

Kings and Prophets 16-03-31

This is Thursday, the 31st of March, 2016. Never thought I'd hear that year number coming out of my own mouth, but here we are, 2016. And we continue our study of kings and prophets.

We're looking at the book of Zephaniah. We'll take a moment as we begin to do a personal spiritual status check and ensure that we're properly orientated, as the army guys used to say, incorrectly to my infinite chagrin, that we have oriented ourselves to the grace of God and his provision for us as we spend this time together in the study of God's word, shall we pray? Father, we're grateful as always for the time of rest and reflection that we have as we come together to learn more about you and about your purpose and enhance our appreciation of our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for this portion of your word and the truth that it contains and the pertinence that it has for our situation right now.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit will minister to our hearts in a meaningful and effective way so that we can see clearly your expectations for us, your plans and purposes for us, and the enablement that you've provided so that we can fulfill those things. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. We've spent the past couple of weeks kind of stepping back and looking at the big picture.

What is God up to? Why does he send the prophets at all? Why do we have this section in our scriptures? You may remember that the Old Testament in Hebrew is called the Tanakh. And that's basically, since there's no vowels in Hebrew, you have T, N, and K, or C-H. And T-N-K, when you vocalize it, becomes Tanakh.

But the T, of course, stands for Torah. Those are the five books of the Old Testament. The N is the Nevi'im, who are the prophets.

And then Ketuvim, Ketav means to cut, or it came to mean to write. And these are the writings, the historical writings. And so our study has been alternating between the writings, which are the historical books, and the prophets whose ministry took place during the events that we have been surveying in the times of the divided kingdom.

So this is knock time. Haven't gone too much to the T portion, but we've spent a lot of times in N and K. Over the past couple of weeks, we stepped back to look at the periodic appearance of a prophetic ministry, such as we are seeing now. And do you remember when those times are? Has it been sort of a regular thing every sabbatical year, every 50th year, or is it every 70th year, or every 120 years, every 250 years? When is it that God sends prophets? A better way to ask the question is, why does he send the prophets? Because the why answers the question when.

They are sent in times preceding the potential for judgment, times of opportunity. There is either an occasion for deliverance or an occasion for judgment every time the prophets appear. Moses, one of the first great prophets, he says, there will come another prophet, capital P, like unto myself.

And when he comes, you'd better listen to him, looking forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. But in Moses' day, that was the prophetic ministry. And can you fill in the blanks? If I say, the prophet Moses, fill in the opportunity for salvation and fill in the opportunity for judgment.

Could you fill in those blanks? Who was it that had the potential to be delivered? The Israelite slaves in Egypt. Who had the potential for being judged? Everybody that didn't put the blood on the doorposts and joined themselves to Israel and come out from under, right? The next time, after the period of the judges, we have another prophet rising up, Samuel. And if I say, prophet Samuel, and I put a blank for time of judgment and I put a blank for time of opportunity for deliverance, who do you fill in? Who is it that has the potential for deliverance? God's people, Israel.

Who is it that's about to be judged? All of the surrounding nations that are plaguing them, the Philistines in particular and foremost. But it's a time of opportunity because what about God's people who do not heed God's word at this time of separation, this time of deliverance for some and judgment for others? How do you know which blank you're going to be included in? It is either response or apathy or even rejection to the word of God that is delivered through that prophet. That prophet delivers the word of God, states the situation and says, now is the appointed time.

Now is the day of deliverance. And if you're not on board, you by default end up with those who get judged. What's the next great time of prophetic ministry? Let's just hit the real high ones.

Moses, pretty big high point there. That's the T in Tanakh. You have Samuel, that's the inception of the monarchy.

You've got some prophets in there, Nathan and Gad, the seer and some of those fellows. What's the next real prominent prophetic ministry? Hundreds of years later in the days of Elijah and Elisha, right? Elijah and Elisha. So fill in the blanks.

Who is in trouble and in need of deliverance? God's people, Israel, specifically in which part of the divided kingdom? The North, Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab has foolishly married the daughter of the high priest of Baal, brought her down into Israel and she has imported this incredibly evil system and spread it with Ahab's willing complicity and participation. And so the threat here is more spiritual than military, right? It's, this is a threat to the existence of God's people, not so much physically, but spiritually.

So you have Elijah followed by Elisha and Elisha ministers in the North and also where else? Where did go up old bald head take place? Down South. Where did the going around the corner and the ax head floating and the poison stew and the sons of the prophets things that was down South, right? So interestingly, when the double portion prophet Elisha shows up, there is a threat to the existence of the people of God in the Southern kingdom and in the Northern kingdom. And where Elijah was primarily ministering in the North, the double portion of the spirit gives you a prophet that ministers in both kingdoms.

And we saw how many ways Elisha foreshadows the Lord Jesus, right? Elijah is sort of the prophet of the Old Testament day. And God said, I'm going to culminate the Old Testament day. Remember in Malachi, before that day, I will send Elijah the prophet.

He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, children of the fathers else, I will smite the land with a curse. And so Elijah comes and then Elisha comes immediately thereafter. And they touch, they overlap, they meet each other in the same way that John the Baptist, the Elijah for the coming of the Lord Jesus, met and talked with and baptized the Lord Jesus.

Kind of a reverse, the mantle falls from Elijah to Elisha. They go across the water a couple of times. And when you have John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus meeting, there they are in the water, the same water, the Jordan, right? Probably the same place.

And you can only imagine what must have been going through the mind of the Lord Jesus when he's getting baptized by John in the Jordan, thinking about all of the history that had taken place there. The first Yeshua coming across with the people of God into the land to go to Jericho. And then later on, Elijah and Elisha crossing that very water.

So time of crisis, prophetic word coming to the people of God, basically saying, get your affairs in order and get right with God and be sure that you are on the repentance and the obedience and the faithfulness side so that you can be in the blank of those who are delivered, not the, I'm too busy, I'm apathetic, I'm indifferent, I've got other things going on, I don't have time to listen, I'll push that to another day. That all sounds well and good, but excuse, excuse, excuse, and you wind up in the judgment. This pattern has persisted as we have looked at these other prophets, Joel and Amos and Hosea and on down through to more recently Habakkuk and now Zephaniah.

So we saw in Zephaniah chapter one, and you remember where we are in the Southern Kingdom now, there's only five kings left to go. There is Josiah, and then you've got these four terrible kings that close out the miserable history of Judah after that. You got three J's and a Z there, you got Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, and Jehoi has, not in that order, and then finally Zedekiah.

He's easy to remember because he's Z and he's the last one. And what a miserable whimper the Southern Kingdom goes out with under him. But Zephaniah is preaching his prophetic message early in the reign of Josiah, right there at the inception.

And this is going to spark a brief and shallow revival. So Zephaniah makes no bones. You'll remember this.

We looked at it a couple of weeks ago. I'm just going to skim through this quickly. The word of the Lord just came to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah, the son of Ammon, king of Judah.

As I said, Zedekiah is the best attested minor prophet that we have. We know more about his

lineage, where he comes from than any of the other prophets in this section of the Bible. Who is his great, great, great granddad? Hezekiah, the king.

He's royal blood. He's got some, he's got some juice here. He's got some credibility.

He's got some authority. He's got some entree because he's going to speak to the leadership. He's going to speak to those who are in charge because they are the ones riding the crest of attitude of the people, just as we see happening around us today.

So it begins announcing, pronouncing, predicting, warning about the great day of the Lord. God says, I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land, says the Lord. I will consume man and beast, consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks you see there, along with the wicked, that which causes them to stumble and those who stumble.

The whole system is going to be destroyed. I will cut off man from the face of the land, says the Lord. Land here is Eretz, just like it is in many other places in the word of God, such as the flood story.

I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place. How did Baal cult really get seeded into the Southern kingdom? We know what happened in the Northern kingdom.

How did it happen in the North? Jezebel, and where does she come from? She's the daughter of the high priest of Baal up in the region of Tyre around in there someplace. She comes down and helps spread it. How did it get to the Southern kingdom? God says here, I will eradicate every trace of Baal from this place in the South.

How did that Baal worship really get entrenched in the South? Who brought it down there? Athaliah, and she is from what stock and lineage? She's the daughter of whom? Ahab and Jezebel. It's genetic. So point of application, think about who you marry, right? Give it a little thought, plan ahead.

It can have long term consequences, not just for you, but for a lot of other people. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place. The names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests, those who worship the hosts of heaven on the housetops, those who worship and swear oaths by the Lord, but who also swear by Milcom.

This is Molech. This is in the Southern kingdom. Remember in our run up to this, we looked at Uzziah in his garden.

He bought into this whole alternate worship system, corrupting, defiling, amalgamating other worship practices right in the place where God was supposed to be worshiped, right next door to the temple. Now, is this all in the historical past? Is there any way, shape or form in which this is happening today? Nod your head like this. Yes, it is happening today.

It is in churches throughout the world, particularly throughout the United States. Baal worship, do you believe me? Are we sacrificing to Molech? What was one of the essential parts of sacrifice to Molech? Did they, when they went to worship Molech, did they just bring some fruit from the vineyards? Did they bring some agricultural stock from the field? Did they bring animals and sacrifice? What did they sacrifice to Molech? Children, the essence of Molech, Milcom worship. Ammonites, think about the Ammonites.

I don't have time to review all the history, but think about what happened on the wall. This is child sacrifice. Is there child sacrifice being countenanced and condoned in our country, even within the hallowed halls of churches today? Yes, there is.

If you've only been exposed to conservative biblical churches, then you don't know the license and the permissiveness and the tolerance and even the support for things like abortion that are taking place in churches. Protestant American denominations in churches are totally fine with it. The alleged women's right to choose.

I believe in a woman's right to choose also. I believe she has the right to choose not to get pregnant. Once she gets pregnant, she has made her choice.

And if you start making subsequent choices to interfere with the work of God and the creation of a human being, that choice is gonna have consequences. I don't care what anybody says. Going to the site where God is forming Adam out of the dust of the ground and kicking it all around and messing up the work, you can explain that to God.

People in churches are gonna have to explain that to God. Throughout this country, the majority of Christians in the United States today are not anti-abortion. It's Molech.

It is child sacrifice. Don't think that we're so much more modern and less evil than these people. And this is in the Southern Kingdom where Bible teaching have been prevalent from the days of David, in the days of Jehoshaphat, and yet look what's happening there.

It only takes a few generations to corrupt and overturn the faith and understanding of the Word of God. Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops, worshiping the host of heaven. Now, we don't do this today, do we? Where does everybody say we came from? Carl Sagan all the way down to Akamai, the white-haired guy, I can't think of his name.

The Oriental astrophysicist guy that's on the TV all the time now. His name is Ak or Ik or Ek or something like that. Can't remember.

Really nice guy, very personable, very interesting to listen to when he's talking straight science. But when they start telling you that we were all created by the stars, unaided and unguided. Now, are we made of star stuff? Did God manufacture the atoms from which you and I are made in the center of stars? Yes.

But worshiping the factory instead of the one who built the factory is what these people were

doing. They're worshipping the host of heaven. They're praising the stars and thanking the stars for their existence and for their prosperity.

Are people doing that today? In droves. People who claim to be Christians and claim to believe in Jesus don't believe in the creator. Oh yes, I'm a Christian.

They're cultural Christians. They're nice guy Christians. I believe in the golden rule, so therefore I'm a Christian.

But people worship the host of heaven. They worship that which is created instead of the creator. It's the last half of Romans one.

This is happening in Judah. These are supposed to be the good guys, the straight guys, the ones who have the word of God, the presence of God on Mount Zion in the temple. This is where the men of Israel are supposed to assemble three times a year to worship and to remember the covenant they have with God.

And what's happening there? Worshipping the stars instead, worshipping the garden of Uzzah instead, sacrificing children to Molech instead. There is no Molech worship without child sacrifice. It's intrinsic.

It's a part of it. That's how you appease and please that God is to take one of these big brass pots and put your baby in there and let him roast to death. Because you've made a great sacrifice for him, he's gonna make some kind of great sacrifice for you and give you prosperity.

Those who worship and swear oaths by the Lord. Notice this is amalgamated. It is mixed in with, well, of course I believe in the God of my fathers and I also believe in the stars and I also believe in Molech.

I say, let's hit them all a lick. You know, let's spread the wealth. Get them all on my side.

Take no chances. Those who have turned back from the Lord. Notice they swear by the Lord, but they've turned back from the Lord.

They claim his name, but they don't actually follow and worship him. Have not sought the Lord nor inquired of him. When I look for answers, whether it's about origins, whether it's about the meaning of life, whether it is about my purpose, whether it is about how to meet my challenges, whether it is what to do as a steward of my prosperity, whether it is interpersonal relations, whether it is any decision, large or small, where do I look for my guidance? Google.

That's where we look. Go to Google. I Google it.

You know, the first two letters are right and everything after that, notice how they just stretch it out. Google. It should be God for us.

For those questions that matter. Now look, I'm as big a fan of Google as anybody, but we are

too quick to turn to the wisdom of the world for answers to problems that God claims as his province. Now, how to fix the display that winked out on my dashboard that's supposed to show me the odometer.

I'll go to Google for that. God doesn't claim to provide car mechanic information in the Bible. Now he tells me what attitude I should have and what priority I should set and how diligent I should be in performing that task.

But he doesn't have instructions for disassembling the dash and heating up the cold solder joints and reassembling the whole thing. Go to Google, look on YouTube. That's fine.

Here, what does it talk about when it says they have not sought the Lord nor inquired of him? The world also claims to be able to answer questions about who you are and who you should be and what is right and what is wrong and what is good and what is bad, what is healthy and what is not healthy. These are areas that God has claimed authority over and communicated to us about. So if God says, come to me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest in your weary soul.

And we instead go to yoga or TM, transcendental meditation, or therapy, or group dynamics, or some other human substitute of human origin and human failure and human result, then we are not inquiring of the Lord in those areas where we should. How do you know that you are right in some area of morality or in some area of decision and setting priorities or pursuing goals or establishing your values? Are you going to adopt the values of the world? Are you going to pursue the goals that the world sets for itself? Well, everybody else in my, fill in the group name here, my class, my company, my section, my associational circle, everybody else is doing thus and so, and they're all looking at me like I'm strange. Are we inquiring of the Lord or are we inquiring of the group? Well, I just want to be accepted by the group.

I want to be told that I'm right by the group. I'll feel good if I can blend and meld and be accepted as a part of the group. Well, that's fine in some cases, but if it is an area where we are defined by who we are in Christ, and we're not inquiring of the Lord, we fall under this judgment.

In those two blanks, am I in line for deliverance or am I in line for judgment? Because God is bringing them both. This is a day of prophetic revelation. In the last days, perilous times will come.

We've got the full revelation of God. So this is our opportunity. In a time of challenge, there's two ways you can look at it.

When you have a problem or a difficulty or you're beset with a tough row to hoe here, there's two ways you can look at it. You can say, wow, this is really a problem. Or you can say, wow, this is a really interesting challenge.

This is my chance to use what I've learned. This is the extra credit question at the end of the

chapter here. The first 10 problems, everybody has to do those, but this is question 11 and question 12, and they didn't put the answer in the back of the book.

I can't go check and see if I'm right. This is a chance to demonstrate the validity of my faith. I was telling somebody just in the last day or two, in fact, I know who it was and I know when it was, now that I think about it.

But how do you know the validity? And we're still talking about Zephaniah here, but how do you know the validity of a formula in mathematics? Let's say you want to get some carpet for the place where you live. Maybe you just want to get a rug. You say, well, my room is 12 feet by 15 feet.

So how many square feet is that altogether? I want to put a rug corner to corner, wall to wall. Well, how do I determine how many square feet there are? I use a formula, I multiply 12 times 15, right? And I get whatever it is, 180 feet, right? I think that's right. I've got more than one degree, but none of them are in math.

So let's say I go and buy 180 squares of stick it down rug and it all fits perfectly. And I say, you know what? That formula is valid, why? Because it works, it works. I use the formula, I got a number, I worked with that number and it came out perfectly, right? If I say, well, force equals mass times acceleration or I say distance equals rate times time and I use those formulas and it works, that tells me the formula is valid, right? This is true throughout the world.

It's the basis of all science. I do a thing, I repeat it and it works. Secular, atheistic, humanistic materialism tells you your faith is no good because we can't put it in a test tube.

We can't put it on a gram scale. We can't determine its mass or its density. We have no scientific tools to verify your faith.

How do you know if things in the intangible world, things in the world of ideas, how do we know if they're valid, if they're true? How do we know in the material world? Two words, one's a pronoun, one's a verb, it works, right? How do you know if your faith is in truth? If your abstract, intangible, unscientifically accessible thoughts and beliefs are true? Say it, it works. Now, if it doesn't work before you throw it away, be sure you did it right. If I do the length times width formula and forget to carry a one, is the formula bad or am I bad at using the formula? There's a lot of people who say, oh, I tried Christianity, I prayed, but God didn't give me what I wanted.

It's like he didn't hear. My child was sick, I prayed that he'd make him well and they died instead, boo on God. Faith doesn't work, there is no God.

I'm gonna write books and talk about Jesus Interrupted and all the rest of it. Be sure if you're going to follow this criteria that you are using the formula as it is intended. Did God say, pray for a thing and I will give it no matter what? We pray in accordance with his will.

Well, if you haven't spent any time ascertaining God's will and the nature of God's will and the

possible nature and outcomes of God's will, you're not really praying in accordance, we're praying in accordance with my will. And well, God didn't answer my prayer. God didn't make things turn out the way I wanted.

I thought he was the genie of the lamp and when I say the right abracadabra hocus-pocus he's going, but you know where hocus-pocus comes from? Do you know where that word comes from? I'm keeping track, I will get back to my trail. Do you know where hocus-pocus comes from? In Latin, when the priest is handing you the bread for what they do by way of the Lord's table, when the Lord broke the bread and handed it to his disciples and you translate this into Latin, hoc est corpus meum, hoc this est corpus body meum, my, this is my body. This is my body in Latin is hoc est corpus meum and if you smash that together, you get hocus-pocus.

And it came from people's lack of appreciation for all of the rigmarole in the Latin church liturgy having to do with the host and the transubstantiation and the rest of it, hocus-pocus. Here's my point. If you seek the Lord and inquire of him on God's terms, if you are genuinely asking, genuinely seeking, genuinely knocking, if your faith is of a genuine kind, it works.

You will have the peace that passes understanding. You will be able to identify the light and stay in it. You will have power over sin.

You will be able to lay aside every sin and the things that entangle us and keep us from moving forward. You will have clarity. You will have understanding.

You will have joy even in the midst of difficulty. You will have tranquility and you look at the witness of literally thousands and thousands and thousands of believers present, millions of believers past. There is no other alleged faith system that has the witness and the testimony of people who have been delivered from addiction, delivered from depression, delivered from every form of problem and difficulty that you can imagine who have willingly endured hardship, willingly endured ostracism and being treated as dead by their families and in danger of their lives.

You look at the Christianity that is aflame in Northern Africa in the face of Islamic persecution. You look at the Christianity that is aflame in China under the weight of communist persecution. You look at Christianity throughout the ages and in different places, especially when it is tested by fire.

The gold and the silver and the precious stones come through. There is no other faith with those witnesses. Google and look for people who have a wonderful glowing testimony of what Buddhism did to deliver them and to make them whole and to give them peace and give them happiness.

We take it for granted that there are an uncountable number of those stories in Christianity. People, there's hundreds, thousands of ministries started by people who were delivered and want to share that deliverance with others, whether it's in prison ministry or drug rehab

ministry or homosexual deliverance ministry or anything you can name. People that have had tragic relationship breakups and have had difficult health situations and their faith has sustained them.

Their faith has drawn them closer to God and closer to one another. Where are those stories in Islam? Where are those stories in Confucianism or Buddhism or the Vedic hymn-based Hinduism and the rest of it? You don't find it. You certainly don't find it with the frequency and the multiplied intensity that you find it throughout history in Christianity.

Why? What are the two words? How do you verify that you're on the right track? It works. Don't let somebody baffle you with some kind of big sleight of hand thing about, oh, well, they've got a new discovery. They spliced some DNA and therefore we all came from the muck.

Does their faith work? I saw a documentary about a particular gentleman who was on a quest for the truth his whole life. He was an atheist, but he thought people ought to know the truth in a certain area of endeavor. And he dedicated his life to exposing fraudulent behavior and people being fooled and taken advantage of.

But at the end of his life, he was miserable. And he was thrown about by the wind of every circumstance and he had no stability and no security and he had no peace. Why? Because his wonderful dedication to secular truth gave him nothing in the soul, conferred no confidence in this life or in the next.

Not the hope that is a part of that triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love. We have a love that is more powerful than our own character because it is put into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Romans 5.5. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. You can't manufacture it.

You can't get it out of philosophy. You can't get it out of a science textbook. As I've told you before, one of my favorite Criswell quotes is when he asks the question, how many secular material atheistic people have you seen on their deathbed saying, bring me my science book.

I need some comfort and encouragement here in my hour of death. Bring me *On the Origin of Species* by Darwin. Let me just read that warm pond thing one more time.

But how many people in extremis and at death's door are comforted and encouraged and at peace listening to scripture and the word of God and being reminded again of a lifelong faith and of the confidence and the promises of God? It works. And we don't do a thing just because it works. Well, if I knock three times and throw salt over my shoulder, I have a good day.

This is not a means of proving it. It is a means of affirming what we have already chosen to believe, what we have already assented to. They do not seek the Lord nor inquire of him.

On the positive side, if we're not gonna look at this as dismal, dank, dark, downward spiraling, woe and judgment, what can we do? Look at it as an opportunity and as a challenge. We are people of faith. We are people of God.

We are related to God in heaven, the creator through the Lord Jesus Christ, his son. And we are golden. We are immortal.

We are eternal. And we have the opportunity in this life to turn time into treasure, to turn circumstances into righteousness by faith. So we look for those opportunities.

We inquire of the Lord. And when we ask and seek and knock, and the answer is given to us, were there any of these people facing judgment that didn't have a clear choice presented to them by God's prophet? Turn you at my reproof. Why will you die, O house of Israel? It doesn't get much clearer than that.

Can you think of a clearer choice? Things are going badly. I think I might be a part of it. God says, turn around, stop doing that.

Do what you're supposed to. You don't have to die. You don't have to be on the judgment line.

I want to write your name up on the deliverance line, on the positive line, the productive line, the shining light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation line. I want you there. Be there.

What do we have to do? Say, okay, good plan. It is in harmony with my purpose. It's in harmony with God's plan and his purpose.

It is right. And when we know that we are on that path, we have peace, we have direction, we have hope, we have confidence, we have stability, we have clarity. Have you looked around at everything that everybody is saying with the political process going on and everybody throwing rocks at everybody else and everyone's got a different plan and everybody says their plan is right and everybody else's plan is wrong.

You look around, you know, you emerge from childhood and early adulthood into the melee of all of these conflicting, antithetical ideas and you say, well, how am I supposed to know which one of these people has got any value at all? Well, if you look to the world for their wisdom, all you're going to do is listen to talking heads all day long and nobody is ever going to bring any kind of clarity. If you go and inquire of the Lord, you will find that there is a light that shines on these things that makes it clear. This is right, this is wrong.

This is good, this is bad. This is in accordance with God's standard, this is not. This is relative, this is absolute.

This is temporary, this is permanent. This is unimportant, this is important. This is peripheral, this is central.

God's word in our souls with prayer and the ministry of the Holy Spirit will clarify what seems hopelessly confusing. It's a gift of God. It has supernatural power.

It's alive and powerful. It is God's gift to us. We just have to remember that we've got it and use

it.

Inquire of the Lord. Be silent in the presence of the Lord God for the day of the Lord is at hand. Notice, be silent.

Put down your phone. Turn off the TV. Squelch the music.

God's not gonna try to talk over all of the background noise that we keep turning up to 11. How many times do you see in scripture, be still and know that I am God. Be silent in the presence of the Lord God.

We need to respect God enough to hush the room when he speaks. Do you not find it annoying? Maybe people don't. I find it hugely annoying.

If I've gone to hear somebody speak and they're up there trying to speak or sing or play an instrument and in the background you've got this conversation. Why did you come if you're not going to listen to the person giving the concert or giving the lecture or making the speech or doing the presentation? Obviously you think that what you've got going on is more important. This is arrogance.

This is hubris. This is self-centeredness. It is insensitivity.

It is inconsiderate. And God's word says it's wrong. In particular, if God is speaking and God has something to say to us, do you really wanna interrupt him? Do you really wanna have a bunch of other voices in the room talking at the same time? What I appreciate is what you all have so graciously accorded throughout the years in our church.

When it's time for me to talk about the word of God, it's dead quiet in here. And it always has been. And I've never had to ask.

I've never had to say, hey, can you guys be quiet back there? Now the dogs, we have to take them out from time to time. But it is a mark of respect for the word of God. Be silent in the presence of the Lord God.

For the day of the Lord is at hand. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice. He has invited his guests.

This is the separation. There is going to be deliverance and there's going to be judgment. If we're quiet and we listen to the quiet voice that says, are you all interested in deliverance? Go to the right.

All of you who don't care and just assume be judged on the left. Sheep over here, goats over here. If you're too busy with too many other noises, you're not going to hear that very helpful instruction.

So what can we do in the face of the knowledge that there is a prophetic word of God going out in a similar day today in our nation, in our culture, in our time and in our circumstance, instead

of just looking around and wringing our hands and saying, wow, this is a really bad day. I see what Paul was saying in the latter days, perilous times will come and be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, unkind, unthankful, unholy, incontinent, disobedient to parents. I sure see all of that.

Wow. Okay, so what? How should we then live? What can we do to distance ourselves and be separate and apart from that? Come out from among them and be separate. Touch not the unclean thing.

Okay, how? Well, we can start by giving God space in our soul to speak. We are called over and over and over again in scripture, you and I as believers to stop the carousel of our life, be still and spend just a little bit of quality time in reflection and communication with our father in heaven. Evening and morning and at noon, I will pray.

I will cry aloud. I would never embarrass myself or you by asking for a show of hands on how frequently or how regularly or whether today we stopped in the morning, at noon and in the evening to come before God in silence and in prayer, speak to him and let him speak to us. People used to talk about having devotions or having a quiet time.

It is essential. How can we possibly expect God to speak to us when the only time we're really paying attention to his word is in Bible class and the moment we leave, it's in a note or it's in a distant memory. Revisiting it, reflecting on it, thinking about it, asking myself the question, so what? I do think I'm in a day in my nation and in my culture and in my circumstance, similar to Habakkuk, similar to Zephaniah, similar to this day at the time of King Josiah.

I wonder what I should do about that. Well, ask, seek, knock, and the answer is going to be in the word of God. Where do we get the word of God? Bible class.

Can you think about it and imagine all the applications while we are all studying it together? No, the time to find that personal application and that call to action is in the privacy of our own soul, later, afterward. You'll find out what your priority is for living your life to please God by whether or not you set aside that time. I have been talking with people who are on the marketing side of things.

We have a website. We want more people to know about it and use it because we think it has good biblical resources. So we want professional help with that.

Help us get the word out that we've got a great website with good preaching. People can get answers to their biblical questions at this place. How do we do that? So they begin to talk about websites and placement of banner ads and email blasts and blogs and podcasts and all the rest of it.

And it's all mechanical. Here are ways to get these things in front of people. But what struck me among several other things in all of this presentation, we've had it from multiple people now, is they said, well, what you want to do is get this in front of people.

And you've seen this when you get in your browser on your phone or your computer and you go to a webpage and you see the banner ads and so on. And if you see something that's mildly interesting, like they've got a pair of tube socks and you've been thinking you might get some tube socks. And so you click the, I'm picking something that I know won't apply to anybody.

I don't think they even make tube socks anymore. There's something harmless. I don't want to step on anybody's unsocked toes.

But let's say there's tube socks. And so you click that. What will you see next? And this is the question they ask us.

If we've got a sermon library ad of some kind and somebody clicks it, what happens next? Do we just throw them to our homepage and leave them to their own devices? And they say, no, whenever you have this and somebody expresses interest by clicking, you want them to go to a landing page. You want them to go to an intermediate place where you do two things. You have a capture of information.

For example, you say free DVD, free USB stick, free whatever. Sign up for our podcast. Somebody clicks that and they go to this landing page.

The landing page says two things. One, it says, give us your name and your email. That lets them capture you for later haranguing.

But then the second one is a call to action. Sign up here. Do this, do that, do the other.

It's a call to action. So the whole key in doing this web traffic promotion thing is you want a two-way communication. You want them to tell you who they are and you want to give them a call to action.

Do this and you'll get your DVD. Do this and we'll send you our free book. Well, God would like us.

I was thinking about the analogy and I apologize for it. It's a little rough, but it just struck me. God has put information in front of us that ought to interest us.

And if we express interest and come to him, what happens? He should know who we are and what we want. And he's going to give us a call to action. And that is going to be a benefit.

You get this access to this great website. You get this wonderful product. You get this free sample or whatever it might be.

But the whole idea of it in a nutshell is you are trying to establish a relationship, two-way communication with people who right now are far away and may not know you at all. That's what God is doing here. In this day of judgment, he says, look, I'm going to proactively send out the profit.

He's put out the advertisement. He's trying to spark interest. He wants people to express interest, to be identified as people who care, people who are interested.

And when we do that, he will give us a call to action. Here's what you do to fulfill that interest, to close that loop. Here's what you do.

Isn't that what this is? Inquire of me, God is pleading. Ask me, see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing on you that you can't even imagine. If we put our faith in the truth, we will see the results.

Why? Because when you are connected to the truth and you function properly with reference to the truth, two words, one's a pronoun and one's a verb, it works. Right? That's what Zephaniah is all about. Flip over real quickly now, I've run myself out of time, but just look at the last chapter, chapter three.

Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted the oppressing city. She has not obeyed his voice. She has not received correction.

One of the ways to know what to do is do everything that these people are not doing. All of these condemnations, all of these judgments, just say, well, I'm not doing that. This is everything not to do.

So if they're oppressing, I'm not going to oppress. They have not been obedient, I will be obedient. They have not received correction, I'm gonna receive correction.

When I am told that I'm doing it wrong, I'm gonna fix it. I'm not setting aside time to communicate with God and let him communicate with me so that he can actually give me the answers that I'm asking for. It's a funny thing, sometimes we ask God, we pray, Lord, show me the way, help me solve this problem, help me answer this need, but then we never give him time to answer.

We run off and go elbows and knees in some other direction. She has not trusted in the Lord. Well, I'm going to do that.

She has not drawn near to her God. Well, I will do that. Because these are all the things associated with the judgment line, I wanna be on the deliverance line.

But look down at verse eight. Therefore, wait for me, says the Lord. What do you do when you wait for someone? Have you ever been in a waiting room? What happens in a waiting room? You wait.

If there's other people waiting on the same thing, you can have some really good fellowship. We've had wonderful conversations with other people in the waiting room, right? Wait for me, says the Lord, until the day I rise up for witness. This isn't plunder.

You've got a text note in your NKJV. This is, I rise up for witness. What is this witness? God is still

sorting out those in line for judgment and those in line for deliverance.

So wait, God says the process is not complete. There's still some sorting. There's still some winnowing between the chaff and the wheat.

So you've got to wait. I know you want an answer right now. I know you want your deliverance right now, but you've got to wait because, listen now, it's bigger than just you.

There's more than just you involved in the plan. So wait, says the Lord, until the day I rise up for witness. The day of witness is the day of judgment when the books are opened.

Here's the book of life. Here's the book of works. Your name is on one side.

Your name is on the other side. My determination is to gather the nations to my assembly of kingdoms. Notice, everybody for judgment has been identified to pour on them my indignation, all my fierce anger.

All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy, for then I will restore to the peoples a pure language. These are the ones for deliverance. God pours out his indignation and wrath, they're gone.

Who's left? These people that God is, look at this. I've told you before, it'd be a good idea to start learning Hebrew. I will restore to the peoples a pure language that they all may call in the name of the Lord to serve him with one accord.

There will be one language to serve him. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my worshipers, the daughters of my dispersed ones shall bring my offering. Notice, the people that have been waiting, the people that are in line for deliverance have been scattered and dispersed among the nations beyond Ethiopia.

That was a long ways in those days. When they were waiting, many of them felt isolated and felt alone. It felt like I'm the only one.

There's none left but me, Lord. Elijah thought that. What did the Lord tell Elijah? I've got 7,001 people in this nation that are trusting me, that are faithful.

I've got 7,000 others besides you, but they're dispersed and you can't see them. Don't think they're not there. Don't think, well, Lord, I'm gonna have to be a spinster or a bachelor my whole life because, you young people, because there's just nobody left.

They're all pierced and tattooed and on something, and there's no hope. They're out there, they're just dispersed. God says, wait, be patient, it's coming.

Have a little faith. If everything came immediately, wouldn't be an occasion for faith. Friendship, companionship, fellowship, wait, it will come, be patient.

Put your trust in the Lord and every hour, every day, every occasion that you do that stacks righteousness in the vault. This is your great opportunity. Look at it as a challenge.

Look at it as an opportunity. Don't think of it as just an interminable problem. Believe me, I know what that's like.

In that day, you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against me for I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride. And you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. Notice so much of this is hubris and pride, self-determination, a high account of one's own wisdom.

God says, I'm gonna purge that from your midst. These yous are plural, by the way. These, I will take this stuff out of your group.

You will be left with a group of people that are like you, who are seekers, who are appreciators, who are worshipers, and you will all speak the same language. You ever been in a group and you say, you know, these people are just on a whole different sheet of music? Not necessarily how they talk, but their assumptions, their likes and dislikes, their priorities, and you feel like odd person out all the time. I'm the weird one.

What's the matter with me? I don't fit. Well, the reason is so much of the group is of the nature that God has to remove. But when he removes them, there's a day coming when everybody left is gonna be just like you.

If you're faithful, if you're obedient, if you love the Lord, if you are positive and proactive in looking for his answers and listening to his voice, God says the day is coming. If you will wait, you are going to be in a group of nothing but. Now, how cool is that? I've never seen that in my whole life.

This is one of the biggest groups I've ever seen of people that were all of that mind. But it will be nothing but. Those who rejoice in pride will no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.

I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people. They shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel, the remnant of God's people shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.

They shall feed their flocks and lie down and no one shall make them feel bad. That's God's promise. You either believe it or you don't.

You're either willing to wait for it or you're not. You either dedicate yourself to being one of these people on the deliverance side or you don't. It's either real or it's not.

It either works or it doesn't. Sing, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O Israel.

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart. O daughter of Jerusalem, the Lord has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemy.

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst. You shall see disaster no more. In that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem, do not fear.

Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord, your God in your midst, the mighty one will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will quiet you with his love. Isn't that a beautiful expression? He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden. You look around the Christian community today and you see it's a sadness almost to be associated with it even by name, and you sorrow over missed opportunity and misunderstanding and misrepresenting and misapplying and misconstruing nearly everything. I will gather those who sorrow over that situation.

At that time, I will deal with all who afflict you. I will save the lame and gather those who were driven out. How many of us have been driven out socially, driven out because we don't fit? God says, I will gather those who were driven out.

I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame. At that time, I will bring you back. At that time, I gather you.

I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth. When I return your captives before your eyes, says the Lord. You can take that to the bank, says the Lord.

Nobody is going to keep him from fulfilling those promises. So it is up to us to treat those as truths, to make them the object of our faith, to be the guiding light, the navigational star by which we plot our course, set our goals and priorities. God will not suffer the righteous to be moved.

He will not forget our work of faith or our labor of love, but it's a dark time. And we do not see that fulfillment yet. Think about these people in Jerusalem, knowing the judgment is just around the corner.

Dark times, but dark times are a time of opportunity. Dark times are a time to get with it, to clarify, to follow the light of God's word. And that's our great opportunity.

And Zephaniah makes it so clear, as Habakkuk did when we looked at him. I see what God is up to. I understand.

I'm going to get up in my strong tower and I'm going to watch and learn. And to be one of those that God calls, that God gathers and that God blesses now and in the ages to come. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for this wonderful word of encouragement, even in the midst of a pronouncement of judgment. We thank you for your justice and righteousness. We know it is

necessary that these things be allowed to mature and to show their nature.

We know that it is necessary that they come to full flower and then be judged and removed. We pray that your Holy Spirit will minister your word to our hearts so that we will have patience, so that we will have the fortitude and the spiritual strength to wait, to have confidence in your promise and anticipation of this wonderful hope that you put before us. We know the Lord Jesus Christ endured the cross for just such a hope and is now seated at your right hand.

We are privileged to be in him. We thank you for that truth and that fact. And we pray these things in his name.

Amen.