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The reason the gospel of Jesus is precious is that it offers joyful rescue from furious judgment. The Bible speaks of the "fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (Revelation 19:15). And the Bible exults that "Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

It is God the Father himself who sent Jesus to rescue us from his own wrath: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . Therefore we shall be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Romans 5:8-9).

How the Scriptures Speak of God's Judgment

There are at least five ways the Bible talks about God's judgment.

1. In judgment, God hands over the impenitent to hardening in this life.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. . . . Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity. (Romans 1:18, 24; see Romans 11:7-8)

2. In judgment, God punishes nations in history, both Israel and others.

"You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury." (Ezekiel 5:15)

"My sword descends for judgment upon Edom, upon the people I have devoted to destruction." (Isaiah 34:5)

3. There will be a final judgment of all people at the end of history.

Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (Romans 2:5)

4. The death of Jesus was God's final punitive judgment on all who believe in Christ.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24)

"By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." (Romans 8:3)

5. Individuals are sometimes judged in this life, but, for Christians, all judgments are disciplinary, not destructive.

An angel of the Lord struck Herod down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. (Acts 12:23)

Many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. . . . But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:30, 32)

This means that all of us should live sober lives of faith, and holiness, and serious joy. "If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile" (1 Peter 1:17).

Does God Judge Nations Today?

But what about judgment on nations today? What about America as a whole? Are there biblical pointers to how God deals with nations today?

First, the Bible portrays God as sovereign over the nations and ruling them for his purposes. This includes ethnic people as well as the political states that emerge around them: "Kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the

nations (Psalms 22:28).

Second, the Bible portrays God's relation to nations as tolerating sin up to a point, and then bringing calamity. God said to Abram that his descendants would spend 400 years in a foreign land as slaves (Genesis 15:13). Then God would bring judgment on the nation that they serve (Genesis 15:14). Why such a long delay before God gave the promised land to Israel? God answers, "Because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16).

In other words, there was a level of corruption that would be reached among the nations of the promised land that would justify God's judgment on them when Israel returned from Egypt.

So God taught his people not to say, "It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land." Rather, "It is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you" (Deuteronomy 9:4).

Third, numerous texts in the Bible mention the kinds of iniquity God has in mind when he says, "the wickedness of these nations." Judgment to Israel and other nations is threatened for arrogant hearts (Isaiah 2:11; 3:15; 13:11), idolatry (Jeremiah 16:18; Ezekiel 23:20), bribery (Isaiah 1:23), extortion (Ezekiel 22:12), and the oppression of the poor (Isaiah 10:2; Malachi 3:4).

The Sequence of Sin in Leviticus 18

But there is a remarkable sequence of sins in Leviticus 18:20-25 that sounds very much like the progress of iniquity in the modern Western world. Moses writes that by these iniquities "the nations, which I am driving out before you, have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants" (verse 25).

What brought the nations of Canaan to that point of judgment? Here are the sins Moses was referring to:

1. Adultery.

Verse 20: "You shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife . . ."

2. Child sacrifice (we call it abortion).

Verse 21: "You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord . . ."

3. Homosexual intercourse.

Verse 22: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."

4. Bestiality.

Verse 23: "And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it: . . . it is perversion."

In the West, we have moved to the point of open approval of adultery, child-killing, and homosexual intercourse. Will the open approval of bestiality be next? Probably. Last week, the Huffington Post reported a woman finding on her boyfriend's phone pictures of him having sex with her dog.

Fifty Years from Now?

Our reaction to this is probably about the same as most people's reaction to so-called homosexual "marriage" fifty years ago. Is there any good reason to doubt that in fifty years the laws against bestiality (zoophilia) will have fallen the same way laws against homosexual intercourse have fallen in recent years? (And as for "marriage," Wikipedia already has an entry on "human-animal marriage.")

It would not be unwarranted, therefore, to suppose that God would bring to ruin the nations that follow this course of corruption the way the Canaanites did.

Of course, history is not a straight line of inevitabilities. God himself may step in and bring to his church a great revival of radical obedience, and a great awakening to the countries of the West. He is able. He has done it before. We should pray that he does. Vengeance belongs to the Lord, not to us (Romans 12:19).

Even if the present rush to increasingly public and approved iniquity continues, the gospel of Christ remains the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Romans 1:16). No individual in Christ needs to fear God's judgment. We may be killed proclaiming biblical holiness, as Paul said in Romans 8:36, but in all these things we will be more than conquerors through him who loved us.