

THRU THE BIBLE SERIES
"Part XXIII: Zephaniah - Handling A Group's Spiritual Complacency"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) While witnessing to some unsaved coworkers where I was once employed in a secular job, one of them responded: "Hey, remember that Christian radio program where 'Shipmate Bob', a former drunk would try to get guys like me 'saved'? Well, I say (In a mockery of Shipmate Bob's opening line, instead of saying, "Ahoy, there, shipmate! Eight bells and all's well!") "Ahoy, there, shipmate! Eight bells and I'm going to **hell!** Sure, I'm going to hell, but all my friends will be there, and we'll turn on the air conditioning and have a beer party! I'd rather be with my friends in hell than go to heaven with nobody I know!"

At the time, I didn't know how to answer the guy! But, WHAT do we do to handle this COMPLACENT attitude many unsaved people have about their desperate spiritual conditions?!

(2) But complacency grips our **nation**. Columnist George Will once wrote about a glaring moral discrepancy in the nation. He said: ". . . it is, by now, a scandal beyond irony that thanks to the energetic litigation of 'civil liberties' fanatics, pornographers enjoy expansive first amendment protection while first graders in a nativity play are said to violate first amendment rights." Yet, when a pedestrian was asked by a reporter what the two greatest problems in America were, he answered: "**I don't know, and I don't care!**" (The Rebirth Of America, p. 84, 81) **The reporter noted that HE GOT BOTH OF THEM RIGHT! How do we deal with such complacency in our nation today?!**

(3) Not only is the nation complacent; often complacency afflicts the **Church!** Bob Bouffard, one of the missionaries we support with the American Mission to Open Churches once told me of this challenge in his former ministry in New York. It was a communion Sunday, and he needed men to help him serve the elements. But that Sunday, **none** of his board members were **present** -- all were out fishing or golfing or taking in some other amusement or business venture over the weekend.

How do we deal with such complacency in the Church?! How should Bob Bouffard have handled it in his ministry?!

(We turn to the sermon's "Need" section . . .)

Need: "When things go well, even CHURCH people can become COMPLACENT and live as though only this earthly life mattered! When THAT happens, I get concerned, knowing God will discipline, and that means MY GROUP! What am I to DO about this?!"

- I. **When the people of Judah failed to fulfill their world mission, they became COMPLACENT, assuming God was indifferent about it:**
- A. Though God created the world and set man up as His deputy, sin deposed him, so Satan became ruler on earth, Gn. 1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4.
 - B. The Lord renewed history through the Noahic flood, Gn. 6:1-9:7.
 - C. Yet, Noah's descendant, Nimrod, began an apostasy opposing God's rule of the earth, Gn. 10:8-10; 11:1-9; Rev. 12:1-3.
 - D. God thus chose Abraham to start a nation to check this sin, Gn. 12:1-3
 - E. Yet, after many challenges en route, that nation, Israel failed to curb Nimrodian error, itself becoming so seduced by it that judgment fell:
 1. Because of Solomon's apostasy, God divided Israel's kingdom, giving most of the tribes to his servant, Jeroboam, 1 Kings 11:1-13.
 2. But Jeroboam started an idol worship to keep people from turning to Solomon's side. That led later kings to sin, so God sent Jeroboam's nation into Assyrian captivity, 1 K. 12:25-2 K. 17:41!
 - F. In the process, events fell out so that **Judah**, the **remaining** Southern Kingdom became spiritually **complacent** and went into apostasy:
 1. When the Assyrians took the Northern Kingdom of **Israel**, they also unjustly afflicted some of **Judah's** cities, bringing on God's wrath and the demise of Assyria's Nineveh (Prophecy of Nahum).
 2. When Assyria's threat then later **diminished**, Judah felt so secure that she fell deep into idolatry, presuming that God was **indifferent** about it, Zeph. 1:12b! (Bib. Know. Com., O.T., p. 1523-1524)
- II. **However, God was ENRAGED about Judah's sins and used Zephaniah to warn complacent Judah to REPENT, or ELSE!**
- A. In a **shocking** opening, Zephaniah's prophecy **immediately** opened by predicting **world catastrophe** in the Great Tribulation: in the **reverse** order from how they were **created** to picture **divine** devastation, **all** wicked humans along with **all** land animal, bird and fish life and **all** the works of man's hands would be destroyed, Zeph. 1:2-3; Gen. 1:20-26!
 - B. This end time prediction, intending to jolt the nation was followed by a prediction of Judah's imminent fall due to her spiritual **complacency**:

1. God would punish Judah for (a) **sluggishly** failing to **follow** the Lord (b) which **led** to religious syncretism, the **mixing** of false Baal worship with the true worship of Israel's God, Zephaniah 1:4-7.
 2. God would punish the princes, wealthy & violent land grabbers and merchants who became materialistic in an atmosphere where people **complacently** felt God wouldn't **judge** them, Zephaniah 1:8-13.
 - C. Zephaniah's prophecy then reached out to call down judgment on Gentile nations along with that of Judah, Zeph. 2:4-3:7. These judgments were foretastes of the Great Tribulation **still** to come, 3:8!
- III. **Yet, though Zephaniah warned Judah, the nation as a WHOLE would NOT repent, Zeph. 3:7. Thus, Zephaniah contributes to the "thread of redemption" by revealing that God RESPONDS to GROUP COMPLACENCY by SAVING its GODLY REMNANT:**
- A. In **view** of coming **national** judgment, God called for godly, humble **INDIVIDUALS** to trust in Him for **shelter** from that judgment, 2:3.
 - B. This begins the theme that God will save a **remnant** through **history**:
 1. God saw that Judah's **national** rebellion was **typical** of **HISTORY'S world** rebellion against Him: thus, **Judah's** imminent judgment prefigured the **Great Tribulation**, Zephaniah 1:2-3; 3:8.
 2. Since only a **REMNANT** would thus **EVER** take God seriously, whether they lived in Judah in Zephaniah's era or in the still future Tribulation Period, **God calls INDIVIDUALS in complacent groups THROUGHOUT history to trust Him for PERSONAL escape from group judgment unto blessing, Zeph. 3:8-9, 11-20!**

***Application:** If noting that a group of people to which we belong is spiritually complacent, realize that GOD is NOT democratic, and that He WILL judge the WHOLE GROUP if He has to, so (1) believe on Christ for salvation from sin to be included in God's saved REMNANT, Jn. 3:16. (2) As a believer, fellowship with God to enjoy PERSONAL blessing regardless if other GROUPS of even BELIEVERS may be spiritually complacent, and (a) confess our sins to live a longer earthly life (1 Jn. 1:9 with 5:16), (b) depending on the Holy Spirit for thought and behavior control to avoid sin, Gal. 5:16-23. (c) In this position, REGARDLESS of what the MAJORITY of others around us may be doing, FERVENTLY obey Scripture for PERSONAL blessing, 1 Jn. 2:1-5; Jn. 21:18-22!*

***Lesson:** (1) God ALWAYS holds ALL men responsible for sin regardless how indifferent are GROUPS of men toward Him. (2) Yet, GROUPS historically do NOT take God seriously and repent, so we must focus on PERSONAL godliness for reward as God aims to save His REMNANT!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon conclusion . . .)

We began this message with an illustration of missionary, Bob Bouffard and his confrontation with complacency in his former ministry in Fort Ann, New York. He faced a communion Sunday with no men on his board around to help him serve the communion elements.

Bob told me that at first he didn't know what to do! He didn't know if he should postpone communion because he didn't have any helpers. Were they to proceed, he wondered **how** was he going to do that! Because he didn't have any adult male helpers, was the whole ministry at Cornerstone Baptist Church a flop, and should he announce the imminent closing of the Church's doors there?!

As Bob looked out over the congregation of those **individuals** who had come to worship the Lord, God jarred his thoughts, for out of the blue, he shared with the people, "We don't have the men here today to help pass out the communion elements, so at the time when the elements would usually be passed, I ask you **individually** to come up here and take the elements on your **own!**"

Bob told me that the service that day became one of the most memorable to those who were present! A real moving of the Holy Spirit in the congregation occurred, giving a shot in the arm to the Cornerstone Baptist Church in Fort Ann, New York!

When it comes down to it, GROUPS historically don't cut it with God -- only the godly remnant WITHIN the group will be blessed! Our part is to do what Bob Bouffard did that Sunday in Cornerstone Baptist Church of Fort Ann, New York -- focus on ministry as an individual to the Lord, and minister for the welfare of the godly remnant of INDIVIDUALS within the group who will respond to God!