

**Wenstrom Bible Ministries**  
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**Zephaniah: Zephaniah 1:9a-The Lord Asserts He Will Punish Those Who Leap Over the Threshold**

**Lesson # 22**

**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.” (NASB95)

“And I will punish on that day all who leap on the *temple* threshold” is a prophetic statement which is an addition to the ones recorded in Zephaniah 1:8.

Specifically, it is introducing a prophetic statement which presents a group of people who will be punished by the Lord for their unrepentant sinful lives who are in addition to the one’s mentioned in Zephaniah 1:8.

“**I will punish**” is the first person singular qal perfect form of the verb *pāqad* (פָּקַד), which pertains to acting in a manner that inflicts hardship, pain or even physical death to someone implying guilt on the part of this individual.

This word speaks of the Lord expressing His wrath or righteous indignation toward sin and unrepentant sinners.

It is used in relation to those citizens in the kingdom of Judah and lived in the city of Jerusalem in Zephaniah’s day who leaped over the threshold of their homes which was practiced by the Philistines (cf. 1 Sam. 5:5).

This practice was related to the Philistine god Dagon.

Therefore, this verb *pāqad* asserts that the Lord will punish these Jews for adhering to this pagan practice.

The perfect tense of this verb is a perfect of certitude or prophetic perfect which describes a future event as if it had already taken place.

It expresses the certainty that the Lord will punish those Jews who stepped over or leaped over the threshold of their homes.

**“All who leap on the *temple* threshold”** is composed of the following: (1) collective singular construct form of the noun *kōl* (כֹּל), **“all”** (2) articular masculine singular qal active participle form of the verb *dālag* (דָּלַג), **“who leap”** (3) preposition *‘al* (עַל), **“on”** (4) articular masculine singular noun *miptān* (מִפְתָּן), **“the threshold.”**

The verb *dālag* means “to jump or hop over” an object which in our context is the threshold of a home.

This word refers to a practice of the Philistines in relation to their worship of their god Dagon in which they hopped over the threshold of a home in order to avoid danger from a spell or a hex hidden under the threshold to inflict harm on anyone who steps on it.

So this word is a ritual or superstition associated with the Philistine god Dagon.

The collective singular construct form of the noun *kōl* pertains to the totality of individuals in the kingdom of Judah who hopped or leaped over a threshold of a home.

It is also used in a distributive sense meaning “each and every one of” emphasizing there are no exceptions.

The Lord will judge each and every one of those individuals in the kingdom of Judah who practiced this Philistine superstition related to their worship of their god Dagon.

The substantive participle *dālag* is also the object of the preposition *‘al* which means “against” since it functions as a marker of opposition.

This would indicate that this punishment inflicted by the Lord will be against each and every one of the citizens of the kingdom of Judah who practiced the Philistine superstition related to their worship of their god Dagon of leaping over a threshold of a home.

The noun *mīptān* means “threshold” since it pertains to an area of a building that is immediately in front of another specific area, often having a plank or molding on the floor as merely a marker or having a function in the construction.

Interestingly, 1 Samuel 5:5 records that the head and hands of Dagan are found on the threshold after it had been broken by its fall.

“**On that day**” is composed of the following: (1) preposition *b* (בְּ), “**on**” (9) articular masculine singular form of the noun *yôm* (יּוֹם), “**day**” (10) definite article *ha-* which is not translated (11) third person masculine singular pronominal suffix *hû’* (הוּ), “**that.**”

The noun *yôm* means “time period” since it does not pertain to a twenty-four period but rather an indefinite period of time which could range from a relatively short to very long period of time.

Here it refers to the period of time in which the God of Israel judged the citizens of the kingdom of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem between 605-587 B.C. through the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar’s attack of Jerusalem in 605 B.C. during the third year of Jehoiakim, Judah’s king resulted in the first of three deportations of the Jewish people (Daniel 1:1; 2 Kings 24:1-2, 13; 2 Chronicles 36:5, 6, 7).

Nebuchadnezzar captured the city of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. and in 587 B.C. destroyed the city and the temple.

The noun *yôm* is the object of the preposition *b* which means “during” since it is functioning as a marker of an extent of time within a larger unit.

Therefore, it denotes that “during” this indefinite period of time the Lord’s sacrifice, He will inflict punishment against those who leap over the threshold of a home.

The third person masculine singular pronominal suffix *hû’* means “that” since it is functioning as a demonstrative pronoun pointing out the noun *yôm* for emphasis.

The articular construction of this pronominal suffix is also for emphasis.

**Zephaniah 1:9 “During this particular period, I will also certainly inflict punishment against each and every one of those who leap over the threshold who are characterized as causing the temple of their Sovereign to be filled with violence as well as deceit.” (Author’s translation)**

Zephaniah 1:9 presents another group of individuals who were citizens of the kingdom of Judah who will be severely disciplined by the Lord for their unrepentant sinful lives.

This verse is another prophetic statement which present a group of people who will be punished by the Lord for their unrepentant sinful lives who are in addition to the one’s mentioned in Zephaniah 1:8.

So Zephaniah 1:9 asserts that during the same period of time in which the Lord’s sacrificial meal will take place, the God of Israel will also as a certainty inflict punishment against each and every one of those of His people who leap over the threshold.

This prophetic statement speaks of the Lord expressing His wrath or righteous indignation toward those citizens in the kingdom of Judah who lived in the city of Jerusalem in Zephaniah’s day who leaped over the threshold of their homes.

There are a several interpretations in relation to the leaping over the threshold.

First, it may be a reference to unscrupulous individuals among the Jews who broke into homes and stole for the benefit of their overlord.

Another interpretation is it is a reference to corrupt palace officials practicing evil.

It can be interpreted as a reference to superstitious priests who adhered to a Philistine superstition related to the worship of their god, Dagon and who practiced violence and deceit in the temple of Solomon.

This is the best interpretation since the verb *dālag* in Zephaniah 1:9 can be connected to this Philistine practice.

It is not out of the realm of possibility that this superstition was practiced by apostate Jews in Zephaniah’s day since the Old Testament Scriptures teach that Philistine pagan practices influenced both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Leaping over the threshold was practiced by the Philistines in relation to their god, Dagon (cf. 1 Sam. 5:5).

1 Samuel 5:5 records that the head and hands of Dagon are found on the threshold after it had been broken by its fall.

The Philistines hopped over the threshold of a home in order to avoid danger from a spell or a hex hidden under the threshold to inflict harm on anyone who steps on it.

K.L. Barker writes “What exactly does it mean to ‘avoid stepping on the threshold’?”<sup>1</sup> The NIV footnote equates this practice with the worship of Dagon among the Philistines as found in 1 Sam 5:4–5.<sup>2</sup> Many pagans believed that evil spirits resided at the threshold, waiting for someone to step on it and let them slip in.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation relates the practice in Judah with pagan worship,<sup>4</sup> perhaps for the same reasons as wearing foreign clothes in the preceding verse.<sup>5</sup> “They observe the minutia of a senseless pagan law, but then run rampant over the basic ordinances of God in his own house.”<sup>6,7</sup>

So the Lord was angered by His people practicing this ritual or superstition which was associated with the worship of the Philistine god Dagon.

Therefore, the prophet Zephaniah is asserting that the Lord will certainly punish these Jews for adhering to this pagan practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Motyer determines that “הַמִּשְׁתָּרֵן (the threshold) “remains imperfectly understood” (ibid.)

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<sup>2</sup> Motyer says, “Zephaniah replaces the sober ‘do not step on the threshold’ (1 Sam 5:5) with a deliberately trivializing word in order to caricature the antics introduced into the Lord’s worship” (ibid.). Roberts summarizes textual and exegetical attempts to define the term לֵלֵךְ, “the one who leaps” (*Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 174–75). J. N. B. Heflin interprets the phrase in terms of the last half of the verse as referring to a call for social justice. “Henchmen” or associates of the political leaders are eager to carry out violence and deceit so they hurry over the thresholds of victims’ houses in their hurry to plunder and rob and cheat (*Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai*, BSC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 134). Similarly L. Walker, “Zephaniah,” EBC 7:547.

<sup>3</sup> See Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 179; Rudolph, *Micha, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 268.

<sup>4</sup> Patterson also adopts this view with some hesitation (*Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 312–13).

<sup>5</sup> Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 179; Motyer, “Zephaniah,” 3:919: Just as the princes affected foreign dress, so the priests imported alien religious fetishes.

<sup>6</sup> Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 278.

<sup>7</sup> Barker, K. L. (1999). *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Vol. 20, pp. 430–431). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.