

12 Prophets - Zephaniah Part 4

The Fish Gate, the Second Quarter and the Mortar

On that day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold, and those who fill their master's house with violence and fraud. "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.

Zephaniah 1:9-10

We come to a part in the text which on the face of it appears to be obvious in what it is stating, but as we will see within the text that this is again pointing us to general principals of understanding as well as being specific to the period.

Many of the commentaries speak only in terms of the gate and the Second quarter in the context of commerce that would have taken place at these locations. This is undoubtedly the case. However, there are some connections worth investigating.

"on that day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold" is a reference to the events that we see in 1 Samuel

When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So, they took Dagon and put him back in his place. But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. The hand of the LORD was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory.

(1 Samuel 5:1-6)

Dagon and Marnas (courtesy of Wikipedia)

In the Classical period the central temple of Gaza was dedicated to a god named Marnas (from [Aramaic](#) *marnā*, "lord").^[104] [Itamar Singer](#) considered it a possibility that this name was a title of the hypothetical Philistine Dagon,^[114] though he notes he was equated not with a Levantine or Syrian deity but with [Cretan Zeus](#), [Zeus Krētagenēs](#).^[104] However, [Gerard Mussies](#) considers Marnas and Dagon to be two separate deities.^[115] According to Taco Terpstra, Marnas' origins are "nebulous,"^[116] and while his name can be plausibly assumed to be Aramaic, his iconography follows [Hellenistic](#) conventions. At times he is shown naked, similar to a naked and bearded Zeus, either seated on a throne or standing while holding a lightning bolt. Other images show him in a form similar to [Apollo](#), holding a bow and standing on a pedestal in front of a female deity. Regardless of the variety of depictions, the abundance of them on coins indicates that the inhabitants of Gaza held him in high esteem and associated this god with their city. Textual sources portray him as a "sky god who also performed oracles."^[117] An indirect reference to Marnas occurs in an inscription from Roman [Portus](#) from the reign of [Gordian III](#) (238-244 CE), which relays that the city of Gaza honored this ruler "at the prompting of its ancestral god."^[118]

Marnas is mentioned in the works of the fourth century scholar and theologian Jerome, in several stories from his *Life of St. Hilarion*, written around 390 CE, in which he condemns his adherents as idolatrous and as "enemies of God." Violent sentiments against the cult of Marnas and the destruction of his temple in Gaza, the Marneion, are described by [Mark the Deacon](#) in his account of the life of the early fifth-century saint [Porphyry of Gaza](#) (*Vita Porphyri*). After the destruction of Marnas's temple, Mark petitioned the emperor [Arcadius](#) through his wife [Eudoxia](#) to grant a request to have all pagan temples in Gaza destroyed.^[119] Terpstra notes there is no direct evidence for the historicity of this account, as Porphyry is not mentioned by other contemporary authors and is entirely absent from inscriptions, though it does indeed appear that in the early fifth century the temple of Marnas was replaced by a Christian church.^[120] However, the majority of Gazans were not Christians in the fifth century CE, and likely continued to worship their city's tutelary deity.^[121]

The connection with the Fish Gate and the deity of the Philistines is worth noting as we find a further connection with that region in the following verse, which we will look at later. At the heart of these verses is the message of how HaShem had become regarded by the people of Israel as just another god. This removed the blessing from them as it became clear by the continued attacks that they received from the surrounding nations, because of their unwillingness to observe and guard the commandments, but also to recognise their place in the world as the emissaries of the Creator. By adopting the practices and mindset of the surrounding nations they became subject to the same judgments and worse as their enemies turned on them as they turned away from the Master.

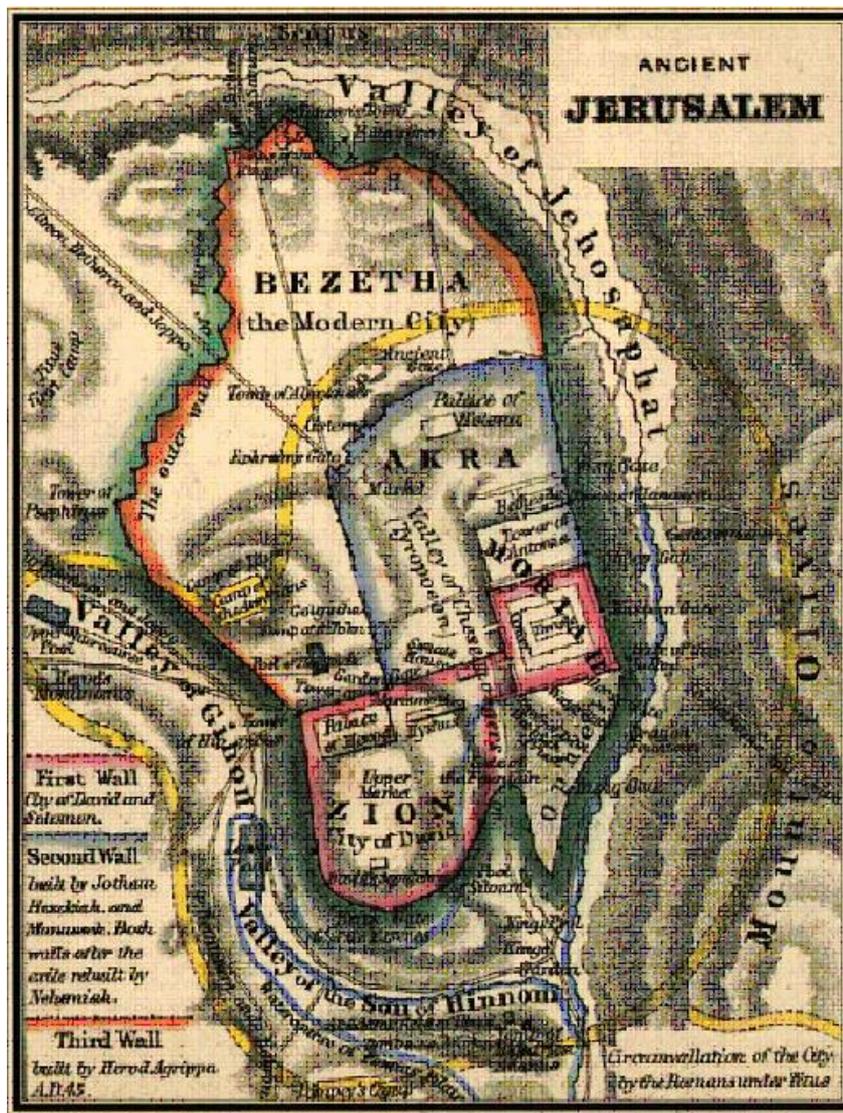
An example of this error is shown through the actions of Uzzah as the Ark of the Covenant is being brought back to Jerusalem.

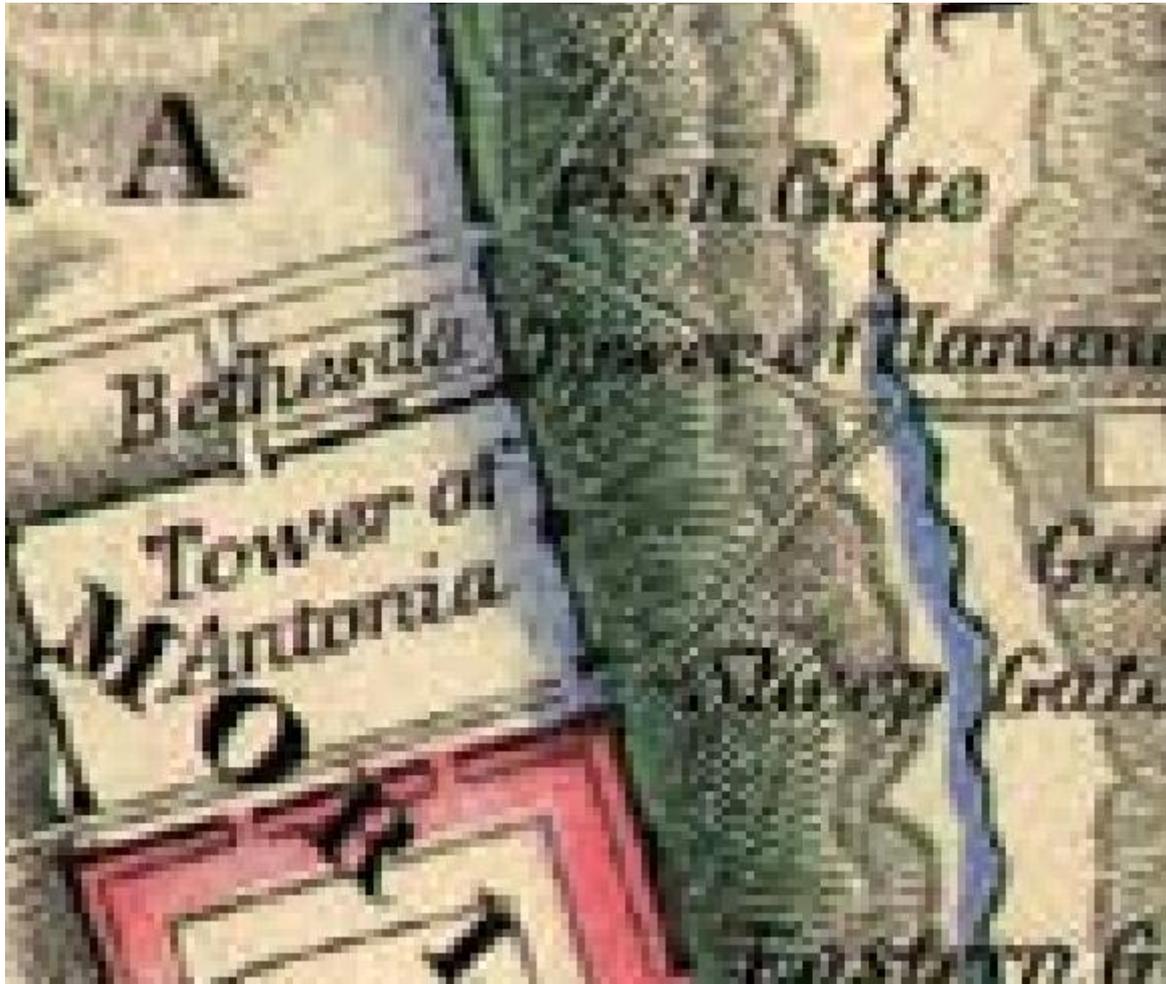
And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.

(2 Samuel 6:5-7)

Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

(Isaiah 46:1-4)





The verses in Isaiah are not poetic, they are practical and vitally relevant to all who claim to be of the believing community. We are not to confuse who HaShem is with the gods of this world and the god of ourselves. As soon as we begin to fall into this trap, we start to believe that we need to help Hashem rather than understanding that if we “shamar” his Torah and cling to his Yshua then it will carry us not the other way round.

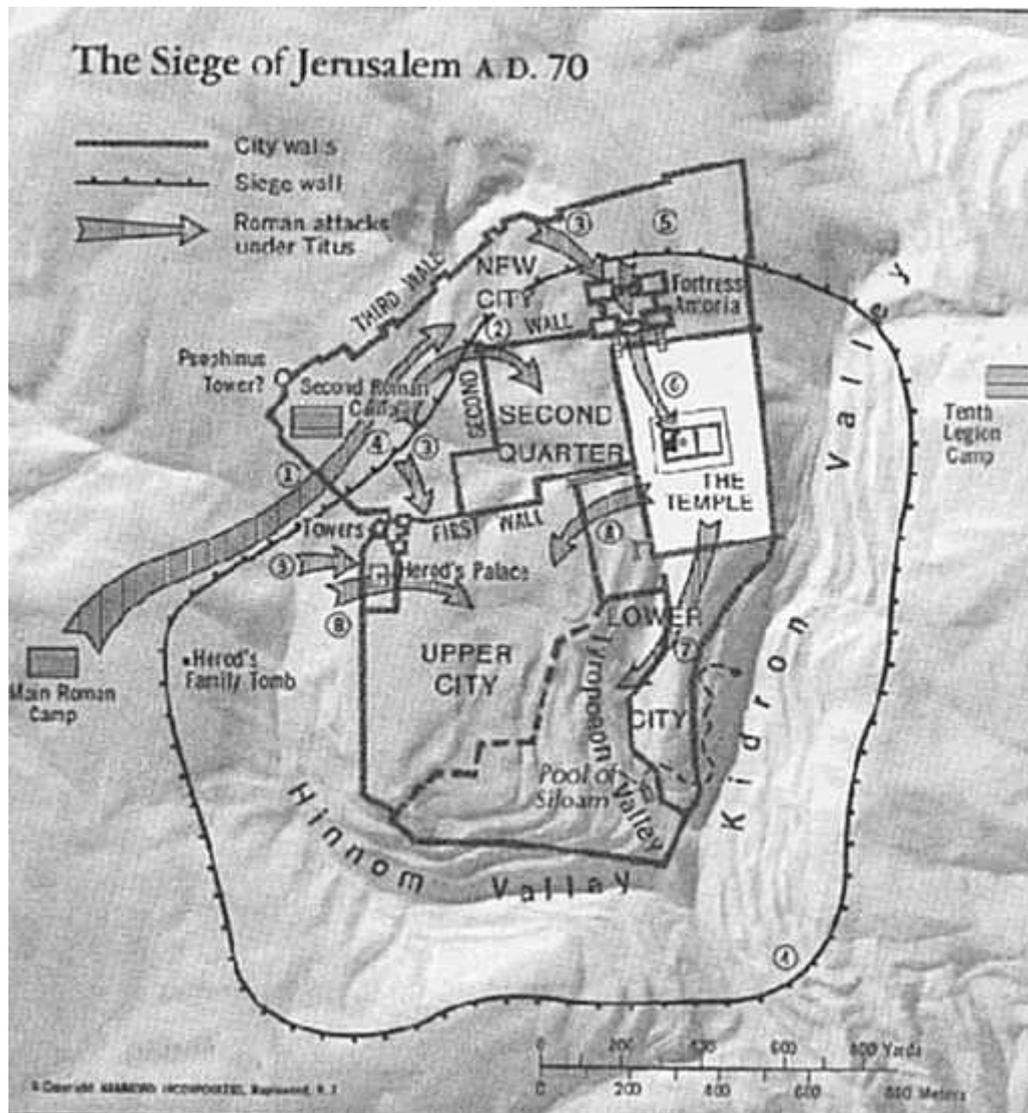
“a wail from the Second Quarter”

Those who have visited Jerusalem and the Old City know that it is divided into four quarters, now called the Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Armenian quarters. section of the text it is worth going to the places that refer to Huldah’s prophecy. The Second quarter where the prophetess Huldah lived is what is presently the Muslim Quarter. At the time of the writing of Zephaniah, the Muslim quarter would not have existed as in its present form.

In order to understand this section of the text we start by looking at the discovery of the Book of the Law, which many scholars agree was probably Deuteronomy.

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter), and they talked with her.

[2 Kings 22:11-14](#)



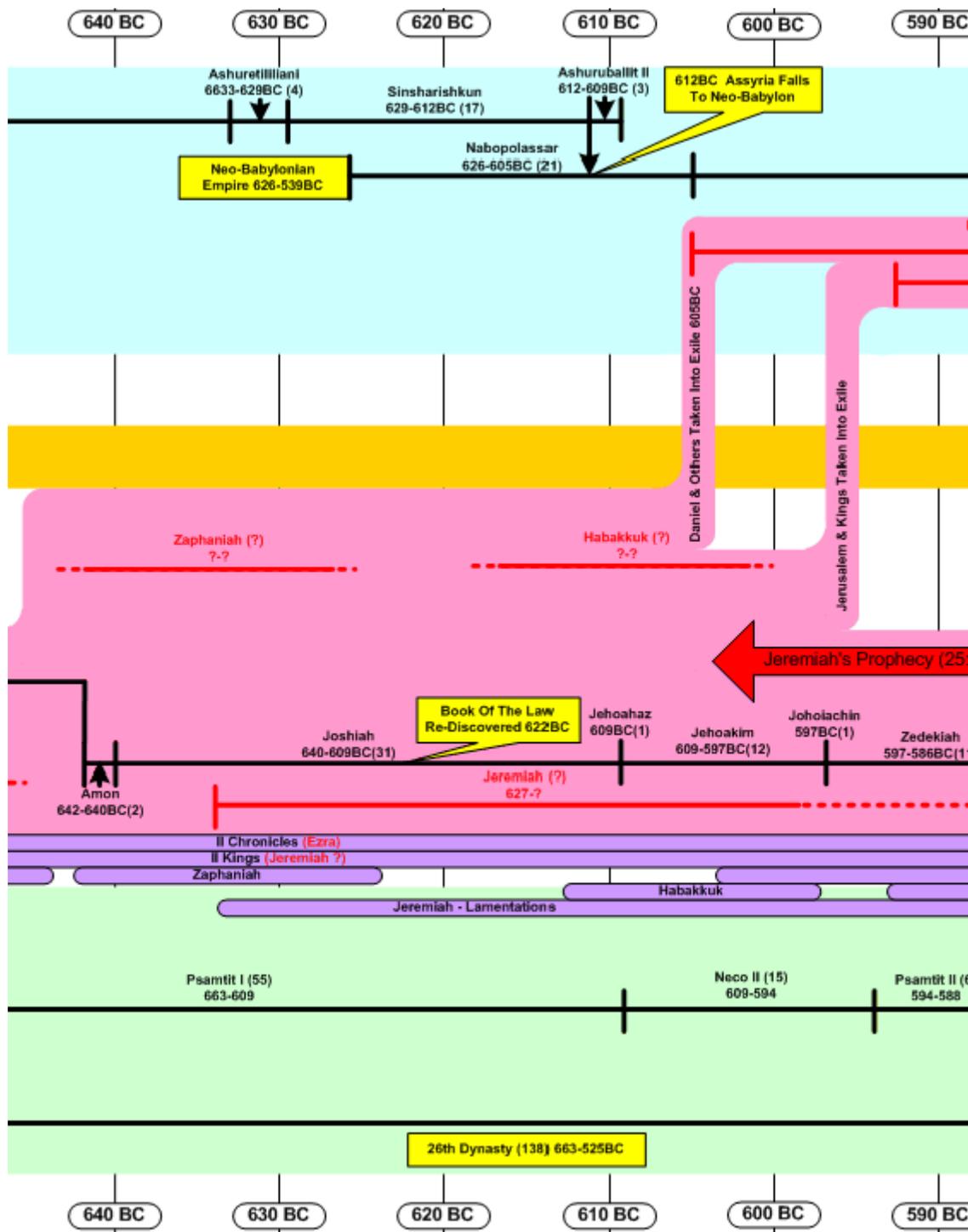
So Hilkiah and those whom the king had sent went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter) and spoke to her to that effect.

[2 Chronicles 34:22](#)

Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the house of the LORD, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book.

[2 Chronicles 34:29-31](#)

The modern-day idolatry that we see is really no different from what existed in Zephaniah's time. At the heart of it is the adoption of commerce as being the vehicle through which most idolatry comes by the commodification of ideas and practices that were never to be used in this manner.



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

Zephaniah 1:11

Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him.

Proverbs 27:22

And he was very thirsty, and he called upon the LORD and said, "You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore, the name of it was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day. And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

Judges 15:18-20