

## **Zephaniah 1:14-18 – Judah’s Judgment: Soon, Severe, Sure**

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Gill, Trapp, Handfuls, Geneva, JFB, Clarke, Poole, Henry, Delitzsch, Calvin, Barnes, INT,

Beloved in the Lord Jesus: The church of God became complacent and fell into a deep hole after the Reformation of Josiah. Why? Judah started to ignore God’s Words again. Yes, they found it briefly in Josiah’s time, but only briefly. So for ignoring God’s Word and living as they saw fit, they had to face judgment – soon, severe, and sure. And they did. **Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel testified to this.**

But that was not the only time that God’s people fell away from holding God’s Word and then he had to severely punish them. Before the Reformation, for 1000 years the Roman Catholics forbade the reading of God’s Word...and the people obliged (...and so the church became stagnant...even shriveled!

We are in a similar position today as those 2 times. The church today is largely going through the motions of serving God. Yes, we have the Word of God – everywhere – but we don’t read it, teach it, and submit to its teaching as we should! So severe judgment is on the horizon...just like the 70 years of captivity and like the 1000 years of darkness before the Reformation. Let us therefore look at the details of Judah’s judgment and learn from it.

Our headings are:

**Judgment is soon**

**Judgment is severe**

**Judgment is sure**

Or goals are: **That you will make sure that the church keeps examining and reforming her life so that she does not become complacent and take her eyes off of the Bridegroom.**

### **Judgment is soon**

14 The great day of the LORD is near; It is near and hastens quickly...

#### **1. God’s judgment on Judah was called the Great Day of the Lord.**

**It was called the great day of the Lord because it proved that God was great and God was able to do what he had threatened on Judah for his idolatry and apostasy.**

#### **3. When did this take place?**

**This took place when Babylon came, captured Jerusalem, cleaned out the temple, and carried away the nobles and educated class to Babylon soon after Zephaniah’s prophecy – very soon.** It did not take hundreds of years! This is similar language to Matthew 24 and Luke 13, where the Lord described the impending destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

**Matthew 24:27 "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.**

### **3. Lessons:**

**a. When God says something he will do it. This particularly applies to judgment.** Some

think that because it seems justice is delayed on the church it won't come. But that is not how God works. So do be deceived into thinking that the church is doing okay since it has not seen judgment recently. **And yet, like Judah, we have time to repent.** And unlike Judah, we must repent!

**b. Judgment might seem to come from man, but it is guided by the hand of God.**

### **Judgment is severe**

14 ...The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out.

#### **1. The day of the Lord would be noisy and bitter, so much so that the great leaders will cry out!**

Some think that "noise" should be better translated "voice," but that would ignore the pattern of the prophecy where everything is basically stated twice. (V13, near, hastens. V14 Noise, cry out. V15 wrath, trouble; devastation, desolation; darkness, gloominess; clouds, darkness) **The meaning is that men will cry out in terror as they see the glorious city in ruins and their children dragged off to a foreign pagan city...some as slaves.** Children will be left as orphans. Women and girls abandoned and abused. One old translation: They will cry like hopeless women. Jeremiah echoed the same fact!

Jeremiah 25:30 "Therefore prophesy against them all these words, and say to them: 'The LORD will roar from on high, And utter His voice from His holy habitation; He will roar mightily against His fold. He will give a shout, as those who tread the grapes, Against all the inhabitants of the earth.

The Jews did not **listen to the prophets' voices** to return to God's Word so they would have to **cry out in pain!** Ironic.

15 That day is a day of **wrath**, A day of trouble and **distress**, A day of **devastation** and **desolation**, A day of **darkness** and **gloominess**, A day of **clouds** and thick **darkness**,

#### **2. They day of the Lord would cause Judah to experience God's wrath.**

**There would be trouble and distress.** These were troubles from God imposed by God's "sanctified ones," the ones especially set apart by God for this punishment. (The Babylonians were the sanctified ones.)

**There would be devastation and desolation.** There would be no one in the city and in the fields harvesting grain and grapes.

**There would be darkness and gloominess.** There would be no children singing in the streets.

**There would be clouds and thick darkness.** It would be as if a dark cloud came

over...and people scurried away to their homes to hide. This could refer to the smoke that covered the city when the Babylonians destroyed it. But this phrase is often translated “blackness on the face” referring to the soot from the burning! So smoke and soot!

Joel 2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion, And **sound an alarm** in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the LORD is coming, For it is at hand: 2 **A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness**, Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, The like of whom has never been; Nor will there ever be any such after them, Even for many successive generations.

Nebuchadnezzar’s soldiers would leave nothing behind.

16 A **day of trumpet** and alarm Against the **fortified ( 坚固的 ) cities** And against the **high towers**.

**3. The people would blow the trumpet, not of victory, but of the arrival of the enemies of God’s people, an enemy so great that they could not overcome them.**

Even with their high towers, Judah could not defend himself. But who could stop God’s Word from coming true?

17 "I will bring distress upon men, And they shall **walk like blind men**, Because they have sinned against the LORD; **Their blood shall be poured out** like dust, And their **flesh like refuse**."

**4. God would specifically target the men of Judah who had abandoned worshipping him.**

**a. They had closed their eyes to his truth and opened them to gaze longingly on Baal and Molech.** So they would no longer be able to see to go and worship these idols.

*Dutch Proverb: God puts out the eyes of him whom he intends to destroy.*

Deuteronomy 28:28 "The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. 29 "And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save you.

**b. They had poured out their offering to Baal and Molech, so God would see that their blood was poured out like dust and refuse.** To have their blood poured out like dust is to show that it was easily poured out. Furthermore, dust has no value, and so was the blood of wicked men. Irony.

**c. They had offered meat to their idols, but now God would refuse them and throw them on the dung heap to rot.** (Refuse=Dung) More irony.

**5. Lessons:**

**a. Nothing will destroy a church faster than the abandoning of the primacy of the Word of God.** All things are permissible without the Word of God. Everything can be

watered down!

**b. Henry: Those who walk as bad men will one day walk as blind men!** God will take out their eyes. There is no escaping the severity of God's judgment – except if we have Jesus Christ to carry our sins. **Jesus took the severity of God's wrath.**

**c. Our help is in the name of the Lord, maker of heaven and earth and our Savior, not in strong walls and high towers!** When we are in danger we call out to him for help. **But you have to be his child to call on him.**

### **Judgment is sure**

18 Neither their **silver nor their gold Shall be able to deliver them** In the day of the LORD'S wrath; But the **whole land shall be devoured** By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance Of all those who dwell in **the land.**

#### **1. Surely no one would be able to rescue the Jews from Babylonian captivity.**

The first thing one thinks about redemption is cost, how much would it cost them to go free from Babylonian captivity. But riches would not deliver the Jews from the Babylonian captivity.

Ezekiel 7:19 'They will throw their silver into the streets, And their gold will be like refuse; Their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them In the day of the wrath of the LORD; They will not satisfy their souls, Nor fill their stomachs, Because it became their stumbling block of iniquity.

**Judah needed spiritual redemption before they could get physical freedom.** They had to look to their Savior!

#### **2. Surely the whole land would be devoured...eaten up by the fires of God's jealousy.**

Who can stand up against a jealous God? Who feels worse than a husband spurned?

Song of Solomon 8:6 THE SHULAMITE TO HER BELOVED Set me as a seal upon your heart, As a seal upon your arm; For love is as strong as death, **Jealousy as cruel as the grave;** Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame.

Deuteronomy 4:24 "For the LORD your **God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.**

God would burn them because he wanted the land purified. Fire was for purifying. The Jews could buy friends, but not their safety from God! **And the custom was to pay the great powers so they didn't invade you, but the Babylonians did not want anything anymore.** They wanted total annihilation of the Jews. (Also, "land" is the proper translation based on the context, though the word could be translated "earth" on other occasions.) **All the briars and thorns would be burned up.** The roots and the fruits would be burned up. Their horses and their homes would be burned up!

**3. Surely God would bring judgment speedily, meaning that none of the guilty party would escape.**

**4. And yet, for the sake of his love for his people, God would rescue them after 70 years.**

The Lord would rescue them because they were given to his Son in the covenant of redemption and his Son loved them – sinners though they were.

**5. Lessons:**

**a. No one can deliver the church from the judgment it is in.** You can't buy your way out of sin with money. Some try to buy their way out of church discipline by giving money to the church. But that won't work with God.

Proverbs 10:2 Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, But righteousness delivers from death.

**The church therefore needs to go to the one who took her punishment – the Lord Jesus Christ- and ask that he be the ground for deliverance from sure judgment.**

**b. The church must not hope life will get better if we get new civil leaders. Getting a conservative government won't change any heart!** The church must be proactive in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what will change hearts and cause the church to wake up from its long sleep. **Getting riches won't make you better**, though you might think so. Getting all the comforts of this life won't make you or the church better!

**c. At the end of the world there will be the ultimate judgment. All men, even great men, will have to give an account to God for every thought, word, and action!**

Proverbs 11:4 **Riches do not profit in the day of wrath**, But righteousness delivers from death.

Yes, everyone from all the ages, of every race, from young to old, and all the genders we have today, will have to stand before God and **give an account for his sins**. If he can't offer Christ for his sins, his judgment is sure!

**Conclusion:**

The Jews learned, because of their complacency, that judgment was coming soon, it was severe, and it was sure. But did they make any efforts to avoid God's judgment? No. And so they died or were enslaved.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

**1. You can't make a deal with God when the fire has started; fix the problem now.** You have to go back to God and make things right. Talk to him. Confess your sins and the church's sins. Listen to him. Listen to him regularly. Bring others to listen to him. And keep doing these things. Don't make Judah's mistakes, lest you face 70 years of slavery. Don't make the church's mistakes and face 1000 years of darkness.

**2. Jesus is the one who enthralled your heart, so he is the reason you would want to clean up**

**your life and the church's**. He is the Bridegroom who loves you and wants to be next to you! Yes, you remember his love for you, you remember his suffering for you, so you want to clean up your life. You will want to stop listening to the drivel of people who don't care about you and return to listen to the Bridegroom's voice.

Finally, as Christians we are punished as children if we don't follow the Savior's voice, but if you are not a Christian you won't be punished as a child but as a challenger to God and have to spend eternity in hell. Your only way out is to call on God to make you his child because you believe that Jesus indeed died on the cross for sinners.