

DEVOTIONS

JUDGMENT

'And will the Judge descend, And must the dead arise
And not a single soul escape His all-discerning eyes?
And from His righteous lips Shall this dread sentence sound
And thro' the num'rous guilty throng Spread black despair around:

'Depart from Me, accursed, To everlasting flame,
For rebel angels first prepared, Where mercy never came?''
How will my heart endure The terrors of that Day
When earth and heav'n before His face Astonished shrink away?

Ye sinners, seek His grace Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of His cross And find salvation there."

This hymn speaks of judgment as does the book of Zephaniah. We shall study the judgment of God from several aspects as Zephaniah presents it. There is mercy in the midst of judgment. The cause of judgment is pride. Judgment is the fulfillment of the promise. Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. Now is the time to repent. There will be no time when the judgment falls. The judgment will be sudden and unexpected. See all past and present judgments as signs and warnings to be alert.

WITH OUR GOD THERE IS MERCY IN THE MIDST OF JUDGMENT

"The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish..." In chapter one verses fourteen to eighteen the prophet unmistakably tells that the judgment is coming. It will fall on Judah and Nineveh alike if there is not repentance and correction. It will fall on all the inhabitants of the world at last.

Then in chapter three verses fourteen to eighteen we read of the mercy of the Lord extended to His faithful. "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear no more..." For the nation of Judah (physical Israel) the judgment would one day fall. Now under Josiah as king there would be a reformation. But it would not last. The true followers of God (spiritual Israel) would be preserved for the heavenly kingdom. The hypocrites would die in their sin and be consigned to hell, while the true believers would see victory and rejoice.

Judgment for unbelief, Mercy for faith in the one true God. At the time of the flood the judgment fell on a world intent through willful sinning on destruction. Eight were saved by faith in the Lord God. His mercy was to them in the midst of judgment. When the army of Israel invaded Canann and by God's miraculous power took the fortress of Jericho, there was mercy to Rahab and all in her house while the rest felt the judgment.

So the great Day of the Lord that ends time will be for the unbeliever a day of: wrath, distress, anguish, ruin, devastation, darkness and gloom. Ah, but for those who trust in the Lord God as did Noah and his household and Rahab and her household, the great Day of the Lord will be: a time of rejoicing and exultation with all one's heart, a time of no more fearing of evil, a time of victory,

a day of festival.

It is definitely a case of mercy in the midst of judgment, because on account of our sins we deserve the exact same thing the unbelievers receive. Never forget that it is by the mercy of our God that we are saved. "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children..." Ex. 34:6-7

THE CAUSE OF JUDGMENT IS PRIDE

The first commandment is "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them..." Ex. 20:3-5 Zephaniah tells us that in Judah the people were not obeying the first commandment. There were still priests of Baal doing their evil sacrifices and services. There were those who bowed down on their roofs to the host of heaven. There were also those who swore by the false god Milcom. It was idolatry that was the visible cause of Judgment coming.

See though why there was idolatry. See the heart cause of pride. Every idol is of man's invention and making. He takes pride in it. It is his very own creation. It is like him because it is made in his own image - evil. The idol is a god that man can control. After all it has a mouth but cannot rebuke man's sin. It has ears but cannot hear all man's vile words. It has eyes but is blind to his evil works. It may have well-crafted hands but they do not reach out and point at guilty man.

Before this kind of a god, man will willingly bow down. He loses none of his pride and haughtiness in worship of this idol. As a matter of fact his pride and haughtiness increases for this idol does not rebuke him and for that matter is his very own creation.

"Woe to her that is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city! She listens to no voice, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God." Zeph. 3:1-2 Zephaniah gives the warning over pride. He tells that the causers of the judgment will be removed in the judgment. "...for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly." Zeph. 3:11-12

All we are that is worthwhile is of the Lord. All we have is from the Lord. All we shall be is given by the Lord. Where is the reason for pride? Those who are proud and haughty are blind like the idols, not really seeing themselves as transgressors of God's holy Law. Those who are proud and haughty are deaf like their idols, hearing not the pleading of their God through the Word and the prophet. They drown out such pleading with their loud self-glorification and self-praise. Those who are proud and haughty are dead like their idols and they face eternal death and damnation unless they repent.

JUDGMENT IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISE 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' SAYS THE LORD.

"Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I

will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth." Zeph. 3:19 Do you worry over the inequities now? You follow God and seem not to prosper, while your enemy prospers. The evil seem to go from bad to worse with no stopping of them. Zephaniah's words assure us that our God is in charge and will in His own time right all wrongs, and redress all grievances.

Some take vengeance into their own hands foolishly thinking that they can correct and make right. It is God who looks into the heart and knows and sees and will judge correctly. We may even make mistakes in our meting out of justice. How do we know whether a Saul will or will not become a missionary and apostle? How do we know if a Manasseh will repent or not? God knows and is just. We should leave vengeance to Him in His judgment.

We should rather pity those facing judgment. It is a horrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God with our sins unforgiven, our guilt unpardoned and our evil nature in full possession of body and soul. Our attitude should be that found in these passages. "Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God...No, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Rom. 12:17-21 "...I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." Mt. 5:44-45 The way of Christ is to plead for our persecutors, to seek forgiveness for our enemies. The final judgment will be sufficient enough to right all wrongs and pay back those who do not repent.

"This shall be their lot in return for their pride, because they scoffed and boasted against the people of the Lord of hosts. The Lord will be terrible against them..." Zeph. 2:10-11

NOW IS THE TIME FOR REPENTANCE, THERE IS NO TIME TO REPENT AT THE JUDGMENT.

The day of the Lord is at hand said the prophet. "This is the exultant city that dwelt secure, that said to herself, 'I am and there is none else.' What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beasts! Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist." Zeph. 2:15 The wicked feel so secure not realizing that their time to repent is slipping by. Only too late does it dawn on them that their time of grace has ended. The mighty city of Nineveh was like the city described in the verses.

During the days of the prophet Jonah, Nineveh was drawing down upon herself the judgment of God by her many sins. The prophet was sent and finally when he spoke, she repented from the lowest commoner on up to the king. Sackcloth and ashes became the order of that day.

Time passed. Generations came and went and Nineveh was back to her old evil ways. The prophet Nahum under the direction of God warned the mighty city. This time she did not repent. The judgment fell. And Nineveh, mighty Nineveh, became the haunt of jackals.

When we consider, for instance, the nation of Nigeria, we see an overarching pride. We see deceit. We see corruption. Living in Nigeria it is our task to remind the citizens that God's judgment will fall. If we do not learn from Nineveh, then we are bound to suffer the same fate as Nineveh.

The great Day of the Lord is not the time to repent. There will be no more time then. Then the goats will be gathered to the left and hear with trembling hearts, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... And they will go away into eternal punishment..." Mt. 25:41,46
No time left!

THE JUDGMENT WILL BE SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED. SEE ALL PAST AND PRESENT JUDGMENTS AS SIGNS AND WARNINGS TO BE ALERT.

"On that day," says the Lord, "a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter, a loud crash from the hills. Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar! For all the traders are no more; all who weigh out silver are cut off. At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are thickening upon their lees, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.'" Zeph. 1:10-12 As a thief in the night, so will the Lord come on the last day. How many in the face of judgments in the past have not been like the traders of Jerusalem?

Like the man in the parable, they build up their earthly fortunes with no regard for the judgment. They build up physical wealth but lay up no treasure in heaven. To them grace, mercy, peace, hope and such are non-existent because they can't be counted and stored away in an earthly treasure. They assure their souls that ample goods are laid up for many years. And that very night judgment falls and finds them trusting in all the wrong things. No faith in God means no eternal life.

God has given us His Word in which are described many judgments that have fallen which are to be examples for us from which to learn. "Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were...We must not indulge in immorality...We must not put the Lord to the test...nor grumble...Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instructions, upon whom the end of the ages has come." I Cor. 10:6-7,8,9,10,11,12

Still today all around us are the judgments failing to keep us alert to the final judgment. There is war in southern Africa. In Angola and Congo two opposing forces are fighting for control of the land. And with the fight comes the desolation of war, judgment. It was not long ago that there was war in Chad. And so it goes, signs and warnings that the great Day of the Lord is coming. There are also judgments meted out upon individuals in their own bodies as a just recompense for sin. The Aids disease runs rampant in Africa among those who just will not obey God's commandment.

Zephaniah was a faithful prophet to preach on the coming judgment and warn people to repent. During his time with King Josiah leading a reformation there was an improvement among the people. We today with our preaching seek not just a temporary improvement among the people. We seek people to share eternity with us who will receive mercy on the last day in the midst of judgment.

"But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; they said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.' It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." Jude