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Zephaniah Overview



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

Zephaniah is often an overlooked book in the Bible that predicts the destruction of Judah because of their idolatry and lack of repentance. The book is divided into three chapters and uses powerful Hebrew poetry and metaphors to warn of the impending judgment that is coming. Despite punishment and warnings, the remnant of Israel will serve the Lord with pure speech and righteousness, and Gentiles will become worshippers and offer spiritual sacrifices.

Transcript

So tonight we're going to be looking at the book of Zephaniah. I have to say Zephaniah is one of the books that very few Christians could tell you much about. I mean, unless they've recently read it, and even then maybe not.

It's a, it's, it's, the prophetic books are the most difficult books for Christians, generally speaking, to read and understand because they use poetry, not our English poetry, they use Hebrew poetry, which is a little more challenging for us. They use a lot of metaphors and in many cases we just, when we're reading a book of the Bible, we don't have immediate familiarity with the background. So even knowing what they're addressing is not the easiest thing in the world.

So, so we'd like to have, I'd like to give some background and go through the book rather rapidly so that it will be one of the books that you no longer have any of those kinds of experiences with when you read it. Like, what's this about? You'll know what it's about. There may be still some things when we're done that are not fully understood.

That's because the teacher doesn't fully understand everything. But, all right, so the man Zephaniah is not mentioned in any of the historical books. He's not mentioned in Second Kings, for example, which would be the time frame when he lived, or Second Chronicles.

We do have mentioned in these books of some of the prophets, certainly Jeremiah is mentioned, Isaiah is mentioned. Some of these guys are mentioned in some of the historic books. Jonah is mentioned.

But, Zephaniah is not, and therefore we don't have any information about him historically as a person except what can be gathered from the book itself. Now, what we can gather from the book itself is that he is a prophet to the nation of Judah. And Judah, of course, was the southern kingdom that survived after the breakup of the nation of Israel into two kingdoms.

The northern kingdom had subsequently been destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC, but the northern kingdom survived somewhat longer, for over 100 years more, and was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Now, prior to 586 BC, there were several prophets that God sent to Judah to warn them that they're facing disaster, and especially if they don't repent. So there was some desire here to see them repent, although by the time Jeremiah came, the possibility of repenting was somewhat seen as basically a past opportunity.

God specifically told Jeremiah, who was at the same time as Zephaniah, don't even pray for these people. You can preach to them, tell them what my complaints are, but they're not going to repent. They're not going to listen to you, so don't even pray for them.

So, Zephaniah was probably, maybe, only a few years before Jeremiah. He could possibly have been alongside Jeremiah as well. Jeremiah began prophesying in 526 BC, and it's almost certain that Zephaniah was prophesying before that.

I say it's almost certain because he predicts things that actually occurred in 530 BC, which is four years before Jeremiah began to prophesy. And since Zephaniah was predicting them, it's obvious that they hadn't happened yet. So it would appear that Zephaniah prophesied before 530 BC, but most scholars think not as early as 535.

So in that window there, perhaps between 535 and 530, Zephaniah begins to prophesy, and about four years later, Jeremiah does. Now Habakkuk, or Habakkuk, probably is a better pronunciation, was prophesying alongside Jeremiah also. So these three prophets we know were all contemporaries.

And we've studied both Jeremiah and Habakkuk previously, and now this is the last of the prophets before the exile that we're going to study. The prophets that will remain to consider after this are the post-exilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. And they belong to a later generation than Jeremiah and Zephaniah and Habakkuk.

But we know the man's name means Yahweh hides, or perhaps the man whom Yahweh hides. It comes from two words, Yahweh, and hides. And it's not clear whether it's implied that this man is hidden by Yahweh.

That is, hidden for safety, protected from disaster. There's a reference later on in chapter 2 and in verse 3 where God calls upon the faithful remnant in Judah to actually hide themselves, or actually to repent. And maybe God will hide them, it says, from the

danger that's coming.

And that may be a play on words on Zephaniah's name, who may be the man whom God hides. And so that's the meaning of the name. We don't have very much about him.

We do know that his lineage goes back to King Hezekiah. You have to go back four generations to get there, but that does mean that he's a great, great grandson of Hezekiah the king, one of the very few good kings Judah ever had. And Zephaniah lived during the reign of Josiah, who is the last good king that Judah had.

So he's related to Hezekiah, who was a good king, but pretty distantly. I mean he's not in a direct line. He's not - did I say great, great grandson? He's not the great - I guess he would be a great, great grandson, but the point is you have to go back quite a bit to get to Hezekiah.

It does mean that in some way he was related to Josiah, the current king, though they had come down through very different lines from Hezekiah and were not distant cousins of some kind. But as a distant cousin of the present king and as royal blood, he probably had access to the throne like some of the prophets did. Isaiah did, for example, had access to the king.

He was of noble blood too. But Zephaniah is the only prophet that we actually have his genealogy going back four generations. Usually we read of who the father of a man is and maybe the grandfather, but we don't go back two more generations.

This is the only time we have going back so far, and this exception is no doubt because if you go back that far, you hit a king. And therefore, apparently you had to go back that far in his genealogy to establish that he was a man descended from the kings of Judah as well as prophesying to the current king, Josiah. Josiah, by the way, reigned from 640 BC to about 609 BC.

As I said, he was a good king, and in his reign he began to reform things. His grandfather, Manasseh, had been the worst king that Judah had ever had and the longest reigning. And he had really botched things up.

He had introduced all kinds of idolatry, horrible abominations, everything the heathen did. He even caused his own son to pass through the fire, which is to burn alive to the demon god, Molech. Manasseh had done these things.

And then his son was no better. And then when Josiah comes along, he becomes king at age eight. And when he's about 20, he begins to seek the Lord, Yahweh, and he begins to do some reforms in the nation and tear down the idols and get rid of the statues of Molech and things like that.

And basically, 2 Kings talks about the sweeping reforms that Josiah made when he was

king. And a few years after he began his reforms in, I guess it was 622 BC, I believe it was, Josiah was made aware of a copy of the Book of Deuteronomy. Hilkiah the priest had been commissioned by the king to refurbish the temple of Yahweh.

Since generations past had failed to worship Yahweh properly and had been a low priority to maintain his sacred building, Josiah began to channel some money and some manpower into refurbishing the temple of Yahweh. And as they were cleaning it out, they found a scroll. Hilkiah the priest found a scroll and took it to Josiah and read it to him.

Somebody read it to him. And as they read it, it turns out it was the Book of Deuteronomy. Now, it doesn't say in the Bible it was the Book of Deuteronomy, but the contents of it, the things that the way Josiah reacted make it very clear that it's the Book of Deuteronomy.

Because Deuteronomy had listed curses that God bring upon the nation of Israel if they violated his covenant. A long list of curses in Deuteronomy 28. Also, of course, Jeremiah, who was prophesying at the same time, made many references to Deuteronomy in his prophecy, which means that that book had become known in Jeremiah's day, which would be no doubt because Josiah, his priesthood, discovered it.

Now, you might say, well, what do you mean it became known? It was written by Moses centuries earlier, wasn't it? It was actually probably over a thousand years earlier. Moses had written the law. But in times of apostasy, Israel had simply lost interest.

And apparently more than one generation of priests had totally I don't know how they knew what to do because their duties are laid out in the Torah. But they had lost touch with it when the priest found it. He didn't even know what it was in the temple.

So this is how ignorant the people of Israel had become of the law. So when the law was read to Josiah and he heard the curses and so forth, he tore his clothes and he was grieving. He said, we have we're under God's curse because we've neglected his law so much.

And so, you know, he continued and increased his efforts to purge Judah of all the evils. And he did a great job, by the way. He was effective in terms of cleaning things up.

He was not effective in a way that a man cannot be effective. And that isn't changing the hearts of other men. A man can change his own heart.

He can't change another man's heart. And unfortunately, although the people were forced by King Zedek to stop worshipping idols and so forth, they still had love for idolatry in their hearts. So as soon as Josiah died, the nation went back to his son.

You know, his, you know, his successors would go back and bring the idols back. And so and they never went away again, the idols. And that's why the Babylonians had to come

and take his Judah into captivity.

So Jeremiah and Zephaniah and Habakkuk were coming around the time when Josiah was making these reforms. Although it would look to me that Zephaniah is no doubt writing before those reforms began. Those reforms began in 626 B.C. And I told you that Zephaniah predicted some things that happened in 586 B.C., which is before those reforms, about four years before those reforms.

So Zephaniah in his book does not reflect, you know, anything about these reforms. He is describing the nation as if it is idolatrous. And it was until Josiah began to reform things.

So this book is apparently probably a few years only prior to Josiah's reforms. And that raises the possibility that it may have been Zephaniah who had some influence on Josiah in doing those reforms. Jeremiah's preaching began the same year the reforms began.

But Zephaniah was before that. He may have sown some seeds in the mind of Josiah to get him to begin to seek the Lord. And we don't know because Zephaniah, if he did write before that, he didn't know he was writing before that.

I mean, the reforms happened later. So he's just describing the way Judah has been for some generations in its idolatry and how angry God was and how much they were in danger of being destroyed. And now Zephaniah does not mention that the Babylonians are going to be the instrument that God would use to bring this judgment.

But he speaks quite a bit, even in a short book. He speaks very strongly about the judgment that's coming. Now, Habakkuk, who is contemporary with him, or perhaps a little later, specifically mentioned the Babylonians.

And Habakkuk specifically says that the Babylonians are the ones that are going to bring this judgment on Judah. Zephaniah may not have known that. At least he didn't.

He didn't mention it. He just knew that God was going to use somebody to bring this disaster upon upon his nation. So the book is divided into three chapters, not by the prophet himself.

The chapters and the verse divisions in the Bible were added much, much later. The prophet just wrote the book straight through. And then for the convenience of being able to look up parts of it, someone added chapters and verses later on.

But it's now in our Bibles as three chapters. It's not, therefore, a very long book. And I'm going to go ahead and just read the book and make comments on it and try to explain what he's getting at.

OK, so chapter one, verse one, the word of the Lord came, which came to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, the son of Galiah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah. In the days of

Josiah, the son of Ammon, the king of Judah. So that's all that we've considered so far is the time frame of the prophecy, both the the well, the genealogy of the prophet and the current king at the time.

And God begins to speak in verse two. He says, I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land, says the Lord. I will consume man and beast.

I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea and the stumbling blocks among along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land, says the Lord. I will stretch my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

I will cut off every trace of bail from this place. The names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests, those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops, those who worship and swear oaths by Yahweh, but also who swear by Milcom, which is another word for Moloch. Those who have turned back from following the Lord and have not sought the Lord nor inquired of him.

Now, we're going to stop there for a moment and comment, because this kind of becomes the end of a sentence. It begins by saying he's going to utterly consume everything from the face of the land. Now, the word land in Hebrew is Eretz.

It is the same word that is used for earth. And therefore, some translations may say earth. I don't know if all of you are using different translations than I am, but in some case, it will say, or do you have one that says earth? And I deserve.

Yeah, Eretz is the Hebrew word for earth or land. It's both. And, you know, if you find the word earth in the Bible, in the Old Testament, it's Eretz.

If you find the word land, it's Eretz. There's only one word. And translators have to decide in context whether it's talking about earth, like the planet earth, or land, like the land of Israel.

The term the land in the Old Testament often is simply a designation for Israel, the promised land, the land of God's people. In fact, in the Old Testament, many times the imagery of land representing Israel is in contrast with the imagery of the sea representing the Gentile nations. As, for example, in Daniel chapter 7, when four beasts are seen coming up out of the sea.

Well, the sea is the Gentile world, and these are successive Gentile empires that would rise up out of the Gentile world. And there's other places in the Old Testament where sea and land are contrasted in images for Israel and the Gentiles or vice versa. So, anyway, in the Hebrew, he says, I'm going to utterly consume everything from the face of the Eretz.

Now, because some translations say earth, many people have taken a prophecy like this

to be eschatological, that it has to do with the end of the world. That this is talking about God finally judging the world on the last day. And, of course, the Bible teaches that he will do that.

But I think that when you get to verse 4, and he makes it very clear, he's talking about Judah. It weighs in favor of translating Eretz, in this case, as the land. He's talking about the land of Judah.

And it's the land of Judah that's coming under destruction. It's going to be from the Babylonians. The Babylonians didn't destroy the whole planet Earth, but they certainly did devastate Judah and Jerusalem and the temple and all of that.

So, if you happen to have a translation that says the earth in any of these passages, that's a translator's preference. But just know that whenever you find the word earth in the Bible, if the context allows it, it can be translated land. It's just a, it's kind of a toss-up, but sometimes it's obvious, sometimes it's not obvious.

In this case, I think we should say the land. That's the translation I'm using says the land, which is the New King James. He says, I'm going to consume the man and the beast, the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea.

Now, this, of course, is one thing that causes some people think this is really talking about the end of the world. Because Nebuchadnezzar didn't destroy all the fish in the sea and all the birds from the air, obviously. However, it is almost certain, at least to me, and others may judge differently, that this is hyperbole.

The prophets use hyperbole extensively. And it's probable that here the imagery is to resemble that of the flood, where the flood was a judgment of God on a world that had simply gone too far. And could not any longer be tolerated by God.

A judgment had to come. And so he sent the waters of the flood. I believe that this is hyperbole likening the Babylonian invasion to Noah's flood.

And he's actually going to speak to the remnant of Israel, who are like Noah, about being in a place of safety as this comes through. So, I mean, it's like I think the flood of Noah is probably what is giving us images for this particular figurative prophecy. He's saying, I'm going to destroy the stumbling blocks along with the wicked.

The stumbling blocks probably are the idols themselves. A stumbling block is something which somebody stumbles over. And it's a term used in scripture sometimes for idols, because the Jews who were supposed to be serving Yahweh and ignoring all of God sometimes were stumbled, tempted, and drawn into idolatry by the idolatry of their neighbors, which God told them to not adopt.

He says, I will cut off man from the face of the land. We're still verse three there, says

the Lord. So this pretty much happened.

Again, it's a little bit of a hyperbole, but Babylon did depopulate the region of Judah very thoroughly in three waves. The first wave came in 605 when Nebuchadnezzar came and took just some of the principal nobility into captivity. That included Daniel and his three friends.

They went into captivity in Babylon in 605. Then 11 years later, I'm sorry, seven years later, excuse me, in 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar came back and took some more people into captivity. This time Ezekiel went into captivity with those captives.

Then in 586 BC, 11 years after the second wave, he came back and burned down the temple and took essentially the rest of the population into captivity. I say essentially because some of the poorest of the poor were left in the land. Nebuchadnezzar did not see them as a threat.

It's obvious that the poor dirt farmers were not the ones who had been resisting him in any effective way, so he didn't punish them. Jeremiah actually was one of those who was left behind in 586 BC and some others, and they fled down to Egypt. But these are the three waves of depopulation.

And so after the third wave, there was virtually nobody to speak of that was still in the land. It sounds here like there's not going to be a single person living, out cut off man from the face of the land. But again, prophets often use this kind of hyperbolic speech.

They're just trying to emphasize the extent of the devastation as being horrendous. And so he says in verse four, I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against 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. Now, the word idolatrous priests in Hebrew is Chemerim. And this word is found also in the description of Josiah's reforms, where he did cut off the Baals and he did cut off the Chemerim.

If you look at the second Kings, chapter 23 and verse five, this is talking about how Josiah, somewhat after Zephaniah's prophecy, but not very long after, began to remove all the the idolatrous trappings from the nation. It says in second Kings 23, five, then he removed the idolatrous priests, that's the Chemerim in the Hebrew, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem. And those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, the moon and the constellations and all the host of heaven.

And so the verses before that also talk about him getting rid of the articles that were made for Baal and Asheron and he burned them outside and so forth. So Josiah actually did remove the Baals and he did remove the Chemerim, these pagan priests is what they were. And here it says, and also the pagan priests, the Chemerim apparently were

Hebrew priests that sold out to idolatry and were worshipping pagan gods.

But then there were also pagan priests. So they were removed. And it was actually, as I pointed out, Josiah that removed them.

Now, one would get the impression from what Zephaniah is saying is the judgment of God is going to remove them when God comes and wipes away all the people. And that happened too, because the Baals were restored after Josiah died. And it was, you know, with the wiping clean of the nation of Judah, but the depopulation of the land that they were taken away permanently.

But actually this had two fulfillments. One is in the reforms of Josiah and the other was in the actual judgment on the nation. It's verse five.

It says those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops and those who worship and swear oaths by Yahweh, but who also swear by Milcom or Moloch. Now, a couple of things here. In Deuteronomy chapter four, when Israel was about to go in and conquer the land of Canaan, Moses gave a number of speeches.

And that's what actually Deuteronomy is. It's the speeches that Moses gave to them just before they entered the land. And he warns them, of course, about the dangers, spiritual dangers and such.

And in chapter four of Deuteronomy. And verse 19, he specifically says. And take heed, lest you lift up your eyes to heaven.

And when you see the sun, the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the peoples under the whole of heaven as a heritage. But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace to be his people. Now, he's saying the sun, moon and stars are a blessing to all nations.

They're not gods, but every nation can appreciate them. And Israel should not be driven to worship those things that all nations have when they have something that all nations do not have. A God who brought them out of Egypt and made himself by covenant, their God and them his people.

So that you see. He saw that there'd be a temptation on their part to worship the sun, moon and stars. There really is apparently such a temptation.

Now, we don't see the sun, moon and stars, the stars very well in the city because of light pollution. Probably it's been a while since some of the facts we've seen any stars. But when you go out in the desert or you go out somewhere where there's not much light pollution, you know, it is awe inspiring to see the stars.

And some people, pagan people have translated that awe into actual, you know, worship. And therefore. Many pagans have worshipped the sun and moon stars.

In fact, the sun God has been the chief deity for most pagan religions. Certainly it was in Egypt. Ra, the sun God.

I think Bell and Babylon was the sun God. Worshiping the sun was something that all the pagans apparently were unable to resist the temptation to do. Apparently, Israel is unable to resist that temptation as well.

But God warned them when you go in there, don't look up and see the sun, moon and stars and be driven to worship them. You know, C.S. Lewis. Before he was a Christian, was an atheist.

And he was an expert in mythologies and things like that. He's a professor at Oxford and Cambridge in medieval literature and those kinds of things. Ancient English literature.

And he was had been very fascinated with pagan deities and so forth before he was a Christian. And he said even after a Christian, after he became a Christian, when he went to places, I don't remember where he was talking like this. It's been so many years since I read it.

I don't know, the Stonehenge or someplace of those kinds of places. He said he could feel this urge inside that he had to resist to almost worship the pagan deities. Now, I've never felt that urge, but I've been a Christian since I was a child and I've never been drawn to paganism at all.

But apparently for those who don't have a firm foundation, there is this demonic drawing toward idolatry, toward worshipping anything but God. Now, Israel worshipped everything plus God, which isn't acceptable. They still had the Temple of Yahweh.

They still had Yahweh's priests and they still considered Yahweh to be their God. But Yahweh had a lot of, had to share them with other gods. They were like a woman who had a lot of lovers.

Now, God saw himself as Israel's husband. They had a covenant relationship just like a man and wife have a covenant relationship. And Israel was the wife.

And worshipping God was like a woman being faithful to her husband. But worshipping other gods in this case would be like a woman cheating on her husband with other gods. So even though they worshipped Yahweh, it says in verse 5, they worship and swear oaths by Yahweh.

But that's not all. They also swear oaths by Molech. And they also worship the host of heaven.

And so he's no happier about that than if they weren't worshipping him at all. God's not okay with sharing the worship with other gods of his people. Just like a man would not be okay with his wife having several other men on the side.

I mean a man may be very offended if his wife leaves him for another man. And that's a very hurtful thing. But for her to stay with him and still have other men brazenly would even be much harder to endure.

And that's kind of, the people hadn't really left God completely. But they were adding other gods with him. Now by the way, you may have noticed in verse 5, it talks about swearing oaths.

It says they worship and swear oaths by Yahweh, but they also swear, that is they swear oaths by Molech. The swearing of oaths is something not much understood in our modern society. In fact, in Christian circles, swearing by God is considered to be irreverent.

And perhaps we remember what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5, where he says, don't swear at all, neither by heaven nor by earth nor by the hairs on your own head. Now because of this, swearing, the term swearing has come to mean irreverence, even blasphemy in the minds of many Christians. But swearing an oath actually was not blasphemous unless you swore by Yahweh and broke the oath.

If you swore by Yahweh and then you broke your oath, that was taking the name of Yahweh in vain. Because people didn't sign contracts as often as we do. They sealed a deal by making oaths.

And we see this in the Old Testament and this is alluded to in the New Testament as well. That people, when they're trying to guarantee that they're going to be honest, they're going to do what they said they're going to do. They're telling the truth.

They swear by something. They always swear by something greater than themselves. That's what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews chapter 6. He said, men always swear by something superior to themselves.

But he goes on to say, when God swore, he swore by himself because there's nothing superior to himself. He could swear by, so he swore by himself, Abraham. But swearing by God was simply a way of saying, I regard God as far above myself.

And therefore the highest thing about myself that I could invoke to guarantee that I'm telling you the truth. To swear by something was to say, I'm invoking the virtue of that thing. Since you don't know if you can trust me, you don't know me.

And I'm just a man. And therefore my promise may not mean much to you because you don't know if I'm trustworthy. But certainly you know that God is trustworthy.

And, you know, it's similar to when people say, may God strike me dead if I'm lying, you know, hand on the Bible. You know, I swear it's true. It's basically saying I'm invoking something so so sacred.

That I would have to be a total wicked person to make such an oath and not be telling the truth. Because I would be inviting God's wrath on myself to take his name in vain like that. And actually God wanted Israel to swear in his name.

That's the interesting thing. Today if someone says by God, I swear by God, you know, some people say, oh, I think that's dangerously close to taking the name of the Lord in vain. Well, it depends on what is meant by it.

I think many of us would just think of swearing as using profanity. But swearing is making an oath, promising, making a sacred promise. Now Jesus did tell his disciples don't even make oaths.

But it wasn't because oaths are themselves that. It's because as he pointed out in Matthew 23, the Pharisees who had basically formed the religious mood of the whole community. Had divided the whole matter of oaths into two categories.

Those that were binding and those that were not. Jesus pointed this out in Matthew 23. He says, you Pharisees, you hypocrites, you say whoever swears by the temple, it's not binding.

But if they swear by the gold of the temple, it's binding. And you say if someone swears by the altar, it's not binding. But if they swear by the gift on the altar, it's binding.

In other words, they had made up us two categories, oaths that are binding and oaths that are not. Now you had to be a legal expert to know which was which. And the Pharisees were nothing if not legal experts.

They were the lawyers and the experts in the law. So what they could do is they could deceive people. If you're trying to bind yourself or you're making a promise and the person wants you to bind yourself.

Okay, I swear by the temple. Well, certainly swearing by the temple, that sounds like something you certainly hold to. That's a sacred building.

But when when they come back to collect on what you promised, you say, oh, no, I didn't swear by the gold of the temple. I'm not bound to my oath. I just swore by the temple.

In other words, those who knew the nuances of the law, that is the rabbinic laws that they'd made up. They could deceive people by taking oaths that the people would imagine to be binding. But legally, they were considered not binding.

So just to just throw out the whole system, don't even use oaths. He's not saying oaths

rightly used are wrong. In fact, Jesus was put under oath by Caiaphas.

He said, I drew you by the living God. You tell me. He's invoking God's name.

And then Jesus answered. He he was silent until then. But he when he was put under oath in the name of God, he answered.

Paul does that, too. He says, before God, I'm not lying. In Galatians, he says there are times when people use oaths, even the apostles and even Jesus.

So obviously, when Jesus said, don't use oaths, he's not saying this is a bad thing. You should never do. He's just saying, listen, the whole oath system has become so corrupt that in the Jewish society, you don't even know if someone's lying even when they're taking an oath.

So just don't lie. Just forget the oaths. Just let your yes be yes.

No, no. That's what you said. He's not saying that oaths are evil.

He's saying that they have become a corrupted form of gaining confidence. And people should have confidence in you, whether you say yes or no with an oath or not. So don't even bother with the oath.

Just be honest. Be as honest without an oath as you would be expected to be if you took an oath. That's basically how Jesus is intending it.

Now, by the way, I would point out, though, that taking oaths in the name of Yahweh is actually a command in the law. It's kind of interesting. And that's I know what I was young about.

It surprised me to first learn that in Deuteronomy 613, Moses said, You shall fear Yahweh your God and serve him, and you shall take oaths in his name. You should not go after other gods. You swear in the name of Yahweh.

Don't swear by Baal or Moloch or, you know, Chimash or any of these pagan gods because that's essentially honoring them. You swear by me. You don't swear by others.

So, you know, taking an oath in God's name was in a sense an honoring of him. And what Zephaniah says, They swear oaths in Yahweh's name, but they also swear oaths in the name of Milcon. So this is not OK.

It's a swearing an oath is almost on the same level as worshiping the other place where it says the same thing. Deuteronomy 1020, if you'd like two passages, it also says there that they should take oaths in the name of Yahweh. So twice in Deuteronomy 613 and Deuteronomy 1020, God actually commands them to take oaths in his name.

But that is not saying that you can that you can't just avoid oaths like Jesus said. You can avoid oaths altogether if you want to. But if you're going to take an oath, don't don't take an oath.

Don't swear by some other god. Make sure you're swearing by the true God. All right.

And in verse six, Zephaniah says, Those who have turned back, he's still listing the people he's going to judge those who have turned back from following the Lord and have not sought the Lord or inquired of him. Now, it's interesting. These people used to know something about God, but they've drawn back.

They've turned away from serving God. This is unlike the heathen who never knew about Yahweh. Israel knew.

And that makes them the more culpable because they've turned away from what they knew. They've sinned against light. The pagans sinned, but they were in the darkness the whole time.

But Israel had light but had rejected that. That always incurs a greater degree of culpability. He says they've not sought the Lord nor inquired of him.

Now they have sworn by him. They they they worship him in a way. Verse five says they worship him.

But they don't seek him and they don't seek his counsel. They don't inquire of him. So they're not following him in other words.

Or interested in what his will is. They they have the outward forms of temple worship, offering sacrifices and incense and all those things in the temple. But they're not interested in knowing what God wants them to do.

They don't inquire of the Lord, he says. They don't follow him. They don't seek him.

So this is of course in any religion it's easy to fall into that trap. It's easy to be distracted from God by the things of the world and still be maintaining the outward forms of religion. And not realize that it's become an empty shell.

Because frankly the outward forms of religion are the ones that we are aware of. Our senses, you know, we see that we're in the church. We hear the music.

We you know these are visible things. Our heart, if our hearts growing cold toward God, that's not in the visible realm. We have to have some spiritual discernment to recognize that that's happening.

And so it's easy for people also in Christian faith, in Christian churches to continue with the worship forms. And to no longer be seeking the Lord or inquiring of him. So verse 7

says, be silent in the presence of the Lord God.

And perhaps this silence means stop swearing in the name of God or Milgram. Stop, you know, the clamor of your religion activities. God is here and you should be awestruck.

You should be dumbstruck. You should be silent in the presence of the Lord. For the day of the Lord is at hand.

For the Lord prepared a sacrifice and has invited his guests. Now this is figurative too. Judah is the sacrifice.

Judah is like the animal that's going to be sacrificed. And God's going to do this to appease himself. Some of the prophets speak of God easing himself or comforting himself by judging those that are being so irksome to him, the Jews.

Because they were so rebellious against him. And so he's going to appease himself as it were with the sacrifice. And they're the ones who are going to be sacrificed.

When it says he has invited his guests, actually the word invited in the Hebrew actually means set apart or consecrated. It's kind of what you do when you invite people to a holy festival or even make someone a priest. They are set apart as holy.

They are consecrated. But these guests that he's consecrated are the Babylonians. He doesn't mention them by name.

And Zephaniah might not even know it's going to be them. But it is nonetheless the invaders he is referring to. They are the ones that have been consecrated to do this.

Actually, you can see a parallel to this kind of imagery in Isaiah chapter 13, which is a prophecy, interestingly, against Babylon. So a later judgment after Babylon has been used to judge Judah, the media Persian would be used to judge Babylon. And in this prophecy about the destruction of Babylon in Isaiah 13 and verse 3, God says, I have commanded my sanctified ones.

I have also called my mighty ones for my anger, those who rejoice in my exaltation. Now, he's talking about the Persians who are coming to, if you read the whole chapter, he's talking about the coming of the Persians to conquer Babylon. And he's referring to the Persians, the conquerors, as his holy ones.

They're his instruments. They're his servants. And so also in Zephaniah, the Babylonians are the consecrated ones that God has set apart to come offer the sacrifice, which is going to be the demise of 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 in foreign apparel. In the same day, I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their master's houses with violence

and deceit. Now, those who wear foreign apparel, there's no law in the Old Testament that says a person can't wear, you know, styles from another culture or another nation.

And a lot of times people from one nation are very fascinated with styles from other cultures and like to appropriate them or whatever. There's no real sin in this in itself. The problem is there were very distinctive ways that God told Israel to dress.

For example, they had to have a blue border around the hem of their garment and so forth. And they were kind of wanting to identify with other cultures rather than with the specific culture of Yahweh. Now, Israel was different than we are today in this respect because the religion of Israel was very much associated with their nation, their national and ethnic identity and their land and things like that.

They were kind of all a composite of a nation and a religion and a geographical location all in one. Now, Christianity, of course, is not. We Christians are from all nations and all ethnic groups and all lands and so forth.

I mean, we do have our own religious practices and so forth and beliefs, but we are not all of one culture, for example. Obviously, you go to different countries and the Christians in those countries dress the way people in those countries dress reasonably enough. It's not like they're sinfully imitating heathen culture.

That's just the way they've always dressed. That's the way everyone dresses. Unless it's like an immoral or evil kind of dress, then there's nothing wrong with dressing like non-Christians dress in your area.

But for Israel to do so is to simply say, we're kind of rejecting our culture. And we're kind of want to imitate the pagans. And you can tell they're imitating them culturally and religiously because he says, I'm going to judge those who leap over the threshold.

That, I believe, is a reference to something we read about in the book of First Samuel, chapter five and verse five. When the Ark of the Covenant was taken into captivity by the Philistines, when they conquered Israel in battle, they took the Ark of the Covenant into the Temple of Dagon, the Philistine God. And overnight, the temple of the God fell down on his face in front of the Ark, and they set it back up again the next day.

And the next night, not only did the image of Dagon fall down, but his head and hands were removed from the statue and were on the threshold of the Temple of Dagon. And it says there in First Samuel, five, five, that for that reason, to this day, the priests of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of their temples. Now, here we have someone leaping over the threshold rather than stepping on it.

It sounds like it's saying that the priests who have become so paganized in Israel are now adopting even some of the superstitions and the practices of the pagans around them, including the Philistines. And so they've adopted, you know, religious ideas and

styles of the pagans around them. Verse 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.

Wail, you inhabitants of Mektesh. For the merchant people are cut down. All those who handle money are cut off.

Now, the fish gate today is called the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. It's on the north side, on the north wall. It was called that, I guess, because the fishermen brought their fish in through that gate.

They had gates named after different agricultural products and after there was a sheep gate and things like that. In fact, one of the speeches of Jesus in the Book of John took place at the sheep gate. But they had different gates where different products were brought in.

Today, that gate on the north side of Jerusalem is called the Damascus Gate. But the second quarter that is mentioned is one of the districts inside the walls of the city. And Mektesh, there's different opinions about what Mektesh is.

Some scholars think it's the Valley of Siloam. Others think it's another district inside the city. But all seem to agree that it refers to a market district.

It's the, you see reference to the merchant people and those who handle money in verse 11. Now, the word merchant people in Hebrew is the Canaanites, the people of Canaan is what it actually says in Hebrew. Some English translations say that.

They say the Canaanite or the people of Canaan. But many translations render it the merchant people because the Canaanites were known for their shrewdness in marketing, commerce, and so forth. And not exactly for their honesty.

And so the merchants in Israel are likened to the Canaanites in that respect. That they're not being honest. They're corrupt.

They're dishonest in their practices. Those who handle money are going to be cut off. It says, and it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps.

The imagery is that he's going to look in every crevice, every dark corner, so no one can escape. No one can hide. You know, later on in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, Josephus, the historian who was there, actually said that people were hiding in dark places, in caves and caverns.

And the Romans went in and they searched them out and pulled them out and so forth. There was no place to hide even in the dark when the city was invaded. No doubt it was similar when the Babylonians invaded in 586 BC, which is what Zephaniah is referring to.

It's like God's, he's going to get them all out of there and if they're hiding in dark places, he's going to go in with a lamp. Not that God needs a lamp, but it's an image of saying you're not going to find any place dark that you can't be exposed and found. He says, I'll punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart the Lord will not do good, nor will he do evil.

Now complacency there, in their complacency, that phrase in the Hebrew is on their leaves. On their leaves is a reference to winemaking. When you would trample the grapes and bottle the wine, initially, it would have a lot of little bits of pits and skin and stuff like that.

We call the dregs. That's stuff you want to get out of the wine. You don't want it there because if it stays, it'll make the wine bitter.

So you have to get rid of the leaves, which are the dregs. In the winemaking process, they would actually pour the wine from one vessel to another. They'd let the wine sit in one vessel until all the leaves settled on the bottom.

Then when the leaves, when gravity is held in another, they pour off the top part into another jar and try to stop pouring before the leaves come out last. But then they let the new jar sit because some no doubt got in and they let it sit. And then when the leaves are at the bottom there, whatever's left, they poured out similarly trying to leave the bottom part in the original jar.

So they try to get all the dregs out of the vats. In fact, this imagery is used in Jeremiah, chapter 48, when he's talking about the Moabites, who are going to actually come up for judgment in chapter 2 here. But when God is talking about the Moabites, he talks about how they've actually never gone into captivity, which means they they've gotten rotten, just like wine sitting on the leaves, never being poured out of the bottle.

It'll go bad. And in Jeremiah, chapter 48, verses 11 and 12, talking about the Moabites, it says Moab has been at ease from his youth. He has settled on his dregs or on his leaves and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, nor has he gone into captivity.

Therefore, his taste remained in him and his scent has not changed. He's not improved. Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will send to him wine workers who will tip him over and empty his vessels and break the bottles.

In other words, Moab's going to go into captivity. But this imagery of being complacent is like never having been disturbed, like the wine that's had the leaves at the bottom and it's not been disturbed by having it poured out again. It becomes useless.

And so that's the term for complacency here in Zephaniah 112. And it says they say in their heart, the Lord will not do good, nor will he do evil. In other words, they believe that God's just not going to do anything.

God just isn't really involved in the affairs of this life. No doubt there's a lot of Christians who have that impression. I mean, they don't see God involved in their life.

They don't pray as if they believe God would get involved by answering prayers. They just think, you know, God's, you know, somewhere out there. I believe there's a God who made us, but they're almost like deists rather than theists.

A deist believes that God made everything, but he doesn't do anything. Not here. He just wound it up like a clock and left it to run.

And he's not going to change anything. It's not even going to adjust the time. That's how like these people.

God's not going to do anything good or bad. He's not going to do anything. Well, that is a miscalculation on their part, as we shall see.

If you actually look at Chapter two, verse seven, it says in the end of verse seven, it says, for the Lord, their God will intervene for them and return their captives. So intervention is exactly what the people don't expect God to do. He will intervene, but they don't think he does anything in the world, either good or bad.

Verse 13, therefore, their goods shall become booty, their houses a desolation. They should build houses, but not inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and not drink their wine.

This is actually a prediction that was made in Deuteronomy. Twenty eight. Thirty says that thing.

They'll plant vineyards and won't eat. Won't drink the wine and build houses, won't live in them if they violate his covenant. And he drives them out.

That's in Deuteronomy. Twenty eight. Thirty.

Also, Amos and Micah both have similar statements in Amos 5:11 and Micah 6:15. Verse 14 says, The great day of the Lord is near. It is near and hastens quickly.

It's the second time he said that now, if he's writing around 530 B.C., it's going to be about 36 years. No, no, no. Fifty.

What do we think? We've got to do math backwards with these B.C. dates. I think I guess about 56 years in advance of the actual destruction, although the first invasions of Nebuchadnezzar would come earlier than that, like 18 years earlier. But it's a few it's a few decades off.

But he says it's coming very quickly. A lot of times things that are not immediate are said to come quickly because they're coming quicker than they think than they would

think they would. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter.

There are the mighty one shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble, of distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. You know, in Amos chapter five, he said, Woe unto you who desire the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord is not to be light to you, it's to be darkness. That's Amos 5:18. Same thing here.

Says this day of the Lord's day of darkness. Now, the day of the Lord is a phrase that she is quite generically in the Old Testament. There's the day of the Lord against Babylon when Babylon fell.

So the day of the Lord against Edom when Edom falls. The day of the Lord against Egypt when Egypt falls. The day of the Lord just means the day that God judges.

And there's different days of the Lord for different nations because they experience their judgments at different times. Now, in the New Testament, the day of the Lord is usually referring to the second coming of Christ, which will be the day of judgment for all nations. But in the Old Testament, you'd be hard pressed, I think, to find any place in the Old Testament where the day of the Lord refers to the second coming of Christ.

It's almost always used in the context of a judgment coming on Jerusalem or Babylon or Assyria or somewhere like that. So the day of the Lord is a generic day, a generic term for the day that God judges a nation. Though in the New Testament, as I say, it's the day he judges the whole world would be the day of the Lord in New Testament usage.

Verse 17, I will bring distress upon men and they shall walk like blind men, apparently stumbling around as if they can't see where they're going because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood shall be poured out like dust in their flesh like refuse. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them.

Now, a lot of the earlier kings had been able to buy off invaders, like when Ahaz, the king of Judah, was threatened by a coalition of Damascus and Samaria. He sent money to Assyria to come protect him from them. On other occasions, sometimes the king sent money to Egypt or even gave money to an invader themselves to say, hey, if you'll go away, we'll give you this money, save you the trouble of conquering us.

We'll give you the money you want to get anyway. But in this case, there'll be no opportunity for that. Their silver and their gold will not be able to save them from this wrath in the day of the Lord's wrath.

But the whole land should be devoured by the fire of his jealousy. This expression, the fire of his jealousy, also is used again in chapter three, verse eight. For he will make

speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.

Now, chapter two, we're going to move a little more quickly. And that's easier to do in chapter two. He says, gather yourselves together.

Yes, gather together, oh undesirable nation. Now, undesirable is the King James, the new King James. In Hebrew, it apparently means shameless.

At least that's what almost all the English translations rendered. If you don't have the version I'm reading, it probably says shameless. There's reference to these people being without shame a number of times, especially in chapter three and verse five, when it says, it says at the end of that verse, but the unjust knows no shame.

You know, we live in a society that actually indicates that we don't want anyone to feel shame. We want to help their self-image. I heard a news story just this week, and I forget where this, I think it was in England, actually.

I believe it was in England. Some principal of a school, someone who's a headmaster at school, had decided that in that school, they're not going to use the word good and bad anymore. They're going to speak of students as either skilled or unskilled, but they will not speak of anyone as good or bad because that might make some people feel ashamed.

Well, I think what our modern society lacks and desperately needs is more shame. We have a shameless society. They're incapable of knowing that they should be ashamed.

There are things that people should be ashamed of. To tell someone when he's, you know, skilled at stealing without anyone noticing, he's calling him skilled, that's not good. That's bad.

And but we don't want to use words that bring shame because that might hurt someone's self-esteem. Well, a lot of people's self-esteem really needs to be hurt. And I think we are suffering in Western civilization because for a couple of generations now, we've been under the influence of crazy psychologists who said, oh, you want to make sure everyone's self-esteem is protected.

You don't want to say anything to make them feel bad. I remember when my children were little, someone I knew used to refer to their little kid as a little sinner. They used to call me a little sinner.

They weren't trying to be mean. They just wanted to, I guess, instill in their children's mind that they are sinners. And I remember someone else who is much more influenced by psychology who is another Christian.

When they heard that, they said, oh, you don't want to tell them they're sinners. Well,

maybe it's not the kindest thing you can say to your children, little sinners, but I don't think it hurts anyone to know they're a sinner if they are, because it's when people don't know they're sinning. When people don't know there's anything wrong with what they're doing.

There's no accountability. There's no shame. They become sociopaths because they're not ashamed of anything.

They don't know right from wrong. And this is how a nation becomes when they depart from God. You know, it's interesting.

All my lifetime when I was young, our nation knew something about God. The Bible was pretty much revered even by those who didn't want to follow it. They thought it was the good book.

They thought it was, you know, a lot of people just believed it was the word of God, but they just didn't read it or care about it. But now people are trying to banish all influence of the Bible, all influence of Christianity from society as best they can. And you would have thought, well, you know, these people would still have some decency even without the influence of the Christian religion.

But you find out you get God out of people's minds. There's nothing to keep them decent. I know Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens and those atheists said, oh, you can be good and be an atheist too.

Yeah, you can be a good atheist as long as you're still living in a culture where you have been influenced by Christianity or where your culture has for centuries been influenced by Christianity and you personally have been raised in a society that recognized Christian morals and virtues. But without that, there's really nothing to argue for decent behavior. It's every man for himself.

If it's just survival of the fittest, I mean, if there's no God and we really just evolve, then it's, you know, kill or be killed. You know, there's no reason particularly to be decent unless you're trying to manipulate somebody to give you a break. But the truth is that shame, actual sense of guilt and shame for bad behavior is considerably lacking obviously now.

And you hear about and read about these horrible crimes. How could anyone bring themselves to do these horrible things? Well, there's no God before their eyes. If a person is not influenced by God, what's to keep them from doing the most cruel things? Other people.

It's shamelessness. We call it being a sociopath. Sociopaths feel no shame.

They don't feel guilt. They don't know the difference between right and wrong. That's

how a nation becomes, a nation of sociopaths.

Israel had apparently become that, Judah had. Oh, shameless nation. Before the decree is issued, that is the decree of destruction, before it happens, or the day passes like chaff, before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you, seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld justice.

Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger. Now notice there's no promises here.

Even if you seek God now, you may not be hidden, but you may be. You know, when Jonah came and preached in Nineveh, he said, 40 days, Nineveh will perish. There's no hope given that they could be spared.

But the king of Nineveh said, well, maybe if we repent, maybe God will spare us. So they did repent, and yeah, God did. God can spare.

God does have mercy when people repent, but he doesn't always have to hold that out. Sometimes the nation's gone so far that, you know, the individual who's righteous will be saved, maybe not physically. I mean, for example, if God judged America at this point, and I would think he'd have no trouble finding reasons to do that, it could result in, let's say, North Korean nukes or Chinese nukes or something like that taking our cities.

Well, in that case, the righteous in those cities, they get nuked as much as the unrighteous. When a nation is under judgment, that doesn't mean the innocent are going to get off scot-free. But, of course, they'll be saved ultimately. If they die, they'll be with the Lord.

That's what matters most. But a nation could be so far gone that even if you're righteous, no guarantee that you'll be hidden from the horrendous things that are coming. Now, he does speak to the meek of the earth who have upheld justice.

So there's obviously some who have. This is the first reference in the book to the faithful remnant. The idea of a faithful remnant is in many of the prophets that when Israel's gone bad, in many cases, there's a remnant that God speaks to and makes promises to.

And there's a remnant in Judah at this particular time that he addresses. Now, he's going to speak to the enemies. The rest of this chapter is speaking about the judgment coming on the enemies of Judah.

So not only Judah's going to suffer, but their enemies too. The Babylonians are actually going to conquer all these groups. But he starts with those to the west, which are the Philistines, then those to the east, which are the Moabites and the Ammonites.

Then he addresses those to the south, which is Egypt and Ethiopia, and then those to the

north, which is Assyria, and that kind of circles the whole society of that time. And so he says, For Gaza shall be forsaken, Ashkelon desolate. They shall drive out Ashton at noonday, and Ekron will be uprooted.

Now, these are four of the five Philistine cities that were in Palestine. The other one was Gath, not mentioned here, probably because it had been destroyed previous to this. We have the same phenomenon in Amos 1, verses 6 through 8, where the four of the five cities of the Philistines are threatened with judgment.

And Gath is not mentioned. So Gath has apparently been destroyed before this, and these other four cities are going to have their time. Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast.

That's where these cities were. The Philistines were seafaring people, and they settled the seacoast area of Palestine. The nation of the Cherethites.

Now, the Cherethites actually is another name for the Philistines. It speaks of their origins in Crete. They had come from Crete and tried to settle in Egypt.

The Egyptians had warded them off, and so they settled in Palestine. This was before the time of Abraham this happened, and they were a very serious problem to Israel, most of their history. But the Cherethites are the Philistines.

The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, the land of the Philistines. I will destroy you, so there shall be no inhabitant. The seacoast and the pastures, which shelters for shepherds and folds of flocks.

Excuse me, shall be pastures. Which shelters for shepherds and folds of flocks. Now, in other words, these are bustling cities, militaristic cities at the time, but nothing is going to be left there except the shepherds tending their sheep.

So this is against the Philistines. This happened when the Scythians actually invaded Palestine in 530 B.C. and did wipe out these cities. But then it says in verse 7, the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah.

They shall feed their flocks there in the houses of Ashkelon, which probably represents the houses of all the cities. Ashkelon is one of them. They shall lie down at evening, for the Lord their God will intervene for them and return their captives.

Now, we're going to talk about returning the captives when we get to the end of the book because it's mentioned again, but this says the remnant of Judah are going to inhabit this region. It is possible that this is literally true that when the Scythians wiped out the Philistines, and of course it was not yet time for Judah to be wiped out, that they inhabited that area. But I believe that the remnant and the prophecies about the remnant and Zephaniah, like most of the prophets, are going to look forward to the

Messianic age.

It was the remnant of Israel that received Christ when he came. Of course, the nation of Israel largely rejected him, but the remnant of Israel, the faithful in Israel, received him. Mary and Joseph were of that remnant.

Simeon and Anna in the temple were of that remnant. Zechariah and Elizabeth were of that remnant. And the disciples of Jesus were of that remnant.

And so when Jesus came, it was the remnant, the faithful remnant of Judah that actually, and Galilee, who actually came to Jesus. And there are many prophecies about the remnant, which we will see apply to the time of Christ and since. That is basically the remnant becomes the church.

We'll see that a little later in Chapter 3. Now, moving from the west to the east, the Moabites and the Ammonites were across the Jordan from Israel. And it says, I have heard the reproach of Moab and the insults of the people of Ammon, with which they have reproached my people and made arrogant threats against their borders. Therefore, as I live, says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, surely Moab will be like Sodom and the people of Ammon like Gomorrah, overrun with weeds and salt pits and a perpetual desolation.

It's interesting. Moab and Ammon were descended from the two sons of Lot, whom he fathered by his two daughters after they escaped from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. So the Moabites and the Ammonites exist because their ancestor Lot escaped from the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.

But now the judgment coming on them is likened to the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. It's like their ancestor escaped because he was righteous Lot, as he's referred to in 2 Peter 2. They are not righteous, and therefore they are going to suffer like Sodom and Gomorrah, not with literal fire and brimstone from heaven, but they're going to become desolate areas. And their land did become desolate.

The Babylonians took them into captivity also or wiped out the remainder. And it's a perpetual desolation. The residue of my people, meaning of Israel, shall plunder them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them.

Again, this is a remnant passage. And I believe we have to understand what the New Testament teaches is that the remnant of God's people, which again were the faithful remnant of Israel who came to the Messiah, but then later Gentiles were grafted into that olive tree alongside them and became what we call the body of Christ, the church. That's what we are.

I mean, Jews today who believe in Christ are part of that remnant, but we Gentiles who believe in Christ are one body with them. There's no distinction of Jew and Gentile in the

body of Christ. So we are part of that expanded remnant of Israel.

And therefore, the possession of the world is promised to that remnant. Now it says in Romans chapter 4 in verse 13 that God promised to Abraham and his seed that they would inherit the earth, the world, it says. They'll inherit the world, Romans 4.13. Now the seed of Abraham is A, Jesus, the seed, according to Galatians 3.16, and B, those who are in Christ are the seed of Abraham.

Paul says in Galatians 3.29, if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and the heirs according to the promise. So God promised Abraham and his seed they'd inherit the world. Jesus told his disciples, blessing of the meek, they shall inherit the earth.

Well, Zephaniah is already referred to the remnant as the meek, and they will inherit the world. They're going to inherit not only the land of the Philistines and the Moabites and Ammonites, but the whole world. But since the focus is addressing the Ammonites and the Moabites, it's their territory that is mentioned.

Yeah, my people are going to inherit that someday. They're going to inherit that. Verse 11, the Lord will be awesome to them, for he will reduce to nothing all their gods of the earth.

People shall worship him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations. That clearly is speaking of the present age, because there never was a time in Old Testament times where God's people were worshipping him from all over the shores of the earth. But they certainly are now.

The church, the body of Christ, the true seed of Abraham, we are all over the world, because we're from all over the world. And God is worshipped. So he's talking about actually the age of now, the messianic age that was inaugurated by Christ when he came.

Verse 12, you Ethiopians also, you shall be slain by my sword. Now that's the only verse addressing those to the south. It says Ethiopian.

And of course, they're further south than Egypt. But Egypt was ruled by Ethiopia during this period of time. So they would probably be considered part of Ethiopia.

So this is addressing, no doubt, the whole Ethiopian kingdom, including Egypt, to the south. And they're going to be slain by my sword. Now, there's many references in the prophets to pagan nations being referred to as God's sword or his rod.

And he disciplines or kills his enemies with. And he's very many times in the prophets in Isaiah chapter 10, verse 5, in Isaiah 34, verses 5 and 6, in Isaiah 66, 16, Ezekiel 30, 24 and 25. All these places refer to the invading armies as God's sword, his weapon he's using to bring judgment.

Now, verse 13, and he will stretch out his hand against the north, destroy Assyria and make Nineveh desolation. As he turns from the south to the north, as dry as the wilderness. Nineveh was famous for its system of cisterns and water collection and distribution.

But they'll be dry as a wilderness. Now, they were, of course, wiped out by the Babylonians and supplanted before Babylon's kingdom became prominent. The Assyrians were, but the Assyrians were defeated at Carchemish.

I think it was in 621 BC, if I'm not mistaken, by the Babylonians. The herd shall lie down in her midst, every beast of the nation, both the pelican and the bittern shall lodge in the capitals of her pillars. The capitals are these, at the top of the pillar, there'd be a decorative cap on a pillar.

That's what the capitals are. These capitals, the pillars will be knocked down. They'll be in the sand.

The capitals will be in the sand. So these creatures, these desert creatures will be lodging among the pillars and the capitals. Their voice shall sing in the windows, these animals.

Desolation shall be the threshold, for he will lay bare the cedar work. So all these fancy buildings of Assyria are going to be wiped out and wild animals, desert animals will be occupying them instead. This is the rejoicing city.

That is Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. They did rejoice. They are now at the time that Zephaniah is writing, but they won't be.

This is the rejoicing city that dwelt securely and said in her heart, I am it, and there is none besides me. How has she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down? Everyone who passes her shall hiss and shake his fist, which are simply gestures of scorn and amazement. Now, Chapter three, very quickly.

Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted the oppressing city. This is, again, going to be Jerusalem. She has not obeyed his voice.

She has not received correction. She has not trusted in Yahweh. She has not drawn near to her God.

Now, no nation had the opportunity that Israel had to draw near to Yahweh because he revealed himself to them. And he didn't reveal himself to the other nations. In fact, in Deuteronomy, Chapter 30, God says to them, this word of mine, it's not far from you.

You don't have to ascend into heaven to bring it down or go across the sea to bring it over to your place. He says it's near to you. It's even in your mouth and in your heart.

In other words, he says, I've made this very easy for you. Geographically speaking, every other nation, if they want to know my words, they're going to have to take a ship over to your place and find from you. You don't have to go anywhere.

I brought it right to your doorstep. I am near you. In other words, you have such an opportunity to seek me and find me and know me.

And yet they took it for granted, obviously, and they did not draw near to God. Her princes in her midst are roaring lions. Her judges are evening wolves that leave no bone till morning.

Now, the leaders of Israel are supposed to be the shepherds of the flock. God's people are the flock. Ezekiel 34, 1 rebukes the leaders of Israel, saying, Woe unto the shepherds who feed themselves, should not the shepherds feed the sheep.

The leaders of Israel are supposed to be shepherds. But when they become wolves, when they become lions, those are the chief enemies of the sheep. And therefore, it's a little bit like, I mean, I don't like to get political because if I say political things, then these lectures are dated and they're going to be online for a while.

But to tell you the truth, more and more, the leadership of our country has moved toward this kind of position. Instead of being the servants of the people, which is the way the Constitution defines their role, we are the people who elect them. They're our servants.

They're our employees. We can fire them, supposedly, unless they were to election us, and we can't. But the point is the government here is different than all governments previous to the United States in that other governments were all ruled by kings.

This was set up to have the people be the rulers and the politicians are the servants. They're supposed to serve us just like a shepherd is supposed to serve the sheep. But now it's almost like whether we're talking about governors or the president or the FBI or any other government agency, it's like they've got their own agenda and they just run roughshod over what people want and over what's good for people.

It's like the shepherds have become lions and wolves instead of shepherds to the sheep, and that's what happened in Israel. Now, even though Israel had kings, the kings were supposed to serve Yahweh and therefore govern in righteousness so that they would serve as good shepherds to the people. But they have become corrupt, unjust oppressors.

It says in verse 5, the Lord is righteous in her midst. Well, the judges are not righteous and the people, the rulers, but God is. There's always that.

No matter how bad the government gets, God, who is righteous, is always with his

people. He judges, excuse me. He will do no unrighteousness.

Every morning he brings his justice to light. He never fails. But the unjust knows no shame.

Obviously, I've cut off nations. Their fortresses are devastated. I have made their streets desolate with none passing by.

Their cities are destroyed. There's no one, no inhabitants. I said, surely you will fear me.

You'll receive instruction so that her dwelling would not be far off, despite everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all the all their deeds. So God says, I thought these guys would get a clue when I judge these other nations around them, when I judge them, when I punish them, that they'd say, hey, we ought to draw near to God.

He says, no, they didn't. Instead, they got up early to go after their corrupt ways. They rose early means they were eager to do it.

They eagerly followed evil. By the way, in Second Chronicles 36:15. Which is at the end of Second Chronicles and talks about how Israel or Judah was taken into captivity in Babylon.

The writer of Chronicles kind of summarizes, says, you know, they kept worshipping these false gods, but God kept sending his prophets rising early and sending them. He says. God was eager to warn them.

He rose up early to send his prophets to warn them, but they kept. They also rose up early to go and follow the corruption. Verse eight.

Therefore, wait for me, says the Lord, until the day I rise up for plunder. My determination is to gather the nations to my assembly of kingdoms to pour out on them. My indignation, all my fierce anger, all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

There's that line again. The fire of my jealousy. Now, this is a little ambiguous.

He talks about bringing all the nations to gather the nations to pour out on them. My indignation. Now, does this mean he's gathering the nations to pour out on the nations? The indignation? Or is the them the ones he's been talking about previously in the verses? The rulers of Judah who are corrupt.

To whom does them refer back? We do know that the nations that conquered Jerusalem. You know, the Babylonian Empire. It had lots of nations part of it.

Already, Assyria had been brought into it and many other lesser nations have been

brought into it. So, it was a multinational force under the king of Babylon in his empire. So, the gathering of all nations could be a reference to this multinational force in Babylon coming to punish Judah.

To pour out my indignation on them. Them is who he's been talking about in the first seven verses. That's Judah.

And that can be seen that way. Although, of course, it can also be read that God's gathering the nations to judge them, the nations. If so, he's changed, you know, his vision here to something else, a different time.

And so, it's a little ambiguous. But I suspect that the fire of his jealousy, which he mentioned back in chapter 1 verse 18, which was against Judah. And it's mentioned here again, too.

May be telling us that he's still speaking about the judgment of Judah. Okay. Now, verse 9. Now, from here to the end of the chapter, we have the remnant being discussed.

And God's blessing on the remnant. And that's us. That's the church.

The age of the church. Because once God did bring down Jerusalem, not only in 586 BC, but after the second time. The Romans brought it down in 70 AD.

That leaves the people of God as the remnant. The remnant who survived that Holocaust in 70 AD and followed Jesus. And had brought Gentiles in with them to do so.

So, this is that entity, that remnant, after Jerusalem has ultimately and finally been brought down. Because what is spoken here in verse 9 and following is not something that actually happened after 586 BC. But it did happen after 70 AD, which was the second time the same prophecy was fulfilled.

For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language that they may all call on the name of the Lord to serve him with one accord. Now, a pure language. I restore a pure language.

There are people who say, well, I guess we're all going to speak Hebrew. Because that's the pure language or something. I think they're missing the point.

There's no particular national language that is more pure than another. At least the Bible doesn't identify one as better than another. You know, sure, the Old Testament is written mostly in Hebrew.

Part of it was written in Aramaic, though. Jesus spoke Aramaic, which is not Hebrew. But it's similar.

The apostles wrote in Greek. Obviously, there's a lot of different national languages.

None of them is pure or impure.

They're just relevant to the cultures that speak them. But the pure language, I think, speaks of they're no longer to be swearing by false gods. They're no longer be taking false oaths.

They're going to because he goes on to say they're not going to lie anymore. He's going to say that a couple of verses down here. In verse 13, he says, the remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies.

Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth, for they shall feed their flocks and lie down and no one will make them afraid. So, I mean, I think this pure language, actually, the word language in Hebrew is lip. It literally says, I will restore to my people a pure lip.

So it's not really the language or speaking. It's what their lips are doing. It's what they're saying and talking, no doubt, about getting rid of the lying and the false oaths and things like that.

OK, so he says they will serve the Lord with one accord. That phrase with one accord reminded me, of course, of Acts chapter two, where they were 120 were in the upper room all in one accord. But when I checked it out in the Septuagint, which is Greek, like the New Testament is, it wasn't the same phrase.

What it actually means literally is under one yoke, which is just as good. They'll all serve God under one yoke. Remember, Jesus said in Matthew 11, take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

My yoke is easy. My burden is light. These are people who will be serving Christ.

The remnant of Israel after the end of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is under the yoke of Jesus. All the remnant of Israel that are faithful are Christians and so are the Gentiles. And so in one accord, actually in Hebrew means under one yoke, which is, I believe, the yoke of Christ.

Verse 10, from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my worshippers, the daughter of my dispersed ones shall bring my offering from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia. In other words, Gentiles, as well as the remnant of Israel, Gentiles, we worshiping God, bringing his offering. And, of course, we offer spiritual offerings now, spiritual sacrifices, the New Testament says.

But there's still the offerings we bring in from beyond Ethiopia would mean simply from far away Gentile lands. There will be people who are not Jews serving God. The interesting thing is that one of the first non-Jewish people that did become a follower of Jesus was an Ethiopian.

In Acts chapter 8, the Ethiopian eunuch. It might even be that that story is related for us, and so many are not in the book of Acts related. In order to kind of reflect on this particular prediction, people from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia are going to become my worshippers, too.

He says, verse 11, in that day you shall not be ashamed for any of your deeds in which you have transgressed against me. I guess they will have been thoroughly forgiven. That's us.

He says, for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountains. I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The followers of Jesus are a meek and humble people.

Jesus said, blessed are the poor in spirit. That means humble. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the meek. They shall inherit the earth. These are the disciples of Jesus are the meek and humble people, the remnant that God leaves in the land when he destroys the rest of the land.

Okay? Now, in verse 14, it says, sing, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O Israel. Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Something to celebrate. Actually, the same exhortation is found in Zechariah 9, 9, where it says, rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Behold, your king is coming to you. He's just having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt in the foal of a donkey. This rejoicing of the daughter of Zion in Zechariah, and Zechariah, you know, was a little later than Zephaniah, but is when Jesus comes.

Your king is coming on a donkey. Rejoice. Shout.

And that's the same exhortation here. Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O Israel.

Be glad and rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem. Then it says in verse 15, the Lord has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemy, the king of Israel.

The Lord is in your midst. You shall see disaster no more. Now, the word disaster in the Septuagint and also in the Masoretic text in the Vulgate is the word fear.

You shall see fear no more. Not that you won't say disastrous. Christians certainly have seen disasters, but we have no ever any grounds to fear.

Now, by the way, when he says I've cast out your enemy in John 12, 31, as Jesus was going to the cross, he said, now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this

world be cast out, referring to the devil. In Revelation 12, speaking of the same thing, in my opinion.

In chapter 9 through 7 through 9, it talks about how Satan is cast out, as Jesus said he would be at the cross. And here it says, the Lord has taken your judgments. He's cast out your enemy.

This is, I think, a reference to the victory of Christ at the cross and Satan being cast out. Verse 16. In that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem, do not fear.

Zion, do not let your hands be weak or slack. Hebrews actually is written to Jewish Christians in the first century. And in Hebrews 12, 12, he says, therefore, strengthen the weak knees, the feeble knees, and let those hands that hang down be strengthened.

Same kind of an exhortation. It means be encouraged. 17, the Lord, your God in the midst of you is mighty.

He's a mighty one and will save. Actually, literally in the Hebrews, a warrior who saves. God in the midst of you is a warrior.

He saves. You've got enemies coming against you. He's a warrior.

He can fight them off. He never loses. He will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing. Now, quiet you with his love is a difficult passage.

You get almost as many different translations of it as there are translators. In the Hebrew, it literally says he will be silent over you with his love, which is strange because it talks about him singing and rejoicing with gladness and so forth. There's a lot of noise here.

And it says he'll be silent in his love. So some translations, several of them say he will quiet you. The Septuagint actually says he will renew you with his love.

This is also followed by the Net Bible and the New RSV Bible and the Syriac versions. The Greek Septuagint is a very important cross reference to the Hebrew Bible. And it says he will renew you with his love, which might be a better way of understanding what is being said there.

Verse 18, I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden. Not everyone finds sin and reproach the things that God finds reproachful. Not everyone finds them a burden.

Some people like them, but righteous people don't like them. When Jerusalem is about to be destroyed by the Babylonians, Ezekiel saw a vision in Ezekiel chapter 9. It was a

judgment of Jerusalem depicted by six angels with slaughter weapons in their hands, but another angel with a ink horn in his hand. He was told to go and put a mark on the forehead of those who sigh and cry over the abominations of Jerusalem.

And when these slaughter weapons were released on Jerusalem, those who had the mark on their head were spared, just like in Revelation. Those who have the seal of God are spared from the judgments of God. But the idea is that God is going to spare those in Jerusalem who sigh and cry over its abominations, who find it, who are sorry about it.

Lot lived in Sodom, but it says in 2 Peter 2.8 that that righteous man vexed his righteous spirit day after day, seeing their unlawful deeds. You know, a person who is spiritually sensitive is going to live in a corrupt society. He's going to be vexed.

He's going to be sorrowful. He's going to be moaning over it. That's why Jesus said, bless are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.

Mourning over the reproach to God that is they see around them in the world. Verse 19, behold, at that time I will deal with all you who afflict you. I will save the lame.

I will gather those who were driven out. I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame. At that time, I will bring you back even at the time I gather you, for I will give you fame and praise among the peoples of the earth.

When I return your captives before your eyes, says the Lord. Now, this talk about gathering. Most people would understand this, I think, as a gathering of the Jews in the last days to the land of Israel.

That's how the popular view of dispensationalism teaches it. And there's many references to gather. I'll gather those who are driven out.

He says in verse 19, verse 18, I will gather those who sorrow in verse 20. It says I will get each at that time. I'll gather you.

And then at the end of verse 20, it says, when I return your captives from before your eyes. So a lot of people just say, oh, this is clearly talking about the end times. And God gathers the Jews from all over the world back into the Holy Land.

As seems to have happened in modern times. However, this idea of gathering his people takes on a different meaning in the New Testament. Jesus said to his disciples who were Jewish followers, I have other sheep you don't know about.

Meaning the Gentiles. I must go to them and bring them also. He's going to gather them into one.

There'll be one fold and one shepherd, he said. The church, the Jewish believers that he was speaking to, the Gentile believers he's going to go gather in to his flock. It's a

spiritual gathering that comes in.

Remember, Jesus said, wherever two or more are gathered in my name, there am I. Gathered. He gathers people in his name and he is among them. And that's what is promised to be here.

And so I'm of the opinion this is talking not so much about the end times and the gathering of the Jews. It's talking about gathering the people into the kingdom of God that he was talking about. The remnant of Israel, the people from beyond Ethiopia, they're all going to be gathered together.

Not in one place, but in one flock, the body of Christ is one flock globally. And the last part was, I'll return your captives. I've always thought it was strange that people see this phrase, I'll return your captives, and think it's talking about bringing Jews back to Israel today.

Jews in the world aren't captives. They haven't been captives for really a long time. I mean, they've been driven out of their land since 70 AD, but most of them around the world have not been slaves.

They've not been servants. They're not in prison. They're not captives.

I mean, in a sense, if they wish to, they could pick up and move somewhere else. They could even go to Israel if they wanted. They're not captives being released.

But we, who are Christians, have been captives. It says in 2 Timothy 2, it says at the end of the chapter, it says, The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle toward all, patient with all, if perhaps they may reason with those who are in opposition so that they can come to their senses, and God may release them from the captivity of Satan. That's a paraphrase, obviously, but those last few verses of 2 Timothy 2, it says they've been taken into captivity by Satan to do his will.

Well, those are the captives that have to be released and returned. You know, it says, The angel said to Joseph, His name is going to be called Jesus. He'll save his people from their sins, not from Egypt or from Rome or from some other nation.

People are saved by Jesus into his body by being brought out of captivity, Satan's captivity, after the enemy has been brought down and cast out that he mentioned earlier here. I would also point out that the expression, I will return your captives, the expression in the Hebrew is, I will turn the captivity. And this is found more than a dozen times in the New Testament, this phrase, I'll turn the captivity, and it clearly does not speak about literal return of captives.

For example, at the very end of the book of Job, when things turn around for Job, in Job 42.10, it says, The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends. Job

never went into captivity. What do you mean, turned his captivity? Same phrase is used here.

Modern translations usually render it, restored the fortunes. Most modern translations in Job 42.10 would say, The Lord restored the fortunes of Job. The phrase in Hebrew is, return the captivity.

But I have a list I can't give you because we're out of time, I have quite a few Old Testament passages and there are more, that speak of God returning the captivity of this or that group who aren't actually in captivity. And the phrase is apparently a Hebraism that means to restore the fortunes. When I restore your fortunes, not when I bring you back from captivity, is really what it's saying.

And so, you know, there are differences of opinion. I would have shared more of the other opinions if I had more time. I already took more time than I planned on to go through this book.

But obviously, some of the passages we've just read are taken quite differently by dispensationalists. They take a futurist approach. They think that most of the commentaries I read by dispensationalists preparing, they all thought this a future millennium this is talking about.

But actually, when you cross-reference the phraseology of these passages with that in the New Testament, it looks like it's talking about the remnant of Israel joined by the Gentiles who believe in Christ in one flock, now the church. And by the way, that's the way these passages were understood through most of church history, before the rise of dispensationalism. But I think a lot of teachers would probably apply these passages to the end times, to the second coming of Christ, to the millennium after that.

That's not, I don't think that's a necessary way to see it. And I don't think it takes into consideration the verbiage of the New Testament which borrows the language from passages like this and applies it to us today. So I believe it's just talking about the age of Christ, which is now.

Jesus has been reigning at the right hand of God for 2,000 years until he returns. This is the age of the body of Christ, the age of the kingdom of God, the church.