

06.07.23

Zephaniah

Chapter 1 – Hidden Things

Hidden Weakness

We're in the book of Zephaniah, whom the Lord hides, and we're looking at hidden things. The question might arise, why would we be looking at hidden things? Well, I would say because that fundamentally is the issue with the tribe of Judah. It's not the overt things, it's the covert things that they are doing that God is dealing with through the prophets. And once again, the perception oftentimes is, well, nobody sees, nobody knows we're doing all the right things externally. It must be ok. When you have prophets such as Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk you realize, ok, it's not ok. They went into captivity because of this.

What is interesting is the promise of going into captivity is affirmed to the king Josiah, at that particular time, even though Josiah was showing great reform. So, there were a lot of reforms that were going on at this time. And once again, if you're confused about who the king was at the particular time, it usually will say it the very, very first chapter. So, when you're looking at these prophets, if you look at the first chapter in the first couple of verses, it'll tell you who the king was at the time that we're talking about. And that gives you that timeline in which you begin to work. What we understand is within 22 years of Josiah's passing they'll go into captivity. So, Jerusalem will go into captivity with Babylon. So, the prophets are writing to these, giving them great warning. We come to Zephaniah and there's clearly a great concern that everything has to go and once again you would say everything, and he goes. Yes, even the hidden. And so, we see that. Books that we would parallel with this, I've already mentioned them to you, but just to reiterate would be Habakkuk and the Book of Jeremiah. They would be contemporaries of Zephaniah at this particular juncture. And the reason why that's important to know, we're going to actually go back into the Book of Jeremiah is it adds more understanding of the things that were going on and the problems that were ensuing. In fact, let me give you a passage that is a familiar passage that we oftentimes turn to in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 17 will once again give this fundamental point that we begin to deal with in the Book of Zephaniah as well as Habakkuk. Remember how the book of Habakkuk opens up. In the first chapter is Habakkuk is complaining to God of just how wicked the people are. Now once again, it's important to remember that this is during the time of Josiah's reforms. So, the point is that we're seeing a lot of well, we would call them revivals. We're seeing a lot of revivals. In fact, the Passover during the time of Josiah was so great it overshadowed the Passover celebration of Hezekiah, which at that time was one of the greatest Passover celebrations that ever happened. So, our point is that it was a tremendous celebration. I'm sure they had a lot of choir members,

huge music. It was a gala, and the sacrifice amounts were just astronomical. Nevertheless, the hidden things were still there, and we're reminded of it in Jeremiah 17.

Jeremiah 17:9. "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

"The heart" And that really is the key here.

"Who can understand it?"

And I know psychologists and psychiatrists think that they can. I think we got this guy. It just finished saying you can't, but it goes on. It says in verse 10,

Jeremiah 17:10. "I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways,
According to the results of his deeds."

The point of the matter is that God knows what you're thinking. I know man thinks he's getting away with murder or whatever, you're not. And regardless of whether or not you're actually overtly doing something wrong or covertly doing something wrong, God looks at the heart. Man looks at the outward appearance; God looks at the heart. So, all the way through the book of Jeremiah, the fundamental point is Jeremiah is going to the people of Judah because of the subterfuge of their hearts and the things that they're doing. Zephaniah will talk about visible signs that begin to show that their heart is wrong. But if you're not looking for it, you wouldn't know it.

If you look with me in Jeremiah 3. Once again, the indictment against Judah is different than the indictment against Israel. Remember Israel went into captivity, why? Well, because they rebelled against the Lord. But it was an open rebellion.

Jeremiah 3:10. "'Yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception,' declares the LORD."

God's saying, in spite of the fact that I've already taken into captivity the northern tribes. In spite of this, you continue to do wrong.

Of course, what you really see throughout the book of Jeremiah is the tribe of Judah will go, "What, what did we do?" You know, you catch people, and they go, "What? I didn't do anything overtly." Now, here again, what we're dealing with Judah is the deception, the hidden things, the things that are being done in a hidden way.

So, by the time you come to Jeremiah 4, I just want to touch upon some of these verses that set the stage, but if you look in Jeremiah 4:14,

"Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem,
That you may be saved.

How long will your wicked thoughts
Lodge within you?"

What is he calling them to do? Yeah, wash your heart. Wash your heart, your wicked thoughts. Here again the thought is that wicked thoughts don't really matter. They do matter, so that when things come in our life that we go, "That's terrible, but I'm doing everything right." And God goes, "What about your thoughts?"

What Scripture is telling us is that God will judge your thoughts just as quickly as He'll judge your actions. It's an important thing to remember. Minor detail, but an important thing to remember. And then of course, Jeremiah 5 shows the kind of people that they've become. Now once again, once you start living in deception, then you'll lie about everything. I know that we're at a time that lying just doesn't seem to matter anymore, but it's a big deal with God, and it really is that which defines Satan. If you remember in John 8, Satan was a liar. See, that was the great indictment that He has against him, and it's that deception. So, as God goes on, in Jeremiah 5:2, He looks for those that are telling the truth. But the problem is you can't find anybody that's telling the truth.

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

"Surely, they all swear falsely," right? You know how people quote God? "You know what God told me?" and I go, "Ok, what chapter, what verse? Because you get into bad territory here." But they start lying about what God says, "Well, God says it's ok." Where did you read that?

Jeremiah 5:12. They have lied about the LORD
And said, "Not He;
Misfortune will not come on us,
And we will not see sword or famine."

They have lied about the Lord. They said, "He won't do this. He and I are like this, you know?" So, all the way we see their heart and how stubborn and rebellious it is. How do we know that? Jeremiah 5:23, right?

"But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;
They have turned aside and departed."

The problem is that they don't acknowledge God in their heart.

Jeremiah 5:24. 'They do not say in their heart,
"Let us now fear the LORD our God,
Who gives rain in its season,
Both the autumn rain and the spring rain,
Who keeps for us
The appointed weeks of the harvest."

And that really is the fundamental point that you begin to see. In some way, Zephaniah makes mention of this, the domestic lies that are going on. We're going to see the influence of women, and I know the thought is, well, we're just talking about this around the table. You're actually causing things to happen from the home, and there is an influence there. So, it goes on and says in Jeremiah 5:27,

“Like a cage full of birds,
So their houses are full of deceit;
Therefore they have become great and rich.”

Their houses are full of deceit.

Jeremiah 5:30-31. “An appalling and horrible thing
Has happened in the land:

The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their own authority;
And My people love it so!
But what will you do at the end of it?”

The prophets prophesied falsely, and everybody likes that.

Then, chapter 6 goes into the sons of Benjamin, who are part of the Levitical tribe, i.e., even the family of Jeremiah, and you begin to realize that 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.”

Why? It pays!

Well, as 2 Timothy says, tickle the ears, tell people what they want to hear. It'll line your pockets. You'll be a popular guy. God goes on, He says in Jeremiah 6:20,

“For what purpose does frankincense come to Me from Sheba
And the sweet cane from a distant land?
Your burnt offerings are not acceptable
And your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me.”

He's saying, why do you bring your offerings to Me? Why would you do that?

So, Chapter 7 then goes into the fact that they go to the temple, and they say, “Well, this is a temple of the Lord. So, obviously, as long as we're in the temple, then everything's ok.” And God says, “You have to truly amend your ways. You have to stop trusting in deceptive words.

Jeremiah 7:8. "Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail."

You have to stop trusting in deceptive words. So, my point is that we're clearly dealing with deception all the way through. In some way, Jeremiah is a prophet that's sent to the deceivers, as well as Zephaniah. These prophets are being raised up at this time because, once again, I remind you that during this time is Josiah's reform, so everything externally is looking pretty good. In case you don't remember, in 2 Chronicles 34, he begins to talk about all the reforms that he begins to make. He even sends the priests and he goes, "Clean up the temple." and they go, "Hey, look what we found we found. Yeah, the commandments of God. We knew we had misplaced something." And I'm thinking, what were you a priest of? What made you think that you could be a priest without God's word?

2 Chronicles 34:14. "When they were bringing out the money which had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the LORD given by Moses."

But anyway, celebration. "We found the word of God!" and you begin to see all of the reforms that the king makes, also recorded in 2 Kings 22 and the following chapters with that, but if you look with me here in 2 chronicles 34:33.

"Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel to serve the LORD their God. Throughout his lifetime they did not turn from following the LORD God of their fathers."

We're going, "Ok, solved. Everything's fine." No, it's not. What's happening is that there is an external celebration, and the very next chapter is, well, the great Passover of Josiah, right? It's a great celebration. Everybody is in on that. The false priest, the lying priests, the lying prophets and the people. They're all celebrating. You drop on down and wow, I mean this king when he gives an offering, he gives an offering 30,000 plus 3000 bulls.

2 Chronicles 35:7-9. "Josiah contributed to the lay people, to all who were present, flocks of lambs and young goats, all for the Passover offerings, numbering 30,000 plus 3,000 bulls; these were from the king's possessions.

His officers also contributed a freewill offering to the people, the priests and the Levites. Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel, the officials of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings 2,600 from the flocks and 300 bulls.

Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethanel, his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the officers of the Levites, contributed to the Levites for the Passover offerings 5,000 from the flocks and 500 bulls."

I mean, that's a lot of bull to sacrifice. But you go on, of course, then after all these things happen, we begin to see Josiah and the arrogance of the heart, which once again parallels Hezekiah. Remember Hezekiah, he did all these reforms, then he had this great celebration, and then after the celebration, he takes a nosedive. The same thing happens with Josiah. Pride gets

the best of him. You know, "I'm doing God a favor" type thing. You know how you get close to God and then all of a sudden you think you think God needs you because of all the wonderful things that you've done? So, what we're seeing is that there are hidden things in Josiah's life, there was hidden pride. In Hezekiah's life the same thing. I mean, he comes before God, and he falls on his face because he knows he's going to die. God says, get ready. Pack your bags. You're coming home. You're going to die. He goes, I'm too young to die, in his early 40s. Which at one time I didn't think was too young to die now I do. But here he is and he's at this point where he cries to God and God goes, "Ok, I'll give you another 15 years." And gives him those 15 years. You would think that he would be grateful to God, but Scripture tells us that he didn't give God thanks for that. Instead, he starts counting his money and starts rejoicing and he gets this wonderful letter from the King of Babylon, and he goes, "I'm going to invite him to lunch." So, he invites him over to lunch. Yeah, kind of paraphrasing, but he invites him over. He invites him over and then he shows him all his treasures. What do you think the king of Babylon's thinking? "O, this is a place to raid." So, clearly, the ignorance of man, but the point is all of these things were revealing the heart. There are a lot of things that you can do that look wonderful, grandiose, and spiritual. I know some people that when they hear somebody say they're Christian, or they hear somebody that maybe have done something kind of remotely Christian, and they go, "What wonderful people." And I'm going, "You can't say that. How can you say that? You don't know them. So, there is this sense of, if you do enough good things that outweigh all the bad things you did; but God doesn't fall for that, because once again, God is looking at your heart. Did you do what you do because you love God? Or do you do what you do because you're trying to weigh out the scales? Which, by the way, you'll never do.

So, you come to Zephaniah 1:1-3, He's just fundamentally saying everything has to go. Our initial thought is that he can't be serious about that, and you begin to see as he begins to go through Zephaniah 1:4-9, that there are visible signs of the problems of the internal. From time to time, you'll get in a conversation with somebody, and the person might start talking to you about either their love for the Lord or they're wanting to do the right thing and then you'll start talking about: "Yeah, there's a problem with money." Then they'll say something like this, "Well, you know, money is not a problem with me. I have no problem with money. I don't even like money. I don't want anything to do with money." And the more they keep talking about it, the more I'm hearing "I love money". So, the nature of man is to cover up by the way that he talks; but there's a sign there. There's a sign. It's sort of like the pastor that gets on a topic, and he just doesn't leave the topic. It's one of the reasons why I preach to the Bible, and I don't get on topics. Because you get on a topic, it's showing what your problem is. See, that's something you're wrestling with. So, there are signs that are visible that began to reveal the invisible, the hidden things.

When you look at these verses (Zephaniah 1:4-9), you begin to see some of the visible problems. If I could just go down a quick list, one of the visible issues is who do you serve? Now, you might say that you love God, but the question is, who are you working for? Who are you serving? Where do you spend most of your time doing your work? Here again, a minor detail,

but who are you serving? What's conveyed within the passage is you still have a remnant of Baals. The reason why we use the word "serve" in there is because Baal is another word for master. So, who's your master? Who are you taking orders from? Who's the one calling the shots? I mean, a guy might say, "I'm following the Lord" but it may be his wife calling the shots. The question is who's calling the shots? Watch who's calling the shots and that will tell you who they really worship. So, who are you serving?

The second point that you see within the passage is that clearly there are people that you admire. It uses the phrase, there are those names that you have to get rid of. He's talking about the names of the priest, right? He's talking about those who have a name, and the question is, who do you admire? Who's your hero? Who are your heroes? You can say that you love God, but your admiration for others can be pretty well, and I would say, clearly seen and then as well, if you look in the passage,

Zephaniah 1:5. "And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven, And those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom."

You see that particular text? What is He talking about? He's talking about domestic worship. You're at your housetop, not in the temple; but the passage is making reference to you go on the roof, you look at the stars, it's talking about aspirations that you have and aspirations that you encourage at home. In other words, maybe at church you say, "Well, you should be following the Lord." You go home and everybody around the table starts talking and maybe the mother and father goes, "You need to be like this sports figure or something like..." whoever your star is that you're looking up at the sky for. But you in the home, have these aspirations and you encourage that kind of talk at the home. I mean, when's the last time you heard a conversation around the table about how wonderful it is to be humble? What a wonderful thing to be. Connie and I were rejoicing, we had heard about an individual recently that had gone through a great humbling, and we were just rejoicing over that. What a wonderful thing that has happened in that person's life. That is the point of James chapter one. You know how wonderful it is when somebody in a high position is humiliated. That's basically what James says in James 1. So, what is he talking about? Well, what we're talking about is, unless you humble yourself, you can't see the kingdom of heaven. So, it's literally keeping you out of not only God's will, but God is opposed to the proud He gives grace to the humble. What? Do you not want God's grace? You don't want the blessings of God? So clearly what we have is the influence of the aspirations at home and you don't think that has an influence, go back to Jeremiah 44. Remember when God sends Jeremiah to those that are going down to Egypt and they go, "We're going down to Egypt. But first, before we go down to Egypt, Jeremiah ask God if it's ok." So, Jeremiah goes, "Ok." So, then he comes back, and he goes, "It's not ok" and they go "Well, who are you?" Fundamentally, the point was we're going to do whatever we're going to do and it's bizarre because the text begins to show the influence of the wife in the family. It's pretty interesting. So, it goes on.

It says in Jeremiah 44:15, "Then all the men who were aware that their wives were burning sacrifices to other gods, along with all the women who were standing by, as a large assembly, including all the people who were living in Pathros"

So, the point is that they were aware that their wives were doing this. I can see the women, "We're just following our husband." Yeah, we know what happened. You already talked him into it, and now the husbands are out there in front. They're going to get their heads cut off and you're going to feel like you're going to make it by ok.

So, they not only got the whole group together, you know that democracy thing? If you get the majority to agree, it must be right because the majority couldn't be stupid. So, you get a large assembly, you get everybody agreeing, and if you can get everybody agreeing, then you even might be able to thwart God. I could just see the picture and someone saying, "God, do you see all people?" And once again, you go back to Noah and God goes, no, it just really doesn't seem to make a difference to me.

The passage goes on and they respond to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 44:16. "As for the message that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not going to listen to you!"

What gave these men such courage? Their wives. Now let me just say this, facts are rarely the argument that people use when they're sinning. Now they'll say what they say and spout them off as facts, but they're not, and I'm going to show you an interesting point here. The argument is, and this is a pretty interesting argument, but they gather together, and they say to Jeremiah, "Look, everything was going ok when we were sacrificing to the queen of heaven." This is the argument in verse 18.

Jeremiah 44:18. "But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine."

Everything is gone, it's terrible. Now Jeremiah goes, "Wait, the reason Babylon came is because you were sacrificing to the queen of heaven." See, but once again, don't confuse me with the facts my mind is made-up. So, it goes on and if you look in Jeremiah 44:19, who's doing the talking? The women.

Jeremiah 44:19. "And," said the women, "when we were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and were pouring out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands that we made for her sacrificial cakes in her image and poured out drink offerings to her?"

The women go, "Look, you can't blame us. Our husbands came along with us." So, they threw their husbands under the bus too. "What are you getting mad at us for? I mean, George did it right, George?", "Right." So, it goes on of course, as Jeremiah begins to convey to them, "well sorry ladies everybody's going to get it then."

Jeremiah 44:20. "Then Jeremiah said to all the people, to the men and women—even to all the people who were giving him such an answer—saying...“then Jeremiah said to all the people, including the women, hear the word of the Lord. It's not going to go well for you.”

The thought is that we can outnumber God, or we can out-argue God and it doesn't matter. So, an interesting point is that the aspirations at home and the encouragement at home actually does influence not only the children, but in many cases, weak husbands. Right? So, you have an interesting sign there in Zephaniah 1 with those who bow down to the stars on their rooftops, which is showing domestic influence, kind of a conversation among “friends and family” and I put that in quotes by the way.

While we're in Jeremiah, I just want to show you another passage. Jeremiah 38, and just want to show you that Jeremiah had even gone to the king at this juncture. Now Zedekiah is the king a little bit later, past actually one of Josiah's sons. So, Zedekiah now is king. Jeremiah is now prophesying to him, and of course he's telling him, “You need to change. I mean, you're the leader. You're the king. You can do what you want to.” And the king says, “I'm worried about what everybody's going to think.” So, politics was actually alive and well back then.

Jeremiah 38:19. “Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, ‘I dread the Jews who have gone over to the Chaldeans, for they may give me over into their hand and they will abuse me.’”

In other words, he's worried about what other people are going to think.

Jeremiah 38:20. But Jeremiah said, “They will not give you over. Please obey the LORD in what I am saying to you, that it may go well with you and you may live.”

But here again, man is more concerned about what other people think.

Jeremiah 38:21-22. “But if you keep refusing to go out, this is the word which the LORD has shown me: ‘Then behold, all of the women who have been left in the palace of the king of Judah are going to be brought out to the officers of the king of Babylon; and those women will say...”

You know, they're afraid of what women are going to say. He's saying the day's going to come when those women that you're afraid of, what they're going to say, are going to say something that you're afraid they're going to say. What are they going to say? Well, here's what they're going to say.

“Your close friends
Have misled and overpowered you;
While your feet were sunk in the mire,
They turned back.”

“Close friends”, right? Obviously, not friends. Friends aren't going to tell you to do the wrong thing. Now granted, there are days when you tell somebody to do the wrong thing and it feels good. Because they're happy with you because you've told them exactly what they want to

hear, but it's not the truth. And what friend tells another friend a lie to make them feel better? What person wouldn't stand up to somebody doing wrong even if it was their own family member, if it was wrong? See one of the interesting points of 1 Corinthians 13 is that "love rejoices in righteousness (1 Corinthians 13:6)". You can't say you love somebody and then do the wrong thing. Even if it's perceived to be something that's beneficial to them at a given moment, you can't do that. So, within the passage, what you clearly see is the conversation among friends and comrades, and obviously the aspirations in the family, and there's their influences around us, whether it's family and friends, they can influence us. What it's saying is that those influences have to go.

Also, in Zephaniah, if you drop on down, it begins to talk about the fact that they are wearing certain clothes, it talks about the kings that are trying to match the kind of clothes that they wear in the world. So once again, the clothes that you wear are going to be an outward sign of an inward problem. The customs and traditions that you practice. Are you aligning with the same customs and traditions that the world does? If in fact that's true, then that's going to be a problem.

This is basically listed as you're going through Zephaniah 1:7-9, and then if you're disregarding authority. God's authority, the authority of God as well as godly authority that God has ordained. I do think it's interesting in the setting that you have Zephaniah, who was in the lineage of kings, and yet he was basically a nobody. I'm sure that his influence wasn't that powerful in that particular realm, as was true with Jeremiah, we know that he comes from the lineage of the priest. We also know that he was pretty young and other people sometimes have a difficult time seeing younger men in positions of authority. But you have to remember Jesus when He started his ministry, He was 30 years old. I can imagine some people would go, "I'm not going to take my orders from somebody that's 30 years old." That's God. Jeremiah was a young man when he was called. That was his whole argument, "You picked the wrong guy. I'm too young." But he's basically about the same age as Josiah at the time and you understand that he doesn't have a lot of clout and we're going to see that in the passage we're going to be looking at tonight, but we pick and choose the people that we want to listen to because of the things that they say because of the things that we want. Instead of just simply asking ourselves, "What's the right thing to do?", "What is it God says about this?", and I know that people twist and distort Scripture. But anyway, there's clearly a disregard. We talked about this last week, so, I won't go into great detail, but when they talk about,

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."

It is a sign of rebellion as well, that they're leaping over the threshold. That is to say that they're dodging the judgment of God, which is an interesting picture, as we were talking about where that particular tradition came from. But it really is defiance if I could just put it in without re-explaining everything. It's an act of defiance, "we're going to do we we're going to do whatever we want to do it." So, it's an interesting picture of that.

We're now going to see in Zephaniah 1:10-13 how we tend to go to the wrong sources for our comfort, for our direction because once again, externally they look like maybe they're experts. I mean, for instance, if they have a degree or if they have a lot of money, they're successful in business. You go down the list and there are certain things that we look for that cause us to think, "Now that's an expert. That's an expert." And I think today it's like huge buildings. You get a mega building, you build it real high, and you call it expert headquarters and people flock to the expert headquarters and once again, it comes to the end of their life and they go, "We don't know we're doing." It's a little late, but anyway, what we see is that we have a tendency to go to the wrong places. This is what we're going to see in Zephaniah 1:10 to start off and God is going to say basically you're going to unreliable people, you're going to unreliable things, and this has to go.

Zephaniah 1:10. "On that day," declares the LORD,
"There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate,
A wail from the Second Quarter,
And a loud crash from the hills.

The Fish Gate was to the north, kind of to the West. That is, say to the sea, the Mediterranean Sea, kind of heading towards that way, and from the coastal towns they would bring in all of the catch and all of the wonderful things and a lot of the trade came into that major gate, the Fish Gate, that was basically the gate of trade. So, what is the text telling us? Well, fundamentally, what he's telling you in verse 18. You know the place of money is not going to be able to save you. Once again, without us going back to Jeremiah, the fundamental argument was that you're opening these gates on a day they should be closed, on the Sabbath. You should be honoring Me on this day, but you're still doing business. Once again, you watch what people put first, who people put first, and you begin to see that it doesn't matter what they say. It doesn't matter what people say. I mean, whatever you're saying, your actions are speaking so loudly that it just nullifies anything that you say. Who's first in your life and what are you doing with your life?

If you're opening that "Fish Gate" at a time that you should be putting the Lord first, there's a big problem. So, he starts off by saying that the place where there normally is this great activity of business is going to have great sorrow and as the verse continues, "A wail from the Second Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills." Now once again, Babylon will come from the north and the Second Quarter is the second gate that was there and was built in some ways, just in case. You know, you hear that maybe somebody's wanting to attack you, so you just build another wall a little bit further out and you go, "Ok, now I think we're pretty safe".

If you go back to 2 Chronicles 33 you begin to see Manasseh, who finally surrendered to the Lord, but yet even in that surrender to the Lord, he's still trying to make sure that everything's taken care of, extra insurance. So, he builds this second wall, and if you look with me in 2 Chronicles 33:14,

“Now after this he built the outer wall”

That's what we're talking about, the Second Quarter.

“... of the city of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entrance of the Fish Gate; and he encircled the Ophel with it and made it very high. Then he put army commanders in all the fortified cities of Judah.”

He begins to talk about how he fortified other cities in Judah. Once again, it's kind of insurance just to make sure everything was ok now we know that there was a confession that was going on here. Then once again, as the son takes office, Josiah, he begins to do the reforms.

2 Chronicles 33:17. “Nevertheless the people still sacrificed in the high places, although only to the LORD their God.”

In other words, there were still hidden things going on. So, what happens in 2 Chronicles 34 as Josiah begins to make all of these reforms, and we talked about this last week, so I'm not going to take too much time, but what's interesting to me is that he begins talking to his priest, who found the Torah and he goes, “Look, I found it.” So, he begins talking to him and he goes, “Well, we need to hear from God what God wants us to do.” So, what do you do? You find a prophet. Now once again, I want to remind you that at this juncture, Jeremiah has been a prophet for five years. It's been five years since his calling. So, Jeremiah's readily available. They won't go to Jeremiah.

If you drop on down and you remember this, but it says that the orders are given in 2 Chronicles 34:21.

“Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book which has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD which is poured out on us because our fathers have not observed the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book.’ So Hilkiah and those whom the king had told went to...”

Not Jeremiah, but who?

“Huldah the prophetess”

Where is she living? Well, let's keep reading.

“...the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, the keeper of the wardrobe”

That's basically saying that's what the family did.

“(now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter)”

You do know what this is talking about, don't you? She lived where everybody did business.

Now, if you were a money hungry, greedy priest, you wouldn't go to Jeremiah? Right. It's sort of like Ahab. Remember Ahab? His son-in-law goes to Jehoshaphat and says, “Let's seek the Lord.

What does He want us to do? Should we go into battle or not?" And Ahab goes, "Well, ok." So, he has his own prophets and he hired them. So, he says, "So, what are we going to do?" And they said, Go! Everything's a go. God is with you." And you know, nobody likes naysayers. He goes back to Jehoshaphat, and he goes, "Everything's good, we're a go." And Jehoshaphat goes, "Could we ask a godly prophet?" Micaiah was the godly prophet at that particular point in time and he tells Ahab, "Ok, there's Micaiah." Then he goes, "I don't like that guy. Every time I ask that guy something, he says the opposite of what I want to hear." And Jehoshaphat goes, "Yeah, but I think we ought to ask him." So, he brings in Micaiah and he goes, "So, Micaiah tell us what's going to happen. Go ahead." And Micaiah goes, "Everything's going to be ok." And the sarcasm must have been so evident, that he goes, "I adjure you tell me the truth." and Micaiah goes, "You're all going to die. You're all going to die." So, he finally comes clean, but the point is that we all seek who we want to hear from. I mean, you think of Saul. He wanted to hear from God. Align with me and the reasoning here, you want to hear from God. So, who are you going to talk to? A Necromancer, a spiritist. I'll talk to a woman who conjures up and talks to the dead. Now think about that. If you really want to talk to God, is that who you would hire? The wonderful thing about this is it doesn't matter who you hire, God is still sovereign, and He'll speak through them. If you remember that particular incident, God literally calls Samuel up from the dead. He goes, "You want to hear from the dead? I'll let you hear from the dead." Samuel comes up out of the grave and he's a little ticked off because he was bothered. What are you bothering me for? Here again, I'm paraphrasing, but the point is that God was going to speak through him in spite of who Saul was looking for. See, Saul had an idea, well, I'll stack the odds in my favor by choosing the messenger that I want, and the same thing is happening here in the text.

If you're money hungry, greedy priests, who are you going to talk to? Well, somebody that lives in the Second Quarter. That's where all the money is flowing. Somebody that's in the business, wardrobes, and once again, I'm not real sure, but it seems like the translation of "Huldah" is weasel. Literal translation. So, you go to the weasel. Not trying to disrespect her, but you go to the weasel, and you say, "What's going on?" God says, "Ok, I'll speak through her." So, He does and as she comes with the message, basically fundamentally, she says, "Let me tell you what's going to happen. God's going to punish the nation; but Josiah, because you've humbled yourself and have the right heart, it won't be in your lifetime. But He's still going to do it. Now at that juncture, you would say, well, why would God still do it? And the point is because there's still sin hidden. Remember, Scripture says, if "My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray" but you have to humble yourself and pray. They're not doing that. The people aren't humbling themselves and praying. The thought is, well, externally, we're bringing the sacrifices. In Isaiah 1, Isaiah goes, "Why are you doing this?" Jeremiah says the same thing, "Why are you doing this?"

I like the phrase that is used in Isaiah 1, quit trampling my courts.

Isaiah 1:12 "When you come to appear before Me,
Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?"

Quit bringing that garbage in. I don't want it. It's bizarre to me how people can think that by virtue of bringing some sort of gift to God that they can continue to do the wrong thing. You know, and that God would be appeased by this. Can you fathom that kind of reasoning? What is it, God needs something? You actually made something that God needs? I don't even know how that thought came into somebody's head. As Zephaniah goes, it's actually telling us we're going to the wrong people. We're going to the wrong places. Hear people that you go to that you think will think like you, and that's why you go there for the council. But if you look in the passage in Zephaniah 1:10,

"On that day,' declares the LORD,
'There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate..."

You've been trusting in your commerce and the money, in all these things as well as hoping that in the Second Quarter, you're going to get a prophecy that will agree with you because, hey, their livelihoods at stake too. Of course, obviously, that didn't happen.

Zephaniah 1:11. "Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar"

Actually, Proverbs 27:22 talks about this. It's a picture of commerce. It's like the grinding mill, mortar is like this valley thing when you crush things in. So, there was valley named after that, but it was also a place where they would do that. It's a picture of making things. You have not only commerce of trade, but you have production that is going on in this and man trusts in both production and in his trade and God says, you ought to stop doing that.

I oftentimes think of that passage in Matthew 18, where it says, "but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Now why is He using "millstone"? I'm going to tell you why. Because the reason why you cause people to stumble is because you're trying to gain advantage in some way. Business is the way that most people do it. A millstone is actually a picture of business. You'll see that in Ecclesiastes 12, as it talks about getting old, and it says you can't hear the millstone grinding anymore. He's basically saying that you're not involved in business anymore. Then Revelation 18 talks about Babylon and it goes, the millstone is going to be thrown into the sea. Well, what is he talking about? No more business, it's all going to stop. So, the same thing is true with the "mortar" here. What you're seeing is production stopping from the loud crash and the wheel.

Zephaniah 1:11. "Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar,
For all the people of Canaan will be silenced;
All who weigh out silver will be cut off."

“Canaan” is always going to be fundamentally a synonym for merchant. All the merchants, you could put in there the word merchants.

The text is talking about the merchants that are involved in those kinds of things.

Zephaniah 1:12. “It will come about at that time
That I will search Jerusalem with lamps...”

That’s an interesting picture of Jeremiah 5 where it goes, go out into the streets to see if you can find somebody that’s truthful.

Jeremiah 5:1 “Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,
And look now and take note.
And seek in her open squares,
If you can find a man,
If there is one who does justice, who seeks truth,
Then I will pardon her.”

(Zephaniah 1:12b) “...And I will punish the men
Who are stagnant in spirit,
Who say in their hearts,
‘The LORD will not do good or evil!’?”

“Stagnant in spirit”. We saw that same wording being used in Jeremiah 48:11 and it will also be used in Amos Chapter 6. What it's talking about is, probably direct translation is stagnant at the lees. Here again, I won't go into too much detail, but wine as it's aging has certain things in it from the vines that they allow to exist. It actually helps the aging process, and it makes the wine taste better but every so often you have to stir the lees. Stir things up, because if you don't, then it could actually reverse the process and make things worse with the wine. So, when it's talking about stagnant lees, what it's basically talking about is you've grown so complacent and so used to ease and comfort, that you now are souring, everything is souring. In our life, we have to have things that stir up our life. Otherwise, we get so complacent with where we are that we just think that what we're doing is ok because it's what we've always done. I mean, we've always done this, that's why our life is going so well. Ok, wait a minute. That's why things are happening. You see, everything's turning sour, and we don't know why it's turning sour, and it's because you've grown comfortable where you are. So, the way that it puts it is if you look at the passage “who are stagnant in spirit”. That's an interesting way of putting it. Basically, saying you've grown sour because you've allowed certain things to exist. You've lived a life of luxury. Nothing's ever bothered you. Everything's gone. That's our idea and that's our thought of a perfect life, nothing goes wrong, everything's good all the time. That's the idea of a perfect life. That's God's idea of a sour life and it will only ultimately create bitterness in your life. You'd be hard pressed to find me somebody that's had everything go their way that's a nice person or thoughtful or compassionate or merciful.

“Who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good or evil!’” Why are they saying that? Because their perception is everything remains the same and so, I guess it will still remain the same. God's not going to do anything. It doesn't matter who I hurt. Doesn't matter what I say. It doesn't matter what I pursue. Everything's going to be ok.

Zephaniah 1:13, “Moreover, their wealth will become plunder
And their houses desolate;
Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit them,
And plant vineyards but not drink their wine.”

There are things that happen in our life, and once again we don't know why things are going south, why things are going sour and what Zephaniah is addressing is the point of we're going to the wrong sources. We're going to the wrong things. We're trusting in the wrong things. Our life has become stagnant, our spirit has become stagnant. We've literally become hard in our thoughts towards God and our perception is that God doesn't really even care about what's right or wrong. Fundamentally, neither your choice in your counsel nor your pursuit of money is going to be able to save you, and that's one of the main emphases of this particular passage.

It's interesting that during this time in which they, the priests, go to Huldah. It is the same time, if you look with me and Jeremiah 20, remember, that the priests go to get some information. It's basically around this time that the high priests are beating Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 20:2. “Pashhur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put him in the stocks that were at the upper Benjamin Gate, which was by the house of the LORD.”

Jeremiah 20:6. ‘And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into captivity; and you will enter Babylon, and there you will die and there you will be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have falsely prophesied.’”

The point of Jeremiah 20:6 is that you and all your friends have prophesied falsely, and the Lord's going to deal with you. Why is that true?

Jeremiah 20:10. “For I have heard the whispering of many,
‘Terror on every side!
Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!’
All my trusted friends,
Watching for my fall, say:
‘Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him
And take our revenge on him.’”

That's Jeremiah talking, by the way. What is the passage saying? Well, the passage is saying that those who said they were friends of Jeremiah now hate him because he's telling them things that they don't want to hear. It's a bizarre phenomenon. I mean, I've known some people for years, and I thought, “They love God.” Then, one time I say something they don't like and I'm out of their lives. Now that's bizarre to me, but what it's doing is revealing the hidden things.

It's just like Jesus when He has His disciples with Him, you know? Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you can't come into the kingdom. Well, we know as the text goes on to say He was talking to spiritual things, but He said it that way to offend them and it says in John 6 that many because of this left them and said we're out of here and then He turns to the rest and He goes, "Do you want to leave too?"

I tell you fundamentally, there's always going to be something that if we go in the Word that's going to offend me. It's going to offend you; but you and I have to make a decision. Do we want to serve God or are we more interested in making friends? And I hate to put it that way because I want you to be friendly people, but if you're more interested in making friends, you're going to have some problems. You're going to find yourself compromising in your life and you're going to find yourself turning away from God and you're going to find yourself hating the messenger that God sends. On a number of occasions, I sat down with people, and I said, "When have I ever told you to do something that was good for me, that was just for me? When have I ever steered you away from what Scripture said?" And they really can't give me an answer to that. But still, they dislike the messenger. Why? Well, even in this passage, they're literally waiting and wanting Jeremiah to fall. Isn't that the way it reads? And this is his family, by the way, he's from the tribe of Benjamin. He's from the tribe of Benjamin, and these are his family and friends. So, he says in verse 10, "I have heard the whispering". I've heard what you're saying. And all my trusted friends "watching for my fall", "Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him and take our revenge on him."

I like what it says in Jeremiah 20:12. "Yet, O LORD of hosts, You who test the righteous, Who see the mind and the heart; Let me see Your vengeance on them; For to You I have set forth my cause."

There have been many times I've come to the Lord, and I go, "Lord, You know my heart. You know I'm not trying to do anything vindictively. You know I'm not trying to do anything to hurt somebody. I'm just trying to do what You tell me to do." There's going to be times that you're going to have to walk that way in your life. You should be walking that way all the time in your life, but there's going to be times that you're going to see that pressure to yield. You'll have to decide, do I want friends, or do I want to please God? Once again, it goes back to that wonderful passage in Galatians 1:10.

"For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ."

We come to Zephaniah and Zephaniah is revealing in these verses 10 through 13, those sources that we go to because we feel like that's the answer we want, but that's a warning sign too. And that's why everything has to go. That's why Zephaniah is going to keep pounding at this. Everything's got to go. What about the people I trust? What about the people that I go to? What about the friends that I have? They got to go.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your Word and we give You thanks for the encouragement of it. I give You thanks for the strength of truth and we realize that if God is for us, who can be against us? And You're the one that tests the minds and the hearts and the one thing we really have to do is just be right with You and we see the signs, the external signs of those that aren't. Lord, You certainly see the heart beyond that. Our confidence is in You. We're going to continue to do the right thing. As Jeremiah would say, I never sat around the table of merrymakers. I stayed clear from association with those people because I knew that they weren't really desirous of doing what You wanted to do and they're going to be times that it's going to look like we're just bad guys; but Lord, You know our hearts. Our desire is to do the right thing and Lord may that be true of everyone in this building tonight. That they just make a resolve to do what You tell them to do. There are going to be times that they're loved for it and there are going to be times that they're clearly hated for it. Lord, You see the heart. We give You thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.