





JUDGMENT

on the Nations?

When I travel, I am frequently asked about God's judgment

on the nations. Recently, as I was traveling in the United States, it seemed to me that many Christians believe that God is currently judging the US. *The Harbinger*, a bestselling book by Jonathan Cahn, warns Americans that judgment is imminent and can only be halted by deep repentance. It has been on the *New York Times* Paperback Trade Fiction best sellers list for a record length of time for a Christian book (64 weeks as of this writing). Many Americans are also re-reading *The Vision*, written by David Wilkerson in 1973, which warned of God's judgment on the United States. In other nations, Christians are also looking at world conditions and asking if or when God will judge their nation?

It is a good question to be asking. Truly, many nations are in distress financially. In March, Cyprus had a major banking crisis that caused ripples throughout the world. Unemployment rates are soaring in many nations. Europe has a combined unemployment rate of over 11%; but some European nations are in dire situations, including Greece at 26%, Spain at 26.6%, and several are at the 15% level. The United States has a record debt load with government spending out of control. Wars and regional conflicts are flaring up in various spots around the globe. Financially, for the past five years the world has been in a "bear" market with good news hard to find. Recent reports show that persecution of Christians is increasing, as is anti-Semitism. The Middle East is a sea of instability and Israel is threatened on a daily basis. How should we interpret all of this? What can we do to help our nation? our faith community? our family?

God's Nature

The Bible is clear that God is a God of mercy and a God of justice. In my opinion Exodus 34:6-7 is one of the most important passages of Scripture in the Bible. It is here that God defines Himself and His character to Moses. Jewish sages call this the 13 Attributes of God's Mercy. "...*The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation.*" (For a deeper look at this Scripture, see our teaching letter "Knowing and Loving God", at www.bridgesforpeace.com).

One of the things I love most about God is that He is utterly consistent—what He says He will do, He does. We see this in the amazing manner in which biblical prophecies for the nation and people of Israel are being literally fulfilled, especially in the last 100 years. Living in Israel, I see evidence of His faithful promise-keeping nature everywhere as Jewish immigrants from the nations are my neighbors and friends. Hebrew is spoken with a multitude of accents as the people of the Book have come home just like the Book said they would. We love to look at the positive side of His promise keeping, but there are also the judgment predictions, which God also faithfully fulfills.



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Nations God Has Judged Historically

The Bible has many accounts of nations or cities that were judged by God. Let's look briefly at a few incidents.

Sodom and Gomorrah—God was so incensed at the behavior of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah that He utterly destroyed the cities and all but four of their residents by raining down fire and brimstone upon them. They were judged for their perversion and depravity. They were also judged for how they treated visitors. Ramon Bennett, in his book *Saga, Israel and the Demise of Nations* says, "The outcry that came to God was 'against Sodom and Gomorrah.' The inhabitants of those cities were in the habit of ill-treating strangers passing through the area and this, too, was an abomination to God, who cares for the stranger as much as He does the widow and the orphan" (90). "*If a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God*" (Lev. 19:33–34).



Egypt—the nation of Egypt was judged for their treatment of the children of Israel. Each year at Passover, the people of Israel remember the time of their slavery in Egypt and the deliverance of God. The ten plagues that God brought against ancient Egypt resulted in unprecedented destruction. They were judged for enslaving the Jewish people, killing Jewish baby boys, and for their cruelty to the people of Israel. They were judged and severely punished; however, they were not totally destroyed. There are many references to Egypt in subsequent time periods, some of which are still to be fulfilled.

Assyria—the prophets, including Jonah and Nahum, prophesied against the Assyrian city of Nineveh. The Assyrian Empire was known for its cruelty. Frederick William Farrar, in his book *The Minor Prophets*, described it well.



“Judged from the vaunting inscriptions of her kings, no power more useless, more savage, more terrible, ever cast its gigantic shadow on the page of history as it passed on the way to ruin. The kings of Assyria tormented the miserable world. They exult to record how ‘space failed for corpses’; how unsparing a destroyer is their goddess Ishtar; how they flung away the bodies of soldiers like so much clay; how they made pyramids of human heads; how they burned cities; how they filled populous lands with death and devastation; how they reddened broad deserts with carnage of warriors; how they scattered whole countries with the corpses of their defenders as with chaff; how they impaled ‘heaps of men’ on stakes, and strewed the mountains and choked rivers with dead bones; how they cut off the hands of kings and nailed them on the walls, and left their bodies to rot with bears and dogs on the entrance gates of cities; how they employed nations of captives in making brick in fetters; how they cut down warriors like weeds, or smote them like wild beasts in the forests, and covered pillars with the flayed skins of rival monarchs” (147, 148).



Impalement of Jews by Assyrians



We are all familiar with the story of Jonah and the big fish. What an amazing story that shows God’s character traits including both judgment and mercy. I understand why Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh! He was well aware of the heinous deeds of the Assyrians. Their interaction with Israel was studded with painful incidents—in fact the 10 northern tribes were eventually taken into captivity by Assyria. Jonah must have been glad that God was judging the Assyrians.

At the same time he understood the character of God: “...for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm” (Jon. 4:2). Notice the similarity to Exodus 34:6–7. And in fact, the people of Nineveh in that

generation did repent and God delayed His judgment. The prophet Zephaniah says: “And He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness” (Zeph. 2:13). In 612 BC, Nineveh was completely destroyed—razed to the ground. All that remains of that once great city are a few mounds of dirt in what is now Iraq.

God, the One who does what He says He will, in His justice judged these and other nations and cities throughout the Bible. There were many reasons why they were judged. They were judged for their cruelty, immoral behavior, and idolatry. And they were judged for how they treated Israel and the Jewish people.

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What about the Future?

There are judgments, which are prophesied in the Bible, that have not yet occurred. Some concern individual nations or cities like the prophecy in Isaiah 17 that speaks about Damascus, an ancient city that endures to the present day in Syria. “Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap” (Isa. 17:1). This has not occurred to date.

There are also several passages, which speak about the nations being judged by God.

Joel 3—The prophet Joel thunders a message for our time. “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land...Proclaim this among the nations: ‘Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up...Let the nations be awakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations...Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain...” (Joel 3:1–2, 9, 12, 14–17).

The name “Jehoshaphat” has a literal meaning in Hebrew. It means God will judge. The word translated “judge” in Hebrew is *shofat* (שפט). The word also means to administer justice, pass sentence, punish, rule, or consider. Judgment is from the same root word: *shfetah* (שפיתה). The first part of the word Jehoshaphat in Hebrew is *Yod-He-Vav* (YHV יהו) which is part of God’s name, (YHVH יהוה) often pronounced Yahweh. There was also a king of Judah called Jehoshaphat.

This is a very helpful Scripture because it identifies the timing of the events as being the time “when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem.” We are living in the times when the captives of Judah and Jerusalem are returning to their ancient homeland (v. 1). Are we nearing the time when God will judge the nations? Certainly that is a real possibility and from many of the signs we see, judgment may be in the near future. I confess that I don’t understand how God reckons time! It is, however, very clear from this passage (v. 2) that God is unhappy about two issues:

1. Scattering His people, the Jewish people
2. Dividing His Land

Rabbi David Kimchi “Radak” (1160-1235) wrote a commentary on all of the *Tanach*, (Gen.–Mal.) and he is viewed by many Jewish students of the Bible as the commentator of choice. His commentary on the statement in verse 2: “And I will indict them there concerning Israel, My people and My heritage,” [Jewish translation] reads, “I will bring them into judgment and castigate them for the evil they perpetrated against the Jewish people, when they were exiled among them.”



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Joel 3:2

In the *Art Scroll Commentary of the 12 Minor Prophets*, Joel's prophecy about the judgment of the nations is related to the battle of Gog and Magog: "Some commentators interpret the war of Gog and Magog to refer to a war which will be fought between the armies of Edom—i.e., the Christian nations—and Yishmael—the Arab peoples. The Almighty will incite them to meet in battle in the vicinity of Jerusalem, where they will both be decimated in punishment for their persecutions of the Jewish people" (176-177).



Zechariah 12—The prophet Zechariah also talks of a day when the nations of the world will come up against Jerusalem: "And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it" (Zech. 12:3). According to Radak, the nations (or peoples) who come against Jerusalem are "the armies of Gog and Magog, who will attempt to besiege Jerusalem, confidently believing that if that great city is conquered, the remainder of the Land of Israel will automatically fall."

Whether Radak is right about the Zechariah passage referring to Gog and Magog or it is another conflict, the result is the same. God will respond on behalf of Israel.

Ezekiel 38–39—We don't have the space to go into great detail about the passage in Ezekiel 38 and 39 which describes the Gog and Magog invasion. See our teaching letter "Living in the Book of Ezekiel" (www.bridgesforpeace.com) for a look at this passage. For the purposes of this teaching, let me point out that, as with these other passages, God makes it very clear that He will come against those nations who come to destroy the nation of Israel.

Matthew 25— Judgment of the Nations

Yeshua also talked about the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me'" (Matt. 25:31–40).

I believe that when Yeshua refers to "My brethren" in this context of judging the nations, He is speaking of the Jewish people. As far as my research has gone, I see no place that Yeshua referred to any other people as "brethren." While He certainly loves all peoples, there is a preponderance of evidence that nations will be judged for how they treat the nation and people of Israel. I will not be dogmatic on this issue, but I am not alone in this opinion. Most of the Bible commentaries I checked agree with this interpretation. This in no way means that we shouldn't also care for the needs of others.

I believe we would be foolish not to recognize that God cares deeply for Israel and will judge those who come against them, scatter the people, divide the land, and don't show love and compassion to the Jewish people when they are in distress.

Nations on Dangerous Ground

In March, US President Obama was in Israel along with a huge entourage which included the new US Secretary of State John Kerry. Although many positive statements were made by the US leaders, they also continued to advocate for "two states for two peoples." They, like most world leaders, are working to divide the Land of Israel once again. This is dangerous ground. God says He will judge those nations that scatter His people and divide His land (Joel 3).



A sheep nation?

Or a goat nation?



Tom Hess, the leader of the Jerusalem House of Prayer for All Nations, has written a book entitled, *Will Africa be Blessed or Cursed* which shows how some African nations have prospered and others failed and how that correlates to their actions toward Israel. Another similar book has been written by William Koenig entitled *Eye to Eye*, showing how disasters have struck the United States in correlation with specific actions toward Israel by US leadership.

Many Christians in the UK have publicly repented for the actions of their government toward the Jewish people in the aftermath of the Holocaust, when they severely limited Jewish immigration, virtually closing the doors of Palestine. Some have felt that the decline of the British Empire can be linked to their actions toward the Jewish people. Looking back in history, one could draw a parallel between Britain and the Spanish Empire, once a mighty world power which lost all international importance after expelling its Jewish population in 1492.

At its height, the British Empire was the largest empire in history. The map shows the areas of the world that at one time were part of the British Empire. Current British overseas territories have their names underlined.

What Can We Do?

My father, Dr. David Allen Lewis, often referred to Israel as “God’s Litmus Test.” A litmus test is defined by Merriam Webster as a test in which a single factor (such as an attitude, event, or fact) is decisive. Litmus paper when dipped into a liquid shows whether it is acidic or alkaline. Just picture for a moment God taking the litmus paper of Israel and dipping it into the cup of individual nations. The results will be seen—some will be for and some against. Some will be sheep nations destined for blessing and some will be goat nations destined for judgment.

In Dad’s book, *Can Israel Survive in a Hostile World?*, he says, “Since so many are so quiet about our nation’s creeping betrayal of Israel, you must shout your protest from the housetops. Insist that your church pay attention to this major end-time issue. Learn to refute the lies of the media and the anti-Semites. Don’t let lukewarm leadership sweep this issue under the rug. You and I can turn the tide for God and righteousness...this is, after all, the most important of all the great issues that face us today. Israel is God’s litmus test of the end times. God cannot put maximum blessing on this nation’s legitimate Christian reformers if they ignore the issue of Israel’s security and survival. There is still time to correct our course. God declares that even if a judgment has been pronounced, it can be reversed.”

Consider what the Lord says here: “*The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it*” (Jer. 18:7–8).



You and I can turn the tide for God and righteousness.

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God's character is one of mercy and justice. He is long suffering and desires for all men and nations to come to repentance. Remember, God did not destroy wicked Nineveh when they donned sackcloth and ashes and truly repented. There is still time for nations to repent of their attitudes toward Israel.

Pray for your leaders; that they will turn toward God and accept His plans and purposes. Speak out on behalf of Israel. Pray earnestly for your nation and combine your prayers with action. Remember God's promise: "...if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14). Our lands need healing. Our lands need to choose God's plan for blessing, and turn away from the path that leads to judgment and possible destruction.

Take positive steps to be a blessing to the people and nation of Israel with your gifts to feed the hungry, clothe those in need and minister to the needy.

My prayer: "Oh God, have mercy on us!" That is His character. May He who was willing to save wicked Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of ten righteous men, look on our repentant hearts and save us from destruction.

Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer
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God's character is one of mercy and justice.

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Bridges for Peace is a Jerusalem-based, Bible-believing Christian organization supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews worldwide through education and practical deeds expressing God's love and mercy.

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