

When National Judgment Comes

By Jim Davis

“For I am with you, declares the Lord, to save you; For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly, and will by no means leave you unpunished.” Jeremiah 30:11

Many nations and tribes of people have existed and then vanished. Archaeology has discovered dominating civilizations that disappeared for centuries before being rediscovered. In the passage above the prophet predicts that the nations that have been used to discipline Judah will come to a complete end. In Genesis Abraham is told that his offspring were to be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years that the iniquity of the Amorites might be made full (Genesis 15:13-16). The picture of iniquity being made full is one of a nation or tribe of people taking a wrong path, the end of which leads to destruction and in some cases annihilation. Following the lead of the Canaanites who lived in the land before them, God's people took the path of iniquity as well. Generations came to judgment and were exiled but they were not completely destroyed because of God's promises.

I would like to think about the Gentile nations in the Bible and how God has dealt with them. Israel destroyed nations going into the land. Also, God declared that He would completely destroy the nations that took Judah into captivity. Scripture and history teach us there is a time when the fullness of iniquity leads to God's judgment upon nations. Having said these things we might ask the question, where is my nation? If there is a readable scale of iniquity, where would we fall on that scale? Or how far away is my country from God's judgment?

How far is my country from judgment?

In 2 Kings 18-20 we read about the reign of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah's death is calculated around 686 BC, approximately 100 years before the exile of Judea into Babylon. As one considers the life and accomplishments of Hezekiah as they are recorded in the Scripture and the predicted conflict with Babylon (2 Kings 20:16-18), you can hardly keep from asking yourself the question, how does my country compare?

There are some serious pitfalls in asking such a question. First, there *is the common error of inaccurately applying God's covenant relationship with Israel to Gentile nations*. We should be careful not to compare a country that does not have a covenant relationship with God to Israel, a country that does have a covenant relationship with God. Not rightly dividing God's word can cause one to blur the promises and the curses that were given to Israel and try to make them fit into our context. This leads into error and does not help us to understand where we are on the scale of iniquity.

A second error is made when we fail to realize that *God has communicated in a special way to Israel*. God has not only made a special covenant with the nation of Israel but He also communicated in special ways with them. The prophet Jonah was sent to the Assyrian city of Nineveh with a special message from the Lord, “Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you” (Jonah 3:2). There is no indication that many of the other Gentile nations that came under judgment were given special warning from God. No prophet was sent to the land of Canaan to warn them of judgment to come. Also, Jesus compared the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom,

places that had not heard the words of prophets or seen special miracles, with the Jewish cities that had heard the words of the prophets and seen His miracles (Matthew 11:20-24). God communicated in special ways before judgment came upon Israel. Judgment came upon Gentile nations often without special warning from the Lord.

If this is the case, how can anyone know where their nation is on the scale of iniquity? How far from judgment are we? The answer to that question is that we cannot know. It has always been the requirement that “the just shall live by faith.” The Lord is the only person who is just and can determine the time and place for such events. This is true for both the Jew and the Gentile. This has been true in every culture and historical period.

In King Hezekiah’s day there was revival and deliverance for the nation of Israel. The great prophet Isaiah was heard in the streets of Jerusalem, and the response would bring hope for those who were concerned about the spiritual health of their nation. Shortly after the death of Hezekiah all would change. Can you imagine the frustration that the godly people of Judah felt when Hezekiah’s son Manasseh violated God’s covenant? “And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations who the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel” (2 Kings 21:2).

Although we cannot answer the question as to how far our nation is from judgment, there are observable parallels between Israel’s judgment and the judgment that came upon the Gentile nations. One thing that should be stated is that Manasseh’s reign was part of God’s judgment upon Israel. It was predicted by Isaiah that Hezekiah’s treasure and offspring would be taken into captivity to Babylon (2 Kings 20:17-18). Manasseh was part of the progression along the scale of iniquity. But what is the evil that Manasseh did that was like the abominations of the nations that God dispossessed before the sons of Israel?

Manasseh’s sins, recorded in 2 Kings 21, can be summarized into three categories: false worship, child sacrifice, and occultic practices. Moses gave a more comprehensive list of things in the Pentateuch. Other things often associated with false worship included many forms of deviate sexual behavior. This list includes adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality and other forms of perversion. Concerning these things God’s word says, “Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled therefore I have visited its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants” (Leviticus 18:24-25). Concerning Manasseh the prophets said that he did abominations that were more wicked than the Amorites who were before him and therefore God would wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish (2 Kings 21:11-13).

God is just not to judge the Gentile nations according to the standard of the law given to Israel by Moses. But God does judge Gentile nations by a natural law, a standard of justice and righteousness that all created beings should understand. Also, those Gentile nations that have some knowledge of the standards in the Bible and have willfully rejected them will most certainly be held responsible for the truth that has been revealed to them. If we understand this correctly then we can say that many of today’s nations are in trouble. Not only are false worship and immoral lifestyles tolerated, they are being practiced and promoted as legal and acceptable.

God is merciful and longsuffering. He is also just and righteous. We on the other hand could never determine when or how God’s judgment might come. The proper response for a nation should begin with individuals who repent from evil and in brokenness and humility submit to the Lord.

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