

# Zephaniah 1:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.

## Analysis

**At that time, I will search Jerusalem with candles** (achapes et-Yerushalayim ba-nerot, אֲחָפֵשׁ אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלָם בְּנֶרוֹת—The verb chaphas (חָפֵשׁ) means to search thoroughly, examine carefully, investigate meticulously. God will conduct comprehensive investigation of Jerusalem, using **candles** (lamps) to illuminate dark corners where sin hides. This imagery depicts divine omniscience penetrating every hidden place—no secret escapes God's scrutiny. Amos 9:2-3 similarly declares God will search out sinners whether they hide in Sheol, heaven, mountains, or sea depths.

**Punish the men that are settled on their lees** (paqadti al ha-anashim ha-qoph'im al-shimreyhem, פָּקַדְתִּי עַל־הָאָנָשִׁים הַקּוֹפְּהִים עַל־שְׁמְרִיקָם—Qoph'im (קּוֹפִּים) means congealed, thickened, hardened. Shemarim (שְׁמָרִים) refers to lees or dregs—sediment that settles at the bottom of wine. Wine left too long on lees becomes thick, bitter, spoiled. The metaphor describes spiritual complacency, moral stagnation, hardened indifference—people who have settled into comfortable unbelief, neither hot nor cold, stagnant in self-satisfied apathy.

**That say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil—** This is practical deism or functional atheism. These people don't deny God's existence but deny His active involvement in human affairs. They believe God neither rewards righteousness (**will not do good**) nor punishes wickedness

**(neither will he do evil).** This philosophy produces moral indifference: if God doesn't intervene, behavior has no eternal consequences. Revelation 3:15-16 condemns Laodicea's similar lukewarmness: "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

## Historical Context

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This complacent deism characterized many in Judah despite repeated prophetic warnings. After decades of prophesied judgment not immediately materializing, people concluded God wouldn't act. Jeremiah faced identical skepticism: "This evil shall not come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine" (Jeremiah 5:12); "Where is the word of the LORD? let it come now" (Jeremiah 17:15). Ezekiel reports people saying, "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth" (Ezekiel 12:22)—prophetic delay bred hardened unbelief.

This phenomenon illustrates Peter's warning about last-days scoffers: "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were" (2 Peter 3:3-4). God's patience in delaying judgment gets misinterpreted as divine indifference or impotence. People "settled on their lees" grow comfortable in sin, convinced that apparent divine silence means divine approval or absence. Ecclesiastes 8:11 identifies this dynamic: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

The Babylonian invasion shattered this complacency. Those who said "God will not do evil" (won't judge) discovered God keeps His covenant warnings as surely as His promises. The comprehensive search "with candles" meant no comfortable sinner escaped—God's investigation was thorough, His judgment complete. This serves as perpetual warning: divine patience is not divine indifference. Delay is mercy providing opportunity for repentance (2 Peter 3:9), but those who misinterpret patience as permissiveness face certain, sudden judgment when mercy's window closes.

## Related Passages

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**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. What forms of practical deism or functional atheism tempt believers to live as though God doesn't actively reward or punish?
2. How does spiritual complacency (being "settled on lees") develop gradually through repeated exposure to truth without heart-level response?
3. In what ways should God's thorough investigation ("searching with candles") affect our pursuit of holiness and transparency before Him?

## Interlinear Text

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וְיֻבִּיה		בְּעֵת		בְּעֵת יָא		אַתְּ אַחֲרֵי שָׁ		אַתְּ
H1961	And it shall come to pass at that time	H6256		H1931	that I will search	H2664		H853
Jerusalem	with candles	and punish		עַל	כִּכְפָּאִים		עַל	
H3389	H5216	H6485		H5921	בָּאָנָשׁ יִם	H376	כִּכְפָּאִים	H5921
on their lees	that say				בְּלִבְבָּס		בְּלִבְבָּס	
H8105	H559				מִן		מִן	
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## Additional Cross-References

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**Jeremiah 48:11** (Parallel theme): Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.

**Amos 6:1** (Parallel theme): Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!

**Ezekiel 8:12** (References Lord): Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.

**Psalms 94:7** (References Lord): Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.

**Ezekiel 9:9** (References Lord): Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not.