

Judgment in the Prophets

I. Introduction

The prophets were first of all sent to bring God's message to the ruler of the people (and the people directly when the ruler wouldn't listen) regarding behaviors and events in their own situation. A good majority of what is written in the prophets pertains to something that happened during the lifetime of the prophet and not to the future. However, there is a distinct thread of prophecies running throughout that pertains to the time of the end. It is this theme that we intend to investigate in this session. Often the message about the future was two fold: (1) judgment (2) restoration. We will look at judgment first and then restoration.

Before the theme of judgment we have to understand that the reason for judgment is sin. Sin is the starting point to talk about judgment. The texts below (though they relate to the situation of the people the prophet was speaking to) are typical of the sort of language used throughout the prophets regarding sin. Since sin has not disappeared we can conclude that the coming end times (eschatological) judgment is likely to be a response to the sins people will be committing in the end.

Isaiah 1:4 ⁴ Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the LORD, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him.

Jeremiah 5:7-9 ⁷ "Why should I pardon you? Your sons have forsaken Me And sworn by those who are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, They committed adultery And trooped to the harlot's house. ⁸ "They were well-fed lusty horses, Each one neighing after his neighbor's wife. ⁹ "Shall I not punish these people," declares the LORD, "And on a nation such as this Shall I not avenge Myself?"

Ezekiel 8:17-18 ¹⁷ He said to me, "Do you see *this*, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose. ¹⁸ "Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them."

Hosea 4:12-13 ¹² My people consult their wooden idol, and their *diviner's* wand informs them; For a spirit of harlotry has led *them* astray, And they have played the harlot, *departing* from their God. ¹³ They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains And burn incense on the hills, Under oak, poplar and terebinth, Because their shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters play the harlot And your brides commit adultery.

The prophets of ancient Israel spoke vociferously of the coming destruction of the wicked. Sometimes this proclamation was focused on the enemies of Israel but usually it focused on Israel herself as an apostate nation (sometimes compared to an adultress). The prophets painted the dismal picture of the Day of the Lord using many hues of gray. As we will see, this Day was proclaimed as a grotesque and grisly nightmare from which there was seemingly no escape. We shall turn now to the prophets themselves and allow them to speak. I have selected sections from each of the prophets in order to acquaint ourselves with what the prophets said and how they said it. This is by no means exhaustive, but rather a sampling to get us familiar with the rhetoric of judgment. In particular I have picked judgment sections that are immediately followed by restoration sections in order to set ourselves up for the next lecture when we talk about the restoration.

II. Isaiah

Isaiah 24:1 – 23 Behold, the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants. ² And the people will be like the priest, the servant like his master, the maid like her mistress, the buyer like the seller, the lender like the borrower, the creditor like the debtor. ³ The earth will be completely laid waste and completely despoiled, for the LORD has spoken this word. ⁴ The earth mourns and withers, the world fades and withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away. ⁵ The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. ⁶ Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left. ⁷ The new wine mourns, The vine decays, All the merry-hearted sigh. ⁸ The gaiety of tambourines ceases, The noise of revelers stops, The gaiety of the harp ceases. ⁹ They do not drink wine with song; Strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. ¹⁰ The city of chaos is broken down; Every house is shut up so that none may enter. ¹¹ There is an outcry in the streets concerning the wine; All joy turns to gloom. The gaiety of the earth is banished. ¹² Desolation is left in the city And the gate is battered to ruins. ¹³ For thus it will be in the midst of the earth among the peoples, As the shaking of an olive tree, As the gleanings when the grape harvest is over. ¹⁴ They raise their voices, they shout for joy; They cry out from the west concerning the majesty of the LORD. ¹⁵ Therefore glorify the LORD in the east, The name of the LORD, the God of Israel, In the coastlands of the sea. ¹⁶ From the ends of the earth we hear songs, "Glory to the Righteous One," But I say, "Woe to me! Woe to me! Alas for me! The treacherous deal treacherously, And the treacherous deal very treacherously." ¹⁷ Terror and pit and snare Confront you, O inhabitant of the earth. ¹⁸ Then it will be that he who flees the report of disaster will fall into the pit, And he who climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare; For the windows above are opened, and the foundations of the earth shake. ¹⁹ The earth is broken asunder, The earth is split through, The earth is shaken violently. ²⁰ The earth reels to and fro like a drunkard And it totters like a

shack, For its transgression is heavy upon it, And it will fall, never to rise again. ²¹ So it will happen in that day, That the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high, And the kings of the earth on earth. ²² They will be gathered together *Like* prisoners in the dungeon, And will be confined in prison; And after many days they *will be* punished. ²³ Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, For the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, And *His* glory will be before His elders.

III. Joel

Joel 1:15 - 2:11 ¹⁵ Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, And it will come as destruction from the Almighty. ¹⁶ Has not food been cut off before our eyes, Gladness and joy from the house of our God? ¹⁷ The seeds shrivel under their clods; The storehouses are desolate, The barns are torn down, For the grain is dried up. ¹⁸ How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander aimlessly Because there is no pasture for them; Even the flocks of sheep suffer. ¹⁹ To You, O LORD, I cry; For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field. ²⁰ Even the beasts of the field pant for You; For the water brooks are dried up And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness. ^{NAU} **Joel 2:1** ¶ Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, ² A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and mighty people; There has never been *anything* like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of many generations. ³ A fire consumes before them And behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them But a desolate wilderness behind them, And nothing at all escapes them. ⁴ Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; And like war horses, so they run. ⁵ With a noise as of chariots They leap on the tops of the mountains, Like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble, Like a mighty people arranged for battle. ⁶ Before them the people are in anguish; All faces turn pale. ⁷ They run like mighty men, They climb the wall like soldiers; And they each march in line, Nor do they deviate from their paths. ⁸ They do not crowd each other, They march everyone in his path; When they burst through the defenses, They do not break ranks. ⁹ They rush on the city, They run on the wall; They climb into the houses, They enter through the windows like a thief. ¹⁰ Before them the earth quakes, The heavens tremble, The sun and the moon grow dark And the stars lose their brightness. ¹¹ The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?

IV. Amos

Amos 8:9 - 9:10 ⁹ "It will come about in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "That I will make the sun go down at noon And make the earth dark in broad daylight. ¹⁰ "Then I will turn your festivals into mourning And all your songs into lamentation; And I will bring sackcloth on everyone's loins And baldness on every head. And I will make it like a *time of mourning* for an only son, And the end of it will be like a bitter day. ¹¹ "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD. ¹² "People will stagger from sea to sea And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, But they will not find it. ¹³ "In that day the beautiful virgins And the young men will faint from thirst. ¹⁴ "As for those who swear by the guilt of Samaria, Who say, 'As your god lives, O Dan,' And, 'As the way of Beersheba lives,' They will fall and not rise again." ^{9.1} I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and He said, "Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake, And break them on the heads of them all! Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword; They will not have a fugitive who will flee, Or a refugee who will escape. ² "Though they dig into Sheol, From there will My hand take them; And though they ascend to heaven, From there will I bring them down. ³ "Though they hide on the summit of Carmel, I will search them out and take them from there; And though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea, From there I will command the serpent and it will bite them. ⁴ "And though they go into captivity before their enemies, From there I will command the sword that it slay them, And I will set My eyes against them for evil and not for good." ⁵ The Lord GOD of hosts, The One who touches the land so that it melts, And all those who dwell in it mourn, And all of it rises up like the Nile And subsides like the Nile of Egypt; ⁶ The One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens And has founded His vaulted dome over the earth, He who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the face of the earth, The LORD is His name. ⁷ "Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?" declares the LORD. "Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, And the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir? ⁸ "Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, And I will destroy it from the face of the earth; Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob," Declares the LORD. ⁹ "For behold, I am commanding, And I will shake the house of Israel among all nations As *grain* is shaken in a sieve, But not a kernel will fall to the ground. ¹⁰ "All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, Those who say, 'The calamity will not overtake or confront us.'"

V. Obadiah

Obadiah 1:15-16 ¹⁵ "For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head. ¹⁶ "Because just as you drank on My holy mountain, All the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow And become as if they had never existed.

VI. Micah

Micah 3:1-12 And I said, "Hear now, heads of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice? ² "You who hate good and love evil, Who tear off their skin from them And their flesh from their bones, ³ Who eat the flesh of my people, Strip off their skin from them, Break their bones And chop *them* up as for the pot And as meat in a kettle." ⁴ Then they will cry out to the LORD, But He will not answer them. Instead, He will hide His face from them at that time Because they have practiced evil deeds. ⁵ Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray; When they have *something* to bite with their teeth, They cry, "Peace," But against him who puts nothing in their mouths They declare holy war. ⁶ Therefore *it will be* night for you-- without vision, And darkness for you-- without divination. The sun will go down on the prophets, And the day will become dark over them. ⁷ The seers will be ashamed And the diviners will be embarrassed. Indeed, they will all cover *their* mouths Because there is no answer from God. ⁸ On the other hand I am filled with power-- With the Spirit of the LORD-- And with justice and courage To make known to Jacob his rebellious act, Even to Israel his sin. ⁹ Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel, Who abhor justice And twist everything that is straight, ¹⁰ Who build Zion with bloodshed And Jerusalem with violent injustice. ¹¹ Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, Her priests instruct for a price And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, "Is not the LORD in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us." ¹² Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, And the mountain of the temple *will become* high places of a forest.

VII. Nahum

Nahum 1:2-11 ² A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. ³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet. ⁴ He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; The blossoms of Lebanon wither. ⁵ Mountains quake because of Him And the hills dissolve; Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence, The world and all the inhabitants in it. ⁶ Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire And the rocks are broken up by Him. ⁷ The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him. ⁸ But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site, And will pursue His enemies into darkness. ⁹ Whatever you devise against the LORD, He will make a complete end of it. Distress will not rise up twice. ¹⁰ Like tangled thorns, And like those who are drunken with their drink, They are consumed As stubble

completely withered. ¹¹ From you has gone forth One who plotted evil against the LORD, A wicked counselor.

VIII. Zephaniah

Zephaniah 1:1-18 The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah: ² "I will completely remove all *things* From the face of the earth," declares the LORD. ³ "I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea, And the ruins along with the wicked; And I will cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the LORD. ⁴ "So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, *And* the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests. 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, ⁶ And those who have turned back from following the LORD, And those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him." ⁷ Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near, For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests. ⁸ "Then it will come about on the day of the LORD'S sacrifice That I will punish the princes, the king's sons And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments. 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. 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. 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. 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!' 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." ¹⁴ Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶ A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers. ¹⁷ I will bring distress on men So that they will walk like the blind, Because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust And their flesh like dung. ¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the LORD'S wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth.

IX. Zechariah

Zechariah 14:1-5, 12-15 Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. ² For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. ³ Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. ⁴ In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. ⁵ You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! ...¹² Now this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth. ¹³ It will come about in that day that a great panic from the LORD will fall on them; and they will seize one another's hand, and the hand of one will be lifted against the hand of another. ¹⁴ Judah also will fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered, gold and silver and garments in great abundance. ¹⁵ So also like this plague will be the plague on the horse, the mule, the camel, the donkey and all the cattle that will be in those camps.

X. Malachi

Malachi 4:1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

XI. The Day of the LORD

The Day of the Lord is a phrase that is found throughout many of the judgment passages of the prophets. It is a phrase that dominates the way the prophets understood the coming wrath of God. In order to fill in the details of this coming moment I have selected from verses that we have already looked at as well as many others in an effort to summarize the major themes.

The Day of Yahweh will come with clouds and thick darkness (Joel 2.1-2). It will be a Day of wrath, trouble, distress, destruction, desolation, and gloom (Zephaniah 1.15). God will arise in the splendor of his majesty to make heaven and earth tremble in the fury of his burning anger

(Isaiah 2.19; 13.9, 13). There will be famine (Joel 1.16). Cosmic signs accompany this judgment to the degree that neither sun nor moon nor stars will shed light (Isaiah 13.10; 34.4; Joel 2.10; 3.15).

Men will be so frightened that they will scurry into caves and dive into holes in the ground to escape (Isaiah 2.21). They will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!" (Hosea 10.8). Even hardened warriors will cry out bitterly (Zephaniah 1.14). Pains and anguish will take hold of pale faced men causing them to writhe like a woman in labor (Isaiah 13.8; Joel 2.6). The whole world will be punished for its evil, for its disregard for what God has said is right, for its arrogance and ruthlessness (Isaiah 13.11).

The coming cataclysm is not limited to one or two countries, for Yahweh's wrath is against all nations and their armies (Isaiah 34.2; Ezekiel 30.3; Joel 3.12; Obadiah 1.15). He will command an army of mighty warriors to execute his anger (Isaiah 13.3-4; Joel 2.11). This army will be unlike anything that has ever come before it, and never again will there be anything like it (Joel 2.2). The earth quakes as fire consumes before them, and behind then a flame burns (Joel 2.3, 10). The army is God's instrument of indignation which he will use to decimate the land and exterminate the sinners from it (Isaiah 13.5, 9). God will utterly destroy the armies of the earth, and their corpses will be strewn about drenching the mountains with their blood (Isaiah 34.3). Because they have sinned against Yahweh, their blood will be poured out like dirt and their flesh scattered like manure (Zephaniah 1.17). So thorough will this judgment be that the earth will be depopulated to a point that mankind is scarcer than gold (Isaiah 13.12). Yet, there are some who will survive (Isaiah 14.2; Joel 2.32; Obadiah 1.17).

The proud will be humbled, and Yahweh alone will be exalted (Isaiah 2.12). Not even the riches of the wealthy will help them in escaping the destruction (Zephaniah 1.18). The Day of Yahweh will be especially dark for those who think that they are innocent by association (Amos 5.18). For them, the judgment of God will be like one who escapes a lion and a bear catches him; or perhaps he finds his way home unmolested and leans his hand on the wall to catch his breath, and a snake bites him (Amos 5.19). All will be beckoned to come to the valley of decision where judgment will be passed (Joel 3.14). Even those who are stagnant, neither violent nor righteous, will be sought out and punished (Zephaniah 1.12). Those who are in power, who wear the garments of royalty, will be punished (Zephaniah 1.8). The wealthy will have their money stripped away from them, and their houses will become desolate (Zephaniah 1.13).

The Day of Vengeance will be to those who are afflicted, brokenhearted, and imprisoned a favorable year, a time of comfort and joy (Isaiah 34.8; 61.1-3). Those who call on the name of Yahweh in this time of distress will escape this wrath (Joel 2.32).

XII. The Reason for the Message about the Coming Wrath

Why did these prophets speak in such a terrifying manner? The purpose of preaching the imminent destruction of the wicked was to splash cold water onto the faces of lethargic sinners. The message shocked men into responding. On the heels of a "Day of the Lord" section, one will typically find a call for repentance.

The prophets urged the people to respond with wailing to their message (Isaiah 13.6; Jeremiah 25.34; Ezekiel 30.2; Joel 1.5, 8, 10, 13). Joel said, "Alas for the day! For the day of Yahweh is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty" (Joel 1.15). He requests that the warning be sounded so that all will know that the day of Yahweh is coming (Joel 2.1). Joel appeals to the people to repent:

"Yet even now," declares Yahweh, "
Return to Me with all your heart,
And with fasting, weeping and mourning;
And rend your heart and not your garments."
Now return to Yahweh your God,
For He is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness
And relenting of evil.
Who knows whether He will *not* turn and relent
And leave a blessing behind Him,
Even a grain offering and a drink offering
For Yahweh your God? (Joel 2:12-14)

Now is the time to blow the trumpet, fast, gather the people, and come before the altar to weep and ask God to spare his people (Joel 2.15-17). Then, Yahweh will forgive and have compassion on his people and pardon them (Joel 2.18-19). This sentiment is shared by Zephaniah:

Gather yourselves together, yes, gather,
O nation without shame,
Before the decree takes effect—
The day passes like the chaff—
Before the burning anger of Yahweh comes upon you,
Before the day of Yahweh's anger comes upon you.
Seek Yahweh,
All you humble of the earth
Who have carried out His ordinances;
Seek righteousness, seek humility.
Perhaps you will be hidden
In the day of Yahweh's anger. (Zephaniah 2.1-3)

Following these pleas for repentance are wonderful passages promising restoration (the restoration is sometimes conditional on the people's repentance). A prophetic template emerges from our study so far: (1) conviction of sin (2) preaching about the coming Day of the

Lord (3) urging the people to repent, and (4) sharing a vision of restoration. This procedure is not exactly followed by each book of prophecy, but the ingredients reappear frequently. Usually, the restoration texts with which Kingdom believers are so familiar begin right after the wrath of God has been proclaimed. Thus, repentance is often squished between these two contrasting themes. The indignation of Yahweh approaches, everyone must repent in order to survive, and then the remnant will enjoy restoration. It is to this restoration, God's grand vision for the new world, that we will now turn.