

A Prophecy of Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem

Zephaniah 1:4-18

Zephaniah 1:4-18: *“I will stretch out My hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests—⁵ those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops; those who worship and swear oaths by the Lord, but who also swear by Milcom;⁶ those who have turned back from following the Lord, and have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of Him.”⁷ Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand, for the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests.⁸ “And it shall be, in the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel.⁹ In the same day I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit.¹⁰ “And there shall be on that day,” says the Lord, “The sound of a mournful cry from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the Second Quarter, and a loud crashing from the hills.¹¹ Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh! For all the merchant people are cut down; all those who handle money are cut off.¹² “And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.’¹³ Therefore their goods shall become booty, and their houses a desolation; they shall build houses, but not inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine.”¹⁴ The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out.¹⁵ That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,¹⁶ a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers.¹⁷ “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.”¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy. For He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.”*

Background Notes

In verses 1-3 we saw that Zephaniah’s prophecy of judgment was worldwide in scope, and that it refers primarily to the coming Tribulation period of the End Times. In verses 4-18, Zephaniah moved closer to home as he pronounced God’s judgment on Judah and Jerusalem.

The logical question that comes to our minds at this point is: “Have these prophecies been fulfilled yet, or do they await to be fulfilled in the future?” The answer is “yes” to both parts of the question. Some of this prophecy of judgment against Judah and Jerusalem was fulfilled in history. Remember, Zephaniah prophesied about 30-50 years before the Babylonian

armies under Nebuchadnezzar swept in from the north and conquered Judah and Jerusalem. The Temple of the Lord was destroyed and the people were taken into captivity. However, all of this prophecy of judgment has not yet been fulfilled. There is an End Time aspect to these prophecies. In fact, any partial fulfillment of these prophecies is a foreshadowing of the fulfillment in the last days.

This brings us then to the meaning of this phrase: “the Day of the Lord.” Zephaniah referred to the Day of the Lord a number of times in the verses we just read, and the Day of the Lord is mentioned many times throughout the Bible. Exactly what and when is the Day of the Lord? In general, the Day of the Lord could be any time that the Lord intervenes in the affairs of nations, either for judgment or for blessings, as we’ll see in chapter 3.

However, the concept of the Day of the Lord can be confusing for many Christians, because there is both an historical aspect to the Day of the Lord and a future (eschatological) aspect to the Day of the Lord. Any Day of the Lord prophecies that have been partially fulfilled or already fulfilled in history are *illustrations* – they foreshadow the future or eschatological fulfillment of the Day of the Lord prophecies.

Doctrinal Points

1. There is a historical aspect to the day of the Lord.

Verse 7, “*For the day of the Lord is at hand,*” and verse 14, “*the great day of the Lord is near. It is near and hastens quickly.*”

The Day of the Lord was near for Jerusalem and Judah at that time, because the Babylonian armies were right there on the horizon - they were about to conquer Israel. And Nebuchadnezzar did indeed enter ancient Jerusalem through the Fish Gate at the north end of the city. Look at verses 10 and 11: “*And there shall be on that day,*” says the Lord, “*The sound of a mournful cry from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the Second Quarter, [northwest from the temple area] and a loud crashing from the hills. ¹¹ Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh! For all the merchant people are cut down; all those who handle money are cut off.*” All this literally took place when Babylon conquered Judah.

Verse 8: “*And it shall be, in the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel.*” The foreign clothes were an implication that the people had absorbed pagan culture. “Leaping over the threshold” (v9) was either a superstitious pagan practice or it meant the sin of robbery. God judged Jerusalem and Judah at that time for their sins, in accordance with His law.

The sin of idolatry is mentioned in verses 4-6. These verses are a good example of a passage in which the historical aspect and the future aspect of the Day of the Lord are fused together. When God allowed the Babylonians to conquer

Judah and Jerusalem, the sin of idolatry was judged and removed. Verse 4: *“I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests.”* When the Jews went into captivity in Babylon, their worship of idols ceased. Baal worship and false priests were rooted out. Idolatry was purged from Israel - even to this day!

However (and this is where the future aspect to the Day of the Lord comes in), idolatry will return to Israel in the last days. They will actually worship the “antichrist” and the “image of a man” that will be set up in the future Temple. This is what our Lord spoke of in Matthew 12:43-45: *“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.”*

Idolatry was purged from Israel during the Babylonian captivity, but it will return in the last days. However, just as God judged idolatry in Israel’s past history, so God will judge the idolatry of the last days when the Lord returns to this earth.

There is an historical aspect to the Day of the Lord, and there is also a future or eschatological aspect to the Day of the Lord.

2. There is an eschatological aspect to the day of the Lord.

Partial or historical fulfillments of the “Day of the Lord prophecies” illustrate and foreshadow the ultimate future fulfillment of the “Day of the Lord prophecies.” The future fulfillment is often called “the *eschatological* aspect” to the Day of the Lord. Eschatology has to do with the *study of the future End Time events*. The future Day of the Lord includes the coming Tribulation period and the time when the Lord will return to this earth in judgment and will set up His millennial kingdom.

In verses 15-18, it seems that Zephaniah was emphasizing the future, eschatological aspect of the Day of the Lord - especially the judgments of the Tribulation period. Verses 15-16 certainly sound very similar to what our Lord said concerning His second coming in Matthew 24:29-30: *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”*

And verses 17-18 here certainly sound like the judgments in Revelation that will take place during the coming Tribulation period. *“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.”* *Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath; but the whole earth shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will*

make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the earth” (v17-18). Zephaniah’s prophecies about the day of the Lord will be completely fulfilled in the last days.

How close are we to the End Times? We can’t say for sure. Certain recent world events indicate that we could be getting close to the coming Tribulation period. There is an eschatological aspect to the day of the Lord.

Practical Application

Don’t be brainwashed with the idea that God is indifferent!

Verse 12: “And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.’”

What was the sin for which these people were denounced? They were just sitting around, relaxed and complacent, living their own lifestyle, thinking that God was completely indifferent to what was going on.

Does this sound familiar? Many people today believe that they can live as they please, thinking that God (if He exists) doesn’t see or care about moral evil. And even if He does exist and does care, it seems like He doesn’t care enough – or He’s not powerful enough - to do anything about it.

This is essentially what’s being taught and practiced on the secular college campus today. I trust that this way of thinking is not true of anyone listening to this Talk. If this the way you think, you need to repent of this sin of blasphemy! You need to commit your life to Christ and become a true Christian before it’s too late. Why not take this opportunity – today - to believe and trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?

Don’t be brainwashed with the idea that God is indifferent!