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Zephaniah 3:1-10 Woe to her that is rebellious and polluted! to the oppressing city! (2) She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in Jehovah; she drew not near to her God. (3) Her princes in the midst of her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they leave nothing till the morrow. (4) Her prophets are light and treacherous persons; her priests have profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. (5) Jehovah in the midst of her is righteous; he will not do iniquity; every morning doth he bring his justice to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame. (6) I have cut off nations; their battlements are desolate; I have made their streets waste, so that none passeth by; their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, so that there is no inhabitant. (7) I said, Only fear thou me; receive correction; so her dwelling shall not be cut off, according to all that I have appointed concerning her: but they rose early and corrupted all their doings. (8) Therefore wait ye for me, saith Jehovah, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger; for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. (9) For then will I turn to the peoples of a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve him with one consent. (10) From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering.

God is faithful – even if we are faithless, and God is righteous even if all men are corrupt.

God says of Jerusalem: “Her princes in the midst of her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they leave nothing till the morrow. (4) Her prophets are light and treacherous persons; her priests have profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.
But Zephaniah says of God: “Jehovah in the midst of her is righteous; he will not do iniquity; every morning doth he bring his justice to light, he faileth not; …..”

A culture can come to love sin so much that it cannot depart from it. The leaders care only for themselves, nothing is held truly sacred, the holy is profaned and the law is violated. It reaches a point where the society refuses to accept correction, “she received not correction; she trusted not in Jehovah; she drew not near to her God.” and the prophets are scoffed at and “the unjust knoweth no shame”.

Even in the midst of such a situation God is not completely absent. He is still there for “Jehovah in the midst of her is righteous”. Neither is God the source of the evil “he will not do iniquity” but in fact is opposed to it “every morning doth he bring his justice to light”. Sometimes we say “Why does God allow such and so to occur?” The plain fact is that God does not allow wickedness – He forbids it utterly. God does not allow murder or rape or theft or injustice. God forbids them and punishes them and prophesies against them and raises up governments to arrest and convict those that do them. (Romans 13:1-8)

When God's instruments for justice (the leadership, priests and government) fail and become corrupt then God continues to forbid evil and acts in direct divine judgment on sin.
" for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger; for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy."

Yet this is not completely predetermined – repentance can change things: "I said, Only fear thou me; receive correction; so her dwelling shall not be cut off, according to all that I have appointed concerning her: …." Thus God is saying that He has seen the mess and appointed judgment but that repentance would change things. "Only fear thou me; receive correction; so her dwelling shall not be cut off". If Israel had received correction and listened to God then Jerusalem would have been spared. We see a similar situation in the book of Jonah where Nineveh does repent – and God turns back from judging the great city.

Thus God is responsive to moral change on the part of His people. God looks for us to listen to Him. As Alcoholics Anonymous has demonstrated The most wretched alcoholic who makes an inventory of their sin and truly turns their life over to God will find mercy and release. God hears the repentant – as the parable of the Pharisee and the publican so clearly tells us: Luke 18:13-14 But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinner. (14) I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Repentance delights God and all the angels in heaven: "Luke 15:7 I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance."

Do born-again Christians need to repent after conversion? Not in the sense of whole-of-life repentance but certainly in the many acts of repentance that accompany sanctification – repenting of a certain sin, repenting of an angry disposition, repenting of being a gossip, or even repenting over financial dishonesty. God wants us to face up to our sin, to heed His voice, to receive correction and to deal with it once and for all.

Zephaniah tells us that God punishes the nations, to break the power of sin and to make a pure and holy people who worship Him: "For then will I turn to the peoples of a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve him with one consent. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering." Or as Jesus says: "John 4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers."

To sum up: God seeks pure hearted people who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth. When we are out of tune with the Spirit, or away from the Truth we need to receive correction and repent. God will always be in our midst as a righteous and faithful God who does no iniquity – and He will speak to us – and we must listen!.

Blessings,

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