

# Zephaniah 1:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;

## Analysis

**I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem**—After announcing universal judgment (verses 2-3), Zephaniah narrows focus to covenant people. The phrase **stretch out mine hand** (natah et-yadi, נָטָה אֶת־יָדַי) consistently signals divine judgment in Scripture (Exodus 7:5; Isaiah 5:25; Jeremiah 6:12; Ezekiel 6:14). God's outstretched hand brings both salvation (Exodus redemption) and judgment (upon covenant-breakers)—the same power that delivered Israel from Egypt now turns against rebellious Judah.

**I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place** (ve-hikrati et-she'ar ha-Ba'al min ha-maqom ha-zeh, וְהִכְרַתִּי אֶת־שְׁאֵר הַבַּעַל מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה)—Remarkably, even after centuries of reform attempts, Baal worship persisted as a "remnant" in Jerusalem. Baal, the Canaanite storm-god, represented agricultural fertility and prosperity. Israelites repeatedly syncretized Yahweh worship with Baal cult practices, violating the first commandment (Exodus 20:3-5). The verb karat (כָּרַת) means to cut off, destroy, eliminate—a strong term often used for covenant-breaking or capital punishment.

**The name of the Chemarims with the priests**—Kemarim (כְּמָרִים) refers to idolatrous priests who officiated at pagan shrines and high places (2 Kings 23:5; Hosea 10:5). The legitimate Levitical **priests** (kohanim, כֹּהֲנִים) had become corrupted, participating in or tolerating syncretistic worship. God promises to

destroy both illegitimate pagan priests and corrupt Levitical priests who violated their sacred trust. Even religious professionals face judgment when they lead God's people into idolatry—a sobering warning for all spiritual leaders throughout history.

## Historical Context

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This verse specifically addresses Manasseh's legacy of Baal worship. During his 55-year reign (696-642 BC), Manasseh "built altars for Baal" (2 Kings 21:3), erected an Asherah pole in the temple, practiced child sacrifice, and consulted mediums. Though he repented late in life (2 Chronicles 33:12-13), his reforms couldn't undo generations of spiritual corruption. His son Amon (642-640 BC) reverted to paganism during his brief two-year reign before being assassinated.

Josiah (640-609 BC) implemented dramatic reforms after discovering the lost Book of the Law in 622 BC (2 Kings 22-23). He destroyed high places, smashed sacred stones, cut down Asherah poles, desecrated Topheth (where children were sacrificed), removed horses dedicated to the sun god, and executed idolatrous priests. Yet Zephaniah's prophecy suggests these reforms were incomplete or superficial—a "remnant of Baal" persisted even after Josiah's purge. External religious reform without heart transformation couldn't avert covenant judgment.

The phrase "the Chemarims" appears only here and 2 Kings 23:5 (describing priests Josiah removed) and Hosea 10:5. These were black-robed pagan priests who led worship at unauthorized shrines. That legitimate Levitical priests collaborated with them demonstrates how deeply syncretism had penetrated Judah's religious establishment. Similar corruption appears throughout Judah's history—from Jeroboam's golden calves (1 Kings 12:28-31) through the prophetic period, proving that institutional religion without genuine covenant faithfulness becomes worse than useless—it becomes an obstacle to knowing God.

## Related Passages

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**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does religious syncretism (mixing true worship with false practices) still threaten the church today?
2. What does God's judgment on corrupt priests teach about the heightened accountability of spiritual leaders?
3. In what ways might external religious reform or institutional changes mask persistent idolatry of the heart?

## Interlinear Text

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כָּל	וְעַל	יְהוּדָה	עַל	יָדִי	וְנָטַח יָתִי
H3605	H5921	upon Judah	H5921	mine hand	I will also stretch out
		H3063		H3027	H5186
הַמָּקוֹם	מִן	וְהִכָּתִיתִי	יְרוּשָׁלַם	וְיֹשְׁבֵי	
H4725	H4480	and I will cut off	of Jerusalem	and upon all the inhabitants	
		H3772	H3389	H3427	
עִם	הַכִּמְרִים	שֵׁם	אֶת	הַבַּעַל	אֶת
H5973	H3649	and the name	H853	of Baal	H2088
		H8034		H1168	H853
				the remnant	
				H7605	
					הַכֹּהֲנִים:
					with the priests
					H3548

## Additional Cross-References

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**Hosea 10:5** (Parallel theme): The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof that rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it.

**Micah 5:13** (Parallel theme): Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands.

