

Kings and Prophets 16-03-17

This is Thursday, the 17th of March, 2016. We continue our study tonight of the kings and the prophets. We have come to the Northern Kingdom being a historical memory, having gone out under the Assyrians.

The Southern Kingdom is down to its last generation, really, with the acceding of Josiah to the throne. And in this time, we have a number of prophets. There are two clusters of times in which the prophets seem to minister, and we're in the second of those, three actually, the third being post-exilic.

But we are looking at the prophet Zephaniah in his historical context. We'll take a moment to focus our concentration and dedicate our time and our fellowship to the Lord Jesus, and then we'll begin. Father, we thank you, as always, for the opportunity to leave aside the daily tasks and concerns that seem to drive us forward through our schedule on a daily basis, and to rest and refresh and restore our souls at the oasis of your Word, to enjoy the encouragement and the upbuilding that comes from spending time together, thinking about the treasures of truth that are imparted to us in every part of your Word.

We thank you for this portion that we study tonight. We ask your blessing on us, that your Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart in a meaningful and powerful way, that we will be freshly dedicated to lay that sacrifice before you that is holy and acceptable in your sight. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, if you step back for just a moment before we return to the detail of our study in the book of Zephaniah, there is, in the latter part of the Old Testament, that section that we call the Minor Prophets. And going back to your memory, we say, well, you've got the Let Us Sing the Books of History and the Let Us Sing the Books of Prophecy, and you have Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel.

Then we get into what are called the Minor Prophets. And that comprises Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. We have looked at a number of these books.

We're not taking them in biblical order. We're attempting to take them in chronological order and fit them into the historical context that we find in the books of Kings and also of Chronicles. Doing that is a bit of a challenge because some of the prophets are undated.

You'll remember that prophets such as Hosea give us a very detailed account of when they ministered. Hosea told us that it was in the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah and Jeroboam, this is Jeroboam II in Israel. So that's a very easy one to pinpoint.

And so when we came to that portion of the historical record, we looked at Hosea. But we began actually with the earliest of our prophets that we can nail down pretty precisely, and that

was Jonah, the book of Jonah. And so just by way of review, because we've looked at a number of these prophets now, you remember in Jonah, we knew that he was in the reign of Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom because of something that is mentioned in 2 Kings 14, verse 25.

And if you want to just flip over to Kings just for a moment, let's refresh our mind and bring ourselves up to speed on the pattern or the trend of all of these prophets. Our non-writing prophets really began back in 1 Kings with the advent of Elijah. And you'll remember the context of that in 1 Kings chapter 17 when Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead said to Ahab, and this is really the first great national prophet or national prophetic ministry in the days of Ahab.

Now, what do we know about Ahab and Jezebel and their daughter Athaliah up in the northern kingdom? This is the apex, the pinnacle, or the deepest abyss, depending on how you want to look at it. It's the apex and pinnacle of evil in the northern kingdom. Rivaling that of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who was the first great nemesis, if you will, of those who wanted to seek God and enter into the covenant promises and covenant obedience with God.

Up in the northern kingdom you have this tragically terrible leadership. Here's my question. As you survey in your mind, just stand on Mount Nebo and look across at the land like Moses, but look at it from a historical context.

The last time there was a great prophet for the people of God in the land of Israel, you go all the way back to the days of Samuel, don't you? Samuel was raised up in a day when there was no king. You had the series of judges in the land and that Gilgal pattern that we saw when we went through the book of Judges. They're down and they're oppressed and they cry unto the Lord and the Lord sends a judge and he delivers that portion of the land where there's the greatest need, whether it's against the Philistines or against the Edomites or the Moabites or whoever it may be.

The inhabitants of the land rise up and create oppression and God allows this and the people say, well, I have come to my senses, oh Lord, deliver us and we'll be faithful. And so here comes an Ehud or a Gideon or another of the judges and that pattern just persists and persists for a long time, for a couple of hundred years. Then the great prophet Samuel is given as a gift to the people of God.

What is the situation when Samuel appears? It is a time of great apostasy. You remember this is Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They're not even doing the sacrifices properly.

Instead of meat on the altar, you have meat boiling in a pot. They're taking flesh hooks and grabbing out parts that they want. It's not as though God didn't amply provide for the Levites in the law.

We've seen that in our recent study of Christ and the prophets, how the Levites got the skins as the sons of Aaron received meat and it's an ample portion. There's just these two guys. They're

pretty much all that's left and that's not enough.

They've got to pervert and corrupt the practice In the days of that great corruption, here is this mighty man of God, Samuel, who rises up and is a prophet and a deliverer, if you remember. The stone Ebenezer being raised up, thus far the Lord has helped us. He calls the people back to repentance.

This is really going to be a pattern that repeats. A time of great apostasy, of a vacancy in spiritual leadership and God raises up a voice, crying out, calling the people back to God. Samuel does that.

But the people say, give us a king. They want to go their own way. And so instead of the man after God's own heart, the monarchy starts with King Saul.

And that goes tragically awry and amuck, ending on the battlefield with the death of Saul and his sons. But earlier, God, sort of in secret and in an invisible way, had already prepared his man. And Samuel, years earlier, had anointed David.

And with the death of Saul, David comes to the throne. Well, that's in the vicinity, just for memory purposes, of 1000 B.C. In the 1100s, you have the ministry of Samuel, the monarchy of Saul, the death of Jonathan, and all the rest of the line of Saul. And then you have David coming to the throne.

Well, the next time you have a great prophetic ministry is here, in 1 Kings 17, in the days of Ahab, reigning in Israel, and Asa down in Judah. Well, this is hundreds of years after David and Solomon and Jeroboam and Rehoboam and the divided monarchy. So during all of this period, you have the 40-year reign of David, you have the 40-year reign of Solomon, then you have Jeroboam and Rehoboam, and you have this accession in the south and in the north, going all the way down to the days of Ahab.

And there is no prophetic voice. You don't have a consistent succession of prophets, like you have a succession of kings. God has remained largely silent.

What's the meaning of that? What do we draw as a conclusion from that? During this entire period, they've had the Law of Moses, the Pentateuch, the first five books. David, of course, has written the Psalms. Solomon has written the Proverbs.

And this is the Bible. This is the written and recorded and rehearsed and sung about and spoken about Word of God delivered at the temple. You get the idea that the great leadership that has led Israel through the wilderness under Moses and into the land under Joshua, and then you have that time of settlement and of opportunity that is wasted and falls away in the judges.

And then there is this renewed opportunity under David and under Solomon. And so that communication from God, the Pentateuch, then the Psalms, which are at least the first 50 that

David wrote and gave as a gift and put in the mouth of the sons of Korah to sing and to communicate and to rehearse as people came to worship and obedience to Jerusalem and to the temple that Solomon builds. That is the testimony, and that is the witness, and that is sufficient.

So you have the five books of Moses and the two books of David and Solomon, sort of a complete sevenfold communication. And that stands unadorned and unaugmented for decade after decade and king after king in the divided kingdom period. But in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, you remember Jezebel is the daughter of the high priest of Baal, and she brings Baal worship to tremendous prominence and pretty much replaces and subjugates all other worship in Israel with that.

And Ahab foolishly marries her and brings that into the very heart of the northern kingdom. In those days, Elijah is raised up by God, and God begins to miraculously intervene with the drought, with the fire on Mount Carmel, and with the call to his people in a miraculous way. And we ask the question at that time, why isn't there a prophet in the south? Why does God rise up and speak through his prophet Elijah and later Elisha in the northern kingdom? Because that is where the crisis is.

That is where judgment is imminent and impending. So we hold that in our minds as we think forward, because after Elijah and the double portion Elisha, we don't see much by way of active prophetic ministry in the land and in the palace to the king. There will be an echo of that with Isaiah in the days of Hezekiah, right? He is a prominent prophet who intervenes in a similar way in the southern kingdom.

And why does he show up in the southern kingdom and speak in the days of Isaiah and Hezekiah and his son on down through Ammon and that? Why? Because there is a similar crisis and imminent and impending judgment. Even though Hezekiah started out well, he ends rather badly. And you know what's going to happen with his son and grandson, and by the time you get to Manasseh, God is going to pronounce the kind of judgment on the southern kingdom that he did in the north.

Well, you have that great prophet Isaiah raised up at that time. So if you look at Samuel, if you look at Elijah and Elisha, and if you look at, and by the way, Elisha comes down to the southern kingdom as well. You remember that? It seems that these miraculous and unusual prophetic ministries arise in times when judgment is imminent and the people of God are in danger of disappearing altogether.

And God, to honor his promise to David that he will not lack a man and that there will be a remnant that is preserved and that will survive whatever judgments come. This is God's miraculous and supernatural intervention at those times of crisis, at those times. And there is a consistent call to repentance.

There is a call back to the covenant, back to the promises and those predictions that were made

at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal hundreds of years before. That's the pattern. So now, tonight, as we resume and pick up our study of Zephaniah, I wanted to just quickly survey how far we have come because there is a silence after Elijah and Elisha, particularly up in the north.

You have the occasional man of God, the occasional reminder and echo there, but we enter into the realm of the writing prophets who delivered these prophecies and they are recorded as books. And that has not happened since the days of Moses and of David and of Solomon. And it is as though God is varying his repertoire.

He is using anything that he's got in the toolbox, everything in the book. He's throwing at his people to try to call them back. But this does another thing, a second thing.

Not only is it a call to repentance in a day of impending judgment, the prophetic ministry, but when it is in writing, and remember, the books of Kings and Chronicles do not appear to have been compiled and available for people to review until the captivity. That's when these seem to have been edited together and drawn from the book of Jasher and other places, the book of the kings of Judah, the book of the kings of Israel. There seems to have been editorial activity.

They had some time on their hands to go back and try to preserve their heritage and the records of the people. But those are not prevalent at this time, not in the days of the kings of Judah, the southern kingdom surviving after 721 down to the 640 era where we now are. So, what is available in terms of the word of God? What is available in terms of the communication of God to his people? Well, they still have the memory of how sacrifices should be performed.

The Levitical ritual is preserved in part, at least. But this has, in the southern kingdom, been compromised with the Garden of Uzzah and with the idolatry in the high places, the resurrection of the Baal cult. Athaliah brought it down to Judah, and it has never quite been extinguished.

Various quote-unquote good kings have tried to suppress idolatry, but they have not eradicated it. It's like the cancer that you didn't completely get in your operation or in your chemotherapy, and it begins to metastasize and to multiply and to infect and to corrupt. And as the people fall away further and further each time, they never quite rise to the heights of the previous revival, and then they sink further and they rise a bit.

But it's sort of a slanted death spiral where the gill is never as high as the previous, and the gall is deeper than the one before. And as they gill gall, they're not rolling up and down and up and down. They're spiraling down ever further.

And we know that we are less than 100 years away from the judgment on the southern kingdom that will rival that that took place in the north. So, when the writing prophets began, when these prophecies that are delivered at a national level are recorded, they compile, they accrete, they are a sedimentary record, if you will. When Jonah comes and gives his ministry, his experience and his record is remembered.

He's a verbal prophet. And we know from 2 Kings 14 where he fits. And you have Amaziah and you have Jehoash up in the north, Amaziah in the south, and there is that conflict.

And in those days, Jonah gives a prophecy. But he doesn't prophesy about Judah. He prophesies about Jeroboam up in the north.

And so, in 2 Kings 14, 23, just a quick review here. In the 15th year of Amaziah, the son of Jehoash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Jehoash, and that's Jehoash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria and reigned 41 years. So, this is going to be circa, let me find my note here.

But during that 41-year reign, you're going to have Jonah rising up and he gives a specific prophecy. Jeroboam II does evil in the sight of the Lord. He does not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin.

But, in verse 25, it says he restored the territory of Israel from the entrance at Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah. This is the Dead Sea area, the Sea of the Desert, of the south down there. According to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spoke through his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-Hephir.

Now, this is an expanse that rivals the territory in the north, the northern border in the days of Solomon. Now, why does this take place? You remember at this time the great pressure from the north is Syria and Assyria, right? We still have a king in the north, so the Assyrians have not, this is before 721, this is circa 780 down to 740-ish, the larger numbers of the 700s BC. And somewhere in there, Jonah delivers a prophecy and says, this king is going to restore the borders of Israel.

This is a prophecy Jonah delivers. Not his prophecy to Nineveh, not the book of Jonah, but he tells the northern kingdom, the God of Israel, seize your oppression. This is in the days, remember Pekah and Rezin and the pressure of Syria in the north.

And there is this confederacy and the northern kingdom feels like they are threatened. And there is the promise that that will dissolve and disappear. And God offers an earnest, he gives a gratuitous promise to the north.

He has been threatening them with mayhem and judgment and destruction for their evil and that doesn't turn them. And he says, well, I've tried the stick, let me try the carrot. I will send you my prophet and promise you that this pressure from the north is going to disappear, and it does.

And the reason it does is with the rise of Assyria, Syria is now worried and Syria turns to the north and they don't have any more ability to pressure the northern kingdom. In this turning around and facing Assyria by Syria, there is a vacuum of power and Jeroboam seizes this. He's a good general.

He's a terrible spiritual leader as a king, but he's a good general. And so he goes back and takes

this territory that they have not had since the days of Solomon. And he retakes it and he expands the border.

It takes the, Hamath is up in the middle of Syria, all the way down to the Dead Sea, which means he has gone kind of around Judah and in the trans-Jorda, all the way down to the Dead Sea. And this is a gift from God. God says, I will relieve you of these international pressures.

And because I'm telling you that I'm giving you this land before it happens and I'm handing it over to Jeroboam, I am hoping that you will turn to me and see that I am not just the God of judgment, but the God of grace, the God of gifts, the God of peace, the God that seeks to hold up my end of the covenant, if you will. This is given in the mouth of Jonah. And it is a call to repent.

And it is at this time that the story of the prophet Jonah begins to circulate because God sent him to Nineveh. And you remember that whole episode, Jonah and the whale, who was not a whale, but was a great fish. So we looked, and you can turn now over to your minor prophets, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, we'll return to those.

But Jonah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, we looked at the book of Jonah and we saw that in the story of Jonah being sent to Nineveh, there is actually embedded within this story a call to his people. If you're going to say, what is the book of Jonah about? What is its theme? It is God's call to repentance to his people. And he uses the people of Nineveh where he says, yet forty days in Nineveh will be destroyed, and they turn in sackcloth and ashes and repent.

And he says, people who are not my people, given the opportunity, given the prediction of judgment, and that's all they're given. You're about to be destroyed. They aren't given the gospel.

They aren't shown signs and wonders. This raggedy, stomach-acid-eaten prophet comes to their town, and from his ghastly appearance, they say, this God is serious. Look at his prophet.

The guy looks like death walking. Three days bathed in stomach acid is not going to be a pleasant experience. And he gets vomited out and walks all the way inland to Nineveh and delivers this.

They take him seriously. They take one look at the prophet and say, if he says we're about to be destroyed, we had better do something. And so they turn.

They dress their animals in sackcloth and ashes, cover their heads with dust. And God says to his own people, Gentiles have got more sense than you do. I send them a prophet, and they turn at one word.

I have been telling you for years. I have been demonstrating to you that judgment is coming, and you have no thought to repent. The book of Jonah.

So in a time of apostasy, Jeroboam II, there is this call to repentance. And that's where we picked up with Jonah. Well, as you continue looking at this call and the times in which the prophets appear, it is always at a time when judgment is impending and there is warning, there is grace before judgment.

So we looked, for example, at Hosea in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah, and Jeroboam II up in the north. Hosea is sent. And you remember he is also an acting prophet.

It's not just a written book, but there is a story. And he acts these things out. And so he takes the wife, Gomer.

And you remember the marriage of Hosea and Gomer the harlot, and she is faithless, but God tells him to take her back. And there is this play acting because their evil is so great that high communication such as you might find in Isaiah, the prophet, is lost on them. So it's a puppet show.

It's a play acting at almost a child's level of communication. And God says, you are faithless, but I am standing by you. I am offering you grace before judgment, and I am calling you to return to myself.

And so in this time of great crisis, after giving the gift of the land and not seeing a return, there is this call of the prophet Hosea. And you remember the outline of that book. Then in the same day, in the day of Jeroboam II, this day of a king that is corrupt and faithless and emulates the sins going all the way back to Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, we had Amos.

And in the days of Jeroboam II in Israel, and in the days of Uzziah, the garden of Uzzah in the south, we had Amos. And Amos also uses a ploy that is in the book of Jonah. It begins with those judgments on the nations.

You remember? God doesn't confront them directly. He uses the strategy of the indirect approach. And he says, I'm going to judge Syria for their cruelty.

I'm going to judge Philistia for impressing people into slavery. I'm going to judge Phoenicia for their lack of observing the treaties that they have made. I'm going to judge Edom for their vengeful and opportunistic spirit in coming in and taking advantage when you're down.

I'm going to judge the Ammonites for their violence. I'm going to judge the Moabites for their cruelty and their injustice. God says, look at these that I am going to judge.

And he's got everybody saying, hooray for judgment on the Syrians. Hooray for judgment on the Philistines. Hooray for judgment on the Phoenicians.

Hooray. Boo on those Edomites. Boo on the Ammonites.

Boo on the Moabites. But the crosshairs are coming ever closer. And so then you remember in chapter 2, he says, by the way, I'm also going to judge Judah.

And I'm going to judge the northern kingdom for corruption and for departing from the law and for immorality and for blasphemy. That was our prophet Amos. And you remember Amos was the man that didn't have credentials.

Hosea and Amos weren't of the school of the prophets. They were sort of blue-collar messengers, Amos in particular. And so God hopes to slip beneath the guard of his people and get this truth into their souls.

It's not my word like as a fire and like as a hammer that breaketh a rock in pieces. But the word has got to get past this outer defense, this deflection, this assumption that it doesn't pertain and doesn't have weight and doesn't have worth. And so God is very creative and inventive in the ways that he is getting this message, this call to repent and to return to him a cross.

That was Amos. And you remember we looked at Micah in the days of Jotham and Ahaz and Hezekiah. But it was actually a prophecy about Samaria.

And he talked about the sins of Samaria and what he was going to do to them. The specific sins were given in chapter 2. And the leadership is indicted and denounced in chapter 3 of Micah. Micah, who is like the Lord, Micaiah.

And then his prophecy of the future glory that is going to come to that remnant and to those who are preserved and survive the judgment and when God restores Israel. And he offers them a future hope. He has given the people land.

He has taken away their oppression. He has called them. He has given them examples.

He has shown what happens to the nations that do not have a covenant relationship with himself. And he has warned them that judgment is coming. Now he says, let me tell you about the future.

And Micah is that great prophecy of the future glory days. The last days of chapter 4 and the coming of Christ in chapter 5. And this recognition of what can be theirs in the future. Look at what I have done in the past.

Look at what I am doing now. Look at what I will do in the future. Another creative way that he called the people to himself.

Then more recently we looked at Habakkuk. I don't have time to review everything that we have covered. But you remember that three-fold prophecy in Habakkuk where he has got that problem.

Why is this evil allowed to persist? And God says, look, I am going to bring judgment. But look at all of the ways that I have been trying to appeal to my people. God doesn't want his word to fall to the ground.

He doesn't want his covenant people to be destroyed. And over these reigns and in the

northern kingdom and in the southern kingdom he is constantly calling. What do we draw from all of this? Step back again and think all the way back to Samuel.

And then to Elijah and Elisha. And then to these example prophets. These puppet show prophets.

And then these proclaiming and writing prophets who have written things down. Not to mention Isaiah in the days of Hezekiah. Not to mention the prophet Jeremiah that is going to be another puppet show prophet.

Another example prophet. And a weeping prophet in these very days that we now find ourselves in. Because Habakkuk prophesies at this time as the young king Josiah at the age of eight comes to the throne.

And there is rulership executed by regents and by princes that are filling in until he comes of age. And Zephaniah is a contemporary of Habakkuk. And both of these are precursors and early guys that are going to prepare the way for the prophet Jeremiah.

What is their call? Now that the northern kingdom is yet a further example of God's reluctant but necessary judgment on evil. And yet Judah does not learn the lesson. What about us? As we look around and we say yes Lord judge the nations.

Yes Lord judge evil. Or we may say I really don't think the Lord is involved. I think history is just evolving of its own accord.

I think it is just happening as a result of the affairs of men. And its cause and effect. And this is up and this is down.

And now that that was down is up and that up is down. And it is just the fads and the ongoing detritus of the kingdom is his who can take it. And whoever is strongest.

And so you have the strong man showing up in Russia. And Putin is there. And you have the strong man showing up in the United States.

And it is going to be whoever is the strongest of these candidates. That talks big and swaggers and impresses people with the force of their personality. And this is the way it is in the entertainment world.

You know you establish some outrageous persona and that makes you popular. And so you have your Madonnas and you have your Lady Gagas. And you have your, you know the more outrageous you are.

You catch fire on the internet and in the imagination of people on social media. And that you are now a thing. And people think well that is what drives culture.

And that is what drives society. And that is what drives fashion. And that is what drives power.

And that is what drives accomplishment. Is just go out there and hack and slash. And take whatever you can grab.

And where is God in all of this? Micah says there is nobody like the Lord. And you ignore him at your peril. Hosea and Amos.

Not to mention Joel. We are going to see the final prophets that prophesy right up to the captivity of Judah. In Obadiah and in Jeremiah.

And in these that Ezekiel and Daniel during the times of the captivity. And then the post-exilic prophets. Looking back and saying have you not yet learned this pattern of departure.

And of rebellion and of apathy and indifference. Leading to judgment and oppression. Leading to a cry and repentance.

Leading to God's deliverance over and over and over again. As we look at this history of the northern kingdom and now the southern kingdom. The prophets that God sends.

And he sends them to call out and to cry out and to make an appeal. And yet the hard flinty resistance of people who just don't think God is serious. Who don't think he is for real.

And they end up crushed. They end up destroyed. They end up losing all of these wonderful promises.

What have you got to lose? By serving the God of your fathers. The God of promise. The God of peace.

The God of prosperity. The God who said I will cause one of you to put to flight a thousand. I will be with you.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will drive out your enemies from before you. I will plant you in a good and pleasant land.

I will grant you prosperity. Not only that but you think about the latter part of Micah where he says not just for now. But I give you a future.

Your life is more than the present. Your existence is more than sort of a circular end in itself. I will raise you.

I will bring you back to an even better land. And an endless future of possibility and prosperity and promise. What is not to like about that? Well, what is our typical downfall? What have all of these prophets consistently said? You are short sighted.

You are myopic. You do not lift your eyes beyond the moment and beyond the immediate. You are caught up in the present where your priorities are of the earth and of the moment.

And looking for pleasure. How did this idolatry catch on? How did Jeroboam the son of Nebat

entice Israel to sin? And how did all of the kings that followed in his pattern after, how did they do that? It wasn't a grinding slavery. It wasn't a task master's whip.

How did he seduce them? It was with appeal. With pleasure. With stimulation.

With short term gratification. Anybody who knows anything about childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood recognizes that the process of maturing is the process of learning to take the long view. Learning to think beyond the moment.

To plan. To provide. To endure short term hardship in the interest of long term prosperity.

Right? That's maturity. Little kids know nothing of that. Give it to me and give it to me now or I'm going to throw a tantrum and a fit.

Maturity is I need to do this hard work because at the end of it is going to come a benefit that will justify and make that effort worth it. I will endure affliction because it is going to yield a great profit. That's maturity.

That's abstract thinking. That is thinking beyond the moment and beyond the immediate and beyond sensory gratification. What is our culture as in the days of Jeroboam II, as in the days of these evil kings, Ammon and Manasseh in the southern kingdom, and Uzziah? It is an appeal to the short term.

It is an appeal to the crass and shallow thinking that doesn't consider the future. That doesn't take the long view. This goes back to the garden.

The serpent talking to Eve. God doesn't have a future for you. Eat the fruit.

It is pleasing to look at. It is desirable to make you wise right now. There's no promise of a future.

There's no consideration of long term consequences. What will happen when you see Adam? What will happen when the Lord God comes in the cool of the day? It's an immediate short term appeal and a senseless and unthinking gratification of an impulse. And generally speaking, impulsive behavior, especially when it turns into a pattern and becomes compulsive behavior, is an inescapable death trap for us.

God offers us salvation out of this present evil age, out of this present evil and corrupt nature into eternal realms. It is real. It has been demonstrated over and over again.

God's promises are firm. They are demonstrable. They are supernatural.

And they have been supernaturally confirmed. And the messengers have been vetted. So it faces us with a decision.

And this is what you find now. If you quickly turn to Zephaniah, all the way up, this has been a

consistent pattern. Each of these prophets has had a different message.

It has been styled and delivered in a different way. It has been direct. It has been indirect.

It has been confrontational. It has been conversational. It has been by example.

It has been by direct revelation. It has been to the king. It has been to the people on the mountainsides.

It has been miraculously delivered, such as at the top of Mount Carmel. It has been subtly delivered, as in the book of Jonah. Every different way, shape, and form of communication that comes through the mind of God Himself has come to these people.

And so in Zephaniah, you remember when we started this last time, the word of the Lord comes to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amorites, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah, the son of Ammon, king of Judah. God says, look, let me give you a descendant of the king. Someone who has credibility.

If he's a descendant of the king, what tribe is Zephaniah from? He's from the same tribe as his great-grandfather Hezekiah. He is from the tribe of Judah. And he is speaking to the southern kingdom.

Judah is the tribe. Judah is the country. He has royal blood in his veins.

But he is not the king. But he has credibility. He has standing in the social world.

He's not an anonymous shepherd. He's not a prophet that has come in from the wilderness. He is known.

He is part of the nobility. And he delivers a very direct confrontational message. God says, I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land.

Well, at the cocktail party, this isn't what people were expecting to hear. At the birthday party for the new boy king, this isn't the happy meal that everybody was expecting to be delivered by the caterers. This is a dark cloud.

This is the hand writing, take a, take a, menel ufarsin, on the wall. It's politically incorrect, you might say. And yet it comes from an unimpeachable source.

Look at chapter 2. Gather yourselves together. Gather together, O undesirable nation, before the decree is issued or the day is passed 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 of humility.

If you're not too impressed with yourself, if you're not overwhelmed by your own genius, if you're not convinced by your own rationalizations, if you have the humility to listen, if you have the meekness to turn, if you have the objectivity to consider, before the decree of judgment,

irreversible, is issued, before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day passes like chaff blowing in the wind, you can't chase it and get it back. You know, the kite string has broken, that kite is across the river. The chaff has blown and you cannot regather that pile.

Before all of that, seek the Lord if you are one of those that has objectivity and humility in the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. This isn't always natural to us.

In fact, it's generally not natural to us. And so we have to look for it, we have to find it, we have to want it. Seek righteousness, seek humility.

It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger. You may still be one of those that the inhorn angel will come and mark, because the judgment is coming. But the decree of naming those on whom it has come has not yet been finalized.

You can still make the list of those who will be spared. Gaza shall be forsaken, Ashkelon desolate, they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron shall be uprooted. Woe to the inhabitants of the Sikoth, the nation of the Karathites.

What are all these nations? Do you recognize them? These cities. What nation are they of and from? Gath, Ekron, they're Philistine, right? Where is Philistia in this latter day of the southern kingdom? That Philistine empire and nation is a memory. The cities are still there, but they are nothing but monuments to the judgment of God on Philistia.

You remember earlier we had the declaration of judgment that would come on Philistia and on the people of Phoenicia and on Edom and Ammon and all the rest of it. That was years ago. But these Philistine cities are named because right now they sort of pertain and are a part of Judah.

And there is this, do you remember when judgment came and these were taken? The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines. I will destroy you, so there shall be no inhabitant. This is, it's like a Venn diagram.

Here's the southern kingdom of Judah. Here's the historical nation of Philistia. And a part of the southern kingdom right now is Ashkelon and Gaza and Gath.

And these, did I say Gaza? Ashkelon and Ekron, the nation of the Karathites. This ought to remind you that there was a previous judgment. How did those cities ever come to be part of your kingdom to begin with? And why are you so in sympathy with the very values that got the Philistines destroyed? You're acting just like them.

They are the legacy of a previous judgment. And the reason they are even in your territory is because they were judged and their government and their people were annihilated. Now you dwell in those towns.

And those towns are going to be judged again and destroyed again unless you turn, unless you

stop and think. The sea coast shall be pastures with shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks. The coast for the remnant of the house of Judah.

They shall feed their flocks there. In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the Lord their God will intervene for them and return their captives.

Who is this remnant? Who are these who are going to be dwelling in the remains of the judged land? Those who heard God's call. Those who saw the handwriting on the wall as it were and turned. Separated themselves.

Distinguished themselves by their humility. By their seeking of righteousness. By their repentance.

By their acknowledgement of God. 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 shall be like Sodom and the people of Ammon like Gomorrah.

Overrun with weeds and salt pits and a perpetual desolation. The residue of my people shall plunder them and the remnant of my people shall possess them. Those who are not the remnant and the residue.

Why is it only a remnant and a residue? What happened? Why doesn't everybody get to plunder and partake and occupy? Think. Think. Judgment is coming and the chaff is quickly blowing away in the wind.

Turn you at my reproof. Why will you die, O house of Israel? There is a remnant and a residue that will wake up, be delivered, but most of the people will not. There is a remnant that survives the conquest and the capture and the carrying away to Babylon.

And some of them will come back. Some of them will repopulate that land. Some of their descendants will be there when the Lord Jesus comes.

But many of these families and households and clans will be utterly wiped out in the judgment that is coming in just a few years under Nebuchadnezzar, under the Babylonians. They are at the point. This is a generation before that.

This is circa 640 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar is going to come the first time to Jerusalem in 605. They've got 30-odd years to change their ways and change their priorities and change their minds. They don't know exactly when this judgment is coming.

God is telling them, but He's giving them time to turn, time to listen, time to see. That has been the pattern throughout these prophets. So the thing to consider, what I would offer you to meditate upon in surveying our study of kings and prophets up to this point and reviewing once again the message in each of these situations as history goes forward, as politics and

power in government comes and goes and we're in a year where power is coming and going in our own government and there is this tremendous historical confetti that is blowing in all directions, this chaff that is in the wind.

What is going to be left when the dust settles? Does it matter as much who gets elected in Washington? Does it matter as much whether you succeed in your social life or in your work life or in your community life or in whatever area of endeavor is analogous to the rise and fall of influence and power in government and in Jerusalem? Does that matter as much as where do you stand before the Lord God? In the day of judgment, what is He going to find? Is He going to find humility and righteousness? Or is He going to find somebody who didn't think that was important and was caught up in the moment and in the day and in the events and is swept away in the judgment of God upon all those things? Ultimately, all of these earthly things, whatever we build, I'm looking out my window downtown. In fact, I have a little time lapse camera going. It's a lot of fun.

I made my first eight-minute movie out of that. They started with a piece of ground that has been untouched since the earliest days of Dallas. It has been sort of a park behind the Chase Motor Bank and there was a little creek.

There were trees. Nothing has touched that. Nothing has changed it since Dallas was just a hamlet.

For the last couple of hundred years, that little patch of ground has been untouched. And so I took pictures of it because they began to fence it and then they came in and they had guys with chainsaws. Then they had guys with bulldozers.

Then they had guys with these giant grabbing hydraulic-powered shovels. And they crushed the trees and they scraped them out of the way and they picked up the pieces and put it in trucks and hauled it off and they scraped it bare. But it was still the flat ground that has always been there.

Well, then here came the shoveling truck, the shoveling tractors and the trucks, and they began to, and over my time lapse, the flat ground, first it scraped off, the sidewalk is gone, the motor bank is gone, and then they begin digging and they dig and they dig and they dig. You know how it is in time lapse. It just jumps around real quickly and these little minions like insects are everywhere.

And the dirt begins to disappear and the hole gets steeper and deeper and they just go around and around and around. They leave themselves a ramp so they can get out. And trucks come and go.

There have been thousands of trucks of dirt that have been taken. Well, now they're down the equivalent of about three stories deep in this hole and my little camera can't even see over the edge of my building anymore to see what they're doing in the bottom. And they're still digging

and they're digging and they may dig all the way to the mantle of the earth down there.

But the trucks just keep coming and going and coming and going. And you think, well, what of the time when someone walked in that park? What if somebody who planted trees or saw those trees or wanted to preserve the trees or argued that they ought to be kept? It's swept away. It's gone.

That chaff has blown, never more to return. That ground is never going to be what it was. They're never going to fill in that hole.

They're never going to chip out these tens of thousands of yards of concrete that they're putting in there, and it is going to be a giant two-tower retail shopping and residential deal with a swimming pool on the top. That is coming, and the past is never going to return there. It's gone.

But that itself, all of the millions of dollars they're spending building this, that will melt and go away. All of the effort and the time and the design and the engineering and the tens of thousands of man-hours building it is a drop in the bucket of history. You speed that up, and you see a work day for a guy that's sweated in one of those tractors just gets compressed to a split second, and you pass it by.

You look at the next day and the next and the next, and the shadows go across, the sun rises and falls, and you realize that from God's perspective, human history is probably going on fast forward compared to what we see. We think it matters. We think our angst and our ups and our downs and everything is important and substantial because we are so myopically close to it.

We are one ant in a gigantic field. And to God, the sun is rising and setting so rapidly, and history is moving forward so quickly, and what counts is where we stand with him. In the blink of an eye, we are born, we live, and we die.

God's evaluation of our life is what will survive our day in the sun. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. His word concerning us, his evaluation of us, he brought us into the world, he called us to himself, did we respond, did we advance, did we mature, did we take the long view, did we heed the call of the prophets to enter into and to value our relationship with God, invest and build into eternity.

This life, and the older you get, the more substantially you realize how brief it is, how effervescent, how temporal, how temporary, and how mundane. What counts are those invisible things that you can't put on a shelf and leave to your children. It is what is written in the books of God.

The books will be opened on the day of judgment. Did the marking angel mark us? Not just for deliverance in time, but deliverance in eternity. Are we qualified to dwell with God? Are we qualified to serve God? Are we smart enough and mature enough to receive power and ruling authority to serve the Lord Christ in his kingdom, to serve God the Father in his kingdom? This

life is nothing but a sorting process, looking for those souls who value God, who have that humility that Zephaniah is talking about, have that heart that seeks and hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

You remember Jesus' Beatitudes in Matthew 5. Blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are you when they persecute you and revile you and say you're crazy and you're nuts for not entering into the momentary paradigm of the world.

You're crazy for taking the long view. Science doesn't back you up. Somebody doesn't have a test tube or a scale that can measure your commitment to God's righteousness, so it doesn't exist.

And in that momentary milieu, there are people who cave and who fall and who give in to rationalization and to human wisdom. Well, look at the people of Judah. Look at the people of the northern kingdom.

Where are they now? Only the ones who heeded the voice of the prophet, only those who committed themselves into the hands of a faithful creator are going to be raised on that resurrection day that Daniel talks about. There's a day coming when those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake. Some to a resurrection of righteousness and some to a resurrection of judgment.

It depends on what is written in the books. These books were written to call us and to motivate us to ensure that what is written in God's books is a heart of humility, a heart that seeks righteousness by faith on a day-by-day basis. That is what lifts us out of the mud and the dust of which we were created into that eternal, lasting realm that God has so graciously offered to bring us into, to live with Him, to have a transcendent and eternal life, not just in duration but in quality.

And that quality begins now. The peace that passes understanding comes now. The contentment, whether we are abased or whether we abound, is now.

The sense of purpose and direction and definition is now. This is what every one of these prophets called God's people to, and it is what every one of them calls us to today and now. So we'll finish our look at Zephaniah next time, but this is a cluster of prophets here, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, and a couple more that we're going to see here right at the time of Josiah, especially Jeremiah, and that lengthy prophecy of Jeremiah that's actually been written down twice.

Remember, the whole book of Jeremiah was written, and then it got burned in the fire, and God said, Go write it all down again. And Baruch had to re-scribe the whole thing. Why? Why is there such a cluster? Why is such an emphatic call here? Because judgment is at the door.

And every time you have prophetic ministry and miraculous intervention, you have an

impending change. Judgment followed by a new order of things. And that is about to come to us, and we're going to see that the timing of that is perhaps closer than we think when we pick up our study of deep questions on Sunday.

So you won't want to miss that, because we're going to be talking about the timing of things this coming Sunday. But we'll close tonight in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

It has been preserved in a miraculous and supernatural fashion for us. Its contents transcend its container. Even when the text is troubled, even when those naysayers come and accuse us of believing a book that is full of contradictions and errors, we understand the truth, regardless of the translation, regardless of the language, whether it is in a modern language or an ancient language.

The truths of Your plan and purpose transcend the messenger and the physicality of the conveyance to strike at our hearts. Our hearts were designed to recognize and receive Your truth. And in every heart there is either a response or a rejection.

We pray that as those who do seek righteousness, that Your Holy Spirit will minister these truths to us in a way that strengthens us and fortifies us and shines a light on our paths so that we can live our lives to please You and to prepare ourselves for serving You in the ages that are near at hand. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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