

**In the  
Potter's House  
—  
God Governing  
the Nations**



**God's Voice  
in Judgments**

**A. W. Pink**

# **In the Potter's House, God Governing the Nations and God's Voice in Judgments**

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## **In the Potter's House**

*“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear My words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it”*  
**Jer. 18:1-4.**

This is a passage which has presented difficulty to not a few, or probably it would be more correct to say that (in most cases at least) it has been *made* to present difficulty. Enemies of the Truth have grievously “wrested” these verses and even the interpretations of its friends have not always succeeded in removing the mists which have beclouded the minds of those influenced by error. Because of this and also as we are to consider some of the later portions in this chapter, a comment or two on its opening verses may not prove unacceptable.

Arminians have appealed to this passage in support of their horrible and God-dishonouring tenet that the Creator may be thwarted by the creature, that puny man is able to bring to nought the designs of the Most High. If such a dreadful calamity were possible, then, to be consistent, they should carry such a premise to its logical conclusion, and avow

*“The universe He fain would save,  
But longs for what He cannot have!  
We therefore worship, praise and laud,  
A disappointed, helpless God!”*

Such a blasphemous caricature of Deity is repugnant and repellent to the last degree unto every renewed heart, yet is it one which finds more or less acceptance today in professedly “Christian” quarters. The natives of dark Africa manufacture idols with their hands but the heathen in Christendom fashion a “God” out of their Satan-blinded minds.

A disappointed and defeated God! What a concept! What a contradiction in terms! How can He be the great Supreme if man is capable of check-mating Him? How can He be the Almighty if lacking in ability to carry out His will? Who would render homage unto One who is thwarted by His creatures? How vastly different is the God of Holy Writ, who has but to speak and it is done—who commands and it stands fast (Psa. 33:9)!

Jehovah is no pasteboard Monarch. No, “our God is in the heavens: He hath done *whatsoever* He hath pleased” (Psa. 115:3). “Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in Heaven and in the earth, in the seas and all deep places” (Psa 135:6). “This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul? and His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (Isa. 14:26, 27). “I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel *shall* stand and I will do *all* My pleasure” (Isa. 46:9, 10).

But are there not other passages which speak of God in quite another strain? Suppose such be the case, then what? Why, would these not oblige us to modify our conception of the absoluteness of God’s supremacy as predicated in the verses cited above? Certainly not. The Holy Scriptures are not a “nose of wax” (as Papists have wickedly affirmed) which man may twist as he pleases. They are the inspired Word of God, without flaw or contradiction; yet we need wisdom from the Holy Spirit if we are to *interpret* them aright. “God is Spirit” (John 4:24), incorporeal, and therefore “invisible” (Col. 1:15), “whom no man hath seen nor can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). Must we, forsooth, modify this representation of His ineffable Being because we read of His “eyes” (2 Chron. 16:9), His “hands” (Psa. 95:5) and “feet” (Exod. 24:10)? “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa. 121:4): is that negated by the statement, “Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep” (Psa. 78:65), or because He represents Himself as “rising up early” (Jer. 7:13)?

When Scripture affirms that God’s “dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth

according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and *none* can stay His hand” (Dan. 4:34,35), are we obliged to place limitations upon such supremacy when we hear Him saying elsewhere, “I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof” (Prov. 1:24, 25)? Of course not.

Then how are we to avoid such an expediency? By distinguishing between things that differ: by discriminating between God’s secret will and His revealed will, between His eternal decree and the rule which He has given us to walk by. The latter passage speaks of men scorning the Word of God, which it is their responsibility to obey. The former passage affirms the sovereign supremacy of God over all, whose eternal purpose is accomplished in and by men, not because of their willing compliance but in spite of their enmity and rebellion—as was the case with Pharaoh.

Settle it in your mind once and for all, my reader, that the true and living God is King of kings and Lord of lords, the Almighty, whom neither man nor devil can defeat or successfully resist—for such is the plain and positive teaching of His word. The churches may no longer proclaim such a God. The vast majority of those who still pose as His people may no longer believe in such an One, but that alters not the fact that He *is so*: “Let God be true and every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). Settle it in your mind likewise that Holy Writ cannot contradict itself, and therefore if the meaning of some passages are not clear to you, humbly look to their Author to enlighten you—for the obscurity is in your mind and not in His Word.

When Christ affirmed, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30), He spake according to His absolute Deity. But when He declared, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), He spake as the God-man Mediator. The perfect accord of the two passages is evident when we perceive the dual relationship of Christ to the Father: as the Son and as God-man. In like manner we must learn to distinguish between God speaking as absolute sovereign and as the Enforcer of human responsibility—as the One who deals with men according to their condition.

Now in the verses at the beginning of this booklet there is not

even an apparent difficulty: men must read into it what is not there, before they encounter a stumbling stone. The Lord does *not* affirm therein that He is represented by “the potter,” and if we suppose He *is*, then we shall be rightly confounded. Jeremiah was sent to a “potter’s house” that he might receive instruction from what he saw. While there he witnessed a vessel of clay “marred” in the hand of the potter. Most assuredly that cannot picture man’s fall, for his Creator pronounced him “very good” when he left His hands. Nor can it picture the experience of any since the Fall, for the hand of God is the place of safety and not of injury. Further, we are told this potter “made it (the marred vessel) again another vessel.” But God never mends what man has marred, but displaces with something altogether *new*: the old covenant was set aside for the New (Heb. 8:8), the old creation for a New (2 Cor. 5:17), the present Heaven and earth by a New (Isa. 65:17). Rather is the “as seemed good to the potter to make it” the particular similitude fastened upon (verse 6).

***“Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them” Jer. 18:5-10.***

A superficial reading of those verses may suggest they contain that which supports the Arminian’s conception of God, yet a more careful pondering should show there is nothing whatever in them which militates against the “immutability of His counsel” (Heb. 6:17). The Lord does not here say to Israel “ye have become marred in My hand”—“ye have defeated My purpose concerning you,” nor does He declare, “I will repair and make another vessel of you”—revise My intention and try again. Rather does He affirm His sovereignty and supremacy over them: “as the clay is in the potter’s hand so are ye in Mine hand.” Again, it is to be carefully noted that

God is not here speaking of the spiritual and eternal destiny of individuals, but of the earthly and temporal fortunes and misfortunes of kingdoms (Jer. 18:7) In this passage the Most High is viewed as the Governor of the nations, as the Dispenser or Withholder of eternal blessings, and not as the Predestinator of His Church to everlasting glory. God deals with kingdoms on a very different footing from what He does His dear children, and unless that be clearly recognized we shall be without the master-key which opens scores of passages

The favour which the Lord shows unto a nation is an altogether different thing from the love which He bears unto His elect, and he who is blind to such a distinction is utterly unqualified to expound Holy Writ. God's favour unto a nation is merely the outward dispensing of good things, which favour is forfeited when they turn their backs upon Him. But His love for the elect is an eternal and unchanging purpose of grace which effectually works in them, ceasing not to do them good and securing their everlasting felicity with regard to the former. He may pluck up and pull down what His providence has planted and set up, but to the elect, His assurance is, "He which hath begun a good work in you will finish it" (Phil. 1:6). From the former He may withdraw what He has bestowed, but to the latter, "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). Nor do the variations of the Divine dispensations with a kingdom argue any fickleness in His character; rather do they demonstrate His stability—as long as a nation's ways please Him He gives proof of His approbation. When displeasing He evidences His disapprobation.

God may act in mercy with a nation today and in wrath tomorrow without the least "shadow of turning" or change of character, and so far from that being any alteration of His eternal decree it is through these multifarious dispensations it is accomplished, for He foreordained *all* that comes to pass. There is therefore no proportion whatever between the fluctuations of His temporal bestowments on a kingdom and the peculiar love and special grace of the Everlasting Covenant wherein God assures His saints of their eternal security on the ground of His immutability. The decrees of God, as to their execution are suspended on no condition in man. If they were, it would destroy alike His wisdom, independence and fidelity. On the

other hand, when He declares, “them that honour Me, I will honour, and them that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30), God is enunciating a moral law according to which He governs the race. His decrees are His irresistible determinations. His laws reveal the duty of men and the issues thereof according to their response.

The Lord approves of obedience and righteousness wherever it is found and rewards the same with temporal blessings without the least saving grace. Conversely, He disapproves of sin and unrighteousness and sooner or later visits His anger upon them in this world. But even when the dark clouds of His judgments hang over a kingdom, calamity may be averted by national humiliation before God and reformation of conduct. But that no more implies fickleness in the Divine character that it denies His foreknowledge. The history of God’s judgments on Egypt is a case in point: each time her monarch humbled himself in any measure, the Divine rod was lifted. Nevertheless, God had foreordained the destruction of Pharaoh and suited His dispensations in great variety and with many changes to bring it about. He plagued and freed him, freed and plagued him again, yet there was not the least alteration in God, all being so many effects of His power suited to the accomplishment of His unalterable purpose.

God’s governmental dealings make more or less evident to men the proportion there is between their conduct and His attitude toward them—the correspondence is such as to convey impressions of His goodness, justice and mercy. The character of God’s dominion is seen to be such that where righteousness and morality obtain He blesses “in basket and store,” but where wickedness is obstinately indulged in it inevitably entails a doom of evil. Yet if sin is forsaken that doom is avoided and a heritage of prosperity is entered into. But such alterations as these in the Divine administration, so far from making God to be capricious in His ways or unstable in the principles of His government, rather demonstrates that He is unalterably the same. It is because His procedure is marked by undeviating righteousness that He must change His dealings with men when their relation or attitude to Him involves a change. Consequently when God is said to “repent” it connotes no change in His purpose or mind, but only in the matter of His treating with men.

Jeremiah 18:7, 8 simply means that many of the judgments which God pronounces against kingdoms are not absolute declarations or infallible predictions of what is about to surely take place, but rather ethical intimations of His sore displeasure on account of sin and solemn threats of what must inevitably follow if there be no change for the better in those denounced. Whether or not the impending judgments become historical events is contingent upon their refusal to heed the warning. In like manner Jeremiah 18:9 has reference to no absolute promise of God: it is no unqualified declaration of what He would certainly do, but rather an intimation of His readiness to bless and prosper, accompanied by a warning that such blessing will be forfeited if obedience gives place to disobedience. God never signified in any promise of national blessing that the promise held good under *all* circumstances. See Deuteronomy 28:2 and 15! God ever presses upon men the fundamental distinction between sin and holiness. It was the fatal mistake of the nation of Israel to regard God's promises to them as absolute, supposing the fulfilment was certain regardless of their degeneracy.

We must, then, distinguish sharply between God's decrees and His denunciations, between His absolute purpose and His conditional promises, between His bestowment of spiritual gifts and temporal mercies, between the administration of the Covenant of Grace and the dispensations of His providence. We must distinguish between the ground on which Jehovah deals with His Church and with a nation, for the former is in Christ and the latter out of Christ. There was a radical and vital difference between Christ shedding tears over Jerusalem because the Jews stubbornly refused to enter into the benefits of a temporal covenant (Matt. 23:37) and His shedding His blood for His brethren that they might receive the blessings of the Everlasting Covenant (Heb. 13:20, 21). Changes in God's material favours unto a nation do not imply that the eternal purpose of spiritual grace is liable to alteration, any more than the removal of a local "candlestick" (Rev. 2:5) argues that He may take away His Spirit from any regenerate soul. The "wills" and "shalls" of Divine immutability and fidelity are never jeopardized by the "ifs" of human responsibility.



## God Governing the Nations

***“If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them”***  
**Jer. 18:8.**

Then is no “if” in connection with what God has foreordained, and the history of nations has been as truly and definitely predestinated as the destiny of each individual. “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18), and they are known to Him because they were decreed by Him. Now if God decreed an event He either foresaw what would be the issue of it or He did not. If He did not, where is His infinite wisdom and understanding? On the other hand, if He foresaw an event would not be, why did He purpose it should be? If God purposed a thing, then either He is able to bring it to pass by His wisdom and power, or He is not. If not, where is His omniscience and omnipotence? From the horns of that dilemma there is no escape. If God be *God* then there can be no failure with Him “The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations” (Psa. 33:11).

“If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto it.” There is always an “if” in connection with human responsibility, for man is as “unstable as water” being influenced by many things both from within and without; nevertheless he is held strictly accountable unto God. Nations, equally with Christians, are responsible: the Lord is their Maker, their Ruler, their God. His Moral Law is as binding upon kingdoms as it is upon the Church. *If* the rulers of the nations acknowledge God in the discharge of their office, if their laws be equitable and beneficent, maintaining a balance between justice and mercy, if the Sabbath be duly enforced, if the Lord be owned in prosperity and sought unto in adversity, *then* the smile of Heaven will be upon that people. But if He be slighted and defied His frown will be experienced. As effects are dependent upon the operation of causes, and the character of the one determines the nature of the other, so a course of obedience is followed by very different consequence from one of disobedience, be it the case of a nation or individual.

“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34) expresses a foundational principle and an unchanging fact. Right doing or walking according to the Divine Rule is the basic condition of national prosperity. A righteous administration of government and the public worship of God gives an ascendancy to a people over those where such things prevail not. Nothing so tends to uphold the throne, elevate the mind of the masses, promote industry, sobriety and equity between man and man, as does the genuine practice of piety, the preservation of the virtues and suppression of vice, as nothing more qualifies a nation for the favour of God. Righteousness is productive of health, of population, of peace and prosperity. But every kind of sin has the contrary tendency. “The prevalence of vice and impiety is a nation’s reproach, conduces to disunion, weakness and disgrace, and exposes any people to the wrath and vengeance of God” (Thomas Scott). When sin has become a public “reproach” then ruin is imminent.

We repeat, then, that Jeremiah 18 portrays not Jehovah as the Determiner of eternal destiny but rather as the Dispenser of temporal benefits, not as decreeing the hereafter of individuals but as distributing the portions of the kingdoms. “Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth” (2 Kings 19:15), and as such He governs them on the basis of His moral Law and in accordance with the discharge of their responsibilities thereto. Jeremiah 18 reveals to us the fundamental principles which regulate the dealings of the Most High with the nations and the relations which He sustains to them. First, He is shown as an absolute Sovereign over Israel in particular and over all peoples in general: “as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel” (verse 6). Jehovah has the most incontestable and immediate power over them. This shows the infinite ease with which He can deal with the most fractious. “He increaseth the nations and destroyeth them: He enlargeth the nations and straiteneth them” (Job 12:23).

Second, the Lord is here depicted as the righteous Governor of the nations, dealing with them according to their deserts. In the exercise of His high and unchallengeable authority the Most High is pleased to act according to the principles of goodness and equity. There is no arbitrary caprice in the infliction of punishment: “the

curse causeless shall not come” (Prov. 26:2). The Lord “doth not afflict willingly (“from the heart,” margin) nor grieve the children of men” (Lam. 3:33), but only because they give Him occasion to and because the honour of His name requires it. “O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments, then had thy peace been as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea” (Isa. 48:18) is His own avowal. Yea, had they respected His authority “I should soon have subdued their enemies and turned My hand against their adversaries” (Psa. 81:14) He declares. Let it be definitely recognized that God’s dealings with the nation of Israel illustrate His administration of the nations today.

Third, the justice of God is tempered with mercy in His government of the nations. “The Lord is of great mercy” (Num. 14:18) and “plenteous in mercy” (Psa. 86:5), and therefore, “His tender mercies are over all His work” (Psa. 145:9). Consequently, when the dark clouds of Divine wrath gather over a kingdom, yea even when His thunderbolts have begun to be launched, genuine repentance will check the storm. When a people humble themselves beneath God’s almighty hand, evidencing the genuineness of their repentance by turning away from their wickedness and doing that which is pleasing in His sight, His judgments are turned away from them. “And the children of Israel (1) did evil in the sight of the LORD and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves. Therefore (2) the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel and He sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years. And (3) when the children cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them” (Judges 3:7-9). The same order—sin, punishment, penitence and merciful deliverance—is repeated again and again in the book of Judges.

That these principles of the Divine administration apply to the Gentiles, equally with the Jews, is unmistakably clear from the case of Nineveh a heathen city, concerning which the Lord said “their wickedness is come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2). Unto the vast metropolis the Prophet was sent, crying, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (3:4). But note well the sequel: “So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them...

And he (the king) caused it to be proclaimed . . . Let neither man nor beast, herd or flock, taste anything: let them not feed nor drink water . . . let them cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them, and He did it not” (Jonah 3:5-10).

“Repent ye, and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15): “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). Unless there be both repentance and faith there is no forgiveness of sins for any soul, yet there are comparatively few passages in which both of them are expressly *mentioned*. In Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38 and 17:30 “repentance” alone is inculcated. In John 3:15; Romans 1:16 and 10:4 only “believing” is specified. Why is this? Because the Scriptures are not written as lawyers draw up documents, wherein terms are needlessly repeated and multiplied. Each passage of the Word must be interpreted in the light of and consistently with “the Analogy of Faith” (Rom. 12:6, Greek)—the general tenor of Scripture—and none made exceptional to the general rule. Thus concerning the above references: where only “repentance” is mentioned, “believing” is implied, and when “believing” is found alone, “repentance” is presupposed. The same principle applies to all other subjects: for example, prayer, “Ask, and ye shall receive” (Matt. 7:7) is not to be taken without qualification: if we are to “receive,” we must “ask” *aright*—believingly (Heb. 11:6), according to God’s will (1 John 5:14), in the name of Christ (John 14:13), and so on.

Our object in the last paragraph was to pave the way for an explanatory word on what was before. Not a few have been puzzled over Jonah’s positive and unqualified declaration, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (3:4), for such an announcement of disaster appeared to hold out no hope of escape. This affords a striking example of the necessity for interpreting each passage in the light of and in harmony with the Analogy of Faith. Now it is one of the established maxims of Scripture that where there is genuine repentance and reformation God will show mercy and stay His judgments. This is plainly stated in such places as Leviticus 26:40-

42; 1 Kings 8:33-36, yet it is not formally expressed in every chapter or even every book. When God's Prophets were sent forth to announce judgments it was (except in extreme cases) with the proviso that the people threatened would be spared if they forsook their wickedness and returned to the paths of virtue. It was unnecessary to always *state* this because it was plainly revealed in the general rule.

Thus, when Jonah proclaimed the overthrow of Nineveh, though he specified not the *means* by which judgment could be arrested, yet they were understood—a reprieve would be granted if there were true repentance. Consequently his proclamation was no heralding of God's inexorable fiat but rather the sounding of an alarm which operated as a means of moral suasion. Had Nineveh obstinately persisted in her sins, she would certainly have been promptly overthrown; but because she ceased from being a city where every form of wickedness ran riot and became a place where the name of God was feared and His authority respected, her doom was averted. Jonah was not disclosing the Divine decree, but rather spoke ethically, addressing himself to human responsibility. And when it is said that, "God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them," He deigned to use a familiar form of speech. There was no change in His eternal purpose but an alteration in His *bearing* toward them because their conduct had changed for the better.

That our explanation of Jonah 3:4-10 is no mere plausible attempt or subtle device of getting out of a "tight place" should be quite evident from Jeremiah 18. "At what instant I should speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, and to pull down, and destroy it; *if* that nation against whom I have pronounced (not "decreed!"), turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (verses 7, 8). Though the threat be genuine and the danger real, yet the announcement of judgment is not an absolute one, but *qualified*, and when the qualification is not expressed it is *implied*. The implied reserve that God will deal in mercy with those who genuinely put right that which displeases Him and will not destroy such was perceived and appealed to by Abram when he said, "That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the

righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25).

Even though no particular notice be taken of other passages and attention be entirely confined unto what is recorded in Jonah 3, will not the thoughtful reader be struck by the very terms of the Prophet's announcement: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown?" Had the guilt of Nineveh been so great and her course in evil so long confirmed, why was any intimation of her destruction at all necessary? If her doom was fixed, if God had purposed her overthrow, then why send one of His Prophets to declare the same? Further, why pronounce Nineveh's judgment almost six weeks before it should be executed? Ah, did not that very interval suggest that a door of hope stood open if her people would humble themselves and avail themselves of it? Was not that very interval an intimation of mercy in reserve? Was it not as much as though God said, "I gave her space to repent" (Rev. 2:21)? But if we compare Scripture with Scripture (and we are ever the losers by failing to do so) then the "forty days" confirms the conclusion we have drawn, for forty is the number which expresses probation and testing: see Deuteronomy 8:2-4; Acts 7:30; Matthew 4:2, etc.

How what above has been before us exemplifies the wondrous patience and forbearance of God! How it demonstrates that His anger is not like ours—a violent passion which ebbs and flows—but rather the calm and deliberate expression of His insulted holiness upon those who despise His authority and refuse to seek unto His mercy. God warns before He smites, expostulates ere He punishes, gives ample time and opportunity for an escape from His judgments. Enoch and Noah preached for many years before the flood destroyed the world. Prophet after Prophet was sent unto Israel before God banished them into captivity. Almost forty years passed after the Jews crucified their Messiah ere Jerusalem was razed to the ground. Well nigh six thousand years have gone since the Fall of our first parents, and yet human history has not closed! The Lord is "slow to anger," yet that slowness is neither indifference to evil nor slackness in dealing with the same—rather is it a proof that He "bears with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

Still another purpose is served by the slowness of God unto anger

and the interval between a nation's degeneracy and the execution of Divine judgment upon it, and that is, it serves to test more completely human responsibility and make manifest how richly deserved is the retribution which overtakes evildoers. If God's slowness to anger evidences His forbearance, how the general response of men thereto displays the inveteracy of their wickedness. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Because God keeps silent they imagine He is altogether such an one as themselves (Psa. 50:21). "Let favour be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:10). Despising the riches of God's goodness and longsuffering, after the hardness of his impenitent heart, man treasures up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath (Rom. 2:4, 5). And thus is it made apparent that he is "without excuse" and that his "damnation is just."

### **God's Voice in Judgments**

***"Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good" Jer. 18:11.***

As the "therefore" denotes, practical application is here made of what has been before us in the context. The Prophet had been called upon to witness an object-lesson set before him in the potter's house. Then the Lord had made known to him the relations which He sustains unto nations, viz., Sovereign, Ruler and Judge over them, and the principles which regulate His dealings with them: authority and power, righteousness and mercy. A specific yet illustrative example of such is here shown us . . . Israel had long provoked God to His face, and though He had been slow to anger, the time had now arrived when He would take them to task and deal with them for their wickedness. The dark clouds of His wrath were suspended over them, yet even at this late hour if they genuinely departed from their evil ways and walked the paths of virtue, mercy should "rejoice against judgment."

God speaks to us not only through His word (both personal and written) but also through His works and ways. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psa. 19:1-4). Creation testifies to the excellencies of the Creator. The Divine providences, too, are vocal: “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity” (Jer. 22:21)—My bounties declared My goodness and should have melted your hearts. God’s judgments also carry with them a definite message: that is why we are exhorted to “hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it” (Micah 6:9)—observe how the verse opens with “the LORD’S voice crieth unto the city.” His “rod” bids us consider the Hand that wields it and calls upon us to forsake our sins.

When God speaks in judgment it is the final warning that He is not to be trifled with. When the Almighty is roused to fury who can stand before Him? Nations are no more able to successfully resist Him than can the clay hinder the fingers of the potter who shapes it; yea they are counted as “the small dust of the balance” (Isa. 40:15), which signifies utter insignificance. May we exclaim, “who would not fear Thee, O King of nations!” (Jer. 10:7). No spiritual warrant whatever has any people to put their trust in human greatness, the sire of their armies, the excellency of their equipment, the strength of their defences. God has but to blow upon them and they are immediately overthrown, entirely demolished. Mark how this is emphasized in Jeremiah 18, “At what *instant* I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy it” (verse 7): it is done in a moment—suddenly, swiftly, invincibly.

“Behold I frame evil against you.” It is the evil of punishment about to be inflicted on the evil of sin. It is no momentary outburst of uncontrollable anger, but dispassionate and deliberated retribution, and when the almighty “frames” or devises that evil against a kingdom, no power can deliver it. Though Lucifer himself says, “I will ascend above the heights of the cloud: I will be like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14), yet is his proud boast seen to be an empty one, for the Lord says, “yet thou shalt be brought down to Hell, to



the sides of the Pit” (verse 15). “Damascus is waxed feeble and turneth herself to flee, and fear hath seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken her as a woman in travail” (Jer. 49:24)—suddenly, sorely, irresistibly, from which there is no escape. How this should make the wicked to tremble and depart from their evil ways! God turneth “a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein” (Psa. 107:34).

“Behold I frame evil against you.” Calamities and judgments come not by chance, nor are they originated by inferior agents or secondary causes. Though He may be pleased to make use of human instruments, yet the Lord is the Author of and principal Agent in them. Before the Assyrians fell upon apostate Israel Jehovah declared, “I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of My wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets” (Isa. 10:6). The Lord moved him, though he was in no wise conscious of any Divine impulse or commission. And when God had finished making use of the Babylonians and raised up the Medes and Persians to humiliate them into the dust, He declared of Cyrus “thou art *My* battle-axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms” (Jer. 51:20). Cyrus was as truly God’s “servant” as Moses or any of the Prophets: see Isaiah 45:1; Ezra 1:1. Curses as much as blessings, calamities as much as boons, judgments as truly as favours proceed from the Almighty, and it is but a species of atheism to deny the fact.

“Behold I frame evil against you.” How this word needs to be pressed upon this evil and adulterous generation, which is occupied with anyone and anything rather than the living God. In a land where Bibles are so plentiful we are without excuse when we look no higher than the agencies now threatening us. Yea, it is a grievous sin for us to throw the blame of our present trials and troubles upon human instruments instead of upon our national iniquities, and refuse to see *God* employing those instruments against us. Hitler is but a scourge in the hand of the Almighty. Nor are they helping any to fix their gaze on the supreme Framer of Evil who constantly directs attention to the machinations of the pope and his longing to see the British Empire destroyed. Doubtless the papacy was behind

the entrance of Italy into active conflict and the perfidy of France, as she is responsible for Eire's refusal to grant us naval bases, of Vichy's steady opposition, of the French Canadian's disloyalty, and of many other hostile factors and forces; but *who* is permitting the "Mother of Harlots" to employ her powerful influence thus? None other than the Lord of Hosts. He is righteously using Rome as a rod on the back of an apostate Protestantism.

We cannot expect the unbelieving nations to look beyond Hitler and his fellows, but it is the privilege of Christians to "look unto *the LORD*" (Micah 7:7). It is the very nature of faith to be occupied with its Author. It is the duty of faith to "set the LORD always before" it (Psa. 16:8). When the Ammonites and Moabites came up against Judah, Jehoshaphat turned unto God and said, "we have no might against this great company that come against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are *upon Thee*" (2 Chron. 20:12). This is the first message to His own people which the voice of the Lord has in His judgments: look above the human scourges and behold *My* hand in righteous retribution. And it is the business of God's servants at such a time to urge upon the saints to "consider in thine heart that the LORD He is God in Heaven above and upon the earth beneath: there is none else" (Deut. 4:39). O that it may be the experience of both writer and reader—"Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens" (Psa. 123:1) and then shall we prove for ourselves "they looked unto Him, and were lightened" (Psa. 34:5).

***"Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I frame evil against you and devise a device against you" Jer. 18:11.***

That is the language of God unto a kingdom whose overthrow is threatened by His judgments, to whom the dispensations of his providence announce impending ruin. The dark clouds of calamity overhead testify to God's disapproval of a nation's sins. Under such solemn presages of the impending storm of Divine wrath proud spirits ought to be tamed and the masses brought to realize what a vain thing it is to fight against the Almighty and how fearful are the consequences of flouting His authority and treading underfoot His laws. The effects of evil doing are termed by the Spirit "gall and wormwood," but it is not until God brings a nation into external

miseries they are made to realize the truth thereof. “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts” (Jer 2:19).

“Behold, I frame evil against you.” The speaker is the Most High and “none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest thou?” He framed evil against the antediluvians. “The earth was filled with violence... all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen 6:11, 12). Warnings of impending doom were given by Enoch (Jude 14, 15) and Noah, but none heeded. Then the storm burst: “all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven opened” (Gen 7:11). And what could men do to help themselves? Nothing whatever. God “framed evil” against Sodom and Gomorrah and what could their inhabitants do when He “rained fire and brimstone” upon them (Gen 18:24). They were powerless to withstand it. God “framed evil” against Egypt. Her haughty monarch exclaimed “who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” (Exo 5:2), but discovered that He was not to be defied with impunity when He “took off their chariot wheels” and drowned him and his hosts in the Red Sea.

When the Almighty sends a devastating earthquake, what can puny man do? When He withholds the rain and famine ravages a land, who can resist Him? When He visits with a pestilence which cuts off millions in the prime of life, as the “flu” did in 1918, who can say Him nay? When He unleashes the dreadful hounds of war, who can turn them back? Is there, then, no hope? Yes, if the masses will truly humble themselves beneath the Hand that has begun to smite them. God’s judgments are articulate: they call upon all to throw down the weapons of their high-handed rebellion against Heaven. God takes away their peace and comforts that they may put away their idols. Calamities are sent upon evil-doers that they should depart from their wickedness. God is able to destroy the mightiest kingdom in the twinkling of an eye, but usually He spreads His judgments over a period, as in the ten plagues upon Egypt, granting space for repentance and allowing an interval between the announcement of His having “framed evil,” and the actual and full execution thereof.

Thus it is here in Jeremiah 18:11: after declaring He had devised a device against a nation God adds, “Return ye now everyone from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.” Conversion ought to be the immediate outcome of God’s judgments, whether they be threatened or in actual course of fulfilment. If men would forsake their sins God would soon lay aside His rod. But observe the urgency of the Call: “return ye *now* every one from his evil way.” There is no time for delay: God will not be trifled with. Men are very prone to procrastinate: they put off the day of repentance and defer their reformation. They hope and resolve, yet postpone the same, and the longer they do so the harder their hearts become and the more completely the Devil obtains possession of them. Agrippa was “almost persuaded,” but that was as far as he went: his lusts held him fast. “*Today* if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Psa 95:7): if ever there was a time when it was imperative to heed that exhortation it is now.

**“*And they said, There is no hope*” Jer 18:12.**

There are three possible interpretations of those words. First, they may be regarded as the language of despair: there is no hope for us *in God*, we have sinned beyond the reach of mercy. But that would necessarily presuppose they were deeply convicted of their guilt, and the remainder of the verse definitely precludes any such concept. Second, “there is no hope” might be the language of confessed helplessness. There is no hope *in us*: we are too besotted to reform, too wedded to our sins to break from them; but the remainder of the verse is flatly against this too. Third, “there is no hope” was the language of blatant defiance. There is no hope *for you*: it is useless to preach to us, our minds are fully made up, we are determined to have our own way, and nothing you say can change us. “We will walk after our own devices and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart” they declared. It was the language of open rebellion, whether expressed in words or in deeds.

That this is the obvious meaning of their “there is no hope” is clear not only from the words which immediately follow but also from other passages in Jeremiah. “But they hearkened not nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward” (7:24);

“thou saidst, *I will not hear*: this hath been thy manner from thy youth that thou obeyedst not My voice” (22:21 and see 44:16, 17). They declined to be affected by the heavy clouds of judgment over their heads. They refused to forsake their evil ways. They were determined to persist in their disobedience. They openly defied the Almighty. They were impervious to all expostulations and admonitions. Their hearts were fully set in them to drink their fill of iniquity. “For the people turneth not unto Him that smiteth them neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts” (Isa 9; 13). “Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock” (Jer 5:3).

“We will walk after our own devices.” We are quite resolved to continue in sin, and no preaching can change us. We are fully determined to do so, no matter what it may cost us. Of old God sent a shortage of food on Israel, but it produced no reformation: “yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.” He smote them with blasting and mildew so that their gardens and vineyards were destroyed, but it moved them not: “yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.” He sent pestilence among them and slew their young men, but they continued impenitent: “yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.” He destroyed some of them by fire, but they persisted in their sins: “yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord” (Amos 4:6-10). And history has repeated itself! It is still doing so before our very eyes. The perversity of ancient Israel finds its counterpart in the contumacy of modern Christendom. God has given Britain “space to repent,” alas, it has to be added “and she *repented not*” (Rev 2:21), nor is their the slightest indication she will yet do so.

