

GOD'S COMING JUDGMENT

Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

"Rejoice over her [Babylon], O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."

—Revelation 18:20

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

2 Thessalonians 1:6–8

Recently I just completed teaching through the Book of Revelation.¹ Something that really struck me this time through the book was the emphasis throughout of God's creatures who rejoice and acknowledge the righteousness of God's judgment throughout the tribulation and at the second coming. There is a sense throughout Revelation that God's judgmental intervention into history is long overdue when it finally arrives. However, I think many of us often look at God's future judgment as sad for those who receive His severe blows, but that is not the attitude advocated in heaven when believers are commanded to rejoice in Revelation 18:20.

FUTURE JUDGMENT

The Apostle Paul begins his third epistle, 2 Thessalonians, speaking of future judgment as well. The context, as in Revelation, is the persecution of his fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, "we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure" (2 Thes. 1:4). These Greek believers were suffering for their faith 2,000 years ago at the hands of unbelievers, yet they were faithful to the Lord as they endured these afflictions. This passage teaches that such persecution by unbelievers will be at least part of the basis for God's future judgment. "Withstanding *present* pressures demonstrates the rightness of God's *future* judgment."² F. F. Bruce echoes this thought and says, "The fact that they are enduring persecution and affliction for Christ's sake is a sure token of God's righteous judgment, which will be vindicated in them and in their persecutors at the Advent of Christ."³ J. N. Darby rightly notes that the judgment for unbelievers was coming when he says, "'the day of the Lord' was coming of the Lord in judgment; but it was not to make His own suffer that He was coming—it was to punish the wicked."⁴ This sets the stage for chapter two when Paul argues that the day of the Lord had not yet come.

Paul continues in verse 6 by noting that retributive justice is called for when God will "repay with affliction those who afflict you." The same root word in the Greek is used in its verbal and noun forms. "Affliction" is the noun form while "those who afflict" is a verb form used as a substantival participle. The noun form of this root is the word used in the New Testament for the term "tribulation" and could be a reference to that seven-year period of history. Robert Thomas notes the following:

Thlipsin is a word often translated “tribulation.” It is the present lot of Christians to undergo tribulation (v. 4; 1 Thess 3:4). For the rest of the world, however, tribulation will be future and far greater in intensity (Matt 24:21; cf. Rev 3:10). In his first Epistle to this church, Paul described this period in relation to its source—viz., God’s wrath (1:10; 2:16; 5:9). But here he speaks of it from the standpoint of circumstances that engulf the victims. After the period of tribulation has passed, these troublers will be denied entrance into the messianic kingdom that has welcomed the faithful followers of Christ (v. 5; Matt 25:41, 46).⁵

In verse 7, which speaks of the second coming bringing relief, we see a connection with Revelation 18:20 and the rejoicing by God’s creation since He has judged wickedness. We see two objects of His wrath in verse 8: first, “those who do not know God” and secondly, “those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” These are the source of persecution for believers in the present church age, but the rapture of the church will bring relief for the entire body of church age believers that will also result in God’s wrath being poured out upon gospel rejecters.

Not only will unbelievers experience the wrath of God during the tribulation, verse 9 tells us that they will also “pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” “It is ironic that those who would reject God receive as punishment God’s rejection,” notes Michael Martin. “It implies that the so-called freedom from God’s influence that the rebellious desire is not freedom but condemnation. It is a hellish banishment from the true and only source of goodness and blessing.”⁶ We see in verse 10 that Christ’s second coming will not only reveal the glory of God, but it will “be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.” Just such a response is what we see in Revelation as heaven, that is angels and believers, marvel at and rejoice over the judgment of the earth dwellers and the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to His rightful place of rule.

JUDGMENT IS FOR THE SON

In John 5:22–23a Jesus tells us, “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.” This passage reveals that even though the Son will be the agent of judgment in history, within the outworking of the persons of the Godhead, the Son and the Father have the same standard of justice because they are the same God. Jesus continues and says, “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man” (John 5:26–27). Jesus, who is the Son to the Father within the Godhead, is also the Son of Man and related to humanity. Thus, as the God-Man, Jesus will be the agent judging mankind because He is both God and Man. Therefore He will be able to evaluate humanity with perfect justice.

Romans 12:19 says, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 in this passage. Moses says in the next verse, “For the Lord will vindicate His people” (Deut. 32:36). Both for Israel and the church, the Lord will take vengeance and He will do it with righteousness and justice. Back in Romans, Paul argues in chapter 13 that believers should generally obey the civil authorities, because God set-up civil government as his instrument through which He takes vengeance

during the interim—between the judgment of the Flood and the judgment at His second coming. This is an instrument that He uses to restrain evil until the tribulation when the man of lawlessness leads the into total cooperate rebellion against God resulting in His direct intervention throughout the tribulation culminating in the second advent.

CONCLUSION

The Bible teaches that one of the ways we can demonstrate our trust and confidence in God and His plan for history is to let Him take care of the wrongs that we have experienced throughout this life in the process of serving our Saviour. Just as the persecution and eventual death of Christ was so wrong and unjust, there have been millions of similar injustices perpetrated upon God's people since; yet, we are to wait for His day when He will right all the wrongs and take vengeance upon the wicked. This does not mean that when a crime is committed against a believer that justice through the civil authorities should not be sought. It should! However, too often the authorities become corrupt and we must wait for the judge of all the universe to set things right. Exhibit A would be the miscarriage of justice by the civil government in the death of Christ.

One of the main points of these passages that we have looked at is that a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ does not have to become bitter or sour over an injustice that someone may have committed against them, because Jesus Himself will one day bring perfect justice to this sinful world. He will make all things right. Instead, when wronged or persecuted because of Christ, we can respond with the love and grace that God in Christ has already shown us in redemption. We have an opportunity to show them the love of Christ. Paul says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). How do we do that? As the previous verse says, we are to be kind and gracious to our enemies by attempting to meet their needs. What a wonderful salvation we have in Christ. He saves us while we were His enemies and now we treat our enemies the same way Christ has already treated us. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ One can download a MP3 recording of the teaching at the following web address:
<http://cbcomaha.org/sermons/>.

² (Emphasis original) Robert L. Thomas, "2 Thessalonians" in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), p. 308.

³ F. F. Bruce, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," in David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin, eds. *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 45 (Dallas: Word, 1998), p. 149.

⁴ John Nelson Darby, "Colossians to Revelation" in *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 5 vols., (Winschoten, Netherlands: H. L. Heijkoop, 1970), vol. 5; p. 115.

⁵ Thomas, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," p. 310.

⁶ Michael D. Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians: The New American Commentary*, Vol. 33 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), pp. 213–14.