

THREE ASSURANCES CONCERNING GOD'S JUDGMENT

63 Who is this who comes from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? [Who is this,] this one who is clothed with majesty, striding in the greatness of his strength? [It is] I, the one whose speech is righteous, [the one who is] powerfully able to save. ²Why are your garments red, like the garments of him who stomps in the winepress? ³I have stomped in the winepress alone; of [all] the peoples there was no one with me. Indeed, I stomped upon them in my anger and I trampled upon them in my wrath. Their blood splattered my garments, and I have stained all my clothing. ⁴[I trampled upon them] because the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. ⁵I looked, but there was no one to help; I was astonished that no one could give support; so my own arm procured salvation for me and my wrath sustained me. ⁶I trampled down the peoples in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk [with their spilt blood], then I poured their blood on the ground. (Isa. 63:1-6)

Introduction

Suppose you are called to serve the LORD as a foreign missionary in the jungles of South America. You pack up your family, leave your homeland, and re-locate on a mission outpost carved out of the dense jungles.

One day your little son and daughter come racing into the house. They are terrified! When you calm them down, they report that they were attacked by a fifteen-foot long snake. You inquire into their story and discover from the natives that yes, indeed, the compound and the neighboring villages have been terrorized by a demonic monster of a snake that is their mortal enemy.

Now what do you do about this? Because you do not want to disturb the balance of nature or endanger the native wild life, do you suggest that if perhaps we leave the snake alone it will leave us alone? Or, as a loving father and faithful protector of the people who have entrusted themselves to your care, do you get out your machete and go hunting for that snake?

About noon the next day your children and the villagers see you come striding out of the jungle with your clothes splattered with blood. When they inquire, "Where have you been? Why are your clothes all splattered with blood?" you inform them that they no longer need fear that snake. You have dispatched of him and his whole brood. Now at last the compound, the villages, and the whole surrounding jungle are safe. Now at last you can all live in perfect peace and rest.

Summarizing the teaching of Scripture, the Westminster Shorter Catechism states:

Christ executes the office of a King ... by ruling and defending us, and by restraining and conquering all his and our enemies. (Question and Answer #26).

This is the truth we discover in the passage of Scripture presently before us: Because the LORD is a faithful Redeemer, we may be assured that there will be a day of final deliverance and of just retribution. As we consider this passage of Scripture, let us acquaint ourselves with the facts concerning the administration of God's judgment as it shall finally be revealed.

I. Be Assured that the LORD will Judge His Enemies

The nation of Edom was the archenemy of Israel. Edom refused to allow Israel to pass through their land when the Israelites were on the way to the Promised Land of Canaan:

Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, saying: This is what your brother Israel says: You know about all the hardships that have come upon us. ¹⁵Our forefathers went down into Egypt, and we lived there many years. The Egyptians mistreated us and our fathers, ¹⁶but when we cried out to Jehovah, he heard our cry and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt. Now we are here at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. ¹⁷Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory. ¹⁸But Edom answered: You may not pass through here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword. (Num. 20:14-18)

Edom was characterized by a perpetual enmity against Israel and the ambition to take Israel's land:

The word of Jehovah came to me: ²Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir [a reference to Edom]; prophesy against it ³and say: This is what the Lord Jehovah says: I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you and make you a desolate waste ... ⁵because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over to the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax, ... ¹⁰because you have said, "These two nations and countries [i.e.; Israel and Judah] will be ours and we will take possession of them," even though I Jehovah was there. ¹¹Therefore, as surely as I live, declares the Lord Jehovah, I will treat you in accordance with the anger and jealousy you showed in your hatred of them and I will make myself known among them when I judge you. (Ezek. 35:1-3,5,10-11)

This is what the Jehovah says: For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked. (Amos 1:11)

When Israel was invaded by the Babylonians, Edom rejoiced in their defeat and captivity: *"Remember, O Jehovah, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. 'Tear it down,' they cried, 'tear it down to its foundations!'"* (Psl. 137:7.)

Edom is here presented as the representative of all the enemies of God's people. Whereas Isaiah 63:1 refers to Edom, verse 6 refers to God's judgment upon *"the peoples."* In this context we should take note of Jesus' testimony:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you.¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (Jn. 15:18-19)

... you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. (Matt. 24:9)

Since the Garden of Eden there has been a mortal enmity between the LORD and the devil, involving all of mankind, either aligned with the devil against God or redeemed and restored to God. In the Garden of Eden, following the fall, the LORD declared to the devil, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel"* (Gen. 3:15.) Whereas the offspring of the woman is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ and all who believe in Him, offspring of the devil is a reference to all of fallen humanity in their state of sin, note Ephesians 2:1-3,

And [he raised] you [also], when you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² in which you once walked in accord with the course of this world, [which is] in accord with the ruling prince of the air, [that is,] the spirit who is now working in the sons of disobedience.³ Indeed, we all formerly lived among them in the lusts of our sinful nature, doing the will of the flesh and of the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath just like the rest [of mankind]. (Eph. 2:1-3) *"the ruling prince of the air"* is a reference to the devil who is at work in the lives of sinful mankind

This enmity between unregenerate mankind and the children of God is played out across the pages of Scripture and throughout history, beginning with the spiritual conflict between Cain and Abel: *"Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother [Abel]. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.* (1 Jn. 3:12.) That enmity continues in the spiritual conflict between the world and the church: *"Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you"* (1 Jn. 3:13.)

The source of this conflict must be traced back to two distinct heart attitudes towards God: the enmity against God exhibited by the natural man, as opposed to the love for God, for His commandments, and for His people exhibited by the redeemed: *"This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children*

of the devil are: Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother" (1 Jn. 3:10.) As the Apostle Paul writes, "the mind of the sinful nature is at enmity against God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Rom. 8:7.) In striking contrast to the mind of the sinful nature is the heart of the converted, as Paul testifies, "in my inner being I delight in God's law" (Rom.7:22.)

These two distinct heart attitudes towards God manifest themselves in the position they take with regard to God's kingdom and rule, either defying God's holy dominion or reverently submitting to it and desiring its full revelation. Psalm 2:1-3 describes the attitude of the world against the rightful rule of the LORD God over their lives: *"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against Jehovah and against his Anointed One. ³Let us break their chains, they say, and throw off their fetters."* Again, in striking contrast to the attitude of unrepentant mankind, we see the petition the Lord Jesus teaches His people to make, a petition they willingly express from their hearts that have been regenerated with new spiritual life: *"This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9-10.)*

The redemption of God's people inevitably involves the judgment of His and their enemies. This is necessarily the case in order for the LORD to execute justice. In Revelation 18:24 "Babylon," the symbol for the kingdom of man in opposition to God and His people, is described in these terms: *"in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth."* Revelation 19:2 provides this commentary on God's final judgment of "Babylon": *"true and just are his judgments. He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."*

Furthermore, the judgment of His enemies is a necessary part of the redemption of God's people in order to provide perfect security for them; note 1 Chronicles 17:9, *"I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked men will not oppress them anymore."* (1 Chronicles 17:9.) This promise of God shall be fulfilled in its full dimension when Christ returns to execute final judgment and deliverance for His people. Note that the deliverance out of Egypt involved judgment upon the Egyptians; likewise, the deliverance out of Babylon involved judgment upon the Babylonians—both incidents being types that serve as historical models of the final deliverance of God's people and His final judgment of the world.

II. Be Assured that the LORD will Execute a Righteous Judgment

In Isaiah 63:1 the LORD describes Himself as *"the one whose speech is righteous, [the one who is] powerfully able to save."* That is to say, the LORD pronounces a

righteous judgment, and He is powerfully able to perform both an act of judgment as well as salvation.

In verse 3 He declares, *“I have stomped in the winepress alone;”* and in verse 5 He states, *“I looked, but there was no one to help.”* The point being made is that the LORD alone executes His justice, because it is His sole prerogative to do so: *“Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but leave room for the wrath [of God]; for it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, declares the LORD”* (Rom. 12:19.) Furthermore, He alone is truly righteous and worthy to carry out a righteous judgment; note Psalm 11:7, *“Jehovah is righteous; he loves righteousness.”*

Verse 4 speaks of *“the day of vengeance.”* “Vengeance by definition is “punishment inflicted in retaliation for an injury or offense.” The ultimate injury and offense is to transgress the commandments of the LORD our God and to blaspheme His holy Name in word and in deed—and He shall finally take the ultimate vengeance, the execution of a perfectly righteous judgment.

We may be assured that the LORD will execute a righteous judgment. In answer to Abraham’s question, *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* (Gen. 18:25), we have the assurance that the answer is an emphatic “Yes” based upon the very character of God: *“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he”* (Deut. 32:4.) We may also take note of the LORD’s testimony to Ezekiel at the time He judged Israel by means of the Babylonian armies:

... when you see their conduct and their actions, you will be consoled regarding the disaster I have brought upon Jerusalem—every disaster I have brought upon it. ²³You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their actions, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Lord Jehovah. (Ezek. 14:22-23)

Furthermore, let us take note of Revelation 16:5-7,

Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; ⁶for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve. ⁷And I heard the altar respond, Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments. (Rev. 16:5-7)

III. Be Assured that the LORD has Appointed a Day of Judgment

In verse 4 the LORD declares, *“the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come.”* It appears that here the focus has shifted from Edom to Babylon and the fact that the LORD had a day appointed at which time He would carry out His righteous judgment against that empire that set itself in defiance of God and made itself an oppressor of God’s people.

The New Testament informs us that in the same manner the LORD has an appointed day when He will execute His final judgment against the world of sinful mankind. Our Lord Jesus Christ declares, *“the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice ²⁹and shall come out: they who have done good shall be resurrected to life; but they who have done evil shall be resurrected to condemnation”* (Jn. 5:28-29.) The Apostle Paul testified at Athens, *“God ... commands all men everywhere to repent; ³¹because he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed [the Lord Jesus Christ]. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30-31.)

We may be assured that the LORD has set a day on which He will carry out His final righteous judgment of the world and bring about the final and full redemption of all those who have taken refuge in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. As Proverbs 10:24 proclaims, *“What the wicked dreads will overtake him; what the righteous desire will be granted.”*