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Zephaniah – Hidden Things

Chapter 1 – Everything Must Go

Well, the wonderful thing is we can come just as we are. Fact of the matter is God knows everything about us anyway. What we're going to be talking about, though, is our tendency to cover up. And if in fact you were to in some way frame an unpardonable sin, it would be the sin of denial. I'm not guilty. Now, First John says, "You say you have no sin you're just lying." And John, as he's speaking to some of the Jews who perceived that by virtue of their heritage, they're going to be going into heaven, he goes, no, you're of your father, the devil and here's who he was: he was a liar. (John 8:44) We perceive that lying is just kind of a marginal issue, but it is the issue with God. Because all other things can be forgiven but to lie about who you are cannot because you can't come to God, just as you are. God is looking for the heart that is going to be genuine and sincere. There's an interesting passage in Deuteronomy that gives clarity to this, and I just want to look at a few before we come to the passage of Zephaniah. But if you look with me in Deuteronomy 29, as Moses was giving a law and really preparing the people to go into the promised land, there were a few things that God wanted to make clear, and this particular verse just really nails how God sees things.

All the way through up to this point, there have been the warnings of the blessings and the curse, and God says, ok, now you know you have a choice: death or life. Choose life. So, you have these choices that you make, but don't think that you can make them superficially. In other words don't think that you can say one thing, and in your heart actually feel something else.

And the way that he puts it in Deuteronomy 29:14, "Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here today (for you know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed; moreover, you have seen their abominations and their idols of wood, stone, silver and gold, which they had with them); So that there will not be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD..."

That's a key point there, "whose heart turns away from the LORD" as we read in Samuel, man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

"...to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood." (Deuteronomy 28:18)

Now I just want to emphasize "a root" is something that you don't necessarily see.

Now watch the next verse. "It shall be when he hears the words of this curse that he will boast, saying, 'I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart...'" (Deuteronomy 29:19) I've done wrong and I haven't even been whacked for it? Nobody even said anything. There is that sense of I got away with it type thing.

Look at verse 20. "The LORD shall never be willing to forgive him." That's quite a statement, isn't it? What it's talking about is a deceptive heart. Lest you perceive that a deceptive heart is a non-issue with God. That's not true. It is the issue. And whether it's Jesus dealing with the Pharisees or religious leaders. Look, I'd rather be with a thief that at least admits he's a thief than a religious leader that says he's good and is lying. Because you can't really deal with liars, can you? So, as we go through Zephaniah, we realize that even the title of this man's name means hidden - whom the Lord hides, and God literally hides Zephaniah for a particular work. But we're also going to see those hidden things that the tribe of Judah has been pushing aside and the one thing that we have seen clearly in the Book of Jeremiah is that the tribe of Judah is guilty of acting like they love God and yet on the other hand, in reality not. Whereas Israel was kind of overt about the rebellion. He goes, the sin of Judah is far worse than yours because you've deceived me. You said you loved me, but you didn't. (Jeremiah 3:10) And so, as we go through this, we're going to be looking at those hidden things in particular and the deception that oftentimes comes in as the father of lies will come into our hearts and our perception is that it's ok to live that way. We're going to be clearly dismayed when we come into the presence of God, some people, as Matthew records. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" (Matthew 7: 22-23) And I guess you could put it this way: it's literally Jesus saying you liars because you didn't do what I said. You did what you wanted, and your perception is that I was pleased with that. You were playing a role.

And so, as we come to this passage, when He tells us that everything has to go, and if you look at the very beginning in Zephaniah 1:2, "'I will completely remove all things...'" That's actually where we got the phrase: everything has to go.

Ok, as we come to Zephaniah, we're going to see this being unfolded in the passage as it says in Zephaniah 1:2, "'I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth.'" He then goes into the whole realm of the reversal of creation, and then in particular, I want you to take note in Zephaniah 1:3. As He ends with the fish of the sea and the ruins along with the wicked, and once again we talked about this last week, but I just want to emphasize, ruins are what? Stumbling blocks. So, what we're talking about is the stumbling blocks that come into our lives and cause us to love other things and pull us away from loving God and the truth. Who's the creator of all things? Who's the one that loves us? Well, God doesn't love you. I'm going to have more joy. I'm going to have more comfort. I'm going to have more peace by pursuing these things. Well, that's a lie. So, you're pursuing the lie.

And as the passage then goes on, it begins to talk about the way this lie comes into our lives by virtue of us having other lords. Very interesting, the way that it's put within the passage, verse 4. "...I will cut off the remnant of Baal..." Now Baal directly translated actually means lord. Of course, the Scripture tells us we can't have two masters. And in that particular text, Mathew 6:24, it's dealing with money. But almost all gods in some way come to power or possessions or things such as this. And so, Baal is an interesting picture in which is oftentimes used as a very broad word to describe other Lords or a specific God that is worshipped, but the fact of the matter is you're dealing with something else that is master over you or something, or someone that you serve other than God would be the definition of a Baal. So, the point is that you've allowed something to remain in your life in which you serve - you adore. He actually gives the description here "And the names of the idolatrous priests". Now once again we talked about that, and I don't want to rehash too much of this. But the idolatrous priests dealing with the pronunciation of their names is chem - a - rims and they were the ones that wore all black. One of the reasons why they wore all black was they rather represent the soot of burning their children on the altar. So, it was part of the sacrifice. They would wear this like a trophy. You know, I've sacrificed so that I can have what I want. And the willingness to sacrifice to get what you want. So, the strange, bizarre thing about this is that these people became heroes. You wouldn't think that but you know you go to places like New Orleans or something like this and you see people wearing skull things and stuff like that and you go, wow, they really celebrate these things and you wouldn't think that would be a hero in somebody's mind, but it is. What we have is an interesting picture of death and of these individuals.

The way that it's worded here: "I'm going to cut off...the names..." See? He uses the word names which we understand is dealing with the reputation and admiration. We use the phrase: somebody made a name for themselves. So, I'm going to remove fundamentally your heroes. There are things that we have allowed to come into our lives that we've allowed to be master over us, that we serve, and there are individuals in our life that we've made heroes that we never should have made heroes.

And if you look with me, there's a passage in Isaiah 5, to give you a reference to this. We oftentimes go to this passage but none of it makes any sense. I mean really. As Paul says in Romans 6, ok, you know, there's not a sin that you can think of that actually benefits you. There may be a sin that makes you feel good for a moment, but it doesn't benefit you.

Isaiah 5:20, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil..." I said to myself, that would never happen in America. Well, it just shows I'm not a prophet. "...who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!"

Verse 22. "Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant men in mixing strong drink" I would mean it never be true. I don't know. Have you ever watched a cowboy movie? I mean, it's bizarre, isn't it? The kind of people we make heroes. So, what we're talking about are individuals that made a name for themselves, and the fact is, we can easily allow these things to

remain in our lives. Other masters that we serve. Heroes in our lives that we admire; we want to emulate in some way. Famous or infamous? I don't know.

In Zephaniah, He then goes on and talks about how it's infiltrated the domestic world in your households. Zephaniah 1:5 "And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven..." So now it's that kind of worship of other things, and this is an interesting picture to me of domestic and social aspirations. You know what I'm talking about? You go on your roof and say, I can be anybody I want to be. When I was about 8 years old, I jumped off my roof, thinking I was Superman. I actually had a cape. I thought that would give me the...it didn't work. I tried an umbrella too. That didn't work either. Don't do it.

But those kinds of aspirations and as well as superstitions as well as you know, dreams. When you think about it, I mean. It's a man trying to conjure up.

Go back with me to 2 Corinthians if you will. Just thinking about this as I was talking to you. I actually think about a lot of things while I'm talking to you.

2 Corinthians 10:5. Paul says, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God..."

Speculations - *logismos* is the word that He uses, actually where we get the word logic. But what he's talking about is human reasoning. I don't know if you've ever stood on your rooftop and did some mute reasoning or maybe it was just in your house. But that sense of, like TV says, "I can be anybody, I want to be." Right? I mean, there's no limits. I mean, after all, I'm an American, but that's human reasoning and another word for it is computing. That's interesting because it's taking advantage of the things that you have and you're going, I think I can do that if I do this, this, this, this, this. Some people figure, if I go to college and get this degree, I can do this, I'll own a company or be a gazillionaire or whatever. It says "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing". Now, that particular word that He uses here in this passage is dealing with a wall that's raised and it causes a barrier to exist. It has this sense of- I'm grander than anybody else, and nobody can hurt me. That's an interesting picture, isn't it? So, it's this picture of prosperity or dignity or honor that you and I begin to build and raise up against the knowledge of God. Well, I'm rich, so I don't need God. I'm popular so who needs church? I mean, you just go down the list of these walls, the lofty walls that you begin to build, and you begin to think so much of yourself. But Scripture says you need to take those captives. That's you on your rooftop, looking at the stars and saying the sky is the limit. That's what you're doing.

So, in Zephaniah, when it's talking about this, it brings in the domestic influence within the homes. And let me just interject this: mothers, this is kind of your territory and the things that you say at home begin to plant seeds in your households. You know you have to keep bringing that child back, taking every thought captive, the obedience of Christ. So, you know, the kid goes, well, I think I can do this, and mom goes you could do it. You can do it. And I'm going, stop! I told my wife I saw one of these shows on TV, let's just say, like American and it has

something to do with an idol then you have people...America's got, I don't know, something to do with talent. But I'm saying to myself, they're ruining these people. I mean Proverbs 20:21 is very clear. Don't give to somebody too fast. They go, well, I got talent. Good for you. But if that talent brings you to a place in which you have more than you should, your character can't handle it. You may have talent, but you have no character. The problem is you're going to implode. This is not going to work well for you. I mean which kid star ever really turned out great? It's just not going to work out well. Oftentimes, you can see behind the kid and the mom is pushing them forward, you know? It is those parents that are beginning to push their kids towards the stars, if I can put it this way, and the domestic influence. Strangely enough in Jeremiah 7, Jeremiah is a contemporary with Zephaniah, God is very upset with His people because they're playing church and they go to the temple, they do their worshipping, and then they go home and they cheat, steal, commit adultery, worship other things. All these things.

He says in Jeremiah 7:17, "Do you see what they're doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and women knead dough to make cakes..." For whom? The queen of heaven.

If you follow this all the way through, I think it's by the time you get to like Jeremiah 44, what you have is that here the people finally have an opportunity to do the right thing and Jeremiah says, now stay here, let's not go off. And they said, no, we're going down to Egypt. We're going to worship the queen of heaven. And the husbands go, us too! Alright, I'm glad you're in charge. So, what you see is the domestic influence that begins to pull the whole family this way and how powerful that influence is. The picture that is given here is they bow down in the house tops to the host of heaven to those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear to Milcom, which once again gives that picture of king. But more specifically Molech, which is tied directly to power and a king. Of course, that's an interesting picture of grabbing for power and longing for those kinds of things. And so, it begins to literally describe not only domestic, but the social aspirations that people have in society and the duplicity that then comes in which you know it's ok to worship God, sort of, and then to pursue these other things. I mean, after all, I'm only human right? It's that: I love God, but I love these things. Always, God's going to take the back seat on that deal. We're going to see that as we go, but what you have if you look at the passage, he goes to those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom and those who have turned back from following the Lord and those who have not sought the Lord are inquired of him. The point is that you thought you could do two and what ended up was you rejected God. And every time, I mean, I've seen people say, you know, I think I can put my job first and then, when I can, I'll come and put the Lord first. And I'll say to myself, it's not going to happen. I won't see them pretty soon. And you can almost set your watch to it. They're not coming back until they get their heart right. Until they put the Lord first. But there is no compromise and there can't be any compromise in this. But man will deceive himself.

Of course, that's where we're talking about in verse 7, should in some way shake us up. "Be silent before the LORD God!"

You'll see this familiar phrase in Habakkuk 2:20 as well, but the phrase is: *hāsā*. It is the Hebrew which actually gives the onomatopoeia or the sound of what it's saying "hush", God's present and He's doing something magnificent. So, you begin to see God in all of His power and all of His glory. When you do, oftentimes think of Isaiah 6, right? Isaiah comes before the presence of God, and he goes, I see the train of God's robe just flowing through the universe. Could you imagine being in and seeing the presence of God and going, You're #2? Could you picture somebody saying that to Him in His presence? Of course, when Job comes into His presence, he goes, I have nothing to say. (Job 42:3) Well, that's what it does. His presence will close every mouth because of how great and how powerful He is. What Scripture is fundamentally saying is the reason you sin is because you have bad theology. You have no idea who God is. It's one of the things we were talking about Sunday. In Him, we live and breathe and have our existence. Are you actually saying you don't want breath? You don't want to exist? Because God is life. So, an interesting picture as it begins to establish us back to: How in the world do you think you can compromise?

Zephaniah 1:7 "For the day of the LORD is near, for the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests"

The guests in this particular text are not who you think they are. The guests are the Babylonians that are coming down. There's going to be a sacrifice. The point of the matter is, is that God's people have lied, and God says, I'm going to have a genuine sacrifice and it's going to be with your blood. You've lied but there will be a sacrifice. Genuineness will happen. It will take place. The best place to see this in Isaiah 13. If you look there with me, which kind of gives us a parallel and we're going to look at Habakkuk as well. In Isaiah 13 it's actually described, and let me just say this, when Scripture calls God the Lord of *šābā'*, translated the Lord of hosts. The transliteration or spelling in English would be T-S-A-B-A, Lord of tsaba. When it refers to Him as that, it's saying that every single molecule, every single star, everything that ever existed is part of His host.

Our perception is that things happen arbitrarily, things happen accidentally, things happen serendipitously. Things don't just happen. God is the Lord of tsaba. So, if in fact, the Babylonians come in and they attack, guess who invited them?

Isaiah 13:1 reads this way, "The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. Lift up a standard on the bare hill, raise your voice to them, wave the hand that they may enter the doors of the nobles. I have commanded My consecrated ones, I have even called My mighty warriors, My proudly exulting ones, to execute My anger. A sound of tumult on the mountains, like that of many people! A sound of the uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathered together! The LORD of hosts is mustering the army for battle. They are coming from a far country..."

The day of the Lord is coming. This is the Babylonians, and we know this because as you go down a little bit further, God saying, and after they get finished doing their work, then I'm going to raise up the Medes and they're going to take care of them.

Isaiah 13:17, "Behold, I'm going to stir up the Medes against them" and the Medes won't value their silver or gold. Now if you go back to Zephaniah and the book right before Zephaniah is Habakkuk. Habakkuk comes to the realization that his own people have been extremely deceitful. So, what we've been talking about. He turns to God, and he goes, God, you got to take care of these people. They're horrible and I'm around a bunch of people that are just horrible. The way he describes them is violent and they are perverting righteousness. As he says in Habakkuk 1:4, but God then goes on and says, ok, I'm going to invite somebody to the table that will take care of them. And who is it?

Well, Habakkuk 1:6. "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people..."

By the way, Habakkuk 1:9. "All of them come for violence."

Habakkuk 1:10, "They mock at kings."

Well, one of the great indictments against Judah was that the people were disobeying authority. You know, here again a minor detail, it's not really a big issue. It is a real big issue with God, see. I know that some people that have been in Family Bible, they go, you take this authority thing really seriously. Yeah, I do because God does. And if God takes it seriously, guess what? You better. Whether you do or not doesn't really matter. God's still going to take it seriously.

As it goes on, we understand that God appoints other nations and we can put it another way, just kind of fit it in our context of our life. God appoints sinners in your life to discipline you. Do you know that? Yeah, sometimes it could be a neighbor, sometimes it could just be a thief, or somebody is just breaking the law. But God raises up to discipline you.

Habakkuk 1:12b. "You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge..." As he did Assyria. I mean, you go back to Isaiah 10 and, you know, Sennacherib thought, I'm this great king. I'm rolling over all these nations. God goes, don't get cocky. The only reason you're winning is cause I'm letting you win. Then Sennacherib says, well, I'm going to boast. God goes, well, the axe can't boast because you're just an axe. That's all you are. I'm just using you. But when you're done, I'm going to send Babylon. They're going to destroy you, and they do. And then He says then I'm going to send Babylon and Babylon is going to finish this work. Then I'm going to send Medes. So, all the way through what we see is that God is controlling all these things and God is bringing things in our lives as we're rebellious because He sees the heart. Our perception is: what a nice person. Why are bad things happening to them? You can't say that. You have no idea what their heart is like. That's an unfair judgment call by you. If something's happening, God is sovereign. And God of all the earth is doing right. We know that to be true. So, what an interesting picture because we know that much of what Israel had done was, they had taken on some of the gods that were part of the Philistines. They were part of the Assyrians and one god in particular was the fish God that that they began to worship.

If you look in Habakkuk 1:14, the question is, when they come to take them in, it says, "Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them? The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, drag them away with their net, and gather them together in their fishing net. Therefore, they rejoice and are glad."

Watch verse 16, "Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net".

Remember God said His sacrifice is coming? So, Zephaniah says I've invited somebody. And this somebody that's coming from the north is going to reveal everything that's been hidden. Difficulties and trials begin to reveal who you really are. That's when you begin to see who a person is. And you'll watch people in difficulties or trials, or, you know, maybe the things that they love more than God; in some cases, it's kids. Maybe the thing they love more than God starts coming out during those difficult times, and then you begin to watch them choose sides. And I can tell every time. Do they love God? They don't. They love their kids more than God. It is very easy to watch this process. A sad thing to watch; but God is revealing through the process of the difficult things.

In Zephaniah 1-9, He's going to be showing those you follow as we've been talking about other masters. Obviously, there are names that you admire; but now the way you live and He's going to put it in the setting of lifestyle.

Zephaniah 1:8. "Then it will come about on the day of the LORD's sacrifice that I will punish the princes, the king's sons"

That's a very interesting way of putting that, because what we know about this time, just to kind of give you a little backdrop, remember, Josiah is the king. How do we know that?

Go back to Zephaniah 1:1. "The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah"

Ok. It's during the time of Josiah. So, this is how we know what time it is, but more specifically, we know what's going on because if you remember, Josiah was the king that was making reforms. In other words, he was trying to straighten up everything. The best picture I can give you, and I'm not actually trying to put anybody in this picture, but it's like if we as Americans were to have a president that did everything right. You would still have a massive amount of people that, though they followed the rule of order at that time, because they had been doing wrong, would still continue doing wrong. They would just be subverted about it. Right. They would just kind of hide it, being subterfuge. How do we know that? Because all you have to do is get another president and they come out of the woodwork. And you're going, where were all these people? They've always been there. But the one gives license for the one thing and the other gives the license for the other thing. So, what you begin to see is God reveals certain things by virtue of the people that are in control. Well, in this particular setting, Josiah is doing the right thing. I mean, he's cleaning house. He's getting rid of all the idols. That's why Scripture says you need to get the remnant out. Why? Because there's a residue that's hidden

underneath. Now Josiah is doing everything right, but the people still have the residue of Manasseh. You have about 50 years, with Manasseh, of doing evil. Now you get this little kid that comes in and by the age 16, he's making huge reforms. What do you think? You think all those adults are going, ok we're going to change our lifestyle? People just don't change. So, what you have are these prophets Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah that God begins to raise up, and He goes, ok but the problem isn't solved. The king is making reforms, but the people are lying. We know this because Jeremiah comes up the ranks and his own father won't recognize his own authority. But not only that, but his own people, the Benjamites from his tribe hang him on the door. They nail him on the door and mock him. Now this is during the reign of Josiah. In addition, he will ultimately be thrown in the cistern by Zedekiah, who is a son of Josiah. That's the point of the passage. If you look with me, it says within the passage that God's going to punish the princes, the king's sons. What we have is rebellion by the kids. A dad's trying to do the right thing, but there's the strong rebellious nature in the household, and not only with the kids, but with other leaders. That's the word princes, dealing with those that have power within the realm as well. And what we understand according to the Book of Jeremiah, according to some of these other books, and in particular, as we look at Zephaniah, is that they're doing horrific things and yet going to church and worshipping like everything's ok.

You know, it's kind of that picture of Jeremiah 7 where it says, "Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'" - nothing bad is going to happen. You can't do that and go out and steal from people.

Zephaniah 1:8 reads, "Then it will come about on the day of the LORD'S sacrifice that I will punish the princes, the king's sons and all who clothe themselves with foreign garments."

The Scripture tells us that the way we dress will oftentimes reveal who we are. In many respects, it will say who you emulate, who you identify with. It will in some cases reflect your heroes, your affections, your desires.

Deuteronomy 22:5 says, "A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God."

Well, you say that's axiomatic, but what Scripture is saying is that it's revealing a nature and the way you dressed reveals a nature in you and many of them were dressing like these priests, i.e., all in black. I've never seen that before. Oftentimes, people don't know they're identifying with certain groups by virtue of what they're doing, but you are, and that's fundamentally the point. How you dress makes a difference. The things you wear.

An interesting passage in Isaiah 3, and a lot of the time I've thought about this, and I don't want to pick on women in particular, but I guess I will right now. But in Isaiah 3:16, it's says, woe to the proud women. Now, look at how it describes the way they dress. Moreover, the LORD said "Because the daughters of Zion are proud and walk with heads held high and seductive eyes, and go along with mincing steps and tinkle the bangles on their feet"

Look at me! Look at me! How you dress is saying something about you.

In Zephaniah 1:8, it goes on and says, "all who clothe themselves with foreign garments". Now an interesting point, according to Proverbs 5,6 and 7, every time the word foreign is being used it's actually referring to a prostitute. But taking in its general understanding that you're having an adulterous relationship with the world. In other words, the things that you wear, in some way, describe who you love and what you love, and unfortunately, it's revealing that you're loving the wrong thing. So, I won't go into that much more. One of the great passages of course, is found in 1 Peter 3 that we oftentimes refer to. That the hidden woman of the heart is seen in the way that she dresses as well. Not with costly things. You're not trying to flaunt things, it's ok to have costly things, but you're not trying to flaunt your money. You know, you're not trying to show yourself superior. It doesn't mean that you should dress terribly; but it also means that you shouldn't dress scantily. So, you're defining it. We'll move on from that.

Zephaniah 1:9: "And I will punish on that day all who leap on the temple threshold"

It's really kind of a bizarre point that's being inferred here and what we feel is that's coming all the way back from 1 Samuel 5. And let me just say this, that oftentimes those obscure passages that we make reference to are the very things that are saying some of the deepest truths. I'm going to, the best I can, try to summarize for you, because to read all this will get us bogged down. But in 1 Samuel Chapter 5, if you remember the ark of the covenant was taken over by the Philistines because the Israelites had certainly gone against the Lord. God's priests were unholy, priest Eli and his sons. So, the ark was taken. You say, well, the ark, I guess God was keeping it captive. No, the Philistines are going to find out that the ark is going to take them captive. But the way, it reads that they were taking it to Ashdod, which at this point was probably the capital of the Philistines and it seems to have the temple of the fish god there. The reason why the Philistines worship the fish god is because they were maritime people. So, like Crete and everything was actually populated by these people. When you think of Crete, think of the Philistines as well. I mean that's how they made a large part of their living. And so, they worshipped the abundance of the ocean. What we understand is Dagon the fish God, Dag meaning fish. So, Dagon was the fish God. And what we know is that he was symbolized kind of as a Neptune character. So, he had the head of a human, arms of human, and then the fishtail.

It says in 1 Samuel 5:2, "The Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon" They brought it to their temple and set it by Dagon. The interesting picture there is that the ark of the covenant is made to bow down to their god. "When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD." i.e., a picture of bowing down before the LORD. So, they took Dagon and they set him in his place again. You know, when your god's a little weak, you maybe have to help him up a little bit. So, they arose early in the next morning and behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off... On the what? The threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon and it seems like this is an appellative word, which means that in the naming sense it's actually saying, if I could

transliterate, only the fish part was left of him. It's an interesting picture of God going, it's just a fish. I know you want to worship it but it's just a fish.

“Therefore, neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.” It seems as if then at this point a tradition began to arise of jumping over the threshold in honor of the fish God. Now here's the bizarre thing, and once again, I know we've never seen this happen before; but man, often will take those victimized by their own perversions when people do wrong, and they suffer consequences of their own wrong. But then man turns and he memorializes the person that was the failure. They're the good people. And you know, it's kind of like a movie star that goes with an overdose. And then they have these long stories of how wonderful this person was. I'm going he died of an overdose. Really, you know, I mean, I understand he might have been a good movie star, but don't lift him up as a paragon. You know, kids are going to get the wrong idea. It's like a man who dies committing a crime, resisting authority and you name a day after him. I mean, that's the picture that we're seeing with this particular God and how bizarre it is when you begin to understand that we will reward and even make heroes out of the victims of crime, like Bonnie and Clyde or whatever that do these kinds of things. So, the fact that they're leaping over or showing some kind of respect for the threshold.

Now I just want to emphasize if you're going to Ezekiel 7, it deals with the threshold of the Temple of God. Very few places that it's going to emphasize this. However, the threshold is almost always parallel with the gate. So, you'll see that in Ezekiel as well. The point is that the threshold is the place where you make decisions. That's the reason why in Proverbs 1, decisions are made by the judges at the gate. Why? Because it's the perfect picture of you're at a threshold in your life, you can make a decision. And in some respects, it's a picture of rebellion. Jumping over the threshold, I'm not going to make a decision. I'm not going to make a decision you want. I'm going to ignore the things that are valuable and I'm going to do what I want to do, and then the world comes, and it goes, what a hero that is. I mean, it's so bizarre because that would never happen here. if you remember what happens, the passage goes on and talks about instead of giving God the glory, they do this in 1 Samuel 5:5:

“Therefore, neither the priests of Dagon nor all who entered Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon to this day.”

In other words, they were honoring him, and God goes, ok, now I'm upset.

“Now the hand of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories.”

Here again, I'm not going to go into a lot of detail, but what you have are boils and swellings of large tumors that are coming out of them. And the question is, where is it coming from? Do you remember where God says in 1 Samuel 6:4, “Five golden tumors and five golden mice...” Well, the mice, five of each. And you say why 5? Because there are five major cities of the Philistines. So why golden? Well, because you've made them idols. You've made your sin, your idol. So,

we're going to let you. You want to worship something? I'll let you worship a hemorrhoid. What's interesting is that this disease will come from the mice. It is the bubonic plague in the Old Testament. That's what it is. And we know that from the mice of the rats, the fleas of the mice and the rats also began to generate. But do you know where the bubonic plague was or how it spread? It was spread from coming off of ships. It came off of ships. You have these giant incubators that are on the water, nobody can go anywhere, and you get diseases and it begins to foster in this. In one setting during the time of Constantinople, they figure between 25 to 50 million people die. That's a lot of people and it actually starts oftentimes with boils and will go into gangrene. One of the reasons why it's called the black plague. It's no wonder the Philistines, I mean these are great, powerful people, but they're going, you got to get this thing out of here. So, their thought is just to get out of the city. They take it to the other city and the other city has the same problem. Takes it to another city, they go, ok, just get it out of here. And you begin to realize that God is in control. He's the Lord of hosts. He's the Lord of Plagues, He's the Lord of mice, and the Lord of fleas. So an interesting picture as you go into this passage, from what I can see, is you have this rebelliousness that is, you know, I'm going to leap over the laws of God. I'm going to do whatever I want to do in the threshold. I don't even have to make a decision if I don't want to and it just shows the heart and God says, we'll see.

Zephaniah 1:9. "And I will punish on that day all who leap on the temple threshold, who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit."

Once again it goes back to the proclivity of these people to do violence, be deceitful about it and rebellious. Look at the way it reads, "who fill the house of their lord." That's the people that are in charge of them, whether it's a parent or another, with violence and deceit. In other words, they know what the right thing to do is, but they're not doing it and they don't feel like they have to. The king's sons are even rebelling against their own father.

Jeremiah 5. We read this a while back, but just a good reminder, in Jeremiah 5:1 God calls to Jeremiah. He says, roam the streets of Jerusalem and see if there's anybody honest.

Jeremiah 5:2. "And although they say, 'As the LORD lives.'" What does the text say? "Surely they swear falsely."

I mean, God's looking for truth. So, they'll even lie about God. I think if there's one thing that probably irritates me more than anything else, it's somebody coming up to me and saying, well, God told me to do this and I'm going, ok, I know what you're saying that you're going to do and God's not even next to that.

Jeremiah 5:12 reads this way, "They have lied about the LORD and said, "Not He"

God's not going to do anything about this. We're not going to have problems.

Verse 15, What does He say? "Behold, I am bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. "It is an enduring nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say."

Things are not going to go well.

Verse 23, “But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and departed. They do not say in their heart...”

They might say out loud, well, let's go to church. But they do not say in their heart I want to follow the Lord. And that really is the key.

It says in verse 26, “For wicked men are found among My people, they watch like fowls lying in wait; they set a trap, they catch men. Like a cage full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit. Therefore, they have become great and rich...” by taking advantage of people.

Of course, it goes on and says in verses 30-31. “An appalling and horrible thing...The prophets prophecy falsely...And My people love it so!”

Then He goes in Jeremiah 6:13 “For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely.”

So, God says in Jeremiah 6:20, what good is your sacrifice? What good is your burnt offerings? It's not acceptable to me. I'm not interested.

Jeremiah 7:5. “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor...”

But here again, what we have is this, if nobody sees me and I get away with it, or if it's not put out there, then it's not a big deal and all the way through what we're going to see in Zephaniah is everything's got to go. And more specifically, the things that you have hidden. Because it's those things that actually bring the pain and the sorrow. That's what God's punishing, the hidden heart. You know, if you and I would just come clean. Remember Psalm 32. “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away.” Now look, you can go and tell people how wonderful you are, and you can act in such a way that people actually believe it. But God knows different, and he can make that body move in such a way. He's the Lord of hosts, right? And that's what He's going to deal with.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you for Your word and how you begin to examine us in very unique ways. I give you thanks for this book in which you have hidden this prophet for a time such as this. And now Lord, you begin to reveal those things that we have hidden. I Pray that you would then purify us that we would be like you, but most of all, that we would be free from these very things that are bringing all of these things and hurts and pains upon us. We pray this in your name. Amen.