

Wenstrom Bible Ministries
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Zephaniah: Zephaniah 1:12-The Lord Will Discipline His People Living in Jerusalem Who Were Living Unrepentant Sinful Lives and for Their Apathy

Lesson # 26

Zephaniah 1:12 “It will come about at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are stagnant in spirit, who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good or evil!’” (NASB95)

“**It will come**” is the third person masculine singular qal active perfect form of the verb *hāyâ* (הָיָא), which means “to take place, to occur” and is used of the punishment of the idolatrous and unfaithful citizens of Jerusalem.

The perfect tense of this verb is a perfect of certitude or prophetic perfect which expresses the certainty that the Lord will inflict punishment upon the unfaithful and idolatrous citizens of Jerusalem during the period of His sacrificial meal.

“**At that time**” refers to the period of time in which the Lord’s sacrificial meal will take place, the Lord will search Jerusalem with lamps in order to inflict punishment against the people who live sinful lives and who think that the Lord will not call them to account for their sinful lives.

“**I will search**” is the first person singular piel active imperfect form of the verb *hāpās* (חָפַס), which means “to search, to look around, track down, hunt down.”

The piel stem of this verb *hāpās* is factitive which indicates that the Lord as the subject will cause the city of Jerusalem to enter the state of being searched with lamps in order to inflict punishment against those who live unrepentant sinful lives.

“**And I will punish the men who are stagnant in spirit**” presents the purpose for which the Lord will cause the city of Jerusalem to be searched with lamps.

“**The men who are stagnant in spirit**” is composed of the following: (1) articular masculine plural form of the collective noun *’iš* (אִישׁ), “**the men**” (2) articular masculine plural qal active participle form of the verb *qāpā* (קָפַא), “**who are**

stagnant in spirit” (3) preposition *‘al* (עַל), **“who are stagnant in spirit”** (4) masculine plural noun *šemer* (שֶׁמֶר), **“who are stagnant in spirit”** (5) third person masculine plural form of the pronominal suffix *hēmâ* (הֵמָּה), **“who are stagnant in spirit.”**

The collective noun *’iš* means “people” referring to both the male and female citizens of Jerusalem.

The articular construction of this word is anaphoric meaning that it indicates that this word is referring to the people described in Zephaniah 1:8-11 whom the Lord will punish during the period of time in which His sacrificial meal will take place.

Furthermore, the article indicates this noun is referring to those in Jerusalem who had a covenant relationship with the God of Israel through faith Him.

Thus, the article means that this noun is referring to a group of people who are distinguished from the heathen and this interpretation is quite clearly indicated by the fact that the people who assert that the God of Israel will do neither good or evil are employing His covenant name, *yhwh*, **“the Lord.”**

This name indicates that these people have a covenant relationship with Him and are not unregenerate and thus, the article should be translated as a possessive pronoun meaning “my.”

Also, the article is kataphoric since it is pointing ahead to the people who the Lord asserts declared that He will do neither evil or good.

The collective noun *’iš* is the object of the preposition *‘al* which means “against” since it functions as a marker of opposition indicating that the Lord is opposed to those of His people who assert in their hearts that He will do neither good or evil.

The verb *qāpā’* is in the qal stem and literally means “thickening one” but figuratively the word means “to be complacent” since it pertains to a person who has a fulfilled and satisfying existence as a figurative extension of a thickened substance that does not easily move.

This verb describes wine that has been allowed to remain in the bottle after the first stage of fermentation, along with the solid residue or lees, on the bottom.

Such wine was normally filtered before drinking and was exceptionally strong and clear.

If wine were simply left on the lees unfiltered, it would become thick and syrupy.

Here it is used with reference to a member of the covenant people of God in the Old Testament who lived in Jerusalem in the kingdom of Judah during the reign of Josiah and speaks of these believers being complacent in a negative sense of being in apostasy and are unrepentant about it.

The noun *šemer* means “sediment” since it pertains to particles which settle at the bottom usually in an undisturbed, unmoved container and describes wine that has been allowed to remain in the bottle after the first stage of fermentation, along with the solid residue or lees, on the bottom.

“**The LORD**” is the masculine singular proper noun *yhwh* (יהוה), which is the covenant-keeping personal name of God used in connection with God’s covenant relationship with the Jewish people.

This word emphasizes that God has a covenant relationship with these individuals living in the city of Jerusalem who saying in their hearts that God was indifferent to their unrepentant sinful lives.

Zephaniah 1:12 “In fact, during this particular period of time, I will cause Jerusalem to be searched with lamps in order to inflict punishment against my people who are living unrepentant sinful lives who say within their hearts, ‘The Lord will never reward and He will never discipline.’” (My translation)

The prophetic statement in this verse advances upon and intensifies upon the previous prophetic statements recorded in Zephaniah 1:8-11.

The Lord through the prophet Zephaniah asserts that during the period of the Lord’s sacrificial meal, He will search Jerusalem with lamps in order to inflict punishment against His people who were living unrepentant sinful lives.

These people the Lord asserts erroneously and arrogantly thought within their hearts that He would never reward them for faithful godly behavior and that He would never discipline them for unrepentant ungodly behavior.

In other words, they were of the conviction that the Lord would never call them into account for their unrepentant sinful lives.

Therefore, the advancement and intensification is that not only would the Lord discipline them but that He would be thorough in doing so.

“During this particular period” refers to the period of time in which the Lord’s sacrificial meal would take place.

History records that this period of time took place when 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.

When the Lord says that He will cause Jerusalem to be searched with lamps, He is speaking of making a thorough search of the city in order to discipline His people who were living unrepentant ungodly lives and this action was performed by the Babylonians on His behalf as His instrument of judgment.

This statement that the Lord would thoroughly search Jerusalem with lamps in order to discipline those among His people who were living unrepentant ungodly lives expresses the fact that God is omniscient.

It also expresses the fact that no one can escape discipline among God’s people when they live unrepentant ungodly lives.

“My people” is referring to the people described in Zephaniah 1:8-11 whom the Lord will punish during the period of time in which His sacrificial meal will take place and is referring to those in Jerusalem who had a covenant relationship with the God of Israel through faith Him.

This interpretation is quite clearly indicated by the fact that the people who assert that the God of Israel will do neither good or evil are employing His covenant name, *yhwh*, **“the Lord.”**

“Who are living unrepentant sinful lives” speaks of these believers being complacent in a negative sense of being in apostasy and are unrepentant about it.

Thus, this phrase speaks of the complacency of God’s people living in the city of Jerusalem in the days of Zephaniah who were never disturbed or bothered in their conscience by their unrepentant sinful lives.

So this phrase **“who are living unrepentant sinful lives”** speaks of the apostasy among God’s people in Zephaniah’s day who lived in Jerusalem.

“The Lord will never reward and the Lord will never discipline” expresses the erroneous and arrogant conviction of many of God’s people in Jerusalem in Zephaniah’s day that the Lord would never call them into account for their unrepentant sinful behavior or reward them for faithful godly behavior.

Zephaniah 1:13 gives the reason why God’s people were so arrogant, namely it was because of their great wealth which caused them to find their security in their possessions and money rather than finding it in their relationship with God.

This prophetic statement in Zephaniah 1:12 contains the central indictment of the book and promises or guarantees that God does in fact hold His people to account.

He will certainly reward them for faithful godly behavior and He will surely discipline severely those who live unrepentant ungodly lives.

Zephaniah 1:12 speaks of the God of Israel’s wrath or we can say His righteous indignation against His people living in the kingdom of Judah and those living in the city of Jerusalem.

Zephaniah 1:12 describes the God of Israel as the judge of His people living in the city of Jerusalem.

Zephaniah 1:12 makes clear to God’s people living in Jerusalem that God intervenes in the lives of His people since it speaks of God disciplining them for their sinful lives.

This is called the “immanency” of God which means that He involves Himself in and concerns Himself with and intervenes in the lives of members of the human race, both saved and unsaved.