

# THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

## - Romans 11:22

### The Rebellion of Israel

The story of the Jewish people and their relationship with God as revealed in Scripture and confirmed by history has been a painful and tortuous one, like the gnarled, twisted olive tree of old; a story of a people who blew alternatively hot and cold towards God as He, in His infinite love and patience, desired to bring His chosen people to Himself. Nor was the rebelliousness a thing of the people; rather, it started at the top with Aaron, Eli, Saul and Solomon, and continued with all 19 kings of Israel who were wicked and 12 of the 20 kings of Judah who were also wicked. It is a stark reminder to us that Solomon was, initially, a man of great faith to whom God gave an awesome gift of wisdom; as a result he became famous far and wide and was even visited by the legendary Queen of Sheba. Sadly, Solomon lost his wisdom when he married 700 wives and took 300 concubines; let's face it – having 700 mothers-in-law was not wise! This led to his foreign wives turning Solomon's heart after the false gods of their religions, worshipping the gods of Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh and Molech; he even built temples to worship them in! As a result, God judged him and eventually divided the kingdom, tearing away the 10 northern tribes of Israel from the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

### The Severity of God

As a wise father disciplines his children, first gently and then with increasing severity, so God disciplined His chosen ones; even so, God's grace abounded as He demonstrated mercy in the midst of judgment. One of the outstanding passages in Scripture on God's dealings with Israel is Deuteronomy Chapter 28; the first 14 verses being about God's blessings for obedience, the remaining 53 verses being about God's curses for disobedience. We see that God's judgments are increasingly severe and progressive and may be summarized as follows: famine, barrenness of womb, disease, drought, military defeat, plagues of Egypt, exiled to serve gods of wood and stone, eating their own children, extraordinary and prolonged plagues and, finally, scattering them amongst the peoples from one end of the earth to the other. Remarkably, this is just what happened to them!

### The Goodness of God

God is faithful, gracious and long-suffering and even speaks about a second gathering of His people to the land of Israel and the new birth that would come through Jesus! We are familiar with these promises in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but God speaks about this to Moses, right back in Deuteronomy 29:3 & 5-6

*“The LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations, where the LORD your God has scattered you...Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land that your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”*

These promises are so breathtaking! God promised a world-wide return of the Jews from all the nations of the world, followed by their spiritual restoration to Him by circumcision of the heart (the New birth in Jesus) – and they were given these before the Israelites had even entered the promised land, and before the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles! For their disobedience and idol-worshipping, Israel was exiled to Assyria in 722 BC and Judah to Babylon, following the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 586 BC; when Judah returned from exile seventy years later, they never returned to idol-worship. The initial return of Judah under Ezra, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah started well but eventually the zeal of the Jews waned and, by Jesus' day, Biblical Judaism had become a dead religion based on works, legalism and tradition. Finally, the Jews were scattered amongst the nations by the Roman empire in 70 AD, following the destruction of the second Temple; this was the culmination of the Roman-Jewish war of 66-70 AD which lasted three and a half years – a 'type' of Jacob's trouble – the birth-pangs of Messiah – the Great Tribulation. Modern Judaism has moved away from God's word, relying instead on Rabbinic writings – a form of humanism; the Jews, apart from a believing remnant, are a lost people. Their only hope is Jesus.

### God's response to His people's Cries

Throughout Jewish history, whenever the Israelites cried out to the Lord, He heard them and rescued them from their enemies – a pattern repeated time and again. In addition, God has always prepared a correcting rod to bring His people back to Himself; the outstanding example being that of the Philistines. Before God released His people from Egypt, He first sent Philistines from Crete to occupy Gaza and northern

Egypt. Amos gives us this wonderful nugget of information:

*“Are you not like the people of Ethiopia to Me, O children of Israel?” says the LORD. “Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete) and the Syrians from Kir?” Amos 9:7*

So God, knowing the hearts of His people, provided a rod of correction: the Philistines. Whenever the Jews rebelled, God used the Philistines to drive the people back to Him for, as the battles became fierce, the Jews cried out to the Lord and he rescued them through the various judges and kings of Israel

### What is the Situation Today?

To bring us to the present day, it is clear that the modern day Palestinians although unrelated to the Philistines of old, have a similar purpose and, remarkably, are now back in the area once occupied by them: Gaza and the north Egyptian border. Until the Jews see their need of a Saviour and cry out to Him in sorrow and repentance, so will God use Islam (in this case the Palestinians) to drive them back into His arms. It is a painful thing for those who love Israel and her people to see the physical and emotional damage the Jews are enduring at the hands of Hamas, and to a lesser extent Fatah, in regular rocket attacks, especially from Gaza. Nevertheless, as in the days of Haman, both Hamas and Fatah have one objective in mind: the destruction of the Jewish people. At this point it is worth noting that Islam, initiated by Mohammed in the 7th century AD, has had only 19 years of peace since its inception. The reason for this is that Islam (meaning 'submission') has two Houses; a House of Peace (Dar al Salaam) and a House of War (Dar al Harb). You can only be in the House of Peace as a Muslim, submitted to Islam; everyone else: Jews, Christians and

those of other faiths or none are in the House of War, and fair game for Jihad. Allah is not the one true God of the Bible, but a moon-god (hence the crescent moon with the star representing Allah's prophet: Mohammed) a demonic entity behind which lurks Apollyon, the destroyer (Revelation 9:11) causing bloodshed, death and destruction wherever it goes. As Jesus said, **"By their fruit you will know them."**

### **What about the Church and God's Judgment?**

Having considered the actions of Israel over the centuries, we have to ask the question: has the Church been any better than Israel? Emphatically, no. The world-wide church, especially in the west, has been guilty in part of ignoring God's word, idol-worship, legalism and tradition. We have weak leaders; we have lost our first love; we have become lukewarm, embraced charismania and become at ease in our society; in short we have taken our eyes off Jesus. To my shame I have to include myself in this list. It is clear from Scripture that God starts the disciplining process of wayward Christians by giving them over to a debased mind, as Paul makes clear in Romans chapter 1, which is addressed to believers:

*"Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible men – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their bodies among themselves...And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting"* (Romans 1:21-24 & 28).

In days of old, God appointed the Israelites to exile; today His judgment on His Church is the same: exile – spiritual exile. As God's judgments become increasingly severe, He will bring out His correcting rod: Islam. David Pawson spoke about the dangers of Britain being taken over by Islam some years ago and, since then, many have come to the same conclusion. In Britain we have the most atheistic, humanistic government ever – and the nation and Church are going the same way. There is a spiritual vacuum in Britain which Islam is filling. If current demographic trends continue there will be a majority of Muslims in Britain by 2050 (unless the Lord comes sooner). Perhaps what God is saying to His Church now is this: "Britain, you were once a 'Cyrus' nation who loved the Jewish people, and yearned for their restoration both to the land of Israel and to God. Now, as a nation, you have turned your back on God and His chosen people, and judgment must come! I will bring out My correcting rod – Islam – see how you get on with that for a season – then you will soon turn back to Me!"

Perhaps God, in His grace and mercy will remember those days when Britain was His Cyrus nation, used wonderfully by Him, a nation that took the Gospel of Christ to so many nations. Perhaps He will once more pour out upon our nation the Spirit of the fear of the Lord, and use Britain once more – I pray so – as I pray for the revival of His Church in this land.

### **What Now?**

Our individual responsibility is to keep our eyes on Jesus, to rely on Him for our needs, and on His word for our spiritual food; to be good Bereans who weigh up all things by the touchstone of Scripture (if Paul needed that – how much more do we!). We need, each of us, to tread the narrow kingdom path,

avoiding legalism on the one side and licence on the other; we need to seek and exercise the gift that is widely missing in the Church today: discernment between spirits; to know what is of God and what is of Satan.

We look forward to that wonderful, coming day when, as Joseph made himself known to his brothers, so Jesus will reveal Himself to His Jewish brothers and sisters; it will be a time of great trouble, for Scripture points to the time of the Gog-Magog war (Ezekiel 39:29 and Zechariah 12:10). Let me finish by quoting Dr Derek Prince, one of the 20th century's greatest Bible teachers; a man with a heart for the Jewish people. Derek often used Isaiah 30:18-19 as his prayer weapon:

*“Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.”*

We long for that day when God's Spirit will be poured out on His chosen people; a day when they will cry out to God in repentance and sorrow; a day when they receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour of their lives and become a light to the Gentile nations. What a day that will be!

**Rod Boggia**