

ZEPHANIAH

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to the book of Zephaniah as we continue our study through the Word of God. Now Zephaniah prophesied just prior to the time of Jeremiah. They both spoke to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet as he was broken over the condition of the nation and his people. He saw the coming judgment for their sin and refusal to repent and get right with God. And Jeremiah preached into the Babylonian captivity.

On the other hand, Zephaniah was more like a hammer of judgment upon the nation, coming down upon the people for their sin, striking them hard. And he preached during the reign of Josiah and he reigned from 640 to 609 B. C. That puts Zephaniah's prophecy between 640 and 612 B. C. because Zephaniah predicts the destruction of Nineveh (which happened in 612 B. C.)

Two different ministries dealing with the same issues to the same people at basically the same time and yet we see two vastly different approaches. Who was right? Both! You see, each person needs to fulfill the work that God has set before him in the manner that God desires.

You don't need to copy another ministry, but do the work that God has called you to do faithfully and you will be rewarded for your service. As you read the various books of the Bible you will notice that the writer has his own style, his own way of presenting things and yet they were all inspired by the Holy Spirit. And the same is true in our own lives, may we not forget that. Do the work faithfully unto Him!

Let me share these words with you from J. Vernon McGee in a story he calls, “The Dark Side of Love.” And as we will see as we go through Zephaniah there is a lot of judgment being poured out and as many read this they wonder where the love of God is in all of this. I think this story will help explain it to us. We are told,

It was late at night in a suburban area of one of our great cities in America. A child lay restless in her bed. A man, with a very severe and stern look, stealthily entered her bedroom and softly approached her bed. The moment the little girl saw him, a terrified look came over her face, and she began to scream. Her mother rushed into the room and went over to her. The trembling child threw her arms about her mother.

The man withdrew to the telephone, called someone, who was evidently an accomplice, and in a very soft voice made some sort of an arrangement. Hastily the man reentered the room, tore the child from the mother’s arms, and rushed out to a waiting car. The child was sobbing, and he attempted to stifle her cries. He drove madly down street after street until he finally pulled up before a large, sinister, and foreboding-looking building. All was quiet, the building was partially dark, but there was one room upstairs ablaze with light.

The child was hurriedly taken inside, up to the lighted room, and put into the hands of the man with whom the conversation had been held over the telephone in the hallway. In turn, the child was handed over to another accomplice—this time a woman—and these two took her into an inner room. The man who had brought her was left outside in the hallway. Inside the room, the man plunged a gleaming, sharp knife into the vitals of that little child, and she lay as if she were dead.

Your reaction at this point may be, “I certainly hope they will catch the criminal who abducted the little girl and is responsible for such an awful crime!”

However, I have not described to you the depraved and degraded action of a debased mind. I have not taken a chapter out of the life of the man in Cell 2455, Death Row. I have not related to you the sordid and sadistic crime of a psychopathic criminal. On the contrary, I have described to you a tender act of love. In fact, I can think of no more sincere demonstration of love than that which I have described to you. I am sure you are amazed when I say that. Let me fill in some of the details, and then you will understand.

You see, that little girl had awakened in the night with severe abdominal pain. She had been subject to such attacks before, and the doctor had told her parents to watch her very carefully. It was her father who had hurried into the room. When he saw the suffering of his little girl, he went to the telephone, called the family physician, and arranged to meet him at the hospital. He then rushed the little girl down to the hospital and handed her over to the family physician who took her to the operating room and performed emergency surgery.

Through it all, every move and every act of that father was of tender love, anxious care, and wise decision. I have described to you the dark side of love—but *love*, nevertheless. The father loved the child just as much on that dark night when he took her to the hospital and delivered her to the surgeon's knife as he did the next week when he brought her flowers and candy. It was just as much a demonstration of deep affection when he delivered her into the hands of the surgeon as it was the next week when he brought her home and delivered her into the arms of her mother. My friend, love places the eternal security and permanent welfare of the object of love above any transitory or temporary comfort or present pleasure down here upon this earth. Love seeks the best interests of the beloved. That is what this little Book of Zephaniah is all about—the dark side of love.

That is the perspective we need to have even today in regards to the things we are going through. God loves us too much to leave us in sin. He does everything possible to bring us to that place He wants us to be, the place that is best for our lives. That is what we are seeing even today as the Tribulation Period gets closer and God is going to pour out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world. And as we see as we read the Bible, out of that period of time we see the birth of the Kingdom Age where Jesus will rule and reign from Jerusalem and righteousness will fill this land!

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Zephaniah chapter 1 beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

ZEPHANIAH 1

VERSE 1

1. Here we are given some information about this prophet. He was the great, great grandson of King Hezekiah and the cousin of the ruling King, Josiah. Not only was Zephaniah related to one of the great Kings of Israel, but after 55 years of wickedness under King Manasseh and 2 years under his son Amon, we now see Josiah bring spiritual reform to the nation. At least he tried to.

Now, interestingly enough, Zephaniah's name means "YAHWEH hides" or "YAHWEH hidden" which may speak of the dark times under both King Manasseh and King Amon or the coming days of God's judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah as they will go into captivity under the hands of the Babylonians!

2. And make no mistake about it, Josiah did bring spiritual reform to the nation but for the most part, it was superficial. People were going to Temple but their lives were wicked, they were doing abominations before the Lord. And yes, I am sure they used spiritual words when they spoke but their hearts were far from the Lord, their hearts were divided!

Listen to what Jeremiah says of this period of time in Jeremiah chapter 7 beginning in verse 1 where we read, **“The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ‘Stand in the gate of the LORD’S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!’ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, “The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.” For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, “We are delivered to do all these abominations”? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,’ says the LORD.”**

Jeremiah 7:1-11.

Now as I read that I see the church doing the very same thing today. We talk about churches growing, we have mega churches but look at all that is going on in their lives. They go to church, they use spiritual words and yet they endorse homosexuality, they are for abortion, they are committing adultery and-so-on, but the church is growing! No it is not, that is not revival. Revival begins in the heart of the individual and what God is doing on the inside will be manifested outwardly. This is all show many times today!

VERSES 2-3

1. Zephaniah does not waste any time with introductions, he gets right to the point, God's judgment upon His people and the land of Israel will be severe. The near term fulfillment was the Babylonian captivity but we can look ahead to another time, the Tribulation Period where God will pour out His judgment upon the earth dwellers and upon the earth and it will be complete!

And as you look at verse 3 you see that not only the land is judged but even the animals. And this is clearly given to us in Revelation chapters 6 through 19 as God's judgment is poured out on all life and this judgment, as I have said, will be complete!

VERSES 4-6

1. Here we see that Judah or the Southern Kingdom of Judah is going to be judged by God. Now you may wonder how God can do that to His people and the reason is simple and we don't have to guess. Listen carefully to where the people of God were at as the Lord tells us in Ezekiel 16:15-30, **“But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on**

them. Such things should not happen, nor be. You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them. You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them. Also My food which I gave you - the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you - you set it before them as sweet incense; and so it was,' says the Lord God. 'Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter, that you have slain My children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire? And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, struggling in your blood. Then it was so, after all your wickedness - "Woe, woe to you!" says the Lord God - that you also built for yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street. You built your high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be abhorred. You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry. You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbors, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke Me to anger. Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; indeed you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied. How degenerate is your heart!' says the Lord God, 'seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot.'

Keep in mind that Jerusalem was to be the place for people to come and meet the living God. But instead we see that Jerusalem became a place of idolatry. She played the harlot and like the city so went the people.

They dressed themselves up, took possessions that God gave them and used them to make false gods to worship in the high places. And the thought was, the higher up on the hill or mountain you were, the closer you were to these gods'. And understand all this pagan idolatry was sexually oriented, it satisfied the flesh, and thus they were drawn into it, played the harlot and left their God.

And what God had given to them to worship Him by they were using to worship these other false gods' by! And it got so bad that they even sacrificed their children to the god Molech in the fire!

Now think about what was going on. These pagan worship practices centered many times around sexual promiscuity as I have said. Thus, what is the result of sexual promiscuity? Children, and many times unwanted children. Such was the case in Israel. And what do you do with all these unwanted children?

They offered them as a sacrifice to the god of prosperity, Molech. You see, if you sacrificed your child you were ensuring prosperity for yourself or so they thought. Thus, they killed two birds with one stone in a sense. They got rid of all these unwanted children that were being born from their sexual promiscuity and they were securing a blessing, prosperity for themselves.

What they would do is go to the south side of Jerusalem, to the Valley of Hinnom, and get a fire going. And in this fire they placed these brass idols of Molech with his arms outstretched. And they would drink, yell, bang these drums, working themselves up into an altered state of consciousness. Then they would take their children and place them in these burning hot, outstretched hands of Molech as a sacrifice. They burned them in the fire!

Not only that but every street had shrines to these gods and they saw no problem with what they were doing because they went to Temple! And as we read this we are probably thinking, “How could they do these things? How could they turn from God, the One who brought them into existence?” The reason is simple. They forgot where they came from and what God had done for them. That is a dangerous place to be. Never lose sight of what God has done, is doing and will do in your life!

2. These words of judgment from God would be fulfilled some 40 to 50 years from when Zephaniah spoke these words as the third and final invasion of Judah took place in 586 B. C. It is in this invasion that the Babylonians destroyed the Temple, the city and took the people back to Babylon except for a few weak, sick people that they left behind.

3. Listen again to what was going on because I believe we are seeing this happen today in the church as I have said. There were the idolatrous priests or literally “*blackened robed*” pagan priests who were ministering to God’s people. Why some priests wear black robes today is beyond me, you would think they would want to wear white! And, the pagan priests were the Levitical priests who turned from the true and living God and were leading the people in the same direction. This was some of what Josiah was trying to remove from the land. (II Kings 23:4-5)

And as you can see, they had this divided heart where they appeared spiritual, they went to Temple and yet they did all these abominations before the Lord as I have said.

And there were those who didn't have a divided heart, they just walked away from God completely! They were indifferent to the things of God. Today many people call themselves agnostics which comes from the Latin root word GNOZCO which means "to know." When you place the prefix "a" in front of it, it means "one who knows nothing." Without God, isn't that the truth! It is pretty funny, "I don't believe in God and I don't care what you say because I am one who knows nothing!" I would agree.

But look at the church today and the idolatry that goes on within it. We have yoga, eastern mysticism, New Age teachings, all kinds of false doctrine and immorality encouraged from the pulpit and yet, they are going to church. God did not approve of it back then and He does not approve of it today!

And I realize that some may think I am going too far on this one. That the church is doing just fine. But if you were to take someone from 100 years ago and place them in the church today what would they think? I think they would be outraged at the disrespect that is shown towards God and His Word. Let me share with you again from J. Vernon McGee as he wrote,

If you think that this is just the wild raving of a fundamentalist preacher, you are wrong. Let me quote an excerpt from an editorial in a major metropolitan newspaper a number of years ago. Speaking of the failure of the churches to present any spiritual message whatsoever, the editorial concluded:

This betrayal of Christ in the name of Christianity is one reason for the moral and spiritual malaise with which this country is afflicted. The melancholy fact is that the churches no longer influence the development of national character. People go to church mainly because of an impulse to participate in a service of worship, not because of any spiritual guidance they expect from the clergyman.

What a note of condemnation this is! This is true not just of our nation but of every nation.

The historian Gibbon concluded that there were five reasons for the decline and fall of Rome. Gibbon was not a Christian, but here is why he says Rome fell: (1) The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society. (2) Higher and higher taxes; the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the populace. (3) The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting, more brutal, more immoral. (4) The building of great armaments when the great enemy was within; the decay of individual responsibility. (5) The decay of religion, fading into mere form, losing touch with life, losing power to guide the people.

The message of Zephaniah carries out this scriptural principle of human government, and he puts his finger right down on the sore spot in the southern kingdom of Judah—idolatry. Zephaniah saw what was happening. The people were now on the toboggan; they were on the way down and out, and judgment was coming. Idolatry is where every great nation has gone off the track. When a nation departs from the living and true God or when it gives up great moral principles which were based on religion, when it goes into idolatry, these factors eventually lead it into gross immorality and into political anarchy.

Let me show you what I mean about how far we have come. Back in 2014 Hillsong did a Christmas show and one of the songs they sang was Silent Night. Nothing wrong with that but listen to how they presented this. And keep in mind, that as the music starts, the stage looks like a rock concert with lasers and then what transpired disappointed me greatly as this looked like a Las Vegas show with girls and all. Listen to what one article had to say,

Let's just say, Hillsongs' version of Silent Night fails on every account. 1920s Flapper Girls, set to rip-rocking Jazz music just doesn't fit with SILENT night. Further, it doesn't fit with Christ. As a production it is tacky (even artistically it just doesn't work); as an act of worship it is abhorrently fleshly (can we still use that phrase?) – and quite frankly it's just disappointing.

Let's just think about the connotations in this video for a moment. What are the connotations of *Flapper Girls*? According to Wikipedia:

“Flappers were a “new breed” of young Western women in the 1920s who wore short skirts, bobbed their hair, listened to jazz, and flaunted their disdain for what was then considered acceptable behavior. Flappers were seen as brash for wearing excessive makeup, drinking, treating sex in a casual manner, smoking, driving automobiles, and otherwise flouting social and sexual norms.”

Says it all doesn't it? And you didn't need the explanation to see that is the image that the video was conveying. Let's look to the scriptures to see how far this vision of worship and womanhood falls from the biblical pattern:

“Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness . . .” (1 Tim 2:9-10)

It's clear isn't it? Not only does this Hillsongs presentation fail in in terms of media and art, it fails biblically. This is the opposite of biblical Christianity. For too long Hillsongs have had a reputation for being cutting edge Christianity – they are not cutting edge, they are worldly.

Where are the men of God? Where is the Holiness? Where is the fear of God? Where is the Christ-exalting reverence . . .? Where are [those] . . . leaders who care about the honour of Christ?

- <https://needforcreed.wordpress.com/2015/12/18/hillsongs-londons-sexy-silent-night-a-call-for-church-discipline/>

You can watch the video from the web page that I have from this article and you can see how unbelievable it is. We are more interested today in pleasing ourselves than honoring God. We are more interested in how worship makes us feel than how it pleases God! May we wake up because I think the Lord is calling the church today to get right because judgment does begin at the house of God!

VERSES 7-9

1. This seems harsh as verse 7 opens up by saying, “**Be silent, in the presence of the Lord GOD.**” In other words, be quite, shut up, stop making any noise! Why was this said? Because enough was enough, no more empty words, no more empty promises, judgment is coming and the Lord does not want to hear any more excuses from them. David Guzik put it like this,

Boice tells the story of two gangsters, one named “Two-Gun Crowley” who cruelly murdered many including a policeman. He was captured in a shoot-out with police and wrote this note during the shoot-out, fearing he would die: “Under my coat is a weary heart, but a kind one - one that would do nobody any harm.” The other gangster is Al Capone, who said: “I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures, and all I get is abuse, the existence of a hunted man.” Our ability to proclaim our innocence when we are deep in sin is pretty amazing, but through it all God tells us *be silent in the presence of the Lord GOD*.

- David Guzik, Zephaniah 1

And this sacrifice He is speaking of are His people, as they will be judged for their wickedness. The near term fulfillment is speaking of the Babylonians coming in and destroying the Southern Kingdom of Judah, taking them into captivity.

The long term fulfillment we see culminate with the Battle of Armageddon spoken of in Revelation chapter 19 beginning in verse 17 where we read **“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, ‘Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.’ And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword**

which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.” Revelation 19:17-21.

The sacrifice are the wicked people of this world and His invited guests are the birds or vultures that will feed upon their carcasses!

2. Now in verse 8 it speaks of the Lord being angry because of the clothes they were wearing, why is that so important. Why was God upset about the clothes they were wearing? Because their outward appearance was more important than an inward relationship with God. And it was their outward appearance that was a reflection of what was going on in their hearts!

You see, they may have looked good outwardly but inside they were dead. Now some take this to the extreme and say we are not to dress like the world? Then how in the world are you going to dress? Or maybe you should go around naked? Or do you dress old fashioned, like the Amish even though that still is like the world? That makes no sense, does it? It is not what you wear outwardly, but inwardly that will then be manifested in your outward actions!

Now let me also say this because again, some may take this the wrong way. We are to dress decently; we are not to have everything hanging out or have our pants so low that our underwear is showing. We are representing the Lord and thus, dress accordingly. If you would not feel comfortable standing before the Lord in what you are wearing, then change your clothes. I guess that is the best gauge to go by.

But the main idea is their heart and this façade of apparel they were wearing to cover-up the deadness of their heart! And the reality is, if you are dead on the inside you will dress just like the world does because you want to fit in. Dress decently, appropriately and you won't have to worry because it will reflect your relationship with God!

3. We have seen the King's, the princes, the leaders rebuked and now, in verse 9 we see the common people spoken of. The common people who had no problem taking what was not theirs. Sounds so much like the days we are living in where people feel it is their right to have what is not theirs, what they have not worked for. Thus, stealing was common so you can amass your own wealth and possessions and it was not seen as wrong!

Regarding this Dr. Charles Feinberg writes, "What is referred to is the zeal with which the servants of the rich hastened from their homes to plunder the property of others to enrich their masters." (Dr. Charles Feinberg, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi, p. 48)

VERSES 10-11

1. Keep in mind that the fish gate was located in the north wall and this is where business deals were made, the fish brought into the market. And it is here that the prophet is speaking of where the Babylonians would come, from the north through the fish gate.

Also the market district was being judged. Why? Because the focus was making money, climbing up the corporate ladder and not the Lord who will truly supply all your needs! That should sound familiar today!

God was condemning that back then and He is doing no less today. Paul, in Colossians 3:5-7 wrote, "**Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.**"

Paul is calling for us to mortify the flesh nature and to do it now! You see, if you were raised in Christ, if you seek those things which are from above, if you set your mind on things above, on God, then these works of the flesh will not be manifested in your life!

Paul speaks of sexual sins or fornication, uncleanness or moral filth, passion or uncontrollable lusts, and evil desire or illicit cravings.

Then Paul speaks of covetousness or greed and this is truly where the other sins that Paul spoke of spring forth. It is a selfish desire and thus, it is idolatry. Think about it, you covet a relationship with another woman and you are married and where does it lead? It leads to adultery, fornication if you let it grow and don't cut it off! Thus, if you are content in the Lord you will not covet and give room for these other sins to grow by!

And if you think about it, covetousness began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve coveted something that they did not have and God warned them not to partake of that fruit. But their lust got the better of them and Adam partook of the fruit and sin entered this world.

Well, that is not completely correct. Covetousness began in heaven with Lucifer who coveted what God had, he wanted to be like God. And it is that same sin that fills the lives of people today and that is why we as Christians are to crucify the flesh, put it to death every day, don't feed it but starve it and feed the Spirit of God.

Now what I mean by putting the flesh to death is not to abuse your body. And when I say that we are to starve the flesh I am not saying that we are to stay away from food. And if you think about it that would not solve the problem even if we did those things. Then what is the point?

What I mean is that we are not to put ourselves in situations where we are going to be tempted to sin. We are not to feed those lusts. We put on the Lord Jesus Christ and we make no provision for the flesh, we don't give it room to grow because we are so filled with the Lord!

Paul put it like this in Romans 6:1-2, **“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”** Thus, as a Christian you must ask yourself, “Who will I identify myself with, Jesus or this world, the flesh?” And understand that the choice you make will have consequences, one that is good and one that is bad!

Let's put this into the proper perspective as Spurgeon asks us,

Christian, what hast thou to do with sin? Hath it not cost thee enough already? Burnt child, wilt thou play with the fire? What! When thou hast already been between the jaws of the lion, wilt thou step a second time into his den? Hast thou had enough of the old serpent? Did he not poison all they veins once, and wilt thou play upon the hole of the asp, and put thy hand upon the cockatrice's den a second time? Oh, be not so mad! So foolish! Did sin ever yield thee real pleasure? Didst thou find solid satisfaction in it? If so, go back to thine old drudgery, and wear the chain again, if it delight thee. But inasmuch as sin did never give thee what it promised to bestow, but deluded thee with lies, be not a second time snared by the old fowler – be free, and let the remembrance of thy ancient bondage forbid thee to enter the net again!

- Spurgeon, Evening by Evening, p. 151

This is an important lesson for us to learn, to be content with what God has given us and not covet those things which are not ours!

VERSES 12-13

1. Picture what is going on here. The Lord said that “**. . . I will search out Jerusalem with lamps . . .**” In other words, you are not going to be able to hide from God’s judgment. And if God needed to, and He doesn’t because He is all-knowing and all-seeing, He would get out lamps or candles and search Jerusalem and find the wicked and punish them.

It is as Baker wrote, “Unlike Diogenes, the pre-Christian Greek philosopher who was searching for an honest man, Yahweh in this context does not seek righteousness but sin to *punish* and eradicate.”

And keep in mind that God was going to use the Babylonians to bring this judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Josephus tells us in one of the invasions of Jerusalem that the cities aristocracy were literally dragged from the sewer system where they hid for their lives.

In other words, they were searched for and found. And the reason is simple, no concern about the Lord. They had become complacent. And over time they came to the conclusion that God has no power to do anything about their actions or God just does not care. As we can see, God cares very much about this wicked living and He will do something about it!

And thus, in this judgment they were not going to be able to enjoy the fruit from their labors because they were either going to be killed or taken into captivity by the Babylonians, which happened in 586 B. C.

VERSES 14-17

1. Again we need to keep in mind the near-term fulfillment of this prophecy, which was the Babylonian invasion upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah. First in 606 B. C., then in 597 B. C. and finally the third invasion in 586 B. C. as they destroyed the city of Jerusalem, the Temple and took most of the Jews back to Babylon as captives!

And then there is the long-term fulfillment or the completion of what this prophecy is all about, “**The great day of the LORD is near . . .**” This is ultimately looking ahead to the Tribulation Period where God will pour out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world.

It is as Amos 5:16-20 says, “**Therefore the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, says this: ‘There shall be wailing in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, “Alas! Alas!” They shall call the farmer to mourning, and skillful lamenters to wailing. In all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you,’ says the LORD. Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?’**”

And listen to what we are told in Revelation 6:12-17 because this is the day that Zephaniah is speaking of, **“I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”**

Man’s heart is so hard that they know why this judgment is coming upon them but they refuse to repent and turn to the Lord, they want to try and hide from His wrath. And yet, remember what we read in Zephaniah 1:12, that God was going to search Jerusalem with a lamp or candle to find those that are hiding and He is going to do no less in this judgment or the Day of the Lord!

And it says men will walk as blind men, why? Because they have rejected the light and thus, they are walking in darkness apart from Christ! And all they had to do was turn to the Lord but they refused and as Zephaniah said, **“I will bring distress upon men, And they shall walk like blind men, Because they have sinned against the Lord; Their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse.”**

2. Now let me say this because there is this growing movement today that is teaching that the church, believers will go through some or all of the Tribulation Period. I am not here to bash them for what they believe, if they want to believe that, it is fine but don't go teaching this to others and say it is Scriptural. There is no support for the church going through any part of the Tribulation Period!

Yes Jesus said in John 16:33, **“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”** And some would say, “See, we will have tribulation!” That is true but where is this tribulation coming from? It is coming from the world. In the Tribulation Period where is this judgment coming from? It is coming from the Lord! You see, that is a big difference.

And to say that those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture are not going to be prepared for what is ahead is foolishness. Ever since the church was born there has been persecution, martyrdom perpetrated upon believers for their faith. So that makes no sense to me.

And think of it like this. As a father we allow our children to experience difficulties in their lives so that they may grow. We try to protect them but they will face difficult times. But as a father we would never beat-up our children or punish them or hurt them for what someone else has done. That would be very wrong.

If that is true, and it is, then why do we think our heavenly Father will punish us, bring judgment upon us for the sins of this world. In fact, if you really think about it, our sins were paid for by Jesus, the punishment for our sins has was bore by Jesus so why would God then punish us if the work is finished?

The wrath of God is being poured out upon a Christ rejecting world! I know, some like to say but God's wrath is not poured out until the trumpet judgments or at the last trumpet judgment. Again, foolishness! God's wrath begins with the seal judgments. Again, some would say "But the Antichrist is the one who is on the scene first and thus, this is not God's judgment!"

Let me ask you this. When God brought His judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah how did He do it? By the hands of a pagan King, a wicked King named Nebuchadnezzar! And I think that is exactly what we see with the emergence of the Antichrist, this begins the judgment of God upon a Christ rejecting world as that first seal is open by Jesus!

In II Peter 2:7-9 Peter tells us that the Lord, "**... delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) - then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.**"

That is important for us to understand. God knows how to deliver the righteous and punish the wicked. Thus, does it make sense that He would pour out His judgment upon us, the judgment that has already been paid by Jesus? Of course not because "**... the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.**"

3. Now we have seen in our studies of both the major and minor prophets the judgment of God upon the wicked and as many read that they wonder about the love of God? We even see that here in Zephaniah, so where is the love of God? Listen to what J. Vernon McGee wrote regarding this very point. He said,

Zephaniah is speaking here of the harshness, the intensity of the judgment that is coming, and the question naturally arises: How can a God of love do a thing like this? We will find before we finish our study of this book that it is like the story I told in the Introduction of the father who took his little child to the surgeon to be operated upon. The picture can be presented in such a way that it looks like he is being cruel and harsh to bring her to the doctor who will plunge his knife into her.

But actually, everything the father did was out of love for his little girl. Even the great day of wrath is a judgment of God, but it has in it the love of God. Regardless of what takes place, God is love. It is like the farmer who had on his barn the weather vane which said on it, GOD IS LOVE. The farmer explained it by saying, "Regardless of which way the wind blows, God is love." That is true, my friend.

Even in judgment, God is still a God of love. And He judges because it is essential for Him to judge that which is evil. He does that because He has to be true to Himself, and He could not be good to His creatures unless He did that. If God is going to permit sin throughout eternity, if God does not intend to judge sin, if you and I are going to have to wrestle with disease and with heartbreak and with disappointment and with sorrow throughout eternity, I cannot conceive that He is a God of love.

But if you tell me that God is going to judge sin, that He is coming in with a mighty judgment, and that He is going to remove sin from His universe, I'm going to say, "Hallelujah!" And I will believe that He is a God of love even when He does that.

- J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible Vol. III, pp. 868-869

May we not lose sight of God's rich love for us! Yes, God will chasten His children because He loves them and His desire is to draw them back, to protect them from the danger that is out there. And for the wicked, they will be judged!

VERSE 18

1. Isn't it interesting how some people think they can buy their way out of anything, and many times they can! But there is a judge who can't be bought and that is the Lord. And thus, they are not going to be able to buy their way out of this one. Their wealth will be useless. Their bodies will lay on the streets, rotting away, they will not be buried. Nothing will be able to avert the judgment of God from coming upon them and what a warning that should be today! His judgment is coming upon a Christ rejecting world whether you believe it or not!

We saw this with the Babylonian invasion and thus, what God has done in the past He is more than able to do again and this time on a global scale as God will pour His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world! God warned Judah and I believe He is warning us today if anyone is listening!

2. Make no mistake about it, the Day of the Lord is coming. In Isaiah 2:12 we are told, "**For the day of the Lord of hosts Shall come upon everything proud and lofty, Upon everything lifted up - And it shall be brought low.**" Did you notice that? The proud, those that think there is no God, that they don't need God, that they can do whatever they want, look out! God's judgment is coming and the only solution to that is the Lord Jesus Christ. The only solution is repenting of your sins and asking Jesus to be Lord and Savior of your life!

Also, in Isaiah 13:6-11 we are told, **“Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, Every man's heart will melt, And they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; They will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; They will be amazed at one another; Their faces will be like flames. Behold, the day of the Lord comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.”**

And once again the solution and I will close with this. **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”** John 3:16-21. If you have not come to Jesus may you do so tonight. If you have may you never forget His rich love for you and what it cost Him to save you!

Hillsong's Christmas 2014

Singing Silent Night dressed like 1920's Flappers! This is not Christmas!

