

*But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.*

Ezekiel 33:6

### **Watchmen On Alert?**

In last month's message, it was noted that one of the consequences of ministries that have deteriorated into personality cults is their lack of effect on the world around them. This flaw in the modern church has potential consequences for more than just the particular church or ministry, since such ministers tend to ultimately trip over themselves and their own titanic egos, but for the nation as well. This is a point that needs further development, and additional stressing, because God will hold those of us in ministry – and, yes, this includes me – accountable for what we did with His Word and the job He gave us.

In the time of the Judges, the failure of their mission led to chaos both for the system God set up for corporate worship by Israel and for its society outside the walls of the tabernacle. Israel was originally designed to live in freedom under her God. The nation could not even be considered a *theocracy* (rule in the Name of God by His human representatives) so much as it was what we might call a *deocracy* – the direct rule over the people by Almighty God. The first words of the Book of Judges relate how the entire nation asks the Lord for guidance on the next move, and the Lord answered them... personally, in a way the entire nation could hear and understand.

But as the nation grew, it abandoned the Lord and began to serve false gods, which led to the establishment of the Judges and the resulting chaos as the people hardened their hearts and the mission failed. This kind of chaos would not be contained until the advent of the monarchy, with a corresponding loss of freedoms by the people in exchange for what the people felt was greater security.

This occurred during a period where Israel wavered between God-worship and idol-worship, vacillating back-and-forth between the two and not being whole-hearted toward either. God raised judges for Israel during periods of punishment for disobedience, usually at the hands of the nations surrounding Israel. As a result, the punishment affected the entire nation of Israel, not just those who were directly guilty of bowing down to the Baals.

The question, thus, is raised; why didn't God punish only the guilty? Why did the righteous suffer for the sins of the wicked? This is the same God who (in Ezekiel 18:4) said that "the soul who sins is the one who will die," isn't He? Yes, it is. But what you find in the Scriptures are several facts regarding national sin and discipline:

1. **Punishment is delivered when it is the majority of the people that are in sin.** God is "slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness,

rebellion and sin," (Exodus 34: 6, 7) as was even in His very name which He pronounced to Moses. Yet in that same name, God declares that "He does not leave the guilty unpunished." Often, God withholds, reduces, or alters the punishment that was originally in mind because of righteousness or acts of repentance. The most startling example being Abraham's request in Genesis to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if only 10 righteous people (like his nephew Lot and his family) could be found there. But when the majority of people continually defy God and willfully violate His laws, He will act.

2. **Blessings and curses fall without partiality.** "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous," Jesus said in Matthew 5:45. Blessings for obedience are experienced by both, partly because God's kindness is one way He leads the unjust to repentance (Romans 2:4). Ever wonder why that boozing, married-but-still-womanizing co-worker of yours gets bonuses and promotions on the job? This may be one reason. The other side of that truth, however, is that with God's people, national curses for disobedience fall upon both the just and the unjust. Yes, there are instances in the Scriptures where God "customizes" His judgments – delivering a "surgical strike," if you will, so that some are affected and others are not. (The distinction made between the Egyptians and the Israelites in Exodus quickly comes to mind) However, this is usually made when God is trying to remind His creation of who the *real* God is around here. When it comes to those who are called by His Name, judgment falls on the entire land equally. There is a caveat with this truth, however, and that is...
3. **God watches out for His people, but judgment still falls.** Even in the midst of such calamities as national judgment, God still watches out for those who do His will – even if everybody else is partying down at the Baal temple. There are numerous examples of this in Scripture; Elijah being fed by ravens (and, later, by a widow) in the midst of a drought, the servant of King Ahab who protects and feeds the prophets of God while Queen Jezebel is off slaughtering as many of the latter as she can find to please the Baals and end the drought, Noah (described in Genesis as the *only* righteous man of his generation) told to build an ark to protect his family and all animals during the Great Flood. Sometimes, God even raises up people during such crises to demonstrate that His hand is still on the controls, such as Daniel and his three friends who are raised to prominence in the Babylonian court during the exile of the Israelites. But while God protects those who are sold out to Him, *the judgment on the nation is still falling for the majority of the people's sins.* Were there other good and righteous people during times of oppression by other nations and wicked rulers? Certainly; God Himself informed Elijah that "I reserve seven thousand in Israel whose knees have not bowed down to Baal, and whose mouths have not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:18). Did God protect most, if not all,

of them during such hard times? Yes. But they still had to go through the hardships of oppression and exile and, yes, sometimes death as the sin of their fellow countrymen is judged.

It's never just about *us*, a point lost on more and more churches seeking to build up themselves instead of the Kingdom. God will take care of His people, but we have a responsibility to *be* His people in the midst of a wicked culture that walks further away from Him. The entire point of church is not "whoever retires/dies with the largest congregation wins," to paraphrase a lamentably popular bumper sticker, but to be a witness to the Lord Jesus in both word and deed and teaching all men to be disciples of Him so that the Holy Spirit can do His job of turning souls from the wicked culture to the Kingdom of God.

The late Keith Green used to tell people at his concerts, "this generation of believers is responsible for this generation of souls." By extension, because of the influence of such souls, the believers are responsible for the overall health of the nation they live in. If the nation is based on the evil deeds of the few, leaving the people in bondage and repression, then believers have the responsibility to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to that nation, which is its only real cure. If the nation is founded on Christian principles (or at least by Godly men, as I believe this nation was), then believers have the responsibility to maintain Godly standards and actions in order to keep it spiritually healthy. Second President of the United States John Adams wrote that:

*[W]e have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. . . . Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.\**

While the people of this land are still generally good and moral people, still under the influence of the Gospel or its effects on society, the assault on that foundation has been underway now for at least two generations, and it is gaining ground – especially in the culture. The church must stand on its Rock, now more than ever, and pastors must declare the Gospel to this culture, rather than merely trying to make a name for themselves... or simply a pile of cash. God will provide for the needs of His people and His servants in the midst of doing His will. But at the same time, God holds us who are teachers accountable for the knowledge He gives us of Himself and what we do with it. We are regarded as the "watchmen on the wall" for this country, as it were, and too many of us are asleep, distracted or even willing to take the point of view of our adversaries.

Do I believe God will destroy us as a nation if we do not repent? That is *always* possible (He *is* God, after all), but I do not believe it likely, partly

because there are still many people in this country who believe and who desire to serve Him. But another sign of God's displeasure is the rising up of enemies in His permissive will, and trouble within a nation (refer to what happened to King David's family after his sin with Bathsheba in 1 Samuel for reference). In many cases, Israel spent so much time fending off adversaries that every king was a "wartime king," if you will. The freedoms we cherish can easily be lost (some would say we are already on that path) as we are forced to arm, wall and monitor ourselves in order to keep our enemies – both within and without – at bay.

For the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ  
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\* Source: John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Little, Brown, 1854), Vol. IX, p. 401, to Zabdiel Adams on June 21, 1776.