

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 2, 2014

Seek God While You Can

by Dan Trygg

“Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame, ² 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. ³ 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

“Seek Yahweh 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; and let him return to Yahweh, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

Isaiah 55:6-7

“I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to Yahweh’; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. ⁶ Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not reach him. ⁷ You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. ⁸ ‘I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.’”

Psalms 32:5-8

Zephaniah lived at a very dark time in the history of Judah. He was a great-great-grandson to King Hezekiah, the famous king of Judah who had led the people in the *last* great revival the nation had experienced, some 70 years earlier (715 B.C.). **The sins that had cropped up repeatedly over the nation's history had become commonplace. While Hezekiah had led the people to follow God, Manasseh had led them hell-bent away from Him** (II Kg. 21). He had encouraged serving *other* gods, and gave himself to the most degraded and evil practices of witchcraft and fertility religion. He reintroduced Baal worship, the Asherah poles, and the hedonistic worship of sex that accompanied these cults. Both female and male (homosexual) cult prostitutes were part of the practice of these religions. He also worshiped Molech, another ancient idol of pre-Israelite culture. Molech was represented by a bronze statue with hands extended to receive a child, placed in its arms. It was heated within and in front by fire in a bronze brazier. When the infant or child was placed in its arms, it would scream, contract as it was consumed, and then fall into the fire below. This was done to appease the wrath of Molech, and to encourage his blessing. (‘Baal’ is a word for “lord, master” [cf. Hos. 2:16]; and ‘Molech’ is a variant from the Hebrew word for “king”). He also worshiped and served the host of heaven (astrology, and the worship of stars, planets and possibly angels), used divination (Employing ritual means to tell the future or determine a course of action. Modern examples: Tarot cards, reading palms, horoscopes, tea leaves, etc.), and dealt with mediums and spiritists (people who profess to communicate with the dead, or can “channel” a [demonic] spirit to receive special knowledge or power). **He did these things openly, and promoted them. He did much evil, provoking Yahweh to anger. Those who had been faithful to God spoke out against these evil practices. They were considered as backward, judgmental and intolerant.** Manasseh mercilessly persecuted and murdered any who challenged or opposed his practices. He shed much innocent blood, filling Jerusalem with the blood of martyrs. Isaiah himself, the old prophet from Hezekiah's reforms, was put in a hollow tree trunk and sawn in two, a victim of this purge.

Isaiah had already lived through comparable times. His call to prophetic service as a young man came in the year that Uzziah died (739 B.C.). He witnessed the northern kingdom, Israel, in its death throes. Prophets like *Elijah* and *Elisha* had tried to call the people back to Yahweh, but they persisted in their rebellious practices. They were followed by *Amos*, *Hosea*, and *Micah*. *In each case, these prophetic voices were rejected.* A deaf ear was turned toward their words of correction, and warnings of judgment. In addition to the practices that Manasseh promoted, these prophets reveal to us another side to this departure from God's ways. **Each of these prophets decried the rising social injustice, and the oppression of the poor. The rich had become richer, and the poor had become poorer.** The wealthy bought up the land of the poor, and built large, ornate houses, and had vacation homes and seasonal dwellings (Amos 3:15; 5:11; 6:11; Mic. 2:1,2; Isa. 5:8,9). *They controlled law and justice with their money, and oppressed the poor and needy* (Amos 2:6,8; 4:1; 5:7,11,12; 5:24; 8:4,6; Mic. 2:8,9; 3:1-3,9-11; 7:3,4; Isa. 1:17,23; 3:13-15; 5:23; 10:1,2; 29:20,21; 58:6,7; 59:12-14). *They were characterized by dishonesty, sexual immorality, careless ease and drunkenness* (Amos 2:7,8; 4:1; 6:1,4-6; 8:5,10; Hos. 4:2; 4:11-14,18; 7:1; 9:9; 10:13; 11:12; 12:1; Mic. 2:11; 6:10-12; Isa. 3:16-23; 5:11,12,22; 59:3-7). *Though they put on an appearance of religion, they mocked the true revelation of God, and would not endure any correction*, but vehemently rejected it (Amos 2:11,12; 3:4; 4:4,5; 5:10, 21-26; 6:6; 7:10-17; Hos. 2:8-13; 4:4-6,10,12-14,17-19; 6:6; 7:13-16; 8:4,11-13; 9:4,7; 10:1,2; 11:2,5,6; 13:2; Mic. 1:7; 3:5; 5:13; 6:6-8; 7:10; Isa. 1:10-17; 2:8; 58:1-5; 65:3-5). Isaiah also mentioned the practices of the occult, soothsaying, consulting mediums and wizards (2:6; 3:2,3; 8:19).

We live at such a time as this. Read any newspaper, and you will see articles about the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer. It is a concern in our society, even something our politicians are talking about. Interestingly, however, for the first time in history our national congress is comprised of a majority of millionaires. Are our millionaire politicians truly willing to make laws that will benefit the interests of their constituents, or will the “mammon of unrighteousness” and *self*-interest color their judgment? We know our system of government is not above bribery or manipulation, by individuals or by the pressures of special interests. The fruits of our government policies, and world events, speak for themselves: From a low of 11.1% in 1983, the rate of Americans in poverty has grown steadily, until today it stands above the 15% level. Home ownership is down. With the record foreclosures of the past few years, it has become more difficult to find affordable housing. One in seven children in the US are now growing up in poverty. The largest correlating factor that accompanies poverty is whether or not a child grows up in a single parent family. With the focus on *self*-fulfillment, and the loss of sexual morals, our society is rampant with single moms, and one parent families. In addition, there is the financial burden of child support to fathers who move on to other relationships. **We are a society that worships other gods, and dabbles in many other religious traditions.** In our pluralistic society, many religious traditions are welcomed and tolerated. We live at a time when the influence of other gods, and other philosophies, are widely and unquestionably accepted. **This is an affront to the true God.** There is only *one* Truth, in spite of our human claims of many “stories” or “narratives”. God is *not* OK with dabbling in other faiths. **We tolerate, and even celebrate, the occult.** Occult practices have also become widely accepted and marketed. Through the media, we have sanitized, romanticized and even normalized the paranormal (demonic manifestations), painting it either as harmless, or as an attractive alternative for people to pursue. Satan is the world’s first and greatest con man. He comes to steal, kill and destroy (Jn. 10:10), and he will not miss the opportunities that come with the curiosity engendered by the media. **We are a society that promotes the free, almost unrestrained expressions of sexuality.** In spite of what may be “politically correct” in our culture, God has *not* changed *His* mind regarding this matter. Any sexual activity is to take place *only* within the marriage covenant between one man and one woman. God says He will *judge* sex outside of marriage. Fornicators and adulterers He will judge (Heb. 13:4). Homosexuality is an abomination to Him (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:25-27; I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:8-11). He sees it as degrading, a wrongful and unnatural use of the genitalia He created. We may not be worshiping fertility gods or goddesses, but we are still indulging in the sexual expressions that were so much a part of what *they* promoted. **We are a society that routinely sacrifices our offspring in the name of prosperity.** Over a million babies are aborted in the US every year. Currently, 24% of all pregnancies end in abortion, and reportedly 86% of those who have an abortion do so because it is “inconvenient” to have a child. God’s answer of abstinence before marriage may be the only method that actually works to prevent unwanted pregnancies, but it is viewed as old-fashioned, prudish and horribly “inconvenient”. **We are in a society that does not want to be told of God’s standards of truth or righteousness. If you hold to traditional Christian values in our society today, you will be seen as backward, judgmental and intolerant.** In a society that values tolerance above truth, ...or even *life*..., intolerance is the worst, most deplorable, characteristic possible. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it hated Me first” (Jn 15:18).

Read the passages at the top of this study again. **In both of these scenarios, God’s wrath came upon those irreverent, evil societies.** He removed those arrogant and wicked kings. Israel was more entrenched in their pride, and were unresponsive to God. They persisted in their evil ways, and the judgment was harsh and complete. Assyria swept through and took away the nation of Israel into captivity in 721 B.C. Judah had not been quite as entrenched in evil. **There had been waves of revival, and godly kings, that had kept the people coming back to Yahweh.** While Israel was rushing toward disaster during the time of Isaiah, God raised up Hezekiah to initiate revival and spiritual reformation. **This turned the tide, and kept those who responded to Yahweh in the southern kingdom from the annihilation and captivity that fell upon their brothers to the north.** Even after the apostasy and awful degradation of Manasseh’s reign, God *still* took compassion on Judah and raised up Josiah to be king, during the time of Zephaniah. The revivals under Hezekiah and Josiah pushed off judgment for Judah for another 135 years, until finally in 586 B.C. God permitted the Babylonians to breach the walls of Jerusalem and take the people into captivity.

The lesson we can learn from Israel’s history, is that **we should seek the Lord while we can. Our first and best hope, as a nation or as individuals, is to repent of our own sin, call out to God for mercy and for new life, and then determine to live our lives in pursuit of Him, His will and His ways.** If we genuinely come to God honestly and openly, and mean to change our life direction to live for Him, He *will* accept us. We must faithfully hold to God’s values and teachings, even if they are not popular. Jesus warned us not to fear those who can only kill the body. Remember, there is an eternal destiny in the balance (Lk. 12:4,5). That is *far* more important than momentary acceptance. **Finally, live lives that reflect the heart of Jesus, lives that speak the truth, but are overflowing with joy, love, compassion and service to others.** If we reflect *Him* well, then maybe others will want to seek Him, too.