Kings and Prophets 16-09-08b

Let's continue our study now. We're looking at this time immediately preceding the fall of Jerusalem. And this actually came in three waves.

As you will recall, Nebuchadnezzar came in 605 BC. We believe that this is the time when the flower of Judean nobility was plucked in the sense that Daniel and his three friends and others were taken to Babylon. And we sometimes forget that there were others.

Many dozens, if not hundreds of young people were taken in that first carrying away into Babylon. But we've only heard of the four. Why is that? Because the rest of them, you know, God said, conform and obey and follow.

And so a lot of them, when they were taken to Babylon, that's what they did. But what distinguished Daniel and his three friends when they got there? We'll see it when we look formally at the book of Daniel, but you remember that story. They wouldn't eat the king's food.

So even though there is an instruction to comply, to obey, to conform, to submit, which they follow, there are limits to that. Now, where are those limits? We'll talk about this when we do Daniel chapter one in the not too distant future. But just in general, just thinking about it, it's one thing to physically conform and obey the laws that are imposed by an authority that God has mandated, right? But the food was a personal choice.

That was an individual lifestyle thing, correct? Much later in his career, Daniel is given another instruction by those same Babylonian overlords when they pass a law that says nobody can pray publicly. Did Daniel conform to that? He did not. So how do you know when to go along to get along and when to take a stand? Again, these things are a matter of prayer.

They are a matter of reflection. There are things that do not morally compromise us, laws that we obey, edicts and mandates and rules and regulations that we follow because they do not create a moral compromise. If someone says, pack your trash and leave Jerusalem, I'm hauling you off to Babylon.

And you say, okay, there's no moral component to that obedience. You're not being immoral. You're not violating a law of God or your spiritual integrity, right? In fact, you are complying with it because God said, don't fight them.

But when it comes to eating food that is on the do not eat list in the law of Moses, that's something different. When you are told, do not worship your God, that's something different. So as we look at these things, there's helpful insight and guidance and illumination for us on those things about which we can be flexible and those things about which we are inflexible.

And we'll see that especially in the book of Daniel, the narrative portions of Daniel have a lot to do with behavior in a foreign oppressive culture, which our own culture increasingly is. Well, so

we're on the cusp here of these three waves of invasion, 605 BC, 597 BC and 586 or 587, depending on which book you read and how, which calendar you're using. But there's basically the first one in 605, eight years later, there's the second one.

And then 10 years later, 11 years later, there is the third one. Now I want to do something with our remaining time tonight just very quickly before we talk about the fall of Jerusalem proper and exactly what took place. We have a parallel in Kings, but about six months ago, we studied the other primary prophet for this particular time, the one who began his prophetic ministry in the reign of Josiah.

And that was Zephaniah, Zephaniah. And it's been long enough that I want to turn back to Zephaniah because if you want to know what it is that the people in Judah under Josiah, with all of his wonderful exterior superficial outward physical reforms, restoration of the place of worship, restoration of the instruments of worship, restoration of the rituals and the form of worship, restoration of the observances of worship. All of that is external and outside, right? They're only invested with meaning and value when that participation is motivated from the inside.

So ask this question. We ask ourselves this question. I have access to a lot of forms.

I have access to a church. I have access to a Bible class. I have access to family functions, Christian functions.

Some schools have Christian activities that we can associate with. And those are external forms. That's what Josiah restored and put back in place.

The question to ask is, as I participate, as I am involved with any of those things, where does my motivation come from? Am I doing it just because it's there and other people I know are there? It's easier to do it than not do it. It's comfortable. It doesn't cost me anything, but I'm not really personally invested in it.

I am not looking for it. I'm not hungry and thirsty for it. I do it because it's there.

You're going to die in the invasion, the spiritual invasion, in the wrestling match of principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this age. You will lose. You'll be defeated.

You'll be defunct. You'll be fruitless. You will be a dry dead branch trimmed off.

You will be in the darkness which is outside. You will be crying and you'll be grinding your resurrection teeth if you take that attitude. This is serious stuff.

God doesn't purchase us with the blood of Jesus Christ so that we can lounge around and be half baked and incomplete, unmotivated, hanging around, not fulfilling that for which we were bought, that for which we were redeemed. God takes the death of his son and the purpose for that death seriously. There's nothing more serious in this universe or outside it than the work

of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That work was done for you and for me. And to not take it seriously is to be like these people. Zedekiah talked about this.

Turn over to the book of, I'm sorry, Zephaniah talked about it. Zedekiah heard it and didn't pay attention to it. Zephaniah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

Go back to the end of your New Testament. Flip back a few pages. It's worth reviewing.

Zephaniah, you see the theophanic element there at the end, the Yahweh name, the Zephan portion of that means to hold something close, to hold it near. Sometimes they even think that this means the Lord's secret, you know, information that you hold close. This is information that is for those people that God holds close.

The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of who? King Hezekiah. People namby-pamby around and say, well, this might be King Hezekiah. This might be King Hezekiah.

When you've got a King Hezekiah in the immediate context, this guy is from the royal family, but he's not in the direct line. By the way, it's very interesting. You follow the kings of Judah and that royal succession down and then go to the genealogical information given for the Lord Jesus and find out at what point his ancestor line splits off from the ones that sit on the throne.

Is he descended from Athaliah, for example? Is he descended from Coniah, Jeconiah? Is he descended from Manasseh? Is he descended from Uzzah or any of these other wicked kings? Well, it's a fruitful study. Go back and look at the line of the Lord Jesus back to David and how many of those people in his ancestral line, how many of those men sat on the throne and where does his line diverge from the wicked kings who were judged and rejected by God? Interesting study. We don't have time to do it now, but son of Gedaliah, son of Amoriah, the son of Hezekiah in the days of Josiah, the son of Ammon, King of Judah.

Now we did this back in March-ish this year. It's been six months or so. And I just want once more to review.

We're going to skim through this very quickly. Here's what to watch for. Why is God destroying the southern kingdom of Judah? Did he not make a promise to David that David would not lack a man to sit on the throne? Laolam, unto the ages, forever.

Wasn't that the promise of God? Do you think these guys might have laid back and said, well, you know, great, great, great, great grandpa got a promise. We're always going to have a throne. Doesn't matter what we do.

It's secure. A lot of believers are secure thinking, well, we're all going to heaven, streets of gold, gates of pearl, snowy white wings, halos, harps, angels, manna, right? What does God do with

regard to this promise of a man descended from David sitting on the throne? It is not going to be fulfilled from Zedekiah up to this day. And from this day forward through the tribulation, not until the Lord Jesus Christ comes back to earth at the beginning of the millennial kingdom and sits on the throne of his father, David, will this promise pick back up.

We are sometimes casual and cavalier about claiming the promises of God. There are conditions on these promises. Don't fulfill the condition.

God doesn't fulfill the promise. The sons of David who are to occupy this throne are enjoined and commanded to be faithful. When they are faithless, promise of God is off the table.

The promises of God to you and me are off the table when we are apathetic, indifferent, disobedient, preoccupied, worshiping other gods. Zedekiah says, on behalf of the Lord, I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land, says the Lord. This doesn't sound like the promise of God.

I will take you to a land flowing with milk and honey and every man with his own vine and his own fig tree. I will cause one of you to put to flight a thousand of your enemies. This sounds pretty much like the exact opposite, doesn't it? But he's talking to the same people.

I will utterly consume everything from the face of the earth. This is the same earth you see elsewhere, but it's the face of the land, quite obviously. I will consume man and beast.

I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land, says the Lord. Now, when's the last time he said anything this strong and did anything this severe? Genesis 6, 7, 8, right? I will stretch out my hand against Judah.

Of all of the nations of the earth, God chose Israel for his own possession, gave all the rest of them to the God of this world. He said, you try to build your kingdom with them. I'm going to take this one little sliver of humanity to send it from Abraham.

I'll keep them for myself. They're the ones who appreciate me. And yet in that group, there is this faithlessness and indifference and disobedience.

So I will stretch out my hand against Judah, against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place. The names of the idolatrous priests, with the pagan priests, that's God's priests and the Ashdod priests and the Milcom priests and all the rest of them.

Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops. This is the stars. This is the universe.

This is the cosmos. This is all the wonderful effects of the Big Bang. This is, I'm so happy that the wonderful accident that I can't explain in ways that I can't explain produced stuff that I can't explain, which is me.

Oh, the marvel of science. Oh, the marvel of the strange anthropic universe. Don't know how it

happened, but ain't it great.

Certainly is no God in it. It just created itself and created me. I'm a happy accident.

Oh, praise the universe. Oh, praise the molecules. Oh, praise the laws of physics.

Oh, praise astrophysics and microbiology. Oh, praise DNA. Oh, I bow down to the genome, etc.

Do you think this doesn't happen today? I pointed this out six months ago. I'll point it out now. If you don't think there are people worshiping the host of heaven, go watch YouTube.

Host of heaven on the housetops. Those who worship and swear by the Lord, but who also swear by Milcom. Well, I'm both and I'm, I'm just a ubiquitous.

I, I like everything and everybody. I, I like church and I like church people. I like the Bible and I like God, but I also, you know, it's theistic evolution.

It's both. I'll worship the universe and God, you know, just cover my bases, whichever one's right. I'm, I'm halfway there.

Those who have turned back from following the Lord and have not sought the Lord nor inquired of him. This is what I'm talking about in terms of floating in a group. It is not enough to be numbered among the people.

Who is God looking for? Those who are seeking those who are inquiring for themselves and on their own. Do we go to the Lord inquiring, asking. Now this also is humility.

We don't know everything. We ask and inquire. I was trying to figure out how to make a good door out of the pieces of a door.

I had a little skinny stick and then a big flat thing that looked like a door and I wanted the two to be together. And I thought, well, you know, I could put a big ugly metal strap on each side. That would probably hold it.

But what's a good way to make a cabinet door type of thing when I just need to widen it by a couple of inches and stick a stick on one side? Well, I have to first decide that I don't have sufficient knowledge in engineering in my own head to figure that out. I need to look around to somebody that does know, right? And that requires humility to say, well, my idea is going to be good no matter what it is. We go to the experts when we want a recipe for something we haven't made before.

We go to the experts when we have a medical situation, right? So God is looking for those who in the spiritual realm are seeking, asking, knocking. What is the problem with these people? They have not sought the Lord. They have not inquired of him.

This is how Josiah died. Great king, wonderful, heartfelt leader of a great revival. But when he

got ready to go tangle with the Egyptians, he did not inquire of the Lord and he died.

Be silent in the presence of the Lord God. Sometimes this is tough. Come into the presence of the Lord and shut up.

We, we want to do all the talking. We want to tell God his business. Lord, I don't understand why you haven't fulfilled the plan of Sam this week.

I had a wonderful thing all mapped out. It's not coming to pass. Where are you? And why aren't you getting busy, uh, you know, helping me accomplish all the things I've outlined for myself.

We come into the Lord's presence and be silent. If we're silent, what does that let us do? Listen, wait for the word of the Lord. Be still and know that I am God.

Let all the earth keeps silence before him. Takes humility, takes self-control, takes acknowledgement of the rock that is higher than I. You don't want the rock that is higher than I to fall on I do you? I remember the first time we were making a cross country trip and I was reading the signs and so on. You know, you get kind of bored in the back of the station wagon and we'd be winding through those mountain passes and it would say, beware of falling rocks.

And I thought, how do we do this? I can't see through the top of the station wagon and my dad driving can't see through the top. So how do you beware of a falling rock? I mean, it's either going to fall on you or it's not. You, what are you going to do? You're driving along at 50, 55, 60 miles an hour.

Falling. What can you do? The Lord has prepared his sacrifice. He has invited his guests and it shall be in the day of the Lord's sacrifice.

I will punish the princes and the King's children and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel. What does that mean? What's wrong with foreign apparel? I dare say that if most of us check the tags on the clothing we have on this moment, it's foreign apparel. It's a rare thing to find something that's not made in Indonesia or China or some far off place.

I saw something the other day that said it was made in Croatia. It's one of my older garments. I don't even know if there is a Croatia or not, but it said it was made there.

What does this mean? I will punish all such as are clothed with foreign apparel. Why does God care what clothes these people have on? There was guidance for modest and appropriate apparel in Israel, right? Men aren't to wear women's clothes. Women aren't to wear men's clothes.

There was a kind of cloth all woven out of linen or all woven out of wool. You don't mix the fibers. Certain people had to have tassels at certain places.

Certain people had to wear headgear. There were instructions. What kind of clothes are these people wearing? Amorite clothing, Canaanite clothing, foreign clothing, Moabite, Ammonite,

Edomite, Philistine, inhabitants of the land clothing.

They're very stylish. They're very trendy. They're looking good.

And God says, I will punish them for their clothing. What does this really say? What is clothing a mark of? How many times can you look at someone and tell a lot about their political philosophy, their cultural affiliations by the way they dress? Goth people, all dressed up like goths. Bikers dress like bikers.

Wannabe cowboys dress like urban cowboys. Emo people dress like emos. If you don't know what that is, you're blessed.

Don't look it up. And this goes with your body adornments, your piercings and tattoos. People that have these excessive, you know, look, if you got mom or U.S. Navy or something, that's one thing.

But these people that have got like gardens of shrubbery extending beyond the limits of their clothing, and look, is it a sin? No. But is it an association? Yes. I know people that have lots of tattoos, but they've got their own reasons for it that aren't necessarily um trying to identify with a cultural group.

Tattoo is like a lot of other things. It is why you do it more than that you have done it. In general, I figure I got enough little spots that God organized into my DNA without adding any more markings.

Plus, it's such a permanent thing. You know, something you like today could be a completely different shape and location in the future and look pretty silly. And I just don't have enough foresight to, you know, make that kind of decision.

But the idea here is identification with culture. The foreign clothing is identification with foreign culture. It is another mark that they have syncretized.

They have mixed in with the people instead of being what did God say, come out from among them and be separate. And to be conservative, to be modest, is to reflect the glory of God. To be trendy and to be daring and to be individual like everybody else is not.

But it reflects priorities. In the same day, I will punish all those who leap over the threshold. We talked about this when we covered this six months ago.

There will be a mournful cry from the fish gate, wailing from the second quarter and loud crashing in the hills. Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh. This was a market district.

Zephaniah is showing that these well-known suburbs of Jerusalem, these districts or locations within the city, it doesn't matter what your particular slice of the culture is. They were doing one thing at the fish gate that had its own little subculture. It was like in Dallas, we've got the West End and we've got Deep Ellum and we've got Lower Greenville and we've got Highland Park and

we've got Oak Cliff and we've got different parts of Dallas and its suburbs are sort of known for certain things and certain cultures, subcultures inhabit those.

Well, that has happened in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was supposed to be homogenous. It was supposed to be a center of uniform worship.

Even in our New Testament, we're said to be baptized by one spirit, to worship one God through one Lord, Jesus Christ. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. Be like-minded, be of one mind, of one heart, be together without spot and without blemish, without wrinkle or any such thing.

A peculiar people, zealous of good works. These people have all split up into little, into little burbs and little subcultures. So there's one thing at the fish gate, something else in the second quarter, something else up in the hills, something else in the market district of Maktesh.

The merchant people are cut down. Those who handle money are cut off. All of this gets back to trade and commerce and bickering and territories and sort of the things you associate with mobs fighting with each other over turf, gangs fighting over turf, even economic interests fighting over market share.

It shall come to pass, I will search Jerusalem with lamps, punish the men who are settled in complacency. I think for us, it's not so much active association with evil or abominable things in the culture. We're not in our particular group.

We don't have a lot of problem with being too trendy or too off in the weeds. What's our problem? Complacency. I wouldn't even say our problem.

What is our potential problem if we're not watchful, if we're not careful? Complacency. It sneaks up on us. One thing about being complacent is you're not worried about anything.

If you're not worried, how are you going to catch yourself in complacency? Complacency is its own worst enemy because being complacent, you never realize you're being complacent. You're too unconcerned. Who say in their heart, the Lord will not do good nor will he do evil.

We talked about this last Sunday. I'm just in that comfortable middle of the group. I'm not going to be judged.

I won't be rewarded. It's okay. I'm just kind of at the zero point.

I won't get hammered and I won't get a medal. I'll just kind of be there. I'll just kind of float along.

I'll be in the masses. I'll be the faceless, nameless hordes that are just there singing songs and I'll just blend. That is not God's will.

There are so few people who pursue, who seek after God. The Psalmist says there's none that

seek after God in various generations that there isn't a single person. You look at some of the generations in the Old Testament and you've got one Joseph or you've got one Moses or you've got one Gideon.

You've got one at a time in a whole generation. So God is looking around with a lamp and punishing those who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, well, I'm not in line for either fate. I'm just in the middle.

Their goods shall become booty and their houses a desolation. They shall build houses, but not inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine.

Be chopping cotton in a plantation in the millennium. That's how I think of it. I heard somebody long, long time ago, pre-computer age say in the plan of God, Christians are either on the up escalator or the down escalator.

We don't stand still. If you're standing still, you're moving down. Life is basically, have you ever gone up the down escalator? You do this when you're a kid, you know, just to see if you can do it.

But basically this life, because of the fallenness of everything, our nature, the world, the flesh and the devil, everything is a down escalator. We are either climbing up the down escalator because we are taking steps. But if you're standing still, you're going down.

Standing still is going down. That's what this passage says. This is what happened to Judah.

By standing still, they let Josiah do all the work. They let a few faithful guys get their revival underway and rebuild the temple. And all they did was stand still.

And by standing still, they fell back into the old ways. First thing you know, they're back on the housetops, worshiping the stars. They're back bringing in idols.

And God says, I've searched through the city with a lamp. And all I'm finding are these people. I will punish these who are settled in complacency.

Their stuff's going to become booty. The great day of the Lord is near. It is near and hastens quickly.

The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter. The mighty men will cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers.

Everything that people are putting their confidence in. And you look around the Christian world today and there's so many people. I'm subscribed to a particular Twitter account that gets a feed from just hundreds of Christian ministries.

I think the thing is subscribed to 750 different Christian ministries. I can only look at it about twice a month because it just depresses me to no end. The confidence that is placed in things that are not in the word of God, but they are current and prevalent and extolled in our current Christianity.

God says, I will bring distress upon men. They shall walk like blind men because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood shall be poured out like dust, their flesh like refuse.

Now, why is God only judging this in Jerusalem? Why isn't he judging Tyre or Sidon or Nineveh or one of these other towns? Because these people are believers. They are God's people. They are accountable under the law.

That's us by way of prospect. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath. It's not a matter of getting enough resources.

The whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy. He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land. Gather yourselves together, gather together, O undesirable nation, before the decree is issued or the days pass like chaff before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you.

This was delivered by Zephaniah in the early days of Josiah's ministry. Even as the reforms were going on, Zephaniah was warning the people that this superficial going along isn't going to cut it. Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth.

This is us, right? Say, yes, this is me. This is us, right? Nod your head. Yes, this is us.

We are not these ne'er-do-wells who are going to be judged. Seek the Lord, you meek of the earth, who have upheld his justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility.

It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger. What does Zephaniah's name mean? Held close by the Lord, hidden in the Lord. Psalm 91, under the shadow of the Almighty, cleft of the rock.

Remember chapter 2. All of these others are going to be judged. Seek the Lord, you humble of the earth, who have upheld his justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility.

Pretty simple, right? How hard is it to seek righteousness? We know how to get righteousness by faith. Trust God, be obedient, be diligent, spend some time. I'll leave you with one closing thought, which is one of the same thoughts we opened with tonight.

Evaluate investment of time. There are 24 hours in a day. Let's take out eight of them nominally for sleep.

That leaves you with 16 hours. Let's take out another four for daily necessities of getting dressed and eating and so on. Leaves you with 12.

Let's take out another eight for work, school, necessary duties, tasks, and functions. That leaves you with four hours, right? Easily four hours, sometimes more, sometimes less. But we've got at least four discretionary hours on average in a day, right? In that discretionary four hours of time, what percentage of it do we spend on our spiritual life? How many minutes in prayer? How many minutes in reflection on God's word? How many minutes going back over reading a verse of scripture, listening to something on the radio or on the internet, tending our spiritual field? You've got no excuse.

You've got eight hours of sleep. You've got eight hours of work. You've got four hours of necessary eating, dressing, tasking, cleaning up, whatever.

You've easily got a good two to four hours of discretionary time, easily so. Now, if we can't find 10 minutes out of 240 minutes, what percentage is that? 10 minutes out of 240? If you can't take 10 minutes in a day, are you apathetic? Are you indifferent? Yes. If you're spending less than 10 minutes a day on your spiritual life, read Zephaniah because that's what's coming.

The word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword. It instructs, it corrects, it rebukes. And we need to take this to heart, don't we? No reason for us to be on the judgment side of God's righteousness and justice.

We can be on the blessing side. The Lord Jesus died to give us life and give it to us more abundantly. Don't miss it.

Zephaniah. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the powerful light that it shines on our souls, the clear guidance that it gives us. You've provided for us so many wonderful resources, the presence of your spirit, the truth of your word, the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, the exhortation of the apostles and prophets, the examples of so many faithful people who have gone before. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will minister these things to our hearts in a powerful and effective way, that these things will find a response in us, that we will be motivated and encouraged and strengthened by what we've seen, to redeem the time and bear that fruit that reflects your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We pray it in his name. Amen.