is that we understand that they could come at any moment. And therefore, the application is what? To be ready, to be prepared, to have gotten right with God before it comes! There is an urgency to right now get right with God and we're going to see that in Zephaniah's text. So the point of verse 7 and verse 14 is not to give the Judeans any indication of when these things might happen, but they are to get them to respond to God immediately, to get them to repent immediately! So they probably could not get these passages apart, all they knew was there was an urgency to get ready immediately.

That's why verse 7 starts off, "Shut up before Adonai YHWH!" Shut up because I have a very important announcement to make, the day of the LORD is upon you, it could fall at any moment **For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice**, look at that, the sacrifice is already prepared, so there's no time. **He has consecrated His guests**, again, they are already consecrated, they are ready to sit down and eat! So there is an urgency in the text to get right with God right now, don't put it off a single minute because a single minute and it may be too late, you may be dinner on the plate.

Then chapter 2 is the same idea, and I'm trying to impress upon you the urgency of the Hebrew text, these ideas are deeply rooted in how God structured history and how God constructed man; man was built to respond to God today, not tomorrow, not next week, right now. Notice how he says it in chapter 2:1, "Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation," what nation is he talking about? Israel. Gather he says, "without shame," what does that mean? Having repented, having nothing to be ashamed about. Then verse 2, "Before the decree takes effect—" I'm not going to tell you when it's going to happen, the point is you better get your butts in gear today "Before...the day passes like the chaff—Before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you, Before the day of the LORD'S anger comes upon you." See all those "Before's?" He's not going to tell you when, God is not going to reveal to you every detail of the timing of His plan and that is part and parcel of the way God works with us. He says I'm not going to tell you, you just trust Me. Verse 3, "Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth, Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden" that's the word we think Zephaniah's name comes from, *satar*, to hide, speaking of the remnant who repents, who seeks the Lord, who gets right with the Lord before this day comes, he says "Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the LORD'S anger." So the whole point is to understand the imminency of these things and to get right with God immediately. And if I were an Israelite hearing this in Zephaniah's day I'd probably be so scared out of my socks I wouldn't have been able to sit down calmly and do a careful Bible study of this passage. But I would be able to get the point that I better get my rear in gear because at any moment the Lord is going to break in and disrupt the whole course of history and do I want to get smashed or do I want to be hidden?

Now with that background look at verse 1:7. **Be silent before the Lord GOD!** Now he's just got through talking about the three groups of people in the days of Josiah, the Capitulationists in vv 4 and 5a, the Accommodationists in v 5b and the Complacent in v 6 and he tells them all to shut up in verse 7. This is not nice talk but it communicates, when God is about to judge the proper response is to shut up before His anger. It's like a kid and an angry parent, the last thing the kid needs to do is start flapping his jaw at the angry parent, the best thing he can do at that point is just shut up. Well, God is angry at this point, really angry. And if you don't think God can get angry you don't worship the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible

gets angry and jealous and He at times acts out in wrath and if you don't believe me read the rest of the book. So verse 7, **Be silent before the Lord GOD** explanation, **For the day of the LORD is near**, that is, it's imminent, it can come at-any-moment. Then He explains the imminency, **For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice**, it's already prepared, it's ready to be offered, everything is prepared, as are the guests, **He has consecrated His guests**, they are ready to eat the sacrifice. Now the Lord's sacrifice is His people Judah and the nation that has been invited to feast on them are the Babylonians. They have been set apart in God's purposes to feast on the flesh of Judah.

Verse 8, and in these verses we have three groups listed that will fall under the judgment and the point of separating these three groups is to say no one will escape. In verses 8-9 we have the politicians, people in the royal family, the princes, the servants of the king who have oppressed people. In verses 10-11 we have the corporations, the businessmen, all the wealthy people who have stolen to get rich. And in verses 12-13 we have the complacent, people who think there is no person who runs history, selfish people who do nothing but build their little empires.

Let's start with the politicians in verse 8, **"Then it will come about on the day of the LORD'S sacrifice"** again we don't know when, we just know that it will come. And when it does God says, **I will punish the princes, the king's sons And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.** Now you have the princes and these men are in the royal house but they're not on the throne, they serve in high administrative positions. Then you have **the king's sons** and verse 1 tells us the king is Josiah so these are Josiah's sons. We know of four sons of Josiah, they would all have been young at the time of this prophecy but nonetheless, the first one was Jehoahaz. He was taken captive to Egypt and he died there (2 Kgs 23:34). The second one was Jehoiakim and the Egyptian Pharaoh made him king in place of his father Josiah, so he was a puppet king, he did whatever Pharaoh said. Then King Nebuchadnezzar came up with the Babylonian armies and Jehoiakim became his puppet. When he rebelled whole bands of armies came in and defeated him, that was 605BC. That's the first deportation into Exile (2 Kgs 24:1-6). Then his son Jehoiachin became king and after three months King Nebuchadnezzar came up again with his armies and Jehoiachin went out and he was taken into Exile; he had reigned 8 years until 597BC, the second

deportation (2 Kgs 24:8-16). Finally Zedekiah came to the throne and after 9 years he rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar and by this point he had had it so he sent his armies to destroy Jerusalem and the king escaped but they chased him down, took him to the town of Riblah, passed sentence on him, took his sons and slaughtered them right in front of Zedekiah's eyes. Then they plucked his eyes out, so the last thing this man ever saw was his sons being executed, then they took him in chains to Babylon in Exile (2 Kgs 25:1-7). So I'd say the Lord is a little bit angry (2 Kgs 24:20). Then Zephaniah says, **And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.** This would be the Israeli who wore Canaanite or Edomite garments. What this meant was that you were dressing like pagans, following the pagan styles of the day and this was supporting pagan religion. It would be something like contributing money to a pagan organization or promoting it by buying their products and going out and advertising it. And this is in the royal house; this is in the top levels of Israeli administration.

Now before we go to verse 9 there's one person missing. Can anyone guess who strikingly absent from verse 8? The king. Where's Josiah? Why isn't he going to be punished? Because he was a godly man and we read two weeks ago that the Lord revealed to him because he humbled himself before the Lord that he would be spared the judgment by an early death (2 Kgs 22:19, 20; 2 Chron 34:27, 28).

Verse 9, **“And I will punish on that day all who leap on the *temple* threshold, Who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit.** Now that's probably one thought, it sounds strange, like a bunch of hoodlums having a party at the temple, but observe first of all that *temple* is not in the original text, it's in italics so that is added by the translators, it just says all who leap on the threshold and really it says leap over the threshold. If you've ever seen a society in chaos you've seen this. Maybe a few months ago when in Britain you had chaos in the streets and people were doing a lot of what? Looting, they'd run down the streets and literally leap into stores, grab what they wanted and take off. That's the picture here, they're looting, literally leaping into people's homes and stealing what they want and taking it down to **the house of their lord**, which is the Hebrew word *Baal*, *Baal* means lord or master. He was a fertility god that had come into Israel through the Canaanites. So they're filling the house of Baal with these unjust earnings

and by doing so Zephaniah says they're filling the pagan temple of Baal with **violence and deceit**, it was unjust gain used to propagate pagan religion.

Verse 10, **"On that day,"** and here we're shifting to the corporations and corrupt businessmen that got wealthy off of paganism. **"On that day," declares the LORD, "There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate,** that was a gate on the northern side of the city, the fishermen came into the fish market through that gate. There are going to be cries of horror at that gate, apparently that's the gate Nebuchadnezzar is going to enter through. Then **A wail from the Second Quarter,** Jerusalem was divided into quarters then as it is now, and at the time the Second Quarter was NW of the Temple, so as the army moves into the city they'll take the Second Quarter. **And a loud crash from the hills.** That's the never ending stream of Babylonian soldiers coming from every direction on the hills surrounding Jerusalem. The whole point is that the city of Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. Verse 11, **"Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar, For all the people of Canaan will be silenced; All who weigh out silver will be cut off.** Now the Mortar was a place that if you've been to Israel you know, it's one of the major landmarks in Jerusalem called the Tyropoeon Valley or the "Valley of the Cheesemakers." As you look at Jerusalem from the south you can see three depressions and the one running right down the center is the valley of the cheesemakers, it runs right next to the Temple mount on the West side, this is where the market was, this is where daily business took place. And he's telling the businessmen in that valley to wail **For all the people of Canaan will be silenced.** Now he doesn't mean Canaanites did business practices there, he means Jews carrying out Canaanite business practices, carrying out economic and business practices that were based on Canaanite philosophy, thus violating God's standards of economics and business. **All who weigh out silver will be cut off.** And the cutting off, which means destruction, killing them, but it has been suggested that the word **mortar** is suggesting that they will be ground up into dust by the Babylonians. But the point is that all the corporations, all the businessmen and all the pagan philosophy they used to conduct business by, would be utterly destroyed. God hated it.

Verse 12, and here we come to the third group, the people who are completely without a clue, they don't see any plan or purpose for history, they're just plodding along in life, they'd be like the people that sleep in on Sundays,

materialist types, hedonist types who don't care much for anything, they tend their garden, they drink their wine, they build their houses, all materialism. Verse 12, **"It will come about at that time That I will search Jerusalem with lamps,** now picture this, this is YHWH and He's going around with a flashlight through the city looking for these people, searching them out. And he says, **And I will punish the men Who are stagnant in spirit, Who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good or evil!'** So He's specifically looking for these people, they didn't go out and fight the Babylonians, they're the people that would just hide in a corner. And I find it significant that it's these people the Lord says, you aren't going to escape because I myself am going to come looking for you and expose you.

Verse 13, **"Moreover, their wealth will become plunder And their houses desolate; Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit them, And plant vineyards but not drink their wine.** All their hard work building houses and planting vineyards will come to nothing because the Babylonians are going to take everything. And they did. Now we don't have time to go into this destruction of Jerusalem but this is one of the worst days in Jewish history. Every Jew knows about the first destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Babylonians just as they know about the second destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Romans. Jerusalem is the holy city; it's the city where God chose to put His name forever. But it had become so corrupt and so sinful that God's holiness looked down and said, you guys are my next sacrifice. I don't see why I'm keeping you around, I've been patient, I've given you grace, I've sent you the word of God through the prophets, you killed the prophets, you burned the word of God, you spit on it, you ripped it up, there's nothing in you people worth saving so I'm going to demolish you. And He did. And thus the warning stands; the day of the Lord is near. He doesn't tell you when. Near is the day, that's it, it's imminent, so you better be ready today. And if you never have trusted in Jesus Christ for eternal life you better do it now because we likewise stand in a period of history where the day of the Lord is near and if you're not ready you'll be swept away in judgment. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

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