

Judgment Is God's Strange Work

BY PASTOR BRIAN BRODERSEN



When considering whether judgment is at hand, we must first remember that it is the Lord's strange work (Isaiah 28:21). History testifies that judgment is something God is reluctant to do.

Think of all the wickedness that has marred human history. Think of all the sin and disregard for God and His laws, and how few times He has intervened with judgment. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God said, **"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked"** (33:11). Truly, God is reluctant to judge.

Second, we need to remember that God delights in showing mercy (Micah 7:18). Israel's rebellious history reveals that its people were often on the brink of extinction because of their sin. The book of Judges, for example, covers an approximately 335-year period of great moral confusion when **"everyone did what was right in his own eyes"** (Judges 17:6).

Sound familiar? Toward the end of the book, the Jews' fate seemed hopeless, and it appeared as if nothing could alter Israel's course. Yet, we find God wasn't finished with His people. The book of Judges closes with the reign of Samuel as prophet, and with David ascending to the throne, providing a new day of mercy for the Jews. Where judgment had seemed inevitable, God extended mercy.

As we come to the New Testament, how much darker could things have gotten than to have Herod the Edomite as king over the Jews at the time of Christ's birth? This must have seemed like the lowest point in Israel's history. Yet, it was during that dark, dark hour that Jesus Christ came, after which followed the Day of Pentecost—the single greatest outpouring of God's Spirit upon His people.

If we were to follow history from the Day of Pentecost to the present, we would find similar stories of God's incredible grace and mercy. This is illustrated in U.S. history.

The general Christian mindset is that until modern times, America was a solid Christian nation, established by godly Founding Fathers; and that it has only recently weakened by the infiltration of humanistic thinking. This somewhat inaccurate view can undermine hope of God doing a great work.

If we think it's as bad as it's ever been, and because it's so bad, nothing good can happen in the future, then we are not going to be looking forward in faith to the possibility of God doing something fresh today. If we concede that all is lost, we don't have an accurate view of America's history. Believe it or not, there have been times in the past similar to the times we are living in today.

The Revolutionary period was one of those times. In the late 1700s, Americans were greatly influenced by Voltaire and Rousseau's writings from France, and by Thomas Paine and Ethan Allen in America.

In his treatise, *Reason, the Only Oracle of Man*, Ethan Allen wrote, "The doctrine of the Trinity is destitute of foundation, and tends manifestly to superstition and idolatry."¹ As for the atonement, Allen declared, "There could be no justice or goodness in one being's suffering for another, nor is it at all compatible with reason to suppose, that God was the contriver of such propitiation."²

Elihu Palmer, more or less a disciple of both Paine and Allen, stated, "The simple truth is, that their pretended Saviour is nothing more than an illegitimate Jew, and their hopes of salvation through him rest on no better foundation than that of fornication or adultery."³ Such was the thinking of the day.

The moral and social conditions during our nation's founding were not as wholesome as we'd like to think. According to the late revival scholar, Dr. J. Edwin Orr, "Drunkenness became epidemic. Out of a population of 5 million, 300,000 were confirmed drunkards. Profanity was of the most shocking kind. For the first time in the history of the American settlement, women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault.

"The Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the Bishop of Virginia that the Church 'was too far gone ever to be redeemed.' And Thomas Paine echoed, 'Christianity will be forgotten in thirty years.'"⁴

Colleges were bastions of infidelity. In fact, Christians were so few on college campuses in the 1790s that those who did claim allegiance to Christ met in secret and kept their minutes in code so no one would know to whom they belonged.⁵ Church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette wrote, "It seemed as if Christianity was about to be ushered out of the affairs of men."⁶

What happened to change things? The Second Great Awakening began. It broke out first in Connecticut and then in Massachusetts and all the seaboard states before spreading to the frontier. James McGready, a pastor in Logan County, Kentucky, wrote that the winter of 1799 was a time of "weeping and mourning with the people of God," while lawlessness prevailed throughout the region. The Great Kentucky Revival began in the summer of 1800, during which 11,000 people came to a communion service.⁷

Christianity's influence upon our national life is not due primarily to our Founding Fathers (although many of them were committed Christians), but to mighty outpourings of God's Spirit.

Although our world looks bleak, and even though it appears Christianity could be ushered out of the affairs of men, I believe God might work in a special way, pouring out His Spirit, and bringing revival to the Church and an awakening to the nations. Both history and the character of God ought to give us hope for such things. ➦

¹ Keith J. Hardman. *The Spiritual Awakeners*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 1983.

² Ibid.

³ Elihu Palmer. *Principles of Nature*. <http://www.deistnet.com/princnat.htm> (April 15, 2003).

⁴ J. Edwin Orr. "The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Awakenings." Oxford Assoc. for Research in Revival, Los Angeles, CA, 1976.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.