

The Outpoured Wrath of a Long-Provoked God

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Bible Text: Zephaniah 1:14-18

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My message tonight is entitled “The Outpoured Wrath of a Long-Provoked God,” for this message is a lamentation over the sad decline of America as a nation, a nation once favored by God for America has now become a nation which provokes God with its multiplied sins. America has a long history of doing good for the Lord. One can only look back to how God has favored America in times past with periods of revival and national spiritual awakening whereby thousands of individuals were the recipients of grace and light and life, where God poured out spiritual blessings upon the people of America during the Great Awakening under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield and a host of other God-sent men. Divine blessings were so plentiful in America back then that Benjamin Franklin said of the city of Philadelphia that when George Whitfield had preached there, Franklin said it seemed as if the entire city was going religious for there wasn’t a house that he had seen didn’t sing hymns or have family devotions.

Like I said, America has been favored in times past with divine blessings from God which came in the form of national spiritual awakenings. Then God seemed pleased to raise up America and bless her with vast prosperity to where she was looked up to by all the other nations on earth. They looked upon her in amazement. It seemed as if God’s hand was still on America even during the two World Wars where he allowed victory to come over the enemies of America.

But America as a nation slowly turned her back on God. She began to be self-sufficient and proud. In the 1960s, America chose to remove God from the public school system. America then chose to legalize abortion and murder millions of babies. America chose to legislate God out of the courthouse, force him out of the White House and sadly the church house turned their backs on God as they cheapened the Gospel and became a worldly self-reliant church where the focus was on man and his needs rather than on God and his glory.

And the modern day church began a heresy which divided God into two gods. The modern church declared that the God of the Old Testament was a God of judgment. He was severe and revengeful and angry with the wicked but the God of the New Testament was a different God. He was a God only of goodness, mercy and love. Many pulpits

preached such nonsense but the God of the Bible is a God of divine justice for in the Book of Nahum, we read,

“God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth and is furious. He reserveth wrath for his enemies.”

But many believe that God is just a God of love, that he is more tolerant towards sin today, that he is a more tolerant God than the God of the Old Testament. Listen to this verse from the New Testament found in 2 Thessalonians,

“When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

Listen friends, God is a God who changeth not. God has been long-suffering and patient with America but her sins have only multiplied and she has defiantly shook her angry fist in the face of a holy God. God’s timetable is up for America. America, once greatly favored by God, is now a nation that has filled the cup of her iniquity and she is ready to be the recipient of the outpoured wrath of a long-provoked God for the God of the Bible is a God who must punish sin. The Almighty is a jealous God who will defend his holy name.

My message tonight is about the outpoured wrath of a long-provoked God and the text is found in the Book of Zephaniah, in chapter 1 beginning in verse 14 through 18. This passage of Scripture speaks of how an angered God pours out his vengeance upon a nation because of the grievous sins of the people who refuse to turn to God or heed his warnings to return to him. God is provoked by their unwillingness to return to him and he is incensed over the flagrant sins of the nation. The anger of a long-provoked God breaks out upon a people who are stiff necked and rebellious that they become the object of the outpoured wrath of a holy God.

Turn in your Bibles to the Book of Zephaniah and we will look at this passage tonight. Allow me to read it to you beginning in chapter 1 and in verse 14,

“The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the

fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.”

The prophet Zephaniah was preaching a judgment sermon to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Zephaniah was sent by God to pronounce a judgment message upon the rebellious people of God. You see, the Jews foolishly believed they could remain in their sins and turn their backs on God because they felt they were a people favored by God, therefore, they could sin all they wanted to and God would be okay with that. But the Jews were so far removed from the mind and heart of God through their willful disobedience that their perception of themselves was distorted and they held a perverted view of God that ignored his holiness and hatred of sin. They believed themselves to be so greatly favored by God that they believed they would never be the objects of his wrath and divine displeasure.

I can make the same comparison with the people of America today. The so-called followers of God also believe themselves to be so favored of God that they would never dream that God would bring his displeasure down upon them. Why the God they serve just wouldn't act that way. But the problem is, that many in our land have a distorted view of themselves and a perverted view of God. Many claim the name of Christ but do not walk in his statutes or display credible evidence of true conversion. They are undistinguishable from the pagan society in which they live. The God they claim to serve is a figment of their imagination, not the true and living God of the Bible for the God of the Bible is a God who punishes sin. But many in the churches today just don't believe in that kind of God. Their God wouldn't send people to hell or punish sin. But the fact remains that God is a holy God who hates sin and must punish it.

When a nation has so turned its back on the God of the Bible and defiantly shakes its fist at God, then God turns and breaks out upon that nation with his fierce wrath and destroys it. Look at ancient Greece, study ancient Rome, study all the once great nations of the earth that have been reduced to rubble by earthquakes and fire from the hands of an offended God who could no longer tolerate the people whom he created to rebel against him and defy his holy attributes with their flagrant lifestyles and grievous sins.

Listen friends, the city of London was destroyed by fire on September 2, 1666 but notice the difference between the governments of the world back in those days and our governments today. Listen to how the people of London responded to the great fire of London, viewing it as a judgment from the hand of an offended God for their national sins. Listen to this statement made public by Parliament in the Act for the Rebuilding of the City of London. Listen to these striking words from the government of London in that day.

“And that the said citizens and their successors for all the time to come may retain the memorial of so sad a desolation and reflect seriously upon their manifold iniquities which are the unhappy causes of such judgments. Be it further enacted that the 2nd of September be yearly forever hereafter observed as a day of public fasting and humiliation within the said city

and liberties thereof to implore the mercies of Almighty God upon the said city to make devout prayers and supplications unto him to divert the like calamity for the time to come.”

O friends, can you imagine the British Parliament today issuing a statement like that? London has forgotten, in the ashes of history, to commemorate the 2nd of September each year as a day of fasting and humiliation.

I remember America right after the tragedy of 9/11. The churches were full, people were looking to God for answers but then gradually people began to turn their backs on God again and our government has turned its back on God since then, too. 9/11 was a wake-up call for America but I fear most everybody went back to sleep. There was a time in our land when pastors were wiser and called the people of God to fast and pray when disasters hit our land. These men of God attributed the calamity with the just displeasure of God against the sins of the land. Pastors in the day of the great fire of London called their congregations to humble themselves before an offended Creator. One London pastor, the famous Puritan, Thomas Brooks, wrote a lengthy sermon stating it was God’s displeasure with the people of London and their sins which caused the calamity and his sermon is over 300 pages long. No, today you will hear about a ?? Christianity and a fun-loving Jesus who is alright with you living in your sins.

The Word of God and the withdrawn presence of God is a judgment among the people of God. There is a famine in the land today for hearing the Word of God and there is a withdrawn presence of the manifest presence of God from our people. But friends, is there any hope? Is it too late? Let’s look at chapter 2 in the Book of Zephaniah, beginning in verse 1, for in this passage is America’s only hope of survival. Please listen to it carefully as I read it to you,

“Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD’S anger come upon you. Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger.”

What God is saying to his people is that a coming judgment can be averted if the people of the land turn back to God in meekness and brokenness and repentance. God declares that the nation is no longer desired and he is ready to destroy it but if the people turn back to him in true humility and humble themselves and seek his face, then it may be they shall be hid from the falling judgment. Certainly, this has happened in history before. Look at ancient Nineveh and how they humbled themselves from the king down to the beasts at the preaching of the prophet Jonah. The entire populace averted the swift judgment of God. Instead of being destroyed, they were recipients of his mercy. If any nation in history needs to be studied more greatly today it is ancient Nineveh for it is a textbook pattern to avert coming judgment from an angry God. America should heed the

biblical examples that stand out in history and do the same. Revival is America's only hope of survival.

But the church slumbers and the sins of the nation increase at a rapid rate. What will it take to awaken the church and stir the nation? Listen friends, the entire nation should be on her knees right now, right now, begging God for mercy before it's too late. The churches should be open all night and the sanctuaries flooded and full with the weeping, broken people of God crying out to God for their nation and people. The carpets in our sanctuaries should be soaking wet with our tears but alas, they are dry as dust, as dry as the blood described as dust in our passage tonight. The very blood of the church in America has run cold towards God and the things of God. God's sort of justice hangs over this nation like the sword of Damocles, ready to descend without a moment's notice. God's Word declares God is angry with the wicked every day. "If he turn not, he will whet his sword, he hath bent his bow and made it ready."

America, unless you repent, will be brought face-to-face with the outpoured wrath of a long-provoked God. He is whetting his sword and his bow is bent and pointed at the heart of our nation. Heaven help us. May God have mercy on us all.