

Sunday, January 29, 2017

The Day of the Lord – Zephaniah

5. Rebellious and Wayward – Zephaniah 3:1-7

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Take your Bibles and open with me this morning to Zephaniah chapter 3. Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah. If you get to Haggai you've gone too far. If you get to Matthew you've missed it by about 650 years.

Remember now that the prophet's theme in this book is *The Day of the Lord* and what the coming of the Messiah will look like for His people and for those not His people. As God warns the nations about judgment and the wrath that is coming, after addressing the nations that surrounded Judah now the message is focused at Judah and specifically the capital city of Jerusalem.

Our message from Zephaniah 3:1-7 this morning is titled, "Rebellious and Wayward" and here in our text is what God has to say to the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, To the oppressing city! 2 She has not obeyed His voice, She has not received correction; She has not trusted in the Lord, She has not drawn near to her God. 3 Her princes in her midst are roaring lions; Her judges are evening wolves That leave not a bone till morning. 4 Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, They have done violence to the law. 5 The Lord is righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, But the unjust knows no shame. 6 "I have cut off nations, Their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, With none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; There is no one, no inhabitant. 7 I said, 'Surely you will fear Me, You will receive instruction'— So that her dwelling would not be cut off, Despite everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.

At the beginning of the prophecy, Zephaniah was speaking directly to the enemies of Judah, to those who opposed the people of God. At that point I am sure that the people in Jerusalem would have cheered for the prophet and agreed with the words spoken against their enemies. They were glad to hear the threats of justice and judgment against the ungodly.

God told His people in the midst of the judgments against the nations that they, His people, needed to gather together and seek after Him. Their focus was not on the Lord however. Their focus was on those who they thought needed to be punished for their sins against them. It is a typical sentiment, isn't it? To see in others the things that need to be corrected, disciplined, exposed, changed, rebuked. How often is it when we hear a powerful message preached that we know exactly who should have been there to hear it? We know who that message was for. But when the light then shines on us, watch out!

And here we see the light indeed turned to shine on Jerusalem. It begins with the word, "Woe." The people are cursed. They are coming apart at the seams. They are falling apart. And they don't even realize the danger that they are in as they are facing the judgment of

God themselves for their sinfulness and complacency related to the worship and to the things of God.

The prophet proclaims “Woe to her who is rebellious.” In verse 2 he explains, “She has not obeyed His voice.” They are disobedient, deliberately avoiding obedience to the Word of the Lord. They know better, but they have allowed their sin, their desires, their wants, their lusts, their feeling to set their course contrary to the Word of God.

He also says Jerusalem is a polluted people. And again, verse 2 explains, “She has not received correction.” She has sinned and will not be turned back to the truth, to the right way. “She has not trusted in the Lord, She has not drawn near to her God.” She is not faithful. She is not believing. She is disobedient and wayward and stubborn and persistent in her sins. She has not drawn near to God, she wanders, and this is not a wander of curiosity, or distraction – it is a purposeful walk away from the truth and standards of God and His Word.

The people are refusing to hear God’s Word as it is read by the priests, proclaimed by the prophets. They will not listen. They just don’t want to hear what God has to say to them. It is rebellion. A refusal to hear, to listen, to obey. This is not accidental. This is not a sin of omission. This is deliberate. The people have hardened their hearts and do not want anything to do with the Lord or His Word – other than where they can use it to their own desired benefit.

God says to them they are oppressive – “to the oppressing city” – the word translated oppressing here means “to be violent.” They are violent and allow violence. They love violence. Violence against their enemies. Violence against each other. And even worse, violence against God’s Word!

Amos proclaimed 100 years earlier, in Amos 2:4, “Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they have despised the law of the Lord, And have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, Lies which their fathers followed.”

To say there for three transgression and for four – three means it is full, and to add another measure, to add the fourth, is to make it overflow. So Amos is not saying for three or four sins, but for sins that are overflowing, that are in excess. There is no lack to their sin, to their pursuit of rebellion and evil. And this is not a few sins of a few people, the leaders, or the priests. This is a way of life that is ingrained in the culture as a result of their refusal to hear the Word of God.

In Amos God says that He is not going to turn away their punishment. It is coming. It is sure. Judgment is not being warned here, it is being promised because of the depths of the sin in the land.

They have despised the Law of God, literally, the Torah. And the phrase to despise means that they have treated the Word of God as if it were a piece of trash. Interesting then that when Josiah ordered the Temple to be cleansed that they found the scrolls of the Law, the Word of God. As they were cleaning and repairing they came across this discarded book – the Word of God. It had been cast aside as refuse, as trash. It had sat on the shelf collecting dust as idols were set up and worshipped in the Temple of the Lord.

As a result of despising the Law, they have not kept His commandments. There should be an obvious correlation here – doubt the Word, deny the Word, despise the Word, disobey the Word.

Amos further says that they have been led astray by lies, and the word for lies is “fakes.” This is a reference to the false gods, to the fake gods, the idols that they have been worshipping and working and sacrificing to try and please and appease. Look at this indictment against the people, these are the lies, the fake gods that you and your fathers followed.

Fathers, what fake gods, what idols do we allow to be set up in our homes? What do we elevate to compete with God and His Word and His Worship? What things do we teach our children, directly or by example, that can be thought of to be more important than obedience to the Word of God?

Often when we cannot gather with the people of God for worship we call those things preventing us a “providential hindrance.” Things like sickness or cedar fever! Things over which we really have no control and they prevent us from obeying the command of the Lord to gather with His people for worship. On the other hand, opposite of providential hindrances, we see preferential pursuits – things we would rather do, or things we allow to take precedence over obedience to the Lord’s commands because of what we want to do at that particular point in time. Remember that at the heart of the sins of the people here is an abuse of the worship of God. Let us never underestimate the importance of worshipping God as He desires! If we worship Him in any other way we are worshipping ourselves, as we want, not as He wants. And if we are neglecting worship it must be due to providential hindrances and not preferential pursuits.

Here in Jerusalem, the fathers had pursued idols, fake gods, and their children were now going to reap the consequence of what they had been sowing in their families’ lives for these generations. For over 100 years now Zephaniah is able to bring the same charges that Amos proclaimed – this rebellious, polluted people were doing violence to the Word of God, and the day of judgment was fast approaching.

To tell the people that they are polluted here means that they are defiled. He says they have not received correction. The people sinned so God sent prophets to preach to them, to rebuke them, to correct them – to correct means to put back in its proper place, to repair – and they refused to listen and persisted in their sin. Proverbs 5:21-23 says, “For the ways of

man are before the eyes of the Lord, And He ponders all his paths. 22 His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, And he is caught in the cords of his sin. 23 He shall die for lack of instruction, And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.”

It is not that instruction is lacking or unavailable, it is that instruction is ignored and disobeyed. If we don't listen and learn, especially from those who have lived longer and know better, then we will suffer the consequences of ignoring wise counsel.

And to say that they are an “oppressing city”, to see the violence that has been done to the Word of the Lord, we see the fruit of that manifested as social injustice, oppressing people, and specifically we see the people refusing to trust and draw near to the Lord. They are far from Him and will not trust Him, and so they also mistreat others around them.

We cannot say that we love God and hate our brother – if we love God we will love our brothers – this is what John tells us in 1 John, right? And here we see it – they will not trust God or draw near to Him so of course then their relationships and interactions with others are ruled by violence and discord.

Instead of drawing near to God and trusting Him, they would come directly into His temple and set up false gods, idols, and trust them instead! In Deuteronomy 4:7 we read, “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?” They had God right there with them in their midst. The Temple, the sacrifices, it was all right there – and it was rejected and refused.

What we know also from the prophecy of Amos was that the oppression and the social injustice took the form of the rich falsely accusing someone that they knew was too poor to legal refute the charges, and they would use the corrupt legal system to kidnap them and force them into slavery to pay off supposed debts that were owed. This corruption was overflowing through the land – through its leaders, its courts, its wealthy leading citizens. And everyone was living to serve self.

In verses 3-4 then we see who is to blame for these conditions – the religious and political leaders in Jerusalem. And we sign a sign of relief there thinking that it is the leaders' fault. Well, just wait...

“3 Her princes in her midst are roaring lions; Her judges are evening wolves That leave not a bone till morning. 4 Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, They have done violence to the law.”

Look at this picture of the political leadership in the land of Judah. Princes and judges are described as lions and wolves. They are not leading the people, but using the people to further their own personal agendas. As lions hunt, one lion will roar and when all that is edible in the field runs away, they end up running right into the jaws and the claws of the waiting pride at the other end of the plain.

The term for judges, calling them evening wolves, this references a wolf that has been hungry and on the hunt for some time. He is desperate. And when he does catch his prey, he gobbles it up and doesn't leave a scrap. If you watch nature shows, or watch even pets at times, when they have enough to eat, they will eat and then leave some hidden away for later or for morning. But if they are particularly hungry, or suspicious that the meal will be stolen by competing predators, they will gorge themselves and eat it all even at the risk of making themselves sick.

And this is how God describes the political leaders in Jerusalem. In Amos He gives even more detail to show us why He has described them this way. Amos 2:6-7 tells us, "Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for silver, And the poor for a pair of sandals. 7 Those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted. A man and his father go in to the same girl, To defile My holy name."

Life was being valued as equal to a pair of shoes. A low view of God always, always results in a low view of human life, of those created in the image of God.

The scandal of the sandal here is that one of these ruling elites would decide that they needed something, some material want had to be met. They would then falsely accuse a poor person who could not mount a legal defense and even if they could, the judges had been bribed, the poor victim would be found guilty of some theft or some crime, and in those days if you owed a debt, especially a criminal debt, you had to pay it off or work it off. Well if you were poor – which was who they targeted with these schemes – you could not pay it off, so you were sold into slavery to pay the amount owed. The poor became a commodity to provide for the wants of the rich.

Imagine a system that is so corrupt that the princes and the judges are so defiled and defiant that they will let you go and find a poor person, falsely accuse them, uphold the charge with no proof, and by this injustice provide cheap labor, actually, free labor. The wealthy bribed the judges, abused the poor, and this had become normal – it was a way of life.

This is why Amos and Zephaniah tell us that the leaders are like roaring lions and ravenous wolves. When a people begin to refuse to listen to the Word of God all sorts of corruption and injustice will follow.

Zephaniah goes on to say there in verse 4 that "Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, They have done violence to the law." Insolent and treacherous. This describes the priests and many of the prophets (false prophets).

The word insolent means reckless. Their religious counsel and teaching destroys lives.

They are also treacherous, that is to say they are deceitful, they don't speak the truth and if you follow what they say you will ruin your life!

He goes on saying that the priests have polluted the sanctuary. They have made the places of worship unholy. They have done violence to the Law of God by their violations of it. Amos describes this for us this way, "A man and his father go in to the same girl, To defile My holy name. 8 They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, And drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god." This was the experience of false religion and the worship of idols were the priests encouraged prostitution as an act of worship to these false gods.

The mention of drinking the wine of the condemned refers to the wine that was given as a bride to the judges and because all of this corrupt system was working together in the political and religious leadership, these corrupt leaders would drink the wine in celebrations of their debauchery and corruption, even celebrating these things in the Temple of God.

They were seriously making an effort here to thank God for their ill-gotten gains – they were saying that their wealth and the fruits of their corrupt labor was a blessing from His hand. It is almost like an actor winning an Oscar for a filthy film and then standing up and thanking God for his talent and ability. All the while missing that God has turned them over to their sin and that is not a good thing!

Remember, this had become a way of life. This was normal for them in their society at this point. For 100 years from Amos to Zephaniah there had been no reform, no revival, no repentance. Instead this was ingrained as a way of life and accepted as a way to worship God.

What these leaders were doing really can be summarized this way – they were taking the Lord's name in vain. This is what it means to claim to follow Christ but live in a way that is opposite of what He teaches and expects of His followers. The danger of course is that when we make this claim and can't back it up with our actions then we are misrepresenting God. We are bearing false witness. We are lying about Him and His character and holiness. If we defame and defile His name, He promises judgment. He says He is a jealous God. That is NOT a blessed assurance.

The people now hear a contrast in verse 5. He offers Himself and His Ways as a contract to their pollution and corruption in verse 5-7.

"The Lord is righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, But the unjust knows no shame. 6 "I have cut off nations, Their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, With none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; There is no one, no inhabitant. 7 I said, 'Surely you will fear Me, You will receive instruction'— So that her dwelling would not be cut off,

Despite everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.”

Notice that while they were doing all of this wickedness, God was still there in their midst! That is kind of scary isn't it? They were doing violence to His Word and His Name, and He is still there. And God is righteous, to the point that the text says He will do no unrighteousness.

Here is what the people would do – times were tough, crops would fail, livestock would die, they would go worship God and offer Him sacrifices but then if things didn't get better they would go and sacrifice to idols and worship false gods hoping someone would hear them and remedy their situation. Worship for them was the equivalent of buying a lottery ticket. Maybe this god would be the winning number.

But God contrasts Himself to His people, saying that He only ever does what is right.

When we struggle and when we have trials, we sometimes fail to believe what the Bible tells us. That God is sovereign. That God is perfectly holy and completely good. And that He is powerful enough to work any circumstance out for our good and His glory. We don't really believe that though, do we, when “bad” things begin to happen?

If anything that happens in our life can be used and is used to conform us to the image of Christ then what truly bad thing can happen to us? If God can do no unrighteous thing, then what truly bad thing can happen?

Let this sink in for a minute. The Scriptures here tell us that God, who cannot lie – not that He chooses not to lie, in His holy character and person, He cannot lie – He is the truth. God who cannot lie makes promises to us. There is no chance in all of eternity that what God says will not come to pass. His Word is sure.

And look in contrast at the people. Unrighteousness and injustice overflow in their lives and their society. But God does not only stand in contrast to their corruption. He is the cure. And every morning He brings His justice to light – every day is an opportunity to walk in His ways and to draw near to Him.

What other verse in the Scripture tells us about what God makes new every morning? Here we see every morning He brings His justice to light. Aren't you glad then that He has also promised to bring new mercies every morning? In fact, a daily dose of justice is exactly why we need a daily dose of mercy, right? And each daily dose of mercy lasts forever. Aren't you glad?

Zephaniah goes on to say, “He never fails.” The people have failed God but God will never fail His people. He will never fail to accomplish His purposes.

The end of verse 5 says, "The unjust knows no shame." Those who are not just are blatant in their lack of justice. They revel in their unfaithfulness. The people were running in this flood of debauchery, often in the name of worship, and they were doing this without any shame. Their conscience had been seared. There was no sense of guilt. They were bold in their sin. And so God tells them, "I have cut off nations, Their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, With none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; There is no one, no inhabitant." God has demonstrated judgment for them. He had judged other nations. In fact, in the middle of these 100 years between Amos and Zephaniah, between 766 and 660 BC, what had happened in 722 BC?

Back in Amos 2:9-16, "Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, Whose height was like the height of the cedars, And he was as strong as the oaks; Yet I destroyed his fruit above And his roots beneath." This refers to the Canaanites, those living in the Promised Land that God uprooted so His people could live there.

He goes on, reminding them that before they went to the land God had led them out of Egypt. God just didn't promise them a promised land and give it to them, before that He brought them up out of the oppressive land of Egypt. In Amos 2:10 He goes on. "10 Also it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, And led you forty years through the wilderness, To possess the land of the Amorite." Do you know what is amazing about the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, from the banks of the Red Sea to Kadesh Barnea? You can make that journey on foot in less than a month. And when they got to Kadesh Barnea what happened? They had the first ever vote in a church meeting in history. After they sent twelve men to spy out the land, those men saw the Amorites. They saw the giants. They saw all that was going on and when they came back what did they do? They said, "Should we go?" And they said, "It is a beautiful land, it is a great land God is giving us....No." Ten said no, two said yes, Caleb and Joshua. And forty years later the only two who walked out of Egypt and walked into the Promised Land were Caleb and Joshua.

God reminds them. He led them forty years through the wilderness to possess the Land of the Amorites. He goes on in Amos, "11 I raised up some of your sons as prophets, And some of your young men as Nazirites. Is it not so, O you children of Israel?" Says the Lord. 12 "But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, And commanded the prophets saying, 'Do not prophesy!' 13 "Behold, I am weighed down by you, As a cart full of sheaves is weighed down. 14 Therefore flight shall perish from the swift, The strong shall not strengthen his power, Nor shall the mighty deliver himself; 15 He shall not stand who handles the bow, The swift of foot shall not escape, Nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself. 16 The most courageous men of might Shall flee naked (that is without armor) in that day," Says the Lord."

God called and set apart prophets to speak His Word to them but the people abused them and rejected them and would not listen to them...and even killed some of them. God reminds them of all He gave them in the Promises and the Land and now in their rebellion and in their wickedness He says that He is going to come down on them like a cart

overloaded with sheaves – the harvest, the judgement they are about to reap, it will be more than they can bear! There will be no escape. There will be no defense.

In 2 Kings 17 we read about what happened as God drove their enemies toward them like a cart overflowing with sheaves – judgment came by the Assyrians. This is the historical record of what happened in 722 BC to Israel. Israel had refused to listen to the Word of God. They worshipped idols. They polluted themselves. God told them He was going to judge them and that they would not be able to escape. Forty years after the warning of Amos, one generation later, this happened to Israel:

“7 For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, 8 and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. 9 Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. 10 They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. 11 There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, 12 for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, “You shall not do this thing.” 13 Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.” 14 Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God.”

And so God sent the Assyrians in judgment against Israel. And Judah watched it happen. And during the reign of King Hezekiah the Assyrians came after Judah and God stopped them, killing 185,000 of Sennacherib’s troops, sending them home in defeat. They knew what it looked like for God to fulfill His promises of judgment. And they were sinning the same sins and rejecting the same warnings of judgment from the prophets.

In Zephaniah 3:6-7 again, we have read, “I have cut off nations, Their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, With none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; There is no one, no inhabitant. 7 I said, ‘Surely you will fear Me, You will receive instruction’— So that her dwelling would not be cut off, Despite everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.”

Judah was warned. Now there is something significant here about the warning. God warned Israel. Israel refused to listen. Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria and they never came back. You realize that? Israel was taken by Assyria and never came back.

God had told the people through Jeremiah and Daniel understood it in Babylonian exile

that the exile of Judah would be seventy years and then after that under Ezra and Nehemiah the people were brought back, they rebuilt the wall, they re-inhabited the Land. They had an opportunity to come back.

They had seen the example of their sister tribes to the north in Israel. God told them through the prophets that judgment was coming if they did not repent and return to Him. They did not, so He sent word that judgment was coming and there was no escape. But they would not listen. As a nation they were doomed.

Again back to Amos 2:4, “Their lies lead them astray, Lies which their fathers followed.” For generations, fathers taught sons by example how to invite God’s judgment! They followed after false gods. Fathers and sons worshipped the same idols by the same acts of immorality. One generation taught the next how to sin and how to rebel and how to go astray from the Word of God.

God has said to the people through Zephaniah, I am righteous in your midst, I will do no unrighteousness, I bring justice every morning, I will never fail. I have cut off the nations and given you an example of what happens to those who continue in their sin. And I have given you instruction so that you can hear and live. Fathers, look at this – God has laid out a really good pattern for you to follow in your fatherhood! Moms, for you too.

First He says that He will be righteous in their midst. Fathers, and mothers, you need to be righteous in your home, among your family. You need to be an example of holiness and obedience. God says He will do no unrighteousness. Can any human parent follow that example without fail? No, but when we do fail, moms and dads, we have a responsibility to confess that sin and ask our family to forgive us. Model brokenness and humility. Model confession and repentance. Don’t hide your sin, or you will be teaching your kids to do likewise. Be vulnerable in your imperfections and use them to teach righteousness.

Ephesians 6:4 reminds fathers, “Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Teach them by righteousness and by a proper response to unrighteousness. Teach them how to rightly deal with sin. Just as God had given Judah an example, we need to be truthful about the consequences of sin. Too many parents today shelter their children from the consequences of sin, and of stupidity and bad decisions. We must learn from mistakes, ours and others.

Hosea 8:7 reminds us, “They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind.” And Hosea 10:12 says, “Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the Lord, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you.”

And of course Galatians 6:7 gives us this admonition, “7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

Keep in mind, sowing and reaping does not just apply to negative things, to sin and

wickedness. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” Sow righteousness. Sow goodness. Sow holiness.

Finally we see that the children of God in Judah refused to listen to instruction. As a result God was bringing judgment. Parents, in the home, when your children refuse to heed instruction, when they disobey, you need to understand the crucial difference between punishment and discipline.

Punishment is “a penalty paid for an offense.” It is the price to pay.

What is at the root of the word discipline? Disciple. To discipline means “training to act in accordance with the rules or to develop and improve a skill.”

God here offers instruction – this is discipline. If they walk in righteousness they can walk with God. He tells them how. He instructs them in what to do. You need to instruct your children. Discipline them. Punishment exacts a price but offers no growth, no rehabilitation, no grace. Use every opportunity as a teaching opportunity. You see, we do not only discipline in the case of wrong doing. We can teach when they do wrong, and when they do right! Reaffirm righteousness by the way you live and the way you instruct them.

Hebrews 12 tells us this about God our heavenly Father, “3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”

Letting a child do whatever they want to do is not the loving thing to do! Love demonstrates itself in discipline.

Hebrews 12 goes on, “7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

What is the purpose for instruction in righteousness? It is not merely to conform outward behavior to some acceptable standard! It is to produce in us holiness.

What is the complaint against Judah? You have polluted yourselves. You are not holy. Holiness comes by listening to and obey the instruction of God's Word.

We have a lesson to learn from Judah then. If we just let our family go their own way we are despising the Word of God. We must sow righteousness. And what we sow we will reap. Judah is going to learn the lesson the hard way, having rejected the Word of God for so long. Today let us evaluate where we are in our families, in our church. Are we worshipping idols? Are we setting an example that says we can claim to follow Christ and then live however we want? Are we polluting ourselves with the world and its lusts thinking we can sin without consequence?

Today let us turn for instruction to the Word of God, where we know, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Let us pray.