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Zephaniah

Theme: The Coming Day of the Lord

Outline:

1:1-2:3 Warning to Judah of God’s coming Judgment

2:4-3:8 God’s Judgment on specific nations

3:9-20 Future Restoration for Israel

Zephaniah ministered in the days of King Josiah of Judah shortly before the time of the Babylonian Captivity. In short he warned of coming Judgment – the Day of the LORD judgment. Ultimately this will be followed by a time of restoration which He gets to at the end of the book.

We noted last time that the Day of the Lord theme is a prominent theme in the prophets. And it is a layered theme having a near application and yet also a distant application. It had application for the time of Zephaniah, and it has application for us today. So, the Day of the LORD is a broad theme. The Day of the LORD denotes God’s direct intervention in human affairs that puts His LORDSHIP on display front and center.

The Day of the LORD theme is presented in Zephaniah in the form of 3 pictures or portrayals.

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Zeph. 1 – Portrayals of the Day of the LORD

- 1) Portrayal of a Universal Flood that destroys all – Zeph. 1:2-3.
- 2) Portrayal of a great Sacrifice – Zeph. 1:7-13.
- 3) Portrayal of a great Battle – Zeph. 1:14-18.

Zephaniah 1:7–13 (NKJV)

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.

In view of the coming day of the LORD the people are told to be quiet in the presence of the Lord GOD.

Lord GOD here is Adonai YHWH – meaning Lord YHWH – Master YHWH – or the sovereign Covenant God of Israel Who doesn't change.

The idea is to be silent before God in the face of His overwhelming coming intervention of judgment. It is so awesomely terrifying it calls for sobered silence! There is a place just to be still and know that He is God! This is truly the place for the use of the word AWESOME!

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Psalm 46:10 (NKJV)

10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

Habakkuk 2:20 (NKJV)

20 “But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.”

Zechariah 2:13 (NKJV)

13 Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for He is aroused from His holy habitation!”

To be silent means “to hush”, “to be quiet”. In the book of Revelation when the 7th seal is opened there is silence in heaven for about half an hour (Rev. 8:1). It's as if the judgment of God is so overwhelming that there is nothing to say but sit in awe of the aspect of it coming.

Such impending judgment ought to evoke fear and silence. No more calling on Baal; no more invoking the stars; no more swearing by Molech—for now Yahweh, the only God, would act.

– ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***

The appropriate response to guilt before God is SILENCE – humanity has no defense for its sinfulness and God is totally justified in severe judgment.

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Romans 3:19 (NKJV)

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that **every mouth may be stopped**, and all the world may become guilty before God.

God is in the mouth stopping business! People talk big but when He arises to judge its another story! God in His power and glory will shut the world up!

In view here may be a veiled call to repentance. To be silent before God assumes a humbled down position reflective of a repentant heart. This is the proper position to assume in view of the coming divine intervention of judgment.

The day of the LORD is the main theme of the book. Verse 7 is the first of 19 references in the book to the day of the LORD also spoken of as “the day”, “that day”, “a day” or other similar phrases.

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The day of the LORD describes a period of unusual activity on the part of God in the affairs of His people. – ***The Nelson Study Bible***

The day of **the LORD** is when God directly interjects His LORDSHIP into the affairs of humanity in a direct and overt way – especially in relationship to His covenant people Israel. It is called the day of the LORD. LORD is YHWH – the covenant name of Israel’s God. So this DAY puts the God of Israel – their covenant God on display front and center. In the Bible this intervening theme of the day of the LORD has layers of application. There is a near/partial application and a distant/complete application. There are three points of emphasis in particular.

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LAYERS OF THE DAY OF THE LORD JUDGMENT

- 1) Judgment in reference to Babylonian Captivity.
- 2) Judgment in reference to the Second Coming.
- 3) Judgment in reference to dissolving of the present heavens and earth at the close of the Millennial Reign of Christ.

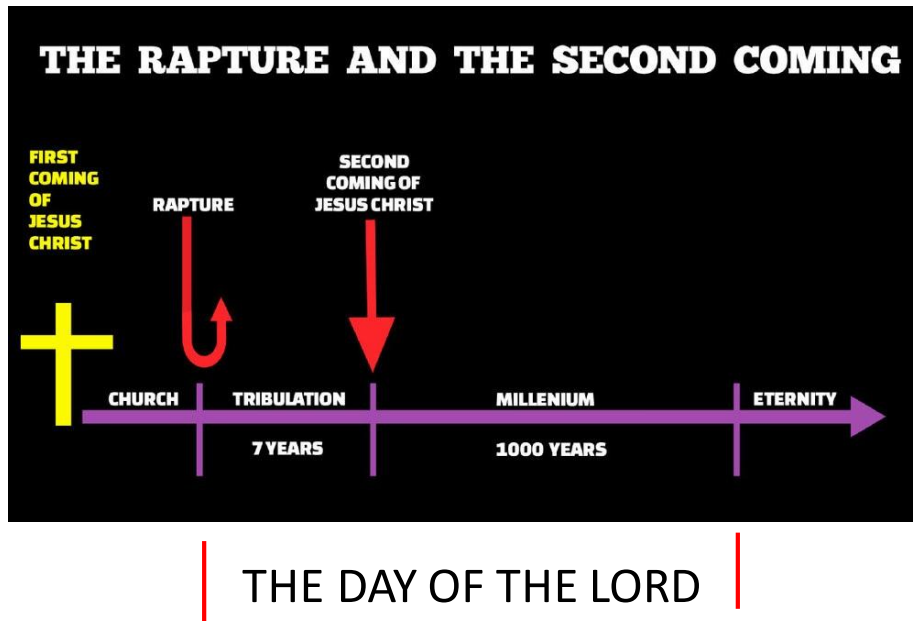
2 Peter 3:10 applies “**bookends**” to the Day of the LORD theme from where Peter was at. The aspect of day of the LORD judgment in reference to the Babylonian Captivity had already taken place. So Peter was writing in reference to the other two remaining prongs of the day of the LORD judgment theme as revealed in Scripture. Note these “bookends”.

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2 Peter 3:10 (NKJV)

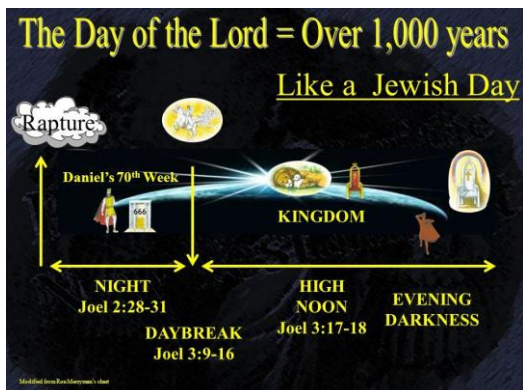
10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night [beginning of the Tribulation Period], in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up [at the end of the Millennial Reign – cf. Rev. 20-21].

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Within the Day of the LORD theme there is a night and a day emphasis – dark and a light emphasis corresponding to the Jewish day.

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But in view here in our study tonight in Zeph. 1:7-13 is the near/partial day of the LORD intervention in reference to the Babylonian Captivity. This was a very unique time of divine intervention in judgment on God's people. They were totally defying His LORDSHIP and so He intervened to show how wrong they were. But He did give them ample warning as seen in the prophets.

This coming day of the LORD judgment was at hand. In fact, if indeed Zephaniah wrote just prior to 622 BC as we suspect then this judgment fell upon them in about 20 years with the 3 sieges of Jerusalem by Babylon taking place in 605, 597, and 586 BC.

The point is judgment was on its way. It is described as a sacrifice prepared by the YHWH.

Normally God's people would bring Him sacrifices to Him in worship, but here God is preparing the sacrifice and this sacrifice is shown to be His own people Judah (cf. Isa. 34:5; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 39:17; Rev. 19:17-18). It is a sacrifice of judgment. And the guests God has invited are the Babylonians who will serve as His divine instruments of judgment (cf. Hab. 1:6).

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 day of the Lord intervention in view involves punishment for the Jews rebellious and idolatrous ways. The **princes** refer to the king's royal officials and his sons are also mentioned. Mention is made of their being clothed with foreign apparel which would indicate they were embracing foreign values and practices.

God's people under the Law were to be a separated people including how they dressed (cf. Deut. 22:11-12). They were commanded to wear tassels on their garment which served as a reminder that they were to be a holy people to the Lord their God (cf. Num. 15:37-40). But evidently, the kings officials and his children were more enamored with worldly clothing – which they probably considered “cool” in context than the stuffy old ways of dressing commanded by the Lord.

Adopting such outward dress meant that the leaders had assumed the customs, habits, and manners of their godless neighbors – Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. They took on the look of worldly materialism.

– **David Levy**

The sons of the king proved to be a disaster as they did not follow in the godly ways of king Josiah. Jehoahaz reigned 3 months and was taken captive to Egypt (2 Kings 23:31-34); Jehoiakim was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:1-2). His son Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:8-16); and then Zedekiah was blinded and also taken captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:18-25:7).

These sons were all wicked and everyone was punished in this “day of the LORD” judgment exactly as prophesied by Zephaniah.

9 In the same day I will punish All those who leap over the threshold, Who fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit.

God said He would also punish those who “*leap over the threshold*”. Since the leaders had a tendency to imitate foreign customs the “threshold” reference here may very well tie to the superstitious practice of the Philistines in reference to their god Dagon as seen in 1 Sam. 5:1-5.

And where there is no fear of God (only superstitious religion) the people know nothing of loyalty and faithfulness. Instead what defines them is violence and deceit.

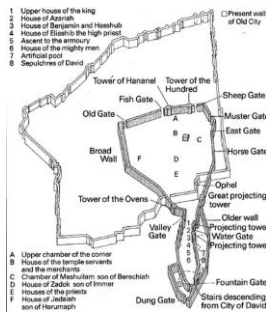
Look at our own society the further we get away from God the more violent and treacherous it becomes. Only recently have we had to start guarding the church every time we meet. I heard on the news this week that in some of our large cities it is more dangerous (statistically) to walk around than it was to serve as soldier in Afghanistan in the heat of the conflict.

Lots of people have all kinds of pagan superstition but they have no fear of God, and it shows in their lifestyle.

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.

The Fish Gate was located on the northside close to where the fish market was located. It was the gate through which Nebuchadnezzar in the Babylonian invasion is thought to have entered.

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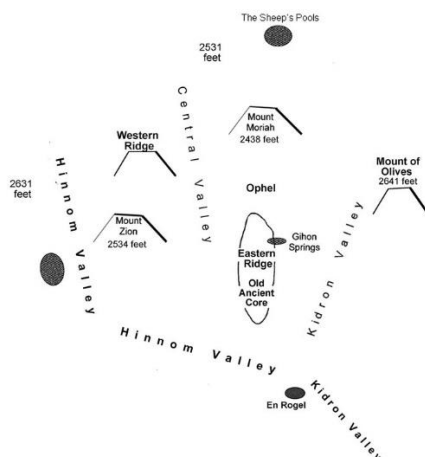
The Second Quarter was northwest of the temple where the upper class tended to live (2 Chron. 34:22). And the area of the hills perhaps refers to the entire surrounding area as Jerusalem is surrounded by hills. There would be a lot of things come crashing down in this whole area.

The whole of Jerusalem and the whole surrounding area would experience the judgment of God that brings screams, howling, and loud crying. There is a reason the book of Lamentations is called Lamentations. The day of the LORD judgment involved mournful crying and wailing – and was no respecter of persons, affecting all sectors of Jewish society.

11 Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh! For all the merchant people are cut down; All those who handle money are cut off.

The word “Maktesh” means “mortar” and came to represent the business district of the merchants. This perhaps refers to the hollow like area commonly know as the depression of the Tyropoeon Valley (Central Valley) that runs through the center of Jerusalem.

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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 is pictured here is the LORD making a thorough search in which nothing is hidden from Him. The punishment is just, and God has all the info on them. Nothing is hidden from Him! (cf. Ps. 139; Amos 9:1-4; Heb. 4:13).

Yes, there were those who were involved in overt idolatry as we have noted. Yes, there were those who were seduced by foreign and pagan influences as we have seen. But the great sin in view here is complacency.

These people are indifferent, and they just don’t care one way or the other about the things of God.

They have a very low view of God seeing Him as completely passive. They don’t deny His existence – they just don’t see Him being involved in anything. They kind of had a “deist” perspective.

Deism is belief in the existence of a supreme being, specifically of a creator who does not intervene in the universe. The term is used chiefly of an intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries that accepted the existence of a creator on the basis of reason but rejected belief in a supernatural deity who interacts with humankind.

In their complacency they see the LORD as not doing anything. In their hearts they say, “***The LORD will not do good, nor will He do evil.***” They see God as removed. He may have set things in motion but then He just lets it go and is not vitally involved – not at this point.

When people are indifferent to God they tend to think that He is indifferent to them and their sin. – ***Life Application Bible***

These people have completely lost sight of God’s providential activity. How does this happen? It happens because God does not all the time intervene in the Day of the Lord judgment. He gives lots of space – so much space that people can come to think He is inactive and not doing anything. After all people get away with sin – seemingly all the time – and there is no intervention. People just keep carrying on like they always do -and seemingly there is no divine action. And so people come to think God (if He exists) is just an old grandfatherly type who is not doing much of anything.

This by the way is a sign of the end times.

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2 Peter 3:3–4 (NKJV)

3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

4 and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”

Last days scoffers also challenge the idea that God is active. They don't see it. Where is His long promised coming? They come to the conclusion that everything is just carrying on in the natural realm as it has from the beginning. They see God as passive and inactive.

But we know what God is doing! This is the age of grace. This is the time when God is allowing the world to become ripe for judgment – and while He is withholding judgment, He is waiting for more to come to repentance.

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2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Here is what the world fails to see. It's not that God is inactive – but rather that He is more patient and gracious than we could ever imagine. He does not want to bring the Day of the LORD hammer down. And so He continues to wait.

Little do they realize that God will in due time rise up and personally interject Himself into the affairs of mankind in a very real and dramatic way in what is called the DAY OF THE LORD. There will be no doubt then as to His activity.

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Revelation 6:14–17 (NKJV)

14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

15 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,

16 and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!”

17 For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

Oh, He will be known to be real and active in that day. This will be sinners in the hands of an angry God and His LORDSHIP will be live and in action for all to see (cf. Deut. 29:19; Job 15:31; Ps. 30:6; Isa. 28:15; 31:1; Jer. 17:5; 23:17; Amos 6:1, 3).

All the complacent who think God will just continue to be inactive and there will be no day of the Lord judgment – they should just look at history. Look at what happened to the Jews. The Babylonian Captivity is a fact of history. No one refutes this. It happened exactly as prophesied. God is on record showing He brings to pass His day of the LORD judgment just exactly as He says He will. We have proof in history!

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.”

In the day of the LORD judgment that God was going to bring on Judah – all would be lost (cf. Deut. 28:30). Their goods would be lost. Their houses would be destroyed. Their vineyards would be abandoned. They were going to lose it all.

And so, it happened exactly as God said. It didn’t happen overnight. It took another 20 years or so – but it did happen. The Word of the LORD always has a fulfillment. When God says judgment day is on the way – be very sure it is on the way.

By way of application, we now live in the last days of the Church. Paul plainly says that we are those **“upon whom the ends of the ages have come”** (1 Cor. 11). We see flagrant apostasy all around. We see complacency everywhere. No one seems to take God very serious – except for a small remnant.

This text of Zephaniah 1 was written just prior to a day of the LORD event as seen in the Babylonian Captivity— even so we also find ourselves on the cusp on the coming Day of the LORD judgment. And with that in mind consider Zeph. 1:7 which says, “***Be silent in the presence of the Lord GOD; For the day of the LORD is at hand***”.

In light of this reality – what should our response be?

Consider what Peter says to us...

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1 Peter 4:7–11 (NKJV)

7 But **the end of all things is at hand**; therefore be serious and watchful in your **prayers**.

8 And above all things have **fervent love** for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”

9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

10 As each one has received a gift, **minister** it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

How should we live as God’s people who live on the cusp on the coming Day of the LORD judgment? Well, we should be serious about prayer, fervent in our love for one another, and good stewards in ministering to one another to the glory of God!

Indeed, may we be silent in the sense of humbled down before God knowing that we are those upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The great eschatological day of the Lord is getting ever closer.

May God help us to live in light of an eternal perspective. Indeed, the end of all things is at hand!