

# The Day of Reckoning in the Old Testament

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Seeking the Lord's blessing, let us now turn back to the portion of scripture that we read, Sephaniah chapter 1 and we'll read at verse 12. And it shall come to pass at that time that I will such Jerusalem with candles and punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart, the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.

And Sephaniah belongs to that section of the Old Testament that we call the Minor Prophets. And these books called the Minor Prophets are probably not the most popular books because we regard them as books of gloom and doom.

Yet within these books we have some of the most beautiful expressions that are to be found in the Bible or in fact in any other literature. In the book of Hosea, for example, speaking of Israel who had fallen into great sin and backsliding, the Lord promises that if they will return, I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from them.

Micah, speaking of the Lord, writes, Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?

He retaineth not his anger forever because he delighteth in mercy. How often these words have brought comfort and encouragement and peace and assurance to believers.

[ 1 : 4 5 ] We know very little about Sephaniah's personal life except what we can glean from his book and from the genealogy with which the book begins, which stretches across four generations to the end with Hezekiah.

If the Hosea named in the genealogy is King Hezekiah, then Sephaniah would have been one of royal blood. He would be the great, great grandson of King Hezekiah.

His own name, Sephaniah, means Jehovah hides or Jehovah shelters. And the main theme that we find in this book is the day of the Lord.

It is an important biblical concept which we should take seriously because it tells us how things are going to end.

God warns us that the day of the Lord is coming when he shall judge the world of both Jews and Gentiles. Now, Sephaniah ministered in Judah during the time of King Josiah.

[ 3 : 0 4 ] You recall that King Josiah led Judah into religious reformations. Josiah in the twelfth year of his reign began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of idolatry.

But six years later, in the eighteenth year of his reign, he began further reforms triggered by the finding of the book of the law in the temple. And it is likely that Sephaniah prophesied before the second reformation took place.

And that's simply because there is no mention of it in his book. He must have begun his prophecy early in the reign of the king, even possibly before the first reformation enacted by King Josiah.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 34, we read that when Josiah was 16, he began to seek the God of his father, David.

And it is quite possible that Sephaniah's ministry may have had some influence upon the life of the young king.

[ 4 : 19 ] It is indeed encouraging for us to know that there is no age barrier for anyone to seek the Lord. Sephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah.

And although Sephaniah began his ministry before Jeremiah, he was called to the prophetic office in the thirteenth year of the reign of King Josiah, King Josiah, so that they overlapped for a while.

King Josiah inherited a nation that was spiritually in a very dangerous state. It was going back to the days of his grandfather, King Manasseh, who ruled over Judah after his father, Hezekiah, died.

And Manasseh had no respect whatsoever towards God. And he began to sponsor pagan practices throughout Judah, even in the temple at Jerusalem.

And during his reign, there was also great persecution, so that it is recorded for us that he shed so much innocent blood that he filled the streets of Jerusalem from end to end.

[ 5 : 47 ] We do know that towards the end of his life, that he saw the errors of his way and tried to make reforms. But we know that that was too late.

The damage had been done. The people had lost sight of the truth, and they showed no commitment whatsoever to the Lord.

And when Manasseh died, his son Amun began to reign. But sadly, he did not continue his father's reforms, but reverted back to his father's former ways, and led the people of Judah deeper and deeper into idolatry.

And also he adopted foreign ideas and foreign customs. And after Amun, his son Josiah came to the throne at a very young age, and although Josiah had sought to reverse the trend, he died on the battlefield before the work was finished.

He began some reforms, but before those reforms were completed, he died out on the battlefield.

[ 7 : 03 ] And it is against that background that Zephaniah and Jeremiah began their ministry.

Zephaniah was not given an easy task, because he had to minister to the people and try to make them realise how much they had gone astray from the Lord, how they had sinned against the Lord, and what horrendous consequences they were going to experience unless they would repent and return to the Lord.

It is never easy to speak and challenge a people who have no respect for God and those who have a wrong conception of God.

Others today promote the love of God to the expense of his justice. God loves everybody, no matter how we live our lives.

We can sin as much as we want. The idea is that God always forgives. God is love and he forgives. And that is true.

[ 8 : 14 ] God is love and he does forgive, but he is also a righteous and a just God. The love and justice of God only met in one place, where his love and justice are manifest, and in harmony together.

Where did the love of God and the justice of God meet? Where did they harmonise? Well, that is at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, 7 Ayah, in his book here, focuses very much on the imminent judgment of God, both on Judah and on the surrounding nations, because of their sin.

Their sins that include pride, idolatry, and oppression of the poor. These anticipated judgments were fulfilled in history, as the power of Assyria was swept away, and the Babylonians came to dominate the region.

Yet, 7 Ayah insists that what was going to happen to Judah when the Babylonians would come, and when the Babylonians would invade the land and take many into captivity, was not the result of the ascendancy of the empire of Babylon, but it was rather a sovereign act of judgment on the part of the Lord, whose power extends over all people and over all nations.

- [ 9 : 53 ] And undoubtedly, the day of the Lord and the prophecy of Sephaniah has reference not only to what was going to happen to Judah when the Babylonians would come and invade and take many of them into captivity, there is no doubt that Sephaniah speaks of the ultimate fulfillment of his prophecy in the coming of Jesus Christ to judge the world.

The day of the Lord, when he will come to judge the world, is not something that is new in prophecy. We find its way back in the preaching of Enoch at the very beginning in the book of Genesis.

For Jude records for us, Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of the east, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed and all of their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

But at the same time, as Sephaniah speaks of judgment, he also has words of hope and encouragement that flow from the reality of the Lord's sovereign power.

Because it is the Lord who is judge, then repentance is possible. If the people repent, and if they humble themselves and they seek the face of the Lord, then a refuge may be found on the coming day of judgment.

- [ 11 : 38 ] In chapter 2, verse 3, we read already where it says, Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek on the earth, which hath wrought his judgment. Seek righteousness, seek meekness.

It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. The Lord's purpose is not to destroy, but to transform the people and the nation into pure worshippers.

In chapter 3, verse 12, we read, I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.

The Lord who demonstrated himself mighty when Jerusalem was destroyed and the people taken captive by the Babylonians will also demonstrate himself as mighty in salvation, redeeming a people over whom he will rejoice with singing.

The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty. He will save. He will rejoice over thee with joy. He will rest in his love. He will joy over thee with singing.

- [ 12 : 52 ] Now I know we spoke of God's judgment last Sabbath evening as given to us in the parable of the sheep and goats, but I would like to say a little this evening on the same theme from the perspective of Old Testament and that of what we have here in the prophecy of Sethaniah, what Sethaniah tells us about God's judgment.

There are particular things given to us by the prophet as he writes about this day of the Lord. What kind of a day will this day called the day of the Lord be?

Sethaniah at the beginning declares that the day of the Lord will be universal in its scope. I will consume man and beast.

I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast. I will consume the fowls of the heaven and the fishes of the sea and the stumbling blocks with the wicked and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord.

He is telling us that this day of the Lord is going to bring a universal judgment. This language that Sethaniah is using reminds us of another occasion when God spoke similar words.

[ 14 : 13 ] It takes us back to the days and the time of Noah where we read, and the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast and the creeping things and the fowls of the air, for it repenteth me that I have made them.

Sethaniah is telling us that the day of the Lord will be like the great flood in the days of Noah. It will be universal in its scope.

The New Testament, like Sethaniah, links the day of the Lord to the universal judgment experienced in the time of Noah.

For the Lord Jesus said, But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, I knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

The day of the Lord will be universal in its scope. It will come suddenly upon us. On this day, there will be a global calling to account, a reckoning which, through justice for all sin, will finally be rendered.

[ 15 : 45 ] Now from verse 3 to chapter 3, verse 8, Sethaniah declares how God is going to judge both Jews and Gentiles.

And then in chapter 3, verse 9, he speaks of another day, the day of restoration. For then will I turn to the people, for then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord to serve him with one consent.

But notice how he ends that section on judgment, again bringing before us that judgment is going to be universal. Therefore wake ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey.

For my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger. for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

So he's bringing before us that this day of the Lord will be a universal judgment. All nations and all peoples shall be before the Lord.

[ 17 : 05 ] Now, where does this judgment begin? Where does it begin? In this book of Siphoniah, who does it begin with? First of all, because he is bringing before us this universal judgment, but on whom?

Where does he begin? He begins with Judah and Jerusalem. Now, why does he begin with Judah and Jerusalem? Well, he begins with them because they were God's people who had been given great covenant privileges.

And coming along with these covenant privileges, there was also covenant responsibility. This is a principle that we must remember as Jesus reminds us.

And that servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes, but he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes.

Why is this? Jesus says, for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required, and to whom man have committed much, of whom they will ask the more.

[ 18 : 30 ] this is a principle of which it would be wise for us to take heed. And that is that those who received much, that much will be required of them.

The blessings that we receive carry with them responsibility. One of the great blessings that we have is the word of God and the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the word, the revelation of the redemptive plan of God and Jesus Christ, which we have from Genesis to Revelation.

And we so often undermine the word of God. And as a result, we put so many things at a distance from us. Because we undermine the word of God, we put at a distance from us things like death and judgment.

We grope for signs and miracles just like they were in the days of Jesus on earth. Always looking for a thrill based upon the supernatural.

Instead of resting totally upon the word of the Lord. Remember how Jesus condemned Capernaum.

[ 19 : 52 ] Claiming it as a city which had exalted into heaven because of its gospel privileges. Because of the many deeds that the Lord Jesus did in Capernaum.

But the people rejected. And he said regarding them that they would be brought down to hell. For if the mighty works which had been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

Where does his judgment begin? Well, he begins in the temple.

Sephaniah identifies three particular forms of idolatry that was prevalent. The worship of Baal, the worship of the stars, astrology, and the worship of Moloch.

In verse 5 he speaks of those who swore by the Lord and had sworn by Malcham. There were people who tried to combine the two types of worship.

[ 21 : 00 ] They claimed to be loyal followers of the Lord and yet at the same time they are also prepared to swear by Malcham.

They had made a public profession of their faith in the Lord but at the same time had no hesitation in conforming to current religious practices of their day.

Their commitment was superficial. They displayed their lack of heart loyalty to the Lord. They wanted the best of both worlds.

That's always a danger that we tend to crave for the best of both worlds.

Like another in the Old Testament Balaam such people wanted people who wanted to die the death of the righteous but did not want to live the life of the righteous.

[ 22 : 08 ] although Balaam experienced God he heard God he even spoke for God but he sinned against God.

Balaam heard God's words but he did not heed them. He was full of the knowledge of God yet destitute of the grace of God and that's always the danger.

We can fill our heads with theology theology and it's not bad to know theology and to learn theology but we can fill our heads with theology and yet be destitute of the grace of God.

God and them that are turned back from the Lord and those that have not sought the Lord nor inquired for him then there are those who have not sought the Lord nor inquired of him.

they are indifferent who go off in ways that suited them. They did not seek the Lord that is they made no endeavour whatsoever to find him and enter into a living relationship with him and to serve him and this is brought before us by Sephaniah in order that we would search ourselves is that what is true of anyone here tonight that they do not seek the Lord that they make no endeavour whatsoever to find him and enter into a living relationship with him and serve him that was true of those people in Sephaniah's day and sadly I'm sure that it is true of many tonight how shall it be for them on the day of the Lord Sephaniah records that Judah's sins were not mainly of the religious variety but they were also guilty of widespread violence and oppression and the same day also will

[ 24 : 16 ] I punish all those that leap on the threshold which fill their masters houses with violence and deceit this teaches us that the way and whom we worship has an inevitable impact that it has an impact on the way that we live these people worshipped idols and their life was full of violence and oppression Sephaniah gives a very unusual description of the day of the Lord as a time of sacrifice followed by a banquet to which guests have been invited those who have been invited are not the people of Judah we notice but the nations whom the Lord has set apart to be his instruments of his judgment upon Judah the Babylonians it is a fearful picture given to us of the day of the

Lord what kind of impact should this knowledge have on how we live our life in the here and now Peter after describing the nature of this day of the Lord moves on to explain how the knowledge of this day should impact on our lives seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved what manner of persons are ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness looking for and hastening into the coming of the day of the Lord wherein the heavens been and fire shall with fervent he says thinking of these things and considering these things and being told of these things the impact that it should have on me and you the impact that it should have on our lives that God is coming to judge that there's going to be a global judgment a judgment where all nations and all peoples shall stand before the judgment seat of

Christ that that that should have an impact upon our lives oh what manner of men what manner of persons are you to be in all holy conversation and godliness Peter's point is that knowledge of this day should impact our lives now the way in which we live and in the way in which we conduct ourselves but for us generally today we respond in the same manner as they did in the days of Saphaniah despite the warnings of the prophet the people fell into apathy and complacency the people said the Lord will not do good neither will he do evil despite the warnings they fell into apathy and complacency they had come to think that

God was not coming in judgment and that is true in the day in which we live we go on with the gospel we go on hearing the gospel and yet how often do we think of the fact that God is coming in judgment is it not true that some apathy comes creeps into my life and your life as if we were putting these things so far away from us and yet as we noted last week he is standing behind the door that's what the book of revelation says to us he is standing behind the door and he's ready to burst these doors open and to come to judge he is standing behind the door in his long suffering he is standing behind the door in mercy and love in compassion how's that you say because he's giving you the opportunity to repent and to trust in him we are always at risk

Judah had sadly grown complacent and had shown apathy of indifference towards God and their disbelief in his coming judgment contributed to them going to live unholy lives in complete defiance to the word of God there's a man there's Jeremiah and they're both telling Judah to repent to humble themselves to confess their sins to turn unto the Lord and he tells them that unless they repent unless they humble themselves unless they return to the Lord that the Lord is going to come and to judge them and they just did not believe they did not believe they showed apathy of indifference towards God's word they disbelieved in his coming judgment and what happened the

[ 30 : 06 ] Babylonians came suddenly upon them and took them away into captivity and it is as it were a picture of the day of the Lord the ultimate day of the Lord people indifferent people in apathy people complacent about the coming and he will come as a thief in the night he will come suddenly the doors will open and he'll come to judge we are always at risk to become complacent and fall into apathy and that is why the church must always keep this day before her eyes and that is why the church must always warn people about it in the book of ecclesiastes chapter 8 we read because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil because it doesn't come immediately the heart of man goes and do evil things

Peter warns us that before the day of the Lord and the last day scoffers will be crying where is the promise of his coming where is the promise of his coming if you speak to people today about judgment and the Lord coming in judgment that's the kind of reply you will receive where is the promise of his coming we are advancing all the time they will tell you we are evolving all the time towards what they think of as perfection where is the promise of his coming you see delayed judgment is actually mercy for sinners like me and you that the Lord has delayed his judgment is mercy for me and you Judah here was given time to repent while the prophets were speaking and exhorting her it was a time given to her an opportunity to repent but she continued in her defiance against

God now I ask are you like Judah God has given you the opportunity to repent he hasn't come in his final judgment yet he's standing behind the door he hasn't burst the door open yet he's giving you an opportunity in his mercy he's giving you an opportunity to repent but I ask you are you continuing in your defiance against God well that's what Judah did many today will claim as the judge pronounces that sin must be judged that it is only a scare story that is how the secular world looks upon the message of the church regarding the judgment of the Lord the day of judgment they will claim that the church is only trying to frighten people it's a scare story so what do people do well in their complacency in their contentment and their self satisfaction they will go on as usual without a care or concern about the divine intervention of which the word of God warns us is that not a picture of our world today the church warns people about the coming judgment of God about the day of reckoning and the secular world will say it's only a scare story and who will people believe well we know who they will believe and so they go on in their indifference in their contentment in their complacency they go on about or they go on as usual without a care or concern about the divine intervention of which the word of God warns us in which the gospel warns us well is that your own approach to

God's warning are you like Judah unconcerned about your accountability to God Judah was not in complete ignorance of the judgment of God they heard about it in fact Judah had actually seen it because you know that Israel was divided into two there was the northern tribes called Israel and the southern tribes called Judah and they were both guilty of the same sins but the northern tribes were taken into captivity first they were swept away and Judah saw that and Judah knew about that and yet they continued with the same sins that brought Israel into captivity it made no difference whatsoever to them oh the hardened heart of man the hardened heart of man and what was Judah doing they were putting it far away from themselves putting it far away from themselves

I heard once of two men that were in a cemetery and they were burying a friend of theirs and one said I wonder who will be the next and the other man replied well it might be you but it won't be me putting it away from himself and we do that all the time putting these things away from ourselves and that was what was happening in Judah they heard about it they had actually seen God's judgment but they were putting it far away from themselves we have heard about it that a

[ 37 : 09 ] Christless life will end in a Christless eternity we have heard about that we have seen people who left this world Christless but we put all these things so far away from ourselves how well we promise ourselves that that won't happen to us and there are many in hell tonight who gave that promise it won't happen to me it won't happen to me tonight you have a different cry it's too late it's too late in chapter 2 we have a list of gentile nations that God said would be judged and Judah would agree that those nations deserve judgment and these lists that we have in chapter 2 the list of the gentile world the

Jews would say they deserve to be judged but Judah was so blinded to her own relationship with God that she was putting judgment so far away the Lord continued to warn her through Sathania we may come to something like where those who commit murder those who are thieves those who abuse children those who do evil things they deserve to be judged but you see the judgment of God is just and the judgment of God says that all those who reject his way of salvation will be judged you don't need to be a murderer you don't need to be a thief you don't need to be an abuser all you need to do to be judged and judge towards destruction is to reject the salvation of

God to reject Jesus Christ that's all you need in the midst of the warnings of God's intervention and judgment he hands to them a ray of hope he exerts them in chapter 2 verse 1 to 3 he says gather yourselves together yea gather together o nation not decide before the decree bring forth before the day pass of the shaft before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you seek ye the Lord or ye meek of the earth which hath wrought his judgment seek righteousness seek meekness it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger or to be hid in Christ to be hid in the clefts of the rock or to be hid in the wounds of a loving saviour to be hid in the only refuge that there is from the anger of

God the psalmist in psalm 130 that we sung earlier if thou Lord shalt mark iniquities O Lord who but there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared there was still hope for those who would heed the words of the prophet and seek the Lord before the terrible day came there was a refuge in which the remnant might be hidden away safely on the day of the Lord's fierce anger there was a refuge available to all those who would repent and humble themselves turn and seek the Lord and there can be a future of hope beyond the judgment that hopeful future has been made possible by the coming of the servant of the Lord whose fearful sufferings and death paid and as death finds us so shall judgment find us as the tree falls so shall it lie there is no second chance now is the time to seek the

Lord to seek righteousness to seek meekness that ye may be hid in the blood of the covenant in the day of the Lord's anger that on that day you can say O Lord I will praise thee though thou wast angry with me thine anger is turned away and thou comfortest me he is the only refuge he is the only refuge for sinners like me and you against the day of the Lord's fused anger the day of the Lord's judgment the day of the Lord well how shall I in you fear on the day of the Lord may the Lord bless our Lord let us pray