

The Day of the Lord
Zephaniah 1:7-2:3

The Day of the Lord is near, so all should seek Him now.

We'll pick up this afternoon where we left off last week, in v7 of chapter 1. Last week, we heard how the book began with God announcing judgment against sinners.

We saw that there are two major judgments of God promised in chapter 1 of Zephaniah. 1) God promised worldwide judgment against *all* humanity; that's still to come. 2) He also promised judgment specifically against His own people under the old covenant: Judah, the Jews, and their capital city, Jerusalem. That ended up happening, long ago...

What you need to see in the passage we will look at today is how God connects these two judgments by referring to *both* of them as "the Day the of Lord." "The Day of the Lord" is a very important, repeated theme found through the Bible. Most simply, the phrase refers to the day of God's coming (the day of the coming of the Lord.) Most often, the phrase describes that Day when God appears to intervene in history, to meet out justice and make things right.

We'll see later in this book, that the Day of the Lord is also a time when God accomplishes salvation for his people. But in today's passage, only the judging aspect of the day of the Lord is in view.

The "Day of the Lord" is the theme that ties today's passage together:

7 *the day of the LORD is near...*

v8 on *the day of the LORD's sacrifice, I will punish...*

v9... *On that day I will punish ...*

v10 *On that day,* declares the LORD, *a cry will be heard...*

v14 *The great day of the LORD is near...*

later in v14... *the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter*

Verses 15 and 16 describe in a rapid-fire manner what kind of day this *day* will be. First, v15 says, *a day of wrath is that day...*

And so v18 refers to it as... *the day of the wrath of the LORD....*

In chapter 2, v2 speaks of *the day of the anger of the LORD...*

v3 ends the same, *"the day of the anger of the LORD."*

There can be no doubt what is the main idea of this passage: a Day is coming when God will not hold back his anger against sin any longer.

We know that this day will happen at the *end* of the age, because the Day is consistently described in Scripture as a cataclysmic judgment of *cosmic* proportions. *All* creation will be shaken, and devastated, on this Day.

But in advance of that great, final creation-wide day, there *have* been judgments of God that happened in history, which are *also* spoken of in Scripture as "the Day of the Lord." These smaller-scale, more localized outpourings of God's wrath in history are described using the

language of “the Day of the Lord,” because these events *anticipate* the time when God will pour out the fullness of his wrath upon all the earth. They are little foretastes of the *ultimate* day of the Lord, when He comes in final judgment. That’s what’s going on here in Zephaniah 1.

So, we should pay careful attention to how this judgment that happened against Judah in the 6th century BC is described, because this glimpse into the past is *also* a glimpse into the future; the fall of Jerusalem in 586BC shows us, in miniature, something of what the great Day of the Lord yet to come is going to be like...

This long-ago judgment against Judah is what our passage warned of first; so our first main point is **The Day of the Lord that Came**.

Of course, when Zephaniah spoke these words, it had not *yet* happened... but it sure was about to, and that’s what v7 says:

*Be silent before the Lord God!
For the day of the Lord is near;
the Lord has prepared a sacrifice
and consecrated his guests.*

The Day of the Lord against Judah *was* near when these words were written. We learned in verse 1 that Zephaniah prophesied during the days of the godly king *Josiah*. The Day of God’s judgment against Judah would come in the *very next* generation, in the days when King Josiah’s sons rose to the throne; they did not follow in their father’s faithful footsteps.

God raised up ancient Babylon to come and conquer the kingdom of Judah, to destroy their capital Jerusalem, and to carry away the Jews into exile; Jerusalem fell to Babylon only about 30 years after this warning from Zephaniah.

The Lord called the people to be *silent* before Him, in anticipation that He was going to show up in judgment *soon*. The Babylonian army would arrive at the gates of Jerusalem, to carry out His judging purposes, after not too long.

The second half of v7 further emphasizes just how near this day of judgment was. It would be a day of *sacrifice*, and the Lord had already made all the necessary preparations for it to happen. The sacrifice was ready; the Lord was going to act as his own officiating priest in offering it. The *guests* who were going to attend the feast of the sacrifice were already consecrated.

So the stage was all set. This day could begin at any moment, whenever the Lord decided it was time to slaughter the sacrifice. And on this occasion the people of Judah and Jerusalem were set to *be* the sacrifice.

Verse 8 begins to tell us more that would happen on this day of the Lord’s sacrifice:

8 *And on the day of the Lord's sacrifice—
“I (the Lord) will punish the officials and the king's sons
and all who array themselves in foreign attire.
9 On that day I will punish*

*everyone who leaps over the threshold,
and those who fill their master's house
with violence and fraud.*

There are two main groups marked off for sacrificial slaughter here: the governmental leaders, and religious leaders. The Lord's pronouncement of punishment begins with the upper echelons of society.

The first term found in v8, "officials," describe all political and military leaders in a general. The second term refers more specifically to the *most* powerful leaders in all of Judah: the royal family. The king's own sons...

The rest of v8, and all of v9, condemn specifically the priests in the city. Like we talked about in last week's sermon, wearing foreign attire and leaping over the threshold seems to refer to how the priests had adopted pagan worship practices; they started to wear the special clothes the pagan priests wore when they worshipped their idols, and they started to copy the pagans in their superstitions about not stepping on the threshold of the temple.

But while they paid *careful* attention to pointless pagan superstitions in their temple service, they gave *little* attention to the many ways they were breaking the *actual* laws of God. That's what the second half of v9 says: they filled the house of their master (the house of their *lord*; that is, the temple of their God), with violence and deceit.

So God singles out for judgment first of all the men of highest rank in the city: rulers, princes, priests. By their rank and privilege, these men epitomized all that seems important and impressive and *secure* in the eyes of men.

But when God brings them to the front of the line for judgment, He shows us that everything that seems important and impressive and secure in the eyes of men, is ultimately *none* of those things. Their privilege and apparent security would give them *no* advantage over anyone else in withstanding the punishment of the Lord.

Even the sons of the king would be punished! It does not matter if your daddy is King Josiah himself, *no* worldly advantage you might have, can shield you from *one bit* of divine retribution.

*If we squint hard enough when we look at these verses, we *can* see a tiny glimmer of hope sparkling in them. When God promises to punish the *sons* of the king, we can't help but notice that the king *himself* is not denounced! Why not?

The Lord promised King Josiah that *he* would be spared from this coming Day of Judgment. In 2 Kings 22, the Lord said 16...*Behold, I will bring disaster upon (Judah)... 17 ... my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. 18 But to the king of Judah (Josiah), thus shall you say to him... 19 because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I*

*also have heard you, declares the LORD. 20 Therefore, behold, ...you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall **not** see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place...*

A word of judgment against the king is *intentionally* left out of v8, and that whispers to us the thrilling hope that those who repent towards God will *escape* the disaster of the Day of the Lord.

The next two verses continue to emphasize how *all-inclusive* this sweeping judgment of God will be. V10 begins to walk us through the city of Jerusalem district-by-district; *no* place will be safe on this Day.

10 “*On that day,*” declares the Lord,
“a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate,
a wail from the Second Quarter,
a loud crash from the hills.

It’s almost as if we are personally transported by these words inside the walls of ancient Jerusalem, so we can *hear* for ourselves the *sounds* of this judgment, when the Lord ordained for the Babylonian army to make the city His sacrifice.

We hear a shrill cry coming from the main entrance to the city, the Fish Gate. Then there is wailing – people *howling* in terror – that comes from the second quarter (the newer part of the city right by the Fish Gate). Then, coming from the various hills in the city we start to hear loud crashes: the sounds of things being smashed and shattered, the sounds of buildings collapsing.

In v11, people living in another district in Jerusalem are *exhorted* to join in on the wailing!

11 ***Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar!***
For all the traders are no more;
all who weigh out silver are cut off.

The command for these people to *wail* is a striking contrast to the command in v7 for the people to *be silent*, isn’t it? Those who refuse to be silent before the Lord, in humble repentance and worshipful reverence, may later end up encouraged to *continue* in their non-silence before Him: to wail on account of his judgments.

As v11 indicated, “the Mortar” was apparently a part of Jerusalem where people engaged in buying and selling, where merchants set up shop and conducted their business, and bankers would collect and exchange and loan money.

Underneath the word “traders” in the middle line of v11 is literally the Hebrew phrase “all the people of *Canaan*,” which is a rather curious way to refer to business people in Jerusalem. Perhaps Jewish businessmen are here called *Canaanites* as a subtle dig at how sinful their business practices had become. The way you buy and sell and do business is very much a matter of righteousness or unrighteousness, even a matter of worship or idolatry...

The lively buzz typical in this major center of commerce was about to be silenced. Instead of that busy hum of vibrant economic activity, there would soon be... wailing. So here the Lord adds business leaders alongside political and religious leaders, as those who are sure to receive his judgment on the Day of His coming. Personal economic success may *seem* to make one more impervious to disaster and instability, but that is not true, in the most ultimate sense; it won't be of any advantage, in the presence of the Lord.

It's worth asking yourself: are your life goals mainly about things that won't matter before God on His Day? Do you mainly daydream about things related to only *earthly* success and status and security?

In the next verse, the Lord's judgment continues to sweep through the city. And the picture here is of God Himself carefully combing through every part of it to make sure no one is missed:
12 *At that time I (the Lord) will search Jerusalem with lamps,*

On the Day of his wrath, the Lord will search every nook and cranny of the city, with searchlights. There would be no dark cove or corner where anyone could be passed over. Do you understand this imagery? It matters. When God comes, there will be *no place to hide from Him*.

Now look at the rest of v12, and see who in particular are told that they will not be overlooked:

12 *At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,*

and I will punish the men

who are complacent,

those who say in their hearts,

'The Lord will not do good,

nor will he do ill.'

God will be very active to be sure he finds every last one of these people who were supposing that God would *not* be active to do much of anything! They are the complacent ones. The phrase literally is "those who thicken on the dregs," referring to the way that the last bits of wine in a vessel would congeal and get nasty, if it just sat there stagnant to thicken around any bits of grape sediment left in the bottom.

It is a picture of spiritual *stagnation*, when one becomes complacent spiritually, for so long, that they end up believing that God was never really going judge anyone, *or* never really going to bless anyone either. "God's not going to do *anything*"

They may not say it out-loud; they're not *professing* atheists, or deists. They just say it in their hearts, v12 indicated. The complacent are *practical* atheists, or *functional* deists. These people have become so complacent towards God, that they start to imagine God is just like that! A complacent Being who will do nothing to them.

*Here we see *another* very common refuge that people seek, which gives a false sense of security. It is groundless positive thinking: just telling yourself in your heart that nothing bad is going to happen. Well, these baseless reassurances do not actually protect anyone from anything bad ever happening. Tell your heart the *truth* about God's coming.

These people in v12 are *skeptical* of God's immanent intervention, and so they live in total spiritual *indifference*. And it seems they are inclined towards this dangerous ease at least in part because of material *prosperity*. V13 says they have houses, and vineyards, and wealth:

13 *Their goods shall be plundered,
and their houses laid waste.
Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them.*"

So, God *will* do something to these complacent ones after all.

The word "goods" in the first line of the verse refers broadly to one's wealth and strength: possessions, power, riches... It will all be plundered. Their pursuits of real estate and business investments and personal luxuries may have given them the false impression that things were going really well for them. But it wasn't.

They said to their own souls, "*Now* I have ample goods laid up for many years! It is time to relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God would say to them: "Fools, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" These complacent, prosperous Jews wouldn't end up enjoying their houses and vineyards. Their hopes for happiness and security were dashed, because they put those hopes in the wrong place.

*We *all* need to be careful that material prosperity does not lead us to spiritual complacency...

Indifference is dangerous because it seems pretty harmless; innocuous. But on the Day of the Lord, it will *suddenly* be so *obvious* that spiritual indifference was high folly, all along. The complacent were wrong. The Day of God against Judah *was* near. It *did* come, as He said.

I think v14 is the big hinge-point where the focus of this passage starts to shift; the past Day of the Lord against Judah begins to fade to the background, while the coming Day of the Lord against all the earth starts to come to the foreground. V14 refreshes of the flow of the passage somewhat, by repeating again the words of v7, which introduced the theme of the Day of the Lord. *This* time, though, it's like the volume gets turned up a bit louder, and the message is intensified.

V7 told us simply, the day of the Lord is near.

But V14 speaks of the *great* day of the Lord, and tells us it is near, *near and hastening fast*...

So v14 begins our next main point: **The Day of the Lord that's Coming.**

14 *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.*

This great day of the Lord could already be considered “near” when Zephaniah wrote. It is an ever-immanent Day, for *all* generations. To say it is near *and hastening fast* seems to indicate that the speed at which it is coming is *increasing*, as if the time-table for that Day is actually being moved up, the more history marches on (like a great boulder gains speed the longer it rolls down a mountain).

That Day is so near you can almost hear it. That’s the idea of v14. The Day is so close it’s already within earshot. Do you hear that bitter sound? That is the sound of the Day of the Lord. The last part of the verse identifies the sound: it is the bitter cry of distress, of a mighty warrior.

Even the strongest, most battle-tested, battle-ready man, whose eyes are quite accustomed to seeing devastation... even such a courageous, seasoned man of war like that *cries aloud* bitterly, when he gets a little peak of what is about to be unleashed on the world.

*See how this verse gives us something *else* to add to our growing list of things that men esteem and trust in for security, which will not benefit on the Day of the Lord; great strength and military might, will *also* give no advantage.

Verses 15-16 give us several more descriptions of this coming day, and it adds to the picture in a fast-paced, staccato style that *amplifies* the urgency and fear we feel about this Day of God.

15 *A day of wrath is that day,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,*
16 *a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.*

The headline depiction of this day is that it is a day of wrath. The Hebrew word under “wrath” is related to the Hebrew word that means “to overflow,” so some argue the idea here is something like: “overflowing anger.”

The Lord has been graciously *restraining* his anger for quite some time now. But one day, those dams of restraint will be removed, and his wrath will go forth completely unobstructed, like an overflowing flood.

After the first line explains the coming Day of the Lord as a Day of overflowing wrath, we find 5 couplets that follow.

Next, v15 says it will be a day of *distress and anguish* for sinful humanity – just as we heard when the mighty warrior cried out in v14, and as we heard when Jerusalem was filled with wailing and howling and crashes in v10.

It is also, next, a day of *ruin and devastation*. The great achievements of man will crumble in ruins, and become desolate. Devastating destruction, all around. The next *two* couplets refer to foreboding signs involving the absence of light.

A day of darkness and gloom – the word gloom here refers not to sadness, but very deep darkness. The same word is used in Ex. 10, to describe one of the plagues against Egypt, when 22 ...*there was pitch darkness* (same word translated “gloom” in our text) *in all the land of Egypt three days.* 23 *They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days.* So we could put this idea in v15 “a day of darkness and pitch darkness...” Like the judgment that terrified and immobilized all of ancient Egypt for days.

The next phrase follows the same kind of pattern: we could translate it “a day of clouds and thick clouds, or heavy clouds...thick darkness. What does all this imagery about thick, cloudy darkness signify about the day of the Lord that’s coming?”

The main idea symbolized is the *awesome* presence of God. There was one remarkable occasion in particular, when God came and manifested his presence that is especially recalled by this description of the Day in v15. That was when Israel stood before God at Mt. Sinai. *Dt. 4:11* says *the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom* (the same words found in Zeph. 1:15!)

The first line of the next verse, in Zeph. 1, v16 *also* recalls Israel’s frightful encounter with God at Mt. Sinai. V16 says it will be a “*day of trumpet blast and battle cry.*” At Sinai, *trumpet* sounds came with the clouds and deep darkness, all together signifying how God’s holy presence had descended upon the mountain.

Listen to how the book of Exodus describes that *past* Day of the Lord (and listen to how the people responded): Ex. 19:16 *On [that] day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.* 17 *Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.* 18 *Now Mt. Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. ... and the whole mountain trembled greatly.* 19 *And the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder...* 20 *The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain.*

On *that* Day of the Lord, the presence of God was *dangerous* for the sinful people. There were strict limits set around the base of Mt. Sinai, which none of the people could cross, to prevent *any* from entering into his holy presence, and perishing instantly. The Lord told Moses, “*do not let the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them.*”

The book of Exodus continues: Ex. 20.18 *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off* 19 *and (they) said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” ...* 21 *[So] the people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.*

Can you even imagine what it would have been like to be there, at the base of that mountain? Now try to imagine what it would be like if all the earth became like the very top of Mt. Sinai was, completely encompassed by the thick cloud of His devastating, glorious presence.

On the great day of the Lord, God will come down like He did on Sinai, but His terrifying presence will cover the earth. It will be a day of cloud, deep darkness, and trumpet blast again, but *unlike* the Mt. Sinai encounter, on this Day there will be no boundaries set up, which mark off an area where people can stand safely *far off* from his presence. And there will be no mediator like Moses, who will go to meet God on behalf of the people, so they can keep far away. No, on that day, every man will meet Him, and *He* will break out against them, just as if all of Israel had been on the very top of Mt. Sinai when the Lord came down upon it.

What defense can any man have in the face of such power and glory? The rest of v16 describes the best defenses of humanity in the times Zephaniah wrote: fortified cities and lofty battlements; high corner towers, thick fortress walls... Again, this passage shows the *utter* insufficiency of all that man proudly trusts in for security. How pitiful and pointless do fortified cities and corner towers seem in the face of the Lord's awesome presence? Before God, even the strongest fortification of man is like a house of cards.

V17 adds to the picture by speaking of some *effects* of that day on man:

*17 I will bring distress on mankind,
so that they shall walk like the blind,
because they have sinned against the Lord;
their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.*

V15 said the Day of God's wrath will be a day of *distress*, so we hear now that God will bring distress upon mankind. V15 said the Day of God's wrath will be a day of *darkness*, so we hear now that mankind will stumble around as if blind, unable to see amidst the thick blackness.

The final part of v17 made some rather unsettling comparisons. The blood of mankind is treated like dust, something fit to just be swept away and discarded. Their flesh is treated like waste, something fit to just be taken outside the camp and buried, or burned.

So the first part and the final part of v17 describe the horrifying effects of the Day of God. Fittingly, then, the center line of the verse explains the *reason* for it. In between these dismaying descriptions of God's judgment, we are very briefly reminded *why* all this is happening. The middle of v17 gives the all-important explanation for these actions of God: "because they have sinned against the Lord."

Simple. Clear. Direct. *This* is why God has promised to do this to mankind: they have sinned against Him.

Are you scandalized by the ways God's judgments are described here in Zephaniah 1? Perhaps that is because you don't understand how horrible our sin against God really is.

If we understood a little bit of the true *heinousness* of sin, then we would find this simple statement in v17 to be a perfectly sufficient explanation for *all* of the judgments that are described here.

Only if you have a woefully small conception of how wonderful and glorious God is, could you protest that you don't deserve these judgments. Only if you are almost completely blind to how gracious God has been, and how much He is rightfully owed, could you think that this judgment is unjust, or overblown. Those who understand something of how glorious and good God is, will *not* protest about any of the judgments to come on the Day of the Lord; they will be silent before Him (v7), knowing that the Judge of all the earth is doing what is right.

V18 ends chapter 1, and also wraps up this portion of the book that describes the Day of the Lord that is coming:

*18 Neither their silver nor their gold
shall be able to deliver them
on the day of the wrath of the Lord.
In the fire of his jealousy,
all the earth shall be consumed;
for a full and sudden end
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.*

On the day of the wrath of the Lord, no amount of wealth will deliver. The wisdom of Proverbs 11:4 will prove true: Riches do not profit in the day of wrath. It won't make any difference how much you have in your wallet, or bank account, or 401K on the Day of the Lord. Silver and gold will not be able to deliver *anyone*.

This initial statement of v18 also exposes the inability of any *idol* to deliver on that Day. Many of the idols that Judah worshipped were made of silver and gold. Many today *still* worship such things. *And*, in less concrete ways, many even in *our* nation do things that are very similar, by making *money* the master they love and serve most. What a pity it is to serve a god who is not able to deliver you.

V18 condemns idolatry again when it says God's wrath is enflamed by the fire of His *jealousy*. Consistently in the Scriptures, idolatry is the sin that fuels the fire of God's jealousy.

For example, in the 10 commandments, God says: Ex. 20:3 "*You shall have no other gods before me.* 4 "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image (an idol)...* 5 *You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.*" Again, in Ex. 34:14 *you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*" Many Scriptures make this same connection.

God is enflamed with the anger of jealousy when people are *unfaithful* to Him, and give their love and loyalty that *rightfully* belongs to Him, to something *else*...when they give their heart and worship to whatever their idol is, as if *it* was the true god. The Lord deserves honor and acknowledgement and worship and faithful love from *all*, because He *alone* is the loving Lord of all.

So v18 says the fire of God's jealousy will consume all the earth, and in this way, he will make a full and sudden end of all the inhabitants of the earth. Full and sudden is a powerful combination of words.

The last lines of the chapter bring us full circle, in a sense, back to the imagery of vv. 7-8, which spoke of the Day of the Lord's *sacrifice*. When a sacrifice was laid on the altar, the *fire* on the altar would *consume* the sacrifice. Here in v18, when we read that the *fire* of God's jealousy will *consume* all the earth, it's sacrificial language. The final Day of the Lord will be another Day of a sacrifice for the Lord, just like the fire of his jealousy had consumed ancient Judah so many years before.

This Day of the Lord *will* come, just as surely as the God's Day against Judah came in 586BC. This great Day of the Lord is *near*, just as surely as God's Day against Judah was near, when Zephaniah wrote down the words of this book. All the preparations have already been made. God could come in final judgment at any moment. A day of reckoning could be near for each one of us *also* because these lives of ours are so fleeting, and we all will pass away quickly...

If this Day is coming, what should we do? How should we respond to news like this?

In the next part of the book, the beginning of chapter 2, God tells us. Having seen the Day of the Lord that's coming, now hear **the Call to Seek before the Day**. First, God summons his people to an assembly:

2:1 *Gather together, yes, gather,
O shameless nation,
2 before the decree takes effect
—before the day passes away like chaff—
before there comes upon you
the burning anger of the Lord,
before there comes upon you
the day of the anger of the Lord.*

Do you feel the intensity of this call? Notice how the command to gather together was repeated: Gather, yes gather! Come...*Come!* Hurry! Hear what I have to say! Notice next how *many* times the word "before" is used in v2: 4 times in the ESV. Oh, this is so urgent! You must not wait too long. Come, gather *before* the decree goes into effect... When will that be? We know it's near. It seems to be just teetering on the edge of coming, so much so that even the small amount of wind that carries away chaff, could be enough to set the Day in motion.

The last two lines of v2 are extremely emphatic, as the last line repeats almost *verbatim* what came before it. The repetition should give *all* who hear a heightened sense of urgency.

Act *before there comes upon you
the burning anger of the Lord...*

Then it's repeated, as if to say: did you hear what I just said?! I'll say it again!

Act...*before there comes upon you
the day of the anger of the Lord.*

How could God's Word be any more *pressing* in this summons? Come and listen *before* this happens!

The message God *urgently* wants to give the people when they gather, is found in v3:

*3 Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land,
who do his just commands;
seek righteousness; seek humility;
perhaps you may be **hidden**
on the day of the anger of the Lord.*

The call is to *seek*. Seek the Lord. Seek righteousness. Seek humility.

In the first line, it is only the *humble* ones, who are called to seek God. Those who are *proud* and self-satisfied in their earthly positions and possessions will *not* seek Him...

To seek the Lord, we must *humble* ourselves before Him, and (v3 indicated) our hearts must earnestly desire to do his just commands. So the call of this verse is to come before His presence in prayer, in repentance from sin, *before* His presence comes to earth in judgment for sin.

What do you stand to gain from seeking the Lord and his righteousness? You can be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.

That is quite an amazing thought, especially after what we have seen; remember the picture of God searching the city with lamps, so he doesn't *miss* a *single* person! We concluded then that there was no place to hide when He came in His wrath! But, apparently, you *can* successfully hide on that day, IF God Himself is the one who is hiding you, keeping you safe when He comes.

Isn't it a wonder, that God tells us we can be hidden from his judgment NOT by running *away* from him, but by running *to* Him. *Seeking* Him before the day. This saying is trustworthy: the only safe place *from* God is *in* God. So *seek* Him. Go see if He will not show you mercy...

He will disprove the lie of the complacent in v12; He is *not* a do-nothing God. He *will* come against mankind in judgment, and He *will* do good, *much* good, to those who seek Him. He has *already* proved that:

*In astonishing wisdom and love, God has already made a hiding place for his people. He did it on *another* great Day when He visited his judgments upon man, on the earth. This Day was *another* forerunner of the final day of God's wrath that comes at the end. It happened sometime around 30 or 33AD, on a Friday in Spring...

This Day was another Day of sacrifice for the Lord, but this time God was *not only* the one who prepared and offered the sacrifice; God *became* the sacrifice. God the Father sent His Son to become a man, so *God Himself* could *be* the slaughtered sacrifice who was punished for *man's* sin. Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, took the punishing judgment *we* deserve, as our *substitute*, when he died on the cross.

Jesus experienced the judgments of God that will be visited on mankind on the great Day of the Lord that is coming:

The day Jesus died was a day of *darkness*: When Jesus was hanging from the cross, the Scriptures says *Lk. 23:44 ... there was darkness over the whole land for hours... 45 ... the sun's light failed.*

This day was a day of *distress and anguish*: Jesus cried out loudly in agony, many times, as he hung and died on the cross...

This day was a day of *wrath*: The full fury of God's judgment against sinners was on poured out upon Him. He bore it *all*, and *then* He rose three days later in triumph. He is now and forever *safe* and secure in glory...

So if you *have* sought God in repentance from sin, and *have* put your faith in Christ's saving death, then you are now safely tucked away in God's hiding place. You will *not* taste the terrors of God's burning anger, which are now being stored up for that Day, and for eternity.

So what should *believers* do now, in response to this message? *Keep* seeking God. *Keep* seeking humility. *Keep* seeking righteousness, and his just commands. Remember the words of 2 Peter: *What sort of people ought we to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [since we are] waiting for the coming Day of God, when the heavens will be burned up and dissolved?*

*If you are *not* in Christ today, you should believe first that God Himself is making an urgent appeal to you through His word right now: and you should respond; you should **run** to Christ, as fast as you can. You should *fly* to Christ, and ask Him to hide you in the shadow of his cross.

Humble yourself, and **hurry**, before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord.

Let no one misinterpret his longsuffering patience. Don't be fooled into thinking that God isn't going to do anything just because that Day has *seemed* to be so long in coming. Don't you know why that is? He is being patient with sinners. He is *right now* patiently, mercifully, giving *more* sinners *more* time to repent *before* the Day.

But He will not hold back his anger forever. He calls you to seek Him *today*...

Is. 55:6 "Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;

7 let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;

let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.