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The Point Of No Return

Zephaniah is known as a compendium of the prophets. Since a compendium is a concise, yet comprehensive compilation of a body of knowledge then Zephaniah is a concise, yet comprehensive compilation of prophecy. Anyone wishing to get a good start on prophecy would do well to start with Zephaniah.

The basic theme of prophecy is the day of the LORD and since a day is a cycle of darkness followed by light then the day of the Lord is a period of darkness followed by light. The darkness signifies a period of judgment; the light signifies a period of blessing. So a concise, yet comprehensive picture of prophecy is first, a period of darkness or judgment will come that will last about seven years, culminating with the visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ to earth, second, this will issue in a period of light or blessing that will last 1,000 years. So the basic prophetic picture is the day of the Lord and it's two phases; darkness followed by light. This is what we call premillennialism; that is, Jesus Christ will return before His 1,000 year reign on earth.

Now since we've been out of Zephaniah a few weeks let's review starting in chapter 1. Zephaniah 1:1 gives the Setting, "The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah." Zephaniah prophesied during the days of King Josiah. Both the prophet and the king were descended from the godly King Hezekiah and worked together to bring the nation to repentance. Zephaniah through his prophetic writings and Josiah through his leadership by example. These two leaders ministered around 620BC, after the Northern Kingdom had gone into Exile to Assyria but before the Southern Kingdom went into Exile to Babylon.

Zephaniah 1:2-3 reveals a Judgment on All Living Things, “I will completely remove all things From the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. 3I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea, And the ruins along with the wicked; And I will cut off man from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.” Very emphatically this is a declaration of the LORD that He will judge the entire earth, separating good from evil.

Zephaniah 1:4-13 then reveals a Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem, “So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” In other words, Judah and Jerusalem will not escape; just because Judah was the tribe chosen to bring forth the Messiah does not protect her from judgment and just because Jerusalem was the city chosen by God to bear His name does not protect her from judgment. God is just and He judges sin no matter who might be involved. Verse 4b, “And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests. Baalism had crept back in to Judah since Hezekiah had removed it. Now the whole religious system was corrupt. Verse 5, “And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven,” these were the astrologers, those who worshipped the heavens, they had capitulated to paganism. Then verse 5b, “And those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom.” So these are the accommodationists, they try to harmonize biblical truth with pagan fiction. Verse 6, “And those who have turned back from following the LORD.” They once followed the LORD but they stopped. And finally, verse 6b, “And those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him.” These are the religiously indifferent types. So they had all four types of people in Judah and all four types are going to come under the judgment of God. Verse 7, “Shut up before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near,” and there is the first usage in Zephaniah of the expression “day of the LORD.” It had been used prior by Obadiah, by Joel, by Amos and by Isaiah; Zephaniah uses it 24 times, making it contain almost a full 1/3rd of all the biblical references. From here on out he will refer to it as “that day,” “the day,” “that time,” “the time,” “the day of God’s anger,” etc...The point here is to prophecy of a day of the LORD that can come at any moment upon Judah and Jerusalem. To avoid this day the Jews will have to shut up and pay attention to what the LORD says and to repent. Verse 7b, “For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,” the Judahites are the sacrifice, “He has consecrated His guests.” the Babylonians are the guests. They’re going to eat the Judahites. This came to pass in a series of three meals, 605BC,

597BC and 588-586BC. He then describes problems in the royal house of David, verse 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." They wore pagan clothes thus supporting pagan value systems. This was going on among the king's sons. The king was Josiah and he was a godly man, but his sons were pagan, they all worshipped pagan gods and goddesses. They will be punished. Verse 10 describes the Babylonian invasion, "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." A devastating blow as the Judahites are crushed in the mortar. 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. They weren't Canaanites, they were Jews, but their business practices were taken from the Canaanites. So they lived like Canaanites. Verses 12 and 13 go on to describe the extent of the destruction. This all occurred in the three deportations to Babylon; 605, 597 and 588-586BC.

Zephaniah 1:14-18 returns to the theme of Judgment on All Inhabitants of the Earth, so you see how the prophet goes back and forth, from a global judgment, to a local expression of it, then back to a global judgment and here he says the same thing of the future global day of the LORD that he said about the local day of the LORD, it is near. "Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly," that is, it too is imminent, "Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. 15A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness," all expressions of the judgment phase of the day of the LORD. 16A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers. 17I will bring distress on men So that they will walk like the blind," then the reason is given, "Because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust And their flesh like dung. 18Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the LORD'S wrath
And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth." The judgment phase of the day of the Lord will end with no unbelievers left on planet earth. The earth must be cleansed in preparation for the period of blessing that follows in the millennium.

Zephaniah 2:1-3 turns back to Judah and gives the condition for surviving the judgment of the day of the LORD and entering millennial blessing, “Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without merit,” we said that should be translated “merit,” the nation should Gather Without Merit, meaning empty handed and in faith. Verse 2 gives the timing, “Before the decree takes effect—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.” There is limited time to respond, the day is decreed, it is in the sovereign plan of God and so the lesson for Israel is to get right with God today because this decree may be enacted any day. Verse 3 then directs attention to the remnant of the nation that responds, “Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the LORD’S anger.” Those of the nation Israel who respond positively are to persevere to the end of the judgment phase despite whatever befalls them, persevere in seeking the Lord, in seeking righteousness and in seeking humility. Perhaps they will be hidden, that is, they will all be believers but perhaps some of the believers of Israel will survive and go into the millennium in mortal bodies, those who are killed will enter the millennium in immortal bodies.

Zephaniah 2:4-15 now turns to the Judgment on Israel’s Enemies during this future day of the LORD; it reaches to the four directions of the compass. Peoples from all four directions tried to take Israel’s Promised Land and for this they must be judged. He starts to the West, the Philistine plain of Gaza. “For Gaza will be abandoned And Ashkelon a desolation; Ashdod will be driven out at noon And Ekron will be uprooted. ⁵Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, The nation of the Cherethites! The word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; And I will destroy you So that there will be no inhabitant. ⁶So the seacoast will be pastures, *With* caves for shepherds and folds for flocks. ⁷And the coast will be For the remnant of the house of Judah, They will pasture on it. In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening; For the LORD their God will care for them And restore their fortune.” The ultimate fulfillment still awaits. Verse 8 turns to the East, modern day Jordan, “I have heard the taunting of Moab And the revilings of the sons of Ammon,” these were the incestuous descendants of Lot. “With which they have taunted My people And become arrogant against their

territory. ⁹“Therefore, as I live,” declares the LORD of armies, The God of Israel, “Surely Moab will be like Sodom And the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah— A place possessed by nettles and salt pits, And a perpetual desolation. The remnant of My people will plunder them And the remainder of My nation will inherit them.” ¹⁰This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the LORD of armies. ¹¹The LORD will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth;” those are the demons that were worshipped behind the idols of Ammon and Moab, they will be starved because they will not receive worship during the millennium, they will be locked away and unable to deceive the nations into worshipping them, “and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his *own* place.” Everyone will worship God in the millennium. Verse 12 he turns to the south, “You also, O Ethiopians, will be slain by My sword.” Verse 13 turns to the north, “And He will stretch out His hand against the north And destroy Assyria, And He will make Nineveh a desolation, Parched like the wilderness.” Assyria and its capital, Nineveh were on the brink of destruction when this prophecy was given, the more elaborate prophecy is Nahum which gives three full chapters detailing the destruction of Assyria and Nineveh which occurred in 612BC. Verse 14, “Flocks will lie down in her midst, All beasts which range in herds; Both the pelican and the hedgehog Will lodge in the tops of her pillars; Birds will sing in the window, Desolation *will be* on the threshold; For He has laid bare the cedar work. ¹⁵This is the exultant city Which dwells securely, Who says in her heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me.” How she has become a desolation, A resting place for beasts! Everyone who passes by her will hiss *And* wave his hand *in contempt*.” Most, if not all of this last direction of the compass, has been fulfilled, unless perhaps modern Iran is implied as the ultimate future fulfillment.

Alright, that brings us to Zephaniah 3 and now again the prophet shifts back to Judgment on Jerusalem. So this flip-flopping is not uncommon for the prophets and while Jerusalem is not mentioned in this prophecy it is clear from vv 2-4 that Jerusalem is the city he is prophesying against. For those of you who are interested in literary structure, we now have a chiasm in the outline of the book. What’s a chiasm? A chiasm is literary structure where the author covers a series of topics and then inverts those topics and covers them again, this time in reverse order. So if you observe this chart, topic A corresponds to A’, topic B corresponds to B’ and so forth.

- A Judgment of Man and Nature (1:2-3)
 - B Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-13)
 - C Judgment on All Inhabitants of Earth
 - D Gather Without Merit (2:1-3)
 - C' Judgment on Israel's Enemies (2:4-15)
 - B' Judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-7)
 - A' Judgment on All Nations (3:8)

What a chiasm does, so far as its purpose in literature is concerned, is it puts the emphasis on whatever is in the center of the chiasm. So what's the emphasis? What's the central message? The center of the chiasm is D, Gather Without Merit, so the central message of Zephaniah is that in light of the imminent day of the LORD the proper response is to come before the LORD without merit, come to Him empty handed, in faith and faith alone, that is the only way to enter into millennial blessing. Without faith there is only day of the Lord judgment, but with faith there is day of the Lord blessing. So 2:1-3 becomes central to the book. That's why in this series without fail I conclude with the lesson to get right with God today.

So with that central theme in mind let's press on into Zephaniah 3 and deal with the first seven verses, the Judgment on Jerusalem and let's get a working outline.

- I. Setting (1:1)
- II. The Day of the Lord Judgment/Darkness (1:2-3:8)
 - A. Judgment of All Living Things on Earth (1:2-3)
 - B. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-13)
 - C. Judgment on All Inhabitants of Earth (1:14-18)
 - D. Gather Without Merit (2:1-3)
 - E. Judgment on Israel's Enemies (2:4-15)
 - F. Judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-7)
 - 1. **Three Indictments Against Jerusalem (3:1)**
 - a. **Rebellious**
 - b. **Defiled**
 - c. **Tyrannical**
 - 2. **Four Evidences Proving Three Indictments**

(3:2)

- a. **Rejection of Law and Prophets**
- b. **Rejection of Biblical Teaching**
- c. **Failure to Trust YHWH**
- d. **Failure to Worship in Temple**
- 3. **Examples of Three Indictments (3:3-4)**
 - a. **Tyranny (3:3)**
 - b. **Rebellious and Defiled (3:4)**
- 4. **YHWH's Righteous Discipline of Jerusalem(3:5)**
- 5. **YHWH's Warnings by Judging Nations (3:6)**
- 6. **Jerusalem's Refusal to Respond to Discipline and Warnings (3:7)**
 - G. **Judgment on All Nations (3:8)**
- III. **The Day of the Lord Blessing/Light (3:9-20)**
 - A. **Blessing on Gentiles Purified to Worship (3:9-11)**
 - B. **Blessing on Israel Restored to Kingdom (3:12-20)**

In verse 1 we have three indictments against Jerusalem; rebellious, defiled and tyrannical. In verse 2 we have four evidences of the proposed indictments; they rejected the Law and the Prophets, they rejected Biblical teaching, they failed to trust YHWH and they failed to worship in the Temple. In verse 3 we have examples of tyranny from the leadership. In verse 4 we have examples of rebellion and defilement among the leadership. Then in vv 5-6 attention is turned to the LORD, He is not like the people of Jerusalem though He does dwell within Jerusalem in the Temple. He disciplines Jerusalem daily and judges nations to warn Jerusalem so she will repent of her sin. But, verse 7 Israel refused to respond to the discipline and warnings and therefore judgment was on the horizon for her. She was now chasing after sin! Jerusalem had sinned and sinned and sinned and now the 5th degree of discipline was determined, Jerusalem was scheduled for Exile. The lesson is that sin reaps disastrous consequences no matter who might be involved.

Think about this; does God excuse people from judgment just because they are elect? No, disciplinary judgment is a corollary truth to divine election, meaning you can't have one without the other. So when you're studying the classical writing prophets; books like Isaiah and the Twelve, understand that the core of their messages relate to divine discipline. God disciplines those whom He has chosen. We have to be reminded of this truth because Israel

consistently forgot it. She reasoned that because she was elect she was somehow super-special and that exempted her from judgment and discipline. But in fact the opposite is the case, because she was elect she was subject to judgment and discipline. See God is just and that means God doesn't play favorites when it comes to sin. Sin always brings forth judgment. Now if you are in the family of God the good thing is that ultimate judgment has been borne for you by Christ on the cross, so the judgment you receive is disciplinary in nature, that is, it's purpose is restoration of fellowship. So it's an intra-family judgment and the goal is to convict you of sin so you'll confess your sin and be restored to fellowship. Now if you're not in the family of God then the judgment is outside the family and the judgment there is final, final destruction and assignment to the lake of fire, which actually a person assigns themselves to the lake of fire, God doesn't assign anyone to the lake of fire because He provided a gracious exit through His righteous provision, so if you reject His gracious provision then you are assigning yourself to the lake of fire. But understand these are all disciplinary truths.

Now Jerusalem is being indicted for a series of sins here and by verse 7 the depiction is that they are chasing after sin, they are eager to do corruption. So what happened was the nation came into its glorious period during the Reign of King David and David led the nation in righteousness, despite the fact that David sinned; David was a type of Him who was to come. And David led the nation in learning loyalty to God through His word. When his son Solomon came to the throne the nation entered its Golden Era. That generation reaped the benefits of the prior generational loyalty. But the problem was that Solomon, while he started off very well, didn't finish so well; he sinned and started accommodating to pagan religion and this sin began to exacerbate until the Lord said he was going to split the kingdom in half, but graciously, not in Solomon's reign. So during Rehoboam's reign the kingdom was split into northern and southern kingdoms. In the north Jeroboam was given a conditional promise of an everlasting dynasty but he failed to live by faith and this promise was rescinded. Consequently everyone who comes to the throne of the northern kingdom fails miserably, each king and his generation fails to confess their sin and produce any lasting loyalty to God. So the northern kingdom declines very rapidly and they start going through the degrees of discipline outlined in Lev 26 and Deut 28.

The problem is that when we sin and we don't confess it there's a negative effect on our conscience and so we sin again and this time it's a little easier to sin and then we don't confess that and our conscience is adversely effected again so we sin again and each time we sin there's this negative effect until our conscience is seared or calloused. And then we have a real problem because now we're not dealing with just one sin, we're dealing with a whole pile of sin and it becomes very difficult if not impossible to genuinely confess our sin. And if we can't genuinely confess our sin then we can't genuinely get back in fellowship. Then we're on our way to sin unto death. So it's right here where this pile of sin gets so deep that we get ourselves in a real jam. What happens, and the reason it's almost impossible to confess our sin in this condition is because sin doesn't only sear the conscience, it also distorts our view of God, it blinds us to His true nature. See God has a specific nature or divine essence, a set of attributes. SRJLOOOIE. God is sovereign, God is righteous, God is just, God is loving, He's omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, immutable and eternal. That's who God is. But when we sin this picture of God starts getting distorted. That's why you'll always find people who sin in the Bible doing stupid things like Adam hiding from God in the bushes, Jonah running from God. Why are they doing thee things? They look stupid to you and to me because we're looking at this picture of God and we say, hide from God, what's wrong with you, you can't hide from God, God is omnipresent. Yeah, we can see that, but Adam and Jonah can't see that because their view of God is now distorted, their sin distorted the picture. And so that's when you get in a load of trouble because you've sinned and need to confess, but to confess you need a clear picture of God. Why do we need a clear picture of God? Because God is the standard by which sin is measured. So in these situations to restore a clear picture of God, God will graciously reveal Himself to you again; somehow, through the word of God, through the prophet, through a fellow believer, through a radio program, and He's saying here is who I am, remember who I am, get a right picture of Me and then we are convicted of our sin and we can confess. But if that happens and we rebel and we don't confess then we are worse off than we were before and it just gets harder and harder and harder to confess because our view of God gets more and more distorted until we are way off the deep end. And that's precisely the condition of the nation at the time Zephaniah writes.

These people are so out of it when it comes to seeing God clearly. They have been fooling around for centuries and they haven't confessed in hundreds of

years. Their consciences are so seared when they sin they aren't even ashamed when they sin. And the more they sin the more they want to sin. So what we have described here is a situation when the nation has reached the point of no return. The door for confession is open but they have lost the ability to confess, it is impossible to renew them unto repentance. They are going down the tube. Now what happens in this situation and to believers in this condition is they occasionally go through the motions. Oh we're so sorry and we'll never do it again and they go through a big emotion. And all it is is a farce, just going through religious motion, but there's nothing on the inside underneath it, it's not genuine. This is what the nation did as it declined. For example, they would gather in Jerusalem and weep and mourn and throw a big tantrum, Oh God, O God, and offer sacrifices but it was all religious motion, there was no genuine heartfelt contrition and the Lord knew it and He hated it. It was a lot of religious hoopla and religious motion with no heartfelt repentance and so He didn't accept their sacrifices and He didn't accept their big emotion. He was disgusted by it.

And it's the same way with believers in the Church. We can get so far out of it. I suspect there are a lot of believers this way, they are never taught the dynamics of the spiritual life, how to confess, how to repent, what these things mean, how to keep check on their spiritual life, the centrality of the word and so forth. Or if they were taught this then they don't follow it and they get way out of it and there's just piles of sin in their life, their consciences are seared, they have a distorted view of God that they don't want to be reminded of, and on occasion they go through some emotional response to God. But there's nothing there, no genuine heartfelt repentance. And they are in a load of trouble. And the only solution is to get back in the word and get saturated in the word. It may take years and years and years, but that's what it takes to get a correct view of God restored so they can genuinely confess and get restored to fellowship. That is what it takes; you've got to have maximum exposure to the word of God. And that is the solution of the classical prophets. God keeps telling the Israelites, I sent you prophets, you stoned them, you sawed them in half, I sent you teachers of the word of God, you ignored them, I sent you the word of God, you burned it. So finally, in that situation what do you do? What do you do with that kind of rebellion and stiff-neckedness? If they're Israel in the OT you send them into Exile; that's Israel's ultimate divine discipline. In the Church, the corollary

ultimate discipline is sin unto death, physically strike you dead and take you home early. So let's see it by starting with verse 1.

Verse 1, **Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, The tyrannical city!**

Now look at those three indictments against Jerusalem. Those are heavy indictments. And we know when we see the introductory word **Woe** we're about to get a list of indictments. And these are heavy, heavy charges. The first charge is that they are **rebellious**. They are rebels; they don't care about authority, they hate authority, I'm going to do what I'm going to do. And in this context whose authority do they hate? God's authority. They hate God and are not going to do what He says. Like a rebellious child who stands there and waves his finger in his parent's face and shoots his mouth off. They're brats and they need a whipping. And that's the picture here, a bunch of brats. The second charge is that these brats had **defiled** the city. And that's what brats do, they defile everything, something that is defiled is nasty; they've turned Jerusalem, the holy city of God, into a pig sty. And they did it by sin. They sinned and sinned and sinned, they defiled Jerusalem, violating the Law God gave at Sinai over and over and over such that all Jerusalem was full of sin and a nasty place to live. Finally the third indictment is that the city is **tyrannical**. What is tyranny? Well it's how brats rule. See brats are all about themselves, the only pronoun they know is "I," "I", "I", and they don't care about anyone else. So they prey on the little people, they smash people to get what "I" want and in this context the brats are tyrannizing the weak of society; the poor, the widow and the orphan; it's all about "I" and what "I" want at the expense of everybody else.

Now in verse 2 we have four evidences or we'll say reasons they've become brats. One **She heeded no voice**, two **She accepted no instruction**, three **She did not trust in the LORD** and four **She did not draw near to her God**. In other words these are essential to not becoming a brat and these are the only solution to being a brat, reverse everything in verse 2 and you get a list for how to get out of brathood. The first reason they became brats is because **She heeded no voice**, that is she did not heed the Law of God, Torah, and she did not heed the charges leveled at her by the Prophets of God. So first you had the prophet Moses come. He was the one through whom God gave the Law at Mt Sinai. The nation was supposed to heed that Law, to obey it and they said, oh yes God, we're going to obey all the Law. Then they didn't. We charted that decline following the time of David and Solomon and

so God sent the prophets and they were prosecuting attorneys, in that they would bring lawsuits against the nation on behalf of God and start prosecuting the nation on points of Law they had violated. But they didn't listen, see, they were supposed to be convicted of their sin and confess so they could be restored to fellowship. But they didn't and their consciences got seared more and more and more until they were in this situation where the fifth degree of discipline, Exile, was the only recourse. The second reason they became brats is because **She accepted no instruction**. Instruction in the word of God came through the priests. What priests were still left teaching the word of God they didn't listen to. They were rebellious students, thought they knew it all and so they challenged the professor on every point and rejected orthodox biblical teaching. The third reason they became brats is because **She did not trust in the LORD**. Obviously, if you don't pay attention to the Law of Moses or the Prophets accusations and if you don't accept the teaching of the word of God then you're not going to trust in the LORD. Trust in the LORD comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And if you reject the word of God you tacitly accept the word of man. So you're trusting in man and man's solutions, you're a gimmick believer. You try to solve your own problems. You're a do-it-yourself believer, I'm going to do it myself, I'm a self-made man and all the rest of the gimmicks. And those of Jerusalem tried to solve their problems by depending on allies, making treaties with other nations, trying to build the military, turning to Baal, all gimmick solutions that all failed miserably. But they could not trust in the LORD. Finally the fourth reason they became brats is because they **did not draw near to...God**. If they wanted to draw near to God they would have gone where? Down to the Temple in Jerusalem. Why the Temple? Because God designated the Temple as the place He would meet with man. So while the LORD was waiting for them to come to Him at the Temple and bring sacrifice and genuine heartfelt repentance, they weren't coming to meet Him. They didn't want to have anything to do with Him. They had plenty of other meeting places, temples of Baal all over the land, we'll go meet Baal, we like it down there with all the prostitutes and we can have sex and get fertility in our crops, get production, get economy. But they didn't.

Now verse 3, having charged them in verse 1 with becoming brats and explaining in verse 2 why they became brats and by implication how to get out of brathood, he now says, alright, if you're so stupid spiritually to be able to see that you are indeed brats, then let me give you some specific examples

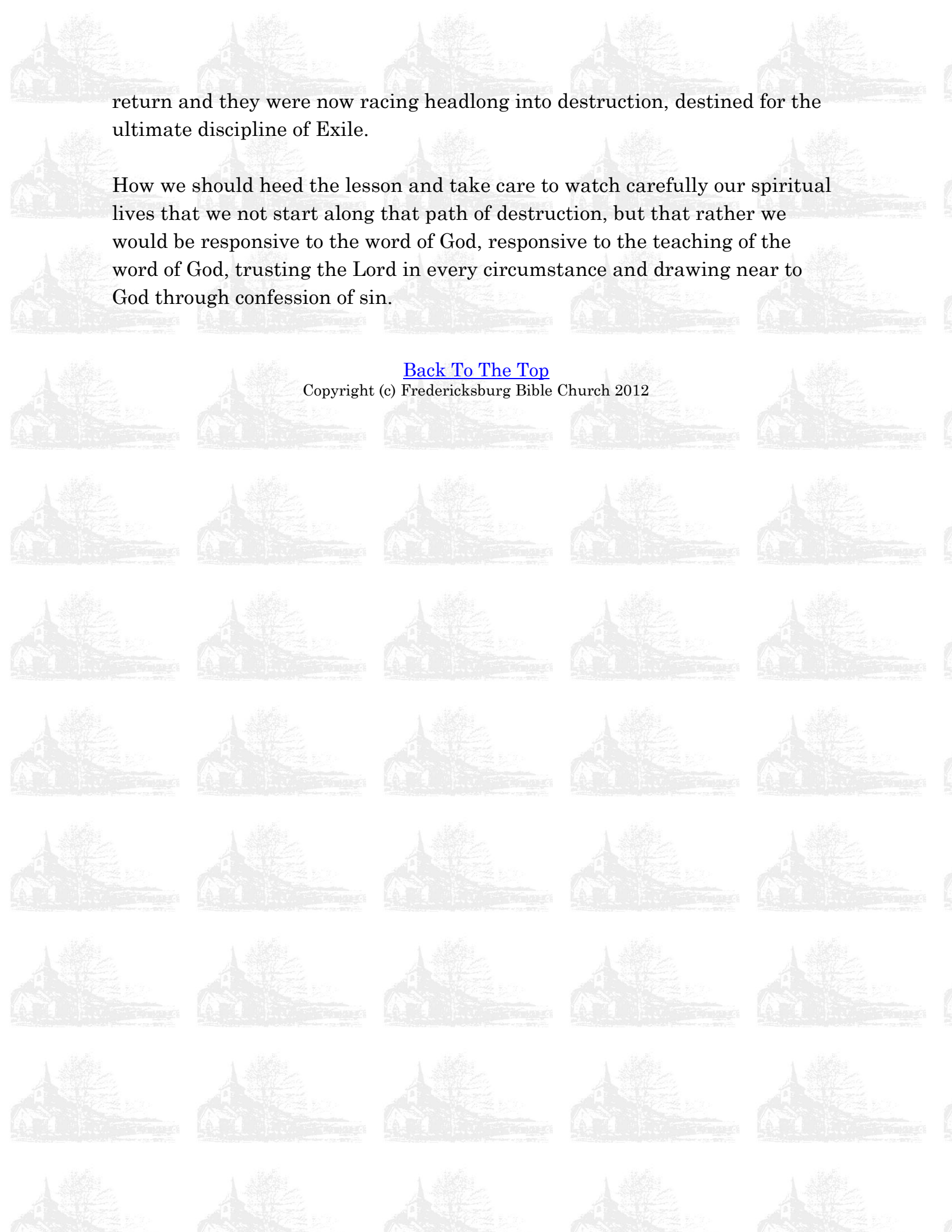
that you've seen with your own eyes in Jerusalem. And to do so he gives examples from the most visible segment of Jewish society, the leadership; prophets, priests, judges and princes. If they can't see this then there's no hope. Verse 3 cites tyranny. **Her princes within her are roaring lions, Her judges are wolves at evening; They leave nothing for the morning.** The princes were the four sons of Josiah, each of which ruled successively on the throne of David in Jerusalem after Josiah died an early death. Josiah was spared the final decay of his nation. His sons were ruthless, they are described as **roaring lions**, they kept the people in constant fear and they rip and tore at the people. And I ask you, since the kings were supposed to shepherd the people, is this how a shepherd should shepherd the Lord's flock? Instead of shepherding them they preyed upon them, feasting on their flesh. Josiah didn't do that. But his four sons did. **Her judges are wolves at evening.** These were the heads of the tribes who solved disputes in the gates of the city, they were experts in the law or they were supposed to be. It was their job to hear cases and judge on the basis of the Mosaic Law, God's Law given at Sinai, to issue justice. But instead of justice what do they do? Well at evening they are **wolves**. See, **wolves** are nocturnal animals; they hunt their prey at night. And these beastly judges do their hunting at night as well. They decide the fortunes of the people at night in smoke filled rooms; they strike deals behind closed doors, it's about money, it's about power, it's about lining their already fat pockets, and this they do in a reign of tyranny over the weak. **They leave nothing for morning.** By the time daylight appears everything is decided and anything that takes place in the regular courts that day is nothing more than a charade. They go in and carry out what they decided the night before. So verse 3 proves the indictment of verse 1, tyranny.

Now in verse 4 he sets out to prove the other two charges of verse 1; they were rebellious and defiled. **Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; Her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law.** Now the prophet, he was supposed to give the word of God and he could be tested as to whether he was a true or false prophet by comparing what he said with the word of God. He had to have logical consistency. So these prophets prophesied as if they were prophets of God but they were false prophets so they were **reckless**, they led people down a false path. This was treachery to deceive people in this way and lead them to death. The **priests profaned the sanctuary**, that's the temple, they didn't

follow the proper Levitical procedures in the Temple and they defiled it. What God had made holy they had defiled. And that in the very presence of God as verse 5 shows. But the verse ends, **They have done violence to the law.** Both prophet and priest had done violence to the law which meant they had attacked the law-giver, God Himself. This was violence, an act of war against God, violations of His law, commandments and statutes.

But now we have verse 5 and what the Lord did to straighten out these brats. He disciplined them. Remember, you have to have a clear view of God to be convicted of sin so you can confess. So the Lord gave them a clear picture of Himself each day as He disciplined them by exacting justice. God said in Lev 26 and Deut 28 that when you violate My law I will discipline you, I'll use agricultural distress, economic recession, population decline, terrorist attacks and so forth. All those things God was doing, those were acts of justice implemented daily to wake up the people so they'd confess. Verse 5, **The LORD is righteous within her; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail.** That is, He daily shows them who He is, this is justice, I bring it to light each day, look at Me all Jerusalem and see your sin and confess. So over and over he gave them a clear picture of Himself but what was their response? **But the unjust knows no shame.** That is they sin and their consciences don't condemn them. They have sinned so much they have officially put their consciences out of commission. They have a defiled conscience and no amount of revelation to these people will jolt their conscience to conviction and confession of sin.

Verse 6, another thing the Lord did to try and convict them was to judge surrounding nations for their sin and so logically if they were so sinful then God was going to judge them. Verse 6, **I have cut off nations; Their corner towers are in ruins. I have made their streets desolate, With no one passing by; Their cities are laid waste, Without a man, without an inhabitant.** God said, verse 7, **Surely you will revere Me, Accept instruction.** Surely you'll respect Me and listen to My word in the Law and the true Prophets because this is the only way to be spared the kind of judgment that came on other nations. **So her dwelling will not be cut off According to all that I have appointed concerning her.** But what? Did they respond to these judgments on other nations? No...**they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.** They wouldn't listen, they were too far gone at this point, too far in the depths of depravity, beyond the point of no



return and they were now racing headlong into destruction, destined for the ultimate discipline of Exile.

How we should heed the lesson and take care to watch carefully our spiritual lives that we not start along that path of destruction, but that rather we would be responsive to the word of God, responsive to the teaching of the word of God, trusting the Lord in every circumstance and drawing near to God through confession of sin.

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