

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness
and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.*

ROMANS 1:18



CHAPTER 32

Does God Judge Nations Today?

Some leading Evangelicals teach that America is now experiencing God's judgment. If that is the case, as a Public Servant sacrificing so much to turn our nation around, it would stand to reason that you are wasting your time. Are you laboring against a foregone conclusion? I think not. But let me qualify that: I do not believe America is experiencing the *forsaking wrath* of God, but yes, America is experiencing the *consequential wrath* of God. I will explain what I mean by these terms shortly.

Before examining pertinent passages in answer to the question of whether God is judging America today, it is important to first understand God's judgment and the Biblical forms in which it manifests. The question can then be asked as to which forms of judgment apply to America.

Understanding God's Judgment

Scripture is replete with proclamations that God is characterized by holiness, righteousness, and perfection (e.g., Psalms 93:5; 7:17; 19:7). Any violation of those qualities demands adjudication in a way similar to what occurs in a courtroom. The satisfaction of God's violated justice is said to be His judgment, or a manifestation of His wrath (e.g., Deuteronomy 9:7). One of the consequences of the fall is that "*God is angry with the wicked every day*" (Psalm 7:11 KJV). Ephesians 5:6 tells us, "*for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*"

However, as the perfect Judge in the Divine Courtroom, God can placate His requirement of justice with His mercy. Since God is just and sin must be paid for, *wrath*—the righteousness of God revealed against sin—is an inevitable consequence. But in His sovereignty He can choose either to manifest His judgment as wrath, or to extend mercy in order to turn away His wrath. Mercy is not just, but it is the preferred response to our sin! We read in Romans 9:15 a quote from the OT: "*I [God] will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.*"

The Five Forms of God's Judgment

Five forms of God's judgment are mentioned in the Bible. They are as follows:

1. Eternal Wrath: Hell
2. Eschatological Wrath: The Day of the Lord
3. Cataclysmic Wrath: e.g., The Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah
4. Forsaking Wrath: Removing Restraint
5. Consequential Wrath: Sowing & Reaping

The first form of judgment, hell, is "the nether realm of the devil and the demons in which condemned people suffer everlasting punishment." The second refers to a final judgment that will occur at a specific future date. The third lies

outside of our ability to ascertain.¹ Therefore it is the remaining two that will be critically evaluated in light of what Scripture teaches.

The Five Forms of God’s Judgment, No. 4: Forsaking Wrath

Forsaking wrath is also referred to by theologians as the *wrath of abandonment*. We will be looking at Romans 1:18–32 for the five characteristics that surface when God forsakes or abandons us, and allows us to go in the way of our wicked desires—that is, when God removes the restraints on our fallen nature.

A vivid portrayal of forsaking wrath is furnished in Hosea 4:17: “*Ephraim is joined to idols; Let him alone.*” Ephraim was the largest of the northern ten tribes of Israel. You would think the prophet Hosea, in speaking for God, would call Ephraim to repentance. He does not. Instead, God is forsaking them, which He does when sinners are determined to pursue “*what was right in [their] own eyes*” (Judges 17:6). Another OT illustration is Psalm 81:11–12, where God declares through the psalmist:

“But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, To walk in their own devices.”

Another illustration is when God the Father places the sins of the world on the shoulders of His Son as a substitute for sinners. In remaining separated from sin, God the Father in essence abandons His Son on the cross. Jesus cries out in response, “*MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?*” (Mark 15:34; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Given those three illustrations, we can understand why Romans 1:18–22 begins with the words, “*For the wrath of God is revealed ...*” Notice the phrase that occurs three times in this segment: “*God gave them over.*” This provides the skeletal structure for the outline that follows. It serves to indicate where forsaking wrath, or the wrath of abandonment, is present.

1. SUPPRESSING TRUTH IN THEMSELVES: ROMANS 1:18–22

While this first passage does not explicitly say “*God gave them over,*” His forsaking wrath can nonetheless be understood as operative here.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made

it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.

The first evidence of God's forsaking wrath is that people "suppress" (*katecho*), meaning "to hold back," that which they know is the *truth*. I am always amazed when people say, "I don't believe in God," or "I don't believe in the Bible." In personal, loving response I think to myself, "According to Romans 1:18–22, aren't they lying?" It is not that the unregenerate don't know there is a God; they *suppress these truths* (cf. Romans 2:15). There is a big difference! In the OT, David declares, "*The fool has said [lied] in his heart, 'There is no God'*" (Psalm 14:1). The simple reason for this suppression is summarized by Jesus in the NT: "*Men loved the darkness rather than the Light*" (John 3:19).

Further down in this passage these truth-suppressors "*became futile in their speculations.*" "Speculations" (*dialogismos*) is perhaps better understood as argumentation or reasoning.² The Greek sentence structure here carries the idea of the vanity that results from godless reasoning. Accordingly, "*professing to be wise, they became fools*" (*moraino*). It is not difficult to figure out the meaning of *moraino*: "moron." In summary, forsaking wrath is evidenced when people suppress the truth, which results in *futile* dialogue and reasoning. Their *speculations* are moronic, or roughly equivalent to the intellectual level of a seven- to twelve-year-old.³ A current illustration of this would be politicians who declare to one audience that they have never viewed the videos that expose the atrocities of Planned Parenthood, yet exclaim to another audience that all those videos are fabricated. They are exercising futile logic, demonstrating the suppression of truth in themselves.

The next recognizable characteristic of God's forsaking wrath is:

2. SWAPPING GOD'S CREATION FOR GOD: ROMANS 1:23–25

[They] exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

We are created in the image of God, whereas the remainder of the created order is not (Genesis 1:26). Therefore humankind is separate from, special, and superior to all else that God has made. Humankind is not equal to or subservient to the rest of God's creation; humankind has preeminence over the environment. Properly understood,

God has appointed us to be His stewards over the earth. We discussed this in depth in chapter 30. Clearly indicative of God’s wrath of abandonment is when the abandoned “*served the creature rather than the Creator.*” A preoccupation with ourselves is a natural consequence of worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, as we see in the next characteristic of forsaking wrath:

3. A TENDENCY TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY: ROMANS 1:26–27

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Indicative of forsaking wrath is a proclivity toward lesbianism and homosexuality.

4. DEPRAVITY: ROMANS 1:28–31

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful.

This portion of the passage indicates the natural progression of events resulting from suppression of truth, worshipping creation rather than Creator, and yielding to self-glorifying lust: what is secured is a *depraved mind*. When restraint is absent *God gives people over* to depravity. Notice what this passage teaches: The attitudes and behaviors that are *not proper* stem from a “depraved” mind (*adokimos*), which means “not standing the test.” *Adokimos* is a term referring to metals that do not stand the test due to impurities. Under close examination they lack internal fortitude, or integrity. *Adokimos* is a picture of that which is worthless.

It’s not as if depraved minds do not know the right thing to do. Later in Romans the Holy Spirit reiterates this principle: “*They show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them*” (Romans 2:15). Men and women inherently know what are the right and wrong things to do. The flow of this passage can be summarized as this:

The mind that finds God worthless becomes worthless itself.

It is debauched, deceived, and deserving only of God's wrath. Lastly, in regards to evidence of God's wrath of abandonment is this:

5. SANCTIONING IN OTHERS: ROMANS 1:32

And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

This is the last of the five effects of God's forsaking wrath: when God removes His restraining influence on the fallen nature, those who practice the aforementioned forms of ungodliness not only do so themselves, "*but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.*"

This should provide mature Christian Public Servants with insights and discernment in order to wisely identify where forsaking wrath is operating in groups and individuals around them.

While we can easily recognize that America is experiencing consequential wrath, as we will discuss later, it is harder to ascertain whether the forsaking wrath of God is in operation in our nation today. This requires a more complex Biblical analysis. What follow are six reasons why I do *not* believe America as a national entity is presently experiencing the forsaking wrath of God.

1. ROMANS CHAPTER 1 DOES NOT ADDRESS NATIONS

As previously seen, Paul warns of God's judgment in Romans 1:18–32, and declares that those who persist in sin will be given over to the tyranny of it and that God will remove restraining grace if they fail to repent. But notice that there is no mention of nations in the passage. Some leading Evangelicals have suggested this chapter refers to nations and the judgment they will receive in this age. Such however must be read into the passage.

Romans 1 addresses the topic of divine abandonment, but says nothing about God forsaking nations. Paul only warns of the judgment that individual unbelievers—"they" and "them" are plural pronouns—will incur during their life on earth. Twenty-one plural pronouns are used in these verses and all of them refer to individuals. Romans 1:18 specifically says that God's wrath is being directed against people—it does not say national entities. Paul speaks of

the futile minds and foolish hearts in verse 21, descriptions only applicable to individuals. Chapter 2 continues this theme by addressing individuals as well (Romans 2:5, 6, 9).

Therefore it is evident that God does judge unbelievers by means of forsaking wrath during the church age. However, Romans 1 should not be used to suggest God judges wayward nations by this form of wrath. This passage provides no Biblical support to warrant that position.

2. GOD'S PRIORITY IS TO JUDGE THE CHURCH, NOT THE STATE

Peter declares in 1 Peter 4:17 that during the church age God's judgment is primarily for the purpose of maturing believers.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

God's present manifestation of judgment will *begin with us first*, before *those who do not obey the gospel*. "Begin" (*archo*) could be translated as "commence." It is chronological in nature, though also implying a sense of importance and priority.⁴ Thus, Peter is teaching that in this *time*, God's *judgment* will focus upon *the household of God*—that is, His Church.⁵ God's intentions are to purify His called-out ones and present them to His Son before He judges others (see Revelation 20:11–15, The Great White Throne Judgment) in a future time after the church age. Again, there is no mention of God's intention to judge nations. First Peter 4:17 and many other passages indicate that God has eternal plans for His Church; the longevity, destiny, and importance of the State pales by comparison.

God has judged nations in the past (the Old Covenant) and will do so again in the future, during the Tribulation period spoken of in the book of Revelation, but there are no passages stating that nations are being judged by God at the present time.

3. THE SANCTIFICATION OF HIS CHURCH IS HIS FOCUS

Closely related to the previous point, God is preparing the Church to be the bride of Christ for all eternity. The State has little to do with God's eternal kingdom and will be done away with in the future. Importantly, God designed nations and their governments to be instruments of His restraining grace in a fallen world (cf. 1 Peter 2:13–14). When Christ returns and reigns, the time will have come when governments will no longer be necessary. Properly understood from Scripture, the Church is eternal and the State is temporal. Consider 2 Corinthians 11:2:

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

In this comparison to marriage, Paul expresses his desire to see the Corinthian believers grow in maturity. He longs to see them become a *pure bride presentable to Christ*. God's desire for His Church can further be seen in Ephesians 5:27:

... that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Colossians 1:28 provides insight on Paul's reason for teaching, and fits alongside the aforementioned passages: *"So that we may present every man complete in Christ."* Further, Ephesians 1:4 explains God's big vision for choosing believers: *"that [they] would be holy and blameless before Him."*

These passages emphasize what God's big purpose is: the sanctification of His Church. God's priority is to purify a bride for Christ. The book of Revelation foreshadows the day when this purification will be complete. In Revelation 19:7 a multitude of voices erupts with praise exclaiming:

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

These select passages (a few of many) unfold the splendor and majesty of God's overarching focus and purpose during the church age. In contrast, in the New Testament era the institution of the State is not associated with God's forsaking wrath. Acts 17:26 is one of the few NT passages on the subject. It states that God *"made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation."* This passage is devoid of mention of forsaking wrath. *Nations* and governments are temporal entities serving God's eternal purposes for a limited time, all under His sovereign eye as He deems fit. Often in history God's purpose for nations has been to judge and thereby mature the Church by allowing persecution. Thus, if by no other method of deduction than the sheer weight of passages in the NT, we can conclude that nations are peripheral to God's thinking, and the Church is central during the present age.

4. NEW TESTAMENT WORD STUDIES DO NOT SUPPORT GOD JUDGING NATIONS TODAY

Again, God judged nations under the Old Covenant and will do so again at His second coming, but there is no NT

indication that He judges nations presently during the church age.⁶ Further, Old Testament references to future national judgments refer to an event still further in the future—not this age—in part because the Church was a mystery in the Old Testament (1 Peter 1:10–11). For example, the OT prophecies of Joel 3:2 along with Zechariah 12:1–9 are about national judgments that will take place during Armageddon (see Revelation 16:16; 19:11–12, 15), in the far future. Revelation 19:15 says that after the second coming Jesus will “*strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron.*” Consider the following lexical support from the New Testament:

The Greek word for “judge”

“Judge” (*krino*) or a derivative is used 182 times in the New Testament. In no instance does this word group refer to judging nations in the church age.⁷

The Greek word for “nations”

“Nations” (*ethnos*) is never used in the New Testament in the context of judgment. With 168 occurrences, this is particularly notable.

The Greek word for “repentance”

“Repentance” (*metanoia*) is never used to speak of nations. In other words, no nation during the church age is ever called to repent, whereas individuals are.⁸

5. THE NEW TESTAMENT DOES NOT THREATEN JUDGMENT AS A CONSEQUENCE FOR NATIONAL SINS

If God judges nations during the church age, why do the New Testament writers fail to mention it? Specifically and illustratively, would it not have been appropriate for Christ to warn Pilate, or for Paul to warn Caesar of impending national judgment? If they did warn these political leaders, it is odd that nothing to that effect has been recorded by the writers of Scripture, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Further, Paul uses very little if any ink on the end of his quill to discuss the morality of the Roman Empire. If God judges nations today, one would think he would have implored the Empire to reverse direction to avoid this divine judgment. His accounts during his imprisonment in Caesar’s household, as we read in the book of Philippians, are void of “Caesarian moralisms” but rich in terms of evangelization (see Philippians 4:22). Even when writing to Philemon, a slave owner, in the book of Philemon, Paul never says anything regarding the evils of national slavery. He provides no hints that it might provoke the judgment of God upon Rome. Would not a warning have been in

order? Poignantly, John the Baptist rebukes the person of Herod, not the nation of Rome (Mark 6:17–18).

The New Testament is devoid of words from Christ or the apostles toward political leaders threatening the hammer of God's national judgment. They don't model a ministry of national damnation such as we see in the ministry of Jonah in the OT, nor suggest such for other believers after them.

6. REVELATION CHAPTERS 2 AND 3 ADDRESS THE CHURCH AND NOT THE STATE

The book of Revelation demonstrates God's concern for the Church. Seven churches are mentioned in chapters two and three. To those lacking, Christ threatens to remove their lampstand unless they repent. Once again, the focus is on purifying the Church. Interestingly enough, these chapters do not mention sins of any particular city or state. If God were set on judging nations during the church age, one would expect national warnings to repent as we saw with Sodom and Gomorrah. There is no warning given to the cities of the seven churches. This serves as additional evidence that God is more concerned about preparing a spotless eternal bride than He is about judging temporal nations.⁹

America is different from Sodom and Gomorrah in that no faithful were to be found in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:22–33), while America today is populated by millions of faithful followers of Christ! Many are those who have glibly asserted, "If God does not judge America, then He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology!" But such thinking fails to take into account what went on between Abraham and God in Genesis 18:22–33 before He judged Sodom and Gomorrah! On the contrary, I believe this is a more Biblically accurate summary:

Abraham, if he were to plead with God for America, would have a much stronger case than he did with Sodom and Gomorrah.

In fact, today's America is not by and large characterized by people who are unfaithful to God's precepts. There is only a small minority who are grossly disobedient to God, individuals to whom the five indicators of Romans 1 apply. Unfortunately for the vast majority of faithful individuals in America, too many of the unfaithful have been allowed by the faithful to gain high positions of influence in our culture—high positions in our government, our educational system, our media, and our entertainment industry. This is tragic, unfortunate, and costly.

The Five Forms of God's Judgment, No. 5: Consequential Wrath

Consequential wrath is best understood through the idea we commonly refer to as sowing and reaping. Galatians 6:7 says, “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*” To illustrate, if a person or a nation *sows* debt, it will *reap* in due time the result of financial crisis. Whenever the precepts of God's Word are violated, there are consequences. Most assuredly, America is facing this form of God's judgment today.

Those individuals who are rebuked by God's forsaking wrath are largely responsible for God's consequential wrath on our nation.

Beloved, that needs to change—and that is something we can change with God's help! What is a great encouragement to me ministering here in our nation's Capital is witnessing the gradual increase of faithful individuals who have been voted into office. If my calculations are correct, there are more believers in Congress now than at any other time in modern American history. And perhaps they are beginning to reach a tipping point!

I think great days lie ahead for our country as more and more Evangelicals rise in their influence—you godly Public Servants—who are working so hard to deliver us from the consequential wrath we are undergoing as a nation due in large part to the misdirection of those who are rebuked by God's forsaking wrath. Proverbs 29:2 gives an apt summary:

When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan.

It is reasonable to believe that God is judging America via consequential wrath, but as we have seen, there is no Biblical basis to conclude that any nation today, including America, is experiencing forsaking wrath, even though the five indicators of Romans 1 seem to describe our present culture and some of the individuals therein.

This should greatly encourage those who serve and lead in America. There is hope! It's not as if you are going against the will of God in your attempts to rebuild America—as though you are hanging in there and He isn't. God has *not* forsaken our nation!

Beloved, the ball is still in our court; let us not lose heart in doing well. Second Corinthians 4:16 states, “*Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.*” May we work

industriously at our own spiritual maturation, convert the lost who presently hold office, and continue to elect new mature believers in order to sow godly policies that will manifest God's blessing for all, for years to come!

In Isaiah 46:10 God speaks through the prophet Isaiah saying, "*My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.*" By now it is clear to you that God has a purpose for us individually and for nations as well. How does God administer His authority in order to achieve His purposes today? In chapter 30 we introduced a concept that helped us understand the administration of care for the needy through God-ordained institutions. We will return to those institutions now in order to answer this question.

Notes

1 I am not discounting the measurability of historical patterning of a nation's catastrophes as an indicator of wrath; it is simply outside the scope of this study.

2 *Bibleworks* 5.0.

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4 *The New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, 1975 ed., s.v. "archastai."

5 Literally, in the Greek, "of the house of God." This is a common synonym used throughout the New Testament for the Church (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:6).

6 Some will disagree at this point, arguing that if the Church today is the Israel of yesterday then what God said and did through Israel in the OT is applicable and transferable to the Church today. I do not believe, however, that the Church today is the same Biblical entity as Israel in the OT. I find this position extremely difficult to hold, not only exegetically, but pragmatically. I cannot imagine trying to defend all of what was true of Israel in the Capital of America today, particularly regarding OT theocracy. This view also opens the door to Dominion Theology/theonomy in terms of a post-millennial eschatology—that is, I don't think that believers are called to make America into a Christianized theocracy.

7 Stephen's statement in Acts 7:7 regarding the judgment of nations is a quotation from the Old Testament. He is reciting Israel's history. In several instances Jesus speaks of judging cities like Chorazin or Bethsaida (Matthew 11:21–24; Luke 10:13–14). The main subject in each passage, however, is the foreshadowing of a future Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11–15), which is explicitly directed toward individuals, not nations. This judgment will take place after the church age.

8 When Jesus calls the disciples to proclaim repentance to the nations in Luke 24:47, it is clear from the parallel passage and context of Matthew 28:18–20 that *nations* refers to all the individuals within a nation.

9 Note that Revelation 2 & 3 are illustrative of 1 Peter 4:17.