

Would Our God Do That?

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Given 18-Sep-01; Sermon #521A

Over the last few days I have personally felt a mixture of anger, and sadness, and pity, and sympathy, a little bit of grief, and frustration. Many may have felt this way because of the **attack** on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, but mine came as a result of the general response to it. Of course, we expect shock and grief and outrage. We expect calls for vengeance. We expect people to rise in patriotism and to make expressions (of one sort or another) of care and of sympathy for the victims and for their families. I have expressed these myself; and I am sure many of you have done the same—gone through a whole gamut of emotions.

Maybe I should have expected arrogance, denial of sin, and flat-out religious ignorance too. I did not. I thought that if something of this magnitude should occur that it would turn us to look inward—to see where we fall short. I guess in that way I am an optimist. I do not really believe in 'the eternal goodness of man' necessarily. But I usually expect good things from people (more than bad), because I have grown up in a time when most things are pretty good. And so I naturally expect good things to happen, and for people to react in the proper way. I do not look at people, normally, and expect them to do something that I would not like. I tend to trust people a little bit more than that. But maybe, looking back on it, I should have been somewhat more pessimistic—because of the way it has all turned out.

Mainly, it has made me profoundly aware of how lacking in understanding the public is. And this includes some very well-known clergy, politicians, and commentators (whom we see on the news and read in our papers)—how lacking in understanding these people are about the Christian faith and the character of Almighty God. It has saddened me. This country was built somewhat on the foundation of God's Word. A great deal of the education of our founding fathers was in the Bible. So you would think that this country (after 226 or 227 years) would still have some of those same values and be able to make the same reactions to disaster that may have been made many decades ago.

But I have found out that is not the case. What has happened over the last week has solidified my understanding—that though they call their deity "God" and His Son "Jesus Christ"—that they worship something else altogether. It is not the God of the Bible, even though they name him the same as the God who is in the Bible.

I have something here that is going to make you mad. It made me mad. It is by a man

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named Rip Rense. He is a columnist that appears on WorldNetDaily. He tends to be a libertarian in most of his views. He wrote an article last week called "Put the Finger Away, Rev. Falwell." I want you to hear what he says, and I want you to notice the attitude. I am going to read most of this article.

Hey, folks, Jerry Falwell has found the terrorists! He's done what the FBI, CIA and all the combined intelligence forces of the free world have yet been unable to do. Good work, Jer! Ready? Want to know who took down the WTC [World Trade Center], blew a chunk out of the Pentagon, hijacked those jets?

It was the ACLU, says the reverend. It was those who support abortion. And most of all, it was feminists and homosexuals.

Well, Jer, you could have fooled me! I thought it was an international network of Arab murderers, hell-bent (literally, I hope) on driving the free and civilized world to total destruction. Thanks for correcting me on this ridiculous assumption. So it was domestic terrorism, after all, eh? Wow. Who'd-uh-think it?

So it was a bunch of homosexuals and pro-abortionists and feminists and some ACLU lawyers who hijacked those jets? Quick, somebody tell Rumsfeld! Get every available agent to San Francisco and West Hollywood. Round up Gloria Steinem! (What? She finally married a man? Never mind.)

Oh, sorry—that's not what the Rev is all revved up about. I had it wrong. He's not saying that these people and groups actually carried out the terrorism. He's saying they "helped this happen." How? They "make God mad."

I don't know about you, folks, but whenever somebody tells me he claims to know God's mind, I get kind of nervous...

But to be fair, let me try and understand you, Jer. Let me follow the logic. God is mad at the ACLU, so He blew up the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. God doesn't like abortion, so He blew up the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. God doesn't like feminists, "gays," and lesbians, so He blew up the Pentagon and the World Trade Center.

Quoth the Rev: "I point the finger in their face and say 'you helped this

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happen."

(Not polite to point, Jer.)

Well, to follow this logic, one can only conclude, then, that God must be a terrorist! Isn't this what the Rev is saying? That the loving, forgiving God of Christianity isn't so loving or forgiving after all. When He gets mad at us, hey, evacuate all large buildings! Ground all commercial airliners! OK, I've got it, now. I think...

To follow the Falwellian logic further, God hired those wacko hit-men and put them up to their fiendish work. It's just a short leap from there to think that maybe—gasp—God is on their side? After all, all those Muslim extremists just hate abortion, feminism and homosexuality, right? I mean, they don't even let women show their faces in public! Osama bin Laden owns three wives (at last count). Young women who have sex before marriage are often decapitated by their own families.

So the Rev is saying, I guess, that God has sided with the Muslim extremists—who have the right ideas on these matters—and put them up to teaching the filthy, infidel West a lesson! Never mind that the United States of America is the most civilized, equaminital, generous, tolerant nation on the planet, and probably, in its history. Oh, we've got our shame, I know—from poverty to \$250 million baseball players and Madonna—but God doesn't really mind that too much. After all, the Arabs are real rich, too, and there is plenty of poverty in their world. No, it's the ACLU, et al, who rile Him up. It's the "gay" parades that stick in the Holy Crow.

Oh, well, God forgive me, but I guess I have to disagree with the Rev on all this. First of all, it bothers me to think that God would be such a darned meanie. I didn't know all those people in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and on those planes, but everything I've heard about them so far has been pretty nice (especially those ex-jocks on that Pennsylvania flight who probably saved the White House.) I don't get the idea that any of them ever intended to do any serious harm in the world—unlike their killers. In fact, I'll go way out on a limb here ...

I'll bet that most of those dead people were hard-working types who maybe wanted to contribute something good to civilization. You know, kind of like you and me. Oh, sure, maybe they picked their noses in the car, or cheated

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on their wives, and all those sorts of common failings—but in the main, I suspect they were well-meaning sorts.

But the Rev says that God killed them all because He's real mad at the ACLU, "gays" and feminists. Well, then, if that's true, why didn't He zap the right targets? Has He developed cataracts?

Now, I don't claim to know God's mind—unlike the Rev—but my God wouldn't do anything like this. My God might stick in my conscience when I do something lousy, and He might prompt me to be polite to people, helpful to old ladies and kind to animals—but I don't think He'd incinerate and crush me for, say, supporting equal rights for women...

[Jerry Falwell's] thinking reminds me of Muslim extremist murderers who think that only they know the mind of a righteous God...

But we are a nation of debate—a roiling mass of points and counter-points, ever valiantly trying to sort out our most wrenching problems. In recent years, we have faltered, becoming more a nation of acrimony—even a nation factionalized by hatred, paranoia. The unity of the past few days is a beautiful and chastening thing, a needed reminder of how civilized, tolerant and aspiring we all really are. I know this is a terrible thought, Jer, but I'll just bet you that some feminists, "gays" and ACLU supporters might be pitching in there in Manhattan.

So let's not muck things up with new divisiveness and hate, OK, Rev?

My guess is that God wouldn't like that.

That is awful! His attitude really got to me. I have read this two or three times, since I first saw it; and it makes me mad every time. I want to really give him a piece of my mind, but I know that would not do any good. What really got to me was his ignorance of the true God.

Today is the Feast of Trumpets. The meaning of this day illustrates the fullness of God and His character. It is not all 'sweetness and light'. God's character is far fuller than that—far more rounded than just sweetness and light. Sometimes He **must** be the God of vengeance and of justice—and **woe** to those who must face it.

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For another point of view, I have to reach back 250 plus years to find another quote that is closer to the mark. This is from Jonathan Edwards, in his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." He was an early 18th century Puritan preacher, who has been called by many 'the best' of all the Puritan preachers. He wrote this, basically, telling people that they are dangling on a spider's thread over the fires of hell. Now, listen to this (so unlike Rip Rense):

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present. They increase more and more, and rise higher and higher—until an outlet is given. And the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course when it is once let loose.

It is true that judgment against your evil works has not been executed hitherto. The floods of God's vengeance have been withheld. But your guilt, in the meantime, is constantly increasing; and you are every day treasuring up more wrath. The waters are constantly rising, and waxing more and more mighty. And there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God that holds the waters back.

They are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward.

If God should only withdraw His hand from the floodgates, it would immediately fly open; and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth—with inconceivable fury—and would come upon you with Omnipotent Power.

And if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is—yea, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the sturdiest devil in hell—it would be nothing to withstand or endure it.

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string. And justice sends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow. And it is nothing by the merest pleasure of God—and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all—that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.

Now, the truth is somewhere in the middle. The truth is somewhere between what modern people believe of God—as 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild,' a babe in arms, a weak and ineffectual Savior on a cross, bound there by nails of iron, unable to do

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anything, and the angry, hell-bent God of Jonathan Edwards. But I think the truth lies a little bit closer to Jonathan Edwards, at this time, than it does to the modern conception of a 'gentle and mild' Jesus.

Let us begin in Leviticus 23; and we will go over, just briefly, the command to keep the Day of Trumpets.

Leviticus 23:24-25 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LOORD.'"

Numbers 29:1 [This is the only other time, in the Bible, that this feast is commanded.] And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing of trumpets.

In one place it is called *a memorial of blowing of trumpets*, and it is called in another *a day of blowing of trumpets*. The Hebrew word translated in both places "blowing of trumpets" is *teruwah*. This word has several senses. Among them are shouting, alarm, loudness, and even joy. In Leviticus 25, it is even the word that is used for "jubilee"—as in the Jubilee year. It is a *teruwah* year. It is a year of shouting, of joy, of loudness—but also of alarm, if all of these meanings are put together. However, it is most often associated with the noise of war.

Zephaniah 1:14-16 The great day of the LOORD is near. It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LOORD is bitter. There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm [*teruwah*] against the fortified cities and against the high towers.

Is that not interesting? "Against the high towers."

In Zephaniah 1:16, this word **alarm** is a form of *teruwah*. It is quite apparent that God is prophesying of a time of *great destruction* as a result of His wrath. This is the Day of the

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Lord! Somebody else's wrath is not mixed up in all of this. It is God's righteous anger that strikes, as a result of sin. "It is near and hastens quickly," He says. So a cry, or a shout of alarm, goes out that death and destruction, darkness and gloominess, are very close.

This scenario is part of what this Day of Trumpets is all about. It is **a warning** that we get every year—that this day approaches ever nearer. And we do not want to be trampled under the hooves of God's army that is coming, because the injustice of this world has been building like water behind a dam (like Jonathan Edwards said); and, in time, it is going to be let loose. God will have to punish for it. So the Day of Trumpets heralds a time of war and death, a time when God, in His wrath over sin, takes direct action in the affairs of men. And from just these verses, it is very apparent that it is near. It is soon.

The word **trumpet**, in verse 16, is *shofar*—the ram's horn that was blown on the new moon. Particularly on the Day of Trumpets, the ram's horn was blown. It is the only holy day to fall on a new moon.

Psalm 81:3 [Asaph says:] Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day.

I would recommend that you go back and read Psalms 81—in light of Trumpets, and in light of what we have just gone through this past week. God says in there, "Listen to Me, Israel. Do what I say." He goes back and looks at the wilderness wanderings and the failings of Israel, and shows that they failed every time—even though they had God right there with them. They made a covenant with Him; and He told them, "You shall worship no other god." And He would have given them whatever they asked—if they would only obey Him.

He said, "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." (Like a bird, waiting for its mother to drop in a worm.) God's saying, "As wide as you could have opened your mouth, I would have filled it—given you everything. But My people would not heed." And so He says, "I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels." And that is when things start to get bad.

Then, at the end of the chapter, He shows that things can get better—if they will only listen, and repent. And then, the last verse is a picture of the Millennium. So you might want to go through and study that—in terms of what we have just been through.

The Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) says nothing about the shofar being

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blown on the Day of Trumpets. We get that from other parts of the Book. Intriguingly, the blowing of the shofar is mentioned in one place that is very interesting; and that is in Exodus 19 and 20. This is just after the people got to Sinai, and God told Moses to get the people ready.

Exodus 19:16 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet [shofar] was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

Now, notice: If you understand the drift, the Israelites did not blow the shofar here. It was evidently blown by angels. The people were trembling. They were not blowing shofars. They were trembling, because this loud shofar was blowing and making them very fearful.

Exodus 19:17-19a And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet [shofar] sounded long and became louder and louder. . . .

This is something that a human set of lungs could not do. A continuous pealing of this shofar—increasing in strength as it kept on going, and going, and going.

Exodus 19:19b Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.

Then, after the law was given:

Exodus 20:18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet [shofar], and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood far off.

I get a mental picture very similar to what happened at the World Trade Center, when that tower came crashing down; and you saw people rushing away from it—because they did not want to be caught in it!

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Exodus 20:19-20b Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you. [Interesting, is that not? "God has come **to test you.**"] and that His fear may be before you. . . .

He wanted to scare them witless—to let them know what He was like. Why? The very next phrase:

Exodus 20:20-21 . . .so that you may not sin." So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

The man of God drew near. People full of sin ran away. It is very interesting that here, when He gives the law as a test for Israel, they heard the shofar. What does that say about the Day of Trumpets? There are three things that are happening when the shofar sounds.

1. *God is drawing near.* He is coming! That is what the sound of the shofar represents. God is coming! The shofar announces His return. In this case, it announced that He was coming down.
2. *The shofar announced the law.* That is the guide, the code, that regulates our relationship with God and with fellowman. It is the code upon which **justice** emanates. If you do what the law says, you are being "just." If you do not do what the law says, you are not being "just." So God, in His Sovereignty, uses that law as the template upon which to measure each of us. If we measure up, which we rarely do, we are fine. But if we do not measure up, He has every right to inflict the sentence of His judgment upon us, just like Jonathan Edwards said.
3. *Judgment is coming.* I kind of melded the two of them together; but God showed here, when He separated Moses from Israel, that there was a split. A judgment was made. He allowed Moses to come near Him. But those who did not measure up were not able to approach Him, and He passed judgment. He tested them.

So the three things are (1) God is drawing near. (2) There is law that guides the affairs of men—between men and God, and man and man. (3) There is a test, a judgment, a crisis where things could go one way or the other. On which side are you going to fall? I just thought that was interesting that the only place in the whole book of the law (the five

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books of Moses) where **shofar** is mentioned—other than in Leviticus 25, about the Jubilee—it has to do with *God coming near, giving the law, and passing judgments*. Of course, we blow it on the Day of Trumpets; and this is the sort of thing that we are supposed to remember when we hear it—when we keep this day.

Let us go to Joel 2. I am getting back to the idea that our God is not just the 'meek and mild' God that this world portrays Him as.

Joel 2:1-3 Blow the trumpet [shofar] in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LOORD is coming, for it is at hand. [It is not just coming. It is here!] A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness [sounds like Zephaniah], like the mourning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; surely nothing shall escape them.

This army of God is **full of destruction**.

Joel 2:4-11 Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run. With a noise like chariots over the mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. Before them the people writhe in pain. All faces are drained of color. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between weapons, they are not cut down. They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. The LOORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LOORD is great and very terrible. Who can endure it?

No one can! All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It is only those who have a right relationship with Him who, in any way, can escape this. Here the shofar is

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blown in Zion to announce the Day of the Lord. And we find out very clearly, in verse 11, that it is God who leads this army. It is His army, His camp. And what do armies do? Rush Limbaugh has, I think, the absolute best definition of what an army does. He says, "They kill people and break things." That is what armies do! That is what they are trained to do. And that is what God's army does—kills people and breaks things—in absolute righteousness. He is entirely just to do that, because He has made His law very plain.

And it says in Romans 2 that even the Gentiles, who have no connection with the law, know this law (like it is just part of the way things are). This law is available. The natural man can understand at least the rudiments of this law. So people are without excuse. It says that in Romans 1. They should be able to see all of this in the creation. So when God marches at the forefront of His army, He is entirely just and righteous to kill people and break things.

Joel 1:15 Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as destruction [from whom?] from the Almighty.

It is very plain Who is behind it all. Rip Rense was wrong. God **destroys** because of sin! Jonathan Edwards was right. God has every right to do whatever He wants, because the water has been building behind the dam. Most people have no problem understanding that the God of the Old Testament was full of wrath. That He was ready to kill. That He would totally eradicate Israel at a moment's notice. This is **not** an accurate conception of Him! The God of the Old Testament was *not* eager to kill. He had lovingkindness that He wanted to give to Israel, and to all that came into contact with Him.

But the Old Testament is a history—a record—of how people **refused Him!** So instead of just leaving it at that, He went in His love and showed the whole process. So He killed many Israelites. He burned their cities (by the Assyrians and the Babylonians). He took them into captivity. He wanted to show **us** what would happen if we did the same.

But this idea of a vengeful, wrathful, hell-bent God of the Old Testament has become popular—especially among Protestant ministers—contrasted to the God of the New Testament. (Jesus meek and mild, the babe in arms, whose mother has more power than he. The weak, naked savior on a cross, looking effeminate, longhaired, lanky. Could not even pick up his own bowl of cereal at breakfast because he was so weak.) Is that not the impression you get from the pictures you see?

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But what they fail to tell the people, who are listening to them, is that the God of the Old Testament is **the same God** who hanged on that cross; **the same God** who was born and placed in a manger; **the same God** who was resurrected after three days. **The same God** who ascended to heaven, and now sits at the right hand of His Father—and who is our Judge and High Priest, and soon coming King. They leave that out. It is sad. It is abominable! They have made a god out of only part of the true God's character. They have left the rest out. They do not want to deal with it. They do not want to deal with that 'knife's edge' side of God's character—Who must uphold His justice.

Now, I do not understand why they cannot see from verses like I Corinthians 10:1-5. This is all the Scripture we need to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the same God who created the world, who gave the law on Sinai, who lead His people out of Egypt, who knocked the walls of Jericho down, and on and on and on. Paul says it very plainly.

I Corinthians 10:1-4 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

How simple! *The same God* who slew 10,000 here, and 50,000 there, and who knows how many Egyptians in the plagues is *the same Christ* that walked on this earth for 33 ½ years. Now notice:

I Corinthians 10:5 But with most of them God [Christ] was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

How many bodies was that? Did you ever think about how many people God slew in the wilderness? If our estimates are right, probably close to a couple million—whose bodies just disintegrated in the desert. "Strewn," he said—scattered like straw in the wind. And the same Jesus Christ of Nazareth did it.

Why is it they cannot see that? Well, it is very easy. Satan the Devil has deceived the whole world. We can lie this at his feet; but those preachers are not innocent, by any means. They know that, if they preach a Jesus 'meek and mild'—who does **not** call for them to obey, then they have job security. They are not demanding of their congregation to repent, and to live the godly way. People do not want to change; and so the preachers teach a smooth thing, a nice thing. And they can continue in their pulpits.

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How many preachers are there in America like Jonathan Edwards? America has not seen his like since, unless it is some true church preachers. But even true church preachers do not preach "hellfire and brimstone" like Jonathan Edwards because, in a way, Jonathan Edwards was too much on the other end of things. He did not give true hope to Christians.

To get back to I Corinthians 10, what does this day commemorate? That the same God in the Old Testament—that appeared in the New as our Savior—***is coming!*** And we will see Him as He is, if we are among the first resurrection. We will know the fullness of His character, and understand why He is the way that He is—why He did the things that He did—even more fully than we do now. But that great God and King is coming!

Please go with me to Hebrews 12. We are in a very precarious position here, because we know. We have been taught. The truth has been revealed to us. We know that God is coming soon. So Paul says:

Hebrews 12:25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. . .

Who is "Him who speaks"? We learned this from Mr. Armstrong. He is the Word, the Logos—the same God Being who has dealt with man from the very beginning. He is the Creator of all things, El Shaddai, the Almighty—who became flesh and dwelt among us. The Man, Jesus Christ. That is "Him who speaks." Now notice what Paul says here:

Hebrews 12:25 . . . For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.

Did you catch the difference? He says, "The God of the Old Testament was quick to punish those who did not heed Him; but now, under the New Covenant, how much more shall we not escape if we do not heed Him who speaks from heaven." Did you catch the ***rise in intensity*** there? The stakes are far higher for us!

Hebrews 12:26 Whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."

Again, this elevation of intensity! He did earthquakes in the Old Testament times. In

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New Testament times—in the coming times—He is not only going to do earthquakes, He is going to shake the very universe. A rise in intensity, because the stakes are higher.

Hebrews 12:27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Physical things can be shaken. They will be removed, destroyed. The only things that will remain are spiritual and eternal things. Those will remain eternally. That is the side we want to be on.

Hebrews 12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

He is not 'Jesus, meek and mild' all the time; only when He needs to be. On the other hand, He is ready to destroy wickedness. So, since we have been given the opportunity to be in an eternal Kingdom—have eternal life and all the rewards that go with it—we had better toe the line, or face the **consuming fire**. It is pretty scary, is it not? We are not dealing with a powder puff, a pushover. We are dealing with the very God who created all things, and upholds all things by the word of His power. We are dealing with the ultimate in Beings—the ultimate in everything. And His holiness will not abide sin! But He gives grace until we come to realize that, or face the music.

I would rather come to realize that, and make the proper decision. What He says is, "Take heed and obey—or else."

There are two sides to His character, if you want to put it that way. In Isaiah 45, when He is describing Himself to Cyrus—before Cyrus was ever born—He says this:

Isaiah 45:5-6 I am the LORD [Meaning, "I am that I am." "I am, I was, I will be."], and there is no other; there is no God besides Me. [This is it. "I am God," He says.] I will gird you [Cyrus], though you have not know Me, that they many know from the rising of the sun to its setting [He is talking about everybody in the whole world.] that there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.

How many times has He said it already? **There is only one.**

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness. . . .

Two sides. There is a light side, and a dark side. And they are from the same Being. Now, I do not want you to get the idea that He is evil—because His "dark side" is the way we look at things. We look at it as dark, and the other side as light. But God does not look at it that way. God is perfect, righteous, holy character. Whatever He does is righteousness. He always acts in justice. He never does anything that has even a hint of wrong or evil. But it is the way we look at it. We think that a spanking is darkness, when God thinks of it as the ultimate of light. But I just wanted you to see that there. He is not evil, in any way. It is just the way that we approach it.

And it is the way that people out there are approaching this terrible incident that has occurred. They are looking at it as darkness. And it is! Death has occurred. Destruction has occurred. But God wants it for a good purpose—to produce *righteousness* in those who remain. He will work with those people who died, in time. He does not see things as 'finished' with those people. He will get to them in the second resurrection. There is hope yet for them. But He wants those who remain—whom He has given a second chance—to make the right choices from here on out.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD [the only One], do all these things.

He is telling Cyrus, "Look, I'm behind everything. I have the power to do these things. I called you by name long before you were born. I'm the only One. I can do this. I can do that." He has one purpose—and that is to bring all of mankind into His Kingdom. And He will do whatever it takes to get that accomplished (obviously, in the bounds of His own character). So, He is not just 'sweetness and light.' He is also darkness, and terror, and gloom—when it is appropriate.

For us, we need to think very seriously about I Thessalonians 5. This is just after Paul had talked about the return of Christ—that we are caught up in the air, and we will be ever with Him.

I Thessalonians 5:1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.

Paul had explained it to them before. It is the same with you. You have studied this before. You have kept the Feast of Trumpets. Year after year after year—you have heard these things. I think Paul was a little bit upset that actually he did need to write to them and to assure them that these things had not happened. He told them, "Why didn't you remember what I told you, when I was there?" There had been people that had come and told them that the resurrection had already been past. And he said, "You guys already know this. So don't be deceived."

I Thessalonians 5:2-3 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

It is very interesting that this came awfully **suddenly**, did it not? Out of peace and safety. David Wyatt-Mair wrote me an e-mail on Friday. He said that he was talking to his wife on the Sunday before this happened. And he said, "Things sure are calm. I bet something is about ready to happen." And on Tuesday, suddenly, the greatest attack of terrorism that has ever happened in this world occurred. "Peace and safety"—and then "sudden destruction."

I Thessalonians 5:4-5 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness.

No, we are on that other side—because God has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

I Thessalonians 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

It says *watch* in the New Testament—and even in the Old Testament. I am thinking specifically about Ezekiel 33. It tells you to watch for war and for the signs of things coming. "Watch and pray always that you may be worthy to escape these things"—talking about the return of Christ and the signs that He gave. Is this one of those signs? I think so. If it is not one of the specific signs, it certainly is an echo of them—of things that could come, and will come, in the future.

And so, what did he warn us to do? *Watch* and *be sober*. When you are sober, you do not get all riled up. You do not go half-cocked to do this, that, and the other thing. You take it seriously. You ponder. You look at it, to see what it means—which is what Paul is trying to gently prod us to do here. Watch. Observe. Be sober in your thinking about what it all means in the scheme of things.

I Thessalonians 5:7-8 For those who sleep [We do not want to be "those who sleep," do we?], sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. [When they cannot see. When it is dark.] But let us who are of the day be sober [He repeats it.], putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

What does this **soberness** drive us to do? Well, there it is. We put on faith, and love, and salvation. We get to work on ourselves! I am not denouncing what the people are doing out there. (Not necessarily.) Sin is sin. It is wickedness. It is awful. It should not be. But what I am trying to get us to do is to watch, observe what has happened, and be sober about it—putting all of this that we have seen in the past week in the perspective of God. And then **use it**, because we have been called and given this opportunity to see where things are going, **to change ourselves!**

Putting on these character attributes of God is a thing that we do personally. We are not in the face of those people out there. We can warn them, certainly—that these things are sinful, that this is a warning from God. We cannot change them, though! Who can we change? Ourselves. We are **His witnesses**. We warn them, and let them take it where they will. But the other half of that witness is how we are in the world, and how we appear to those who are outside, in darkness. Are we fitting examples of God, in this world? Are we spiritual enough to make a witness? That the end is near, and that Israel (the apple of God's eye), among all the families of the earth, is in dire trouble!

Do we have the credibility to make that message plain? I do not know. I pray to God that we do. But that means constant vigilance, being sober, and putting on the breastplate of love, and faith, and the helmet of salvation. Always, constantly—because things are close. The Day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night; and we are of the day, and not of the night. So, we must be ready and always working on ourselves.

I Thessalonians 5:9 For God did not appoint us [He is talking to the church.] to wrath. . . .

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Now, this is not a guarantee. This is an appointment—meaning, what He did was He chose you, and you, and you, and you, and you. And He said, "I've chosen you not to go through the wrath. I will give you the revelation of Myself. I called you out of this world. I've given you My Spirit. I've given you My law. Now, what are you going to do with it? I have not chosen you to go through this. But you still could." Let us go on. What did He appoint us to?

I Thessalonians 5:9-11but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify each other, just as you also are doing.

We have been called to salvation, but this is a gentle warning from Paul that it could be taken away. That we could end up going through that **wrath**—*if* we are not sober, *if* we are not watching, *if* we get drunk and go to sleep and fall into darkness. Paul does not really get on their case, because he is trying to comfort them. But the warning is there, underneath.

We are on the razor's edge—or could be—especially at this time of the end, when the Laodicean attitude is most prevalent. Rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing. Many of them do not even answer the door when Christ Himself knocks. But if we do answer the door, Christ will come in and dine with us. So, if we have been affected by the Laodicean condition, we had better make sure that we are part of those who have opened the door and let Christ in.

Let us go to the second epistle of Thessalonians. He is still on this same theme because, evidently, the first letter was not quite good enough. So he had to reassure them again, in II Thessalonians.

II Thessalonians 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.

They had evidently taken his gentle warnings to heart, and their faith and love were growing. And that was great!

II Thessalonians 1:4-5 So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God [Paul was out there bragging about the Thessalonians, and

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about how faithful and loving they were. And he wanted it to continue.] for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.

What did he say there? He said, "When you begin growing in faith, and love, and patience—even among afflictions and tribulation, and trials, and tests, and destruction—this is evidence (proof) that God has judged you worthy of the Kingdom, and that you are on the road to that glorious end."

II Thessalonians 1:6-7 Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.

Notice, after we just went through that, he brings out the second coming of Jesus Christ. That is when the *reward* is going to occur. But that is also when the *punishment* is going to occur as well, in large part.

II Thessalonians 1:7-10 . . . Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

Now notice that these two sides pop up again. When Jesus Christ returns, He comes to punish them with everlasting destruction, on those who do not believe. Yet, on the other hand, He also comes to reward those who have believed. He comes to glorify and reward His saints, and to give them all that they are due—because of their faithfulness to God. And He also comes with righteous wrath to judge and destroy His enemies. They are both fair. Paul says, very plainly, that God's vengeful wrath is a righteous thing.

II Thessalonians 1:6 Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you.

It is not evil. It is just a part of His character—that He will not abide sin. So our God is meek—yes, very meek—meeker than Moses, who was the meekest who ever lived on this earth (outside of Jesus Christ). But when we come to understand what *meek* means, then you come to understand God (Jesus Christ) a great deal more—because ***meekness means that God expresses the proper emotion and reaction at the appropriate time.*** When it calls for love, and mercy, and gentleness, and kindness—that is what He expresses. But when it calls for destruction, and ruin, and death—He will give that too. Like I said, we are dealing with a Being that is **the ultimate** in everything that is good and loving. And sometimes love has that second edge (if you get my meaning).

Now notice the man, Jesus Christ. I just want to run through this quickly. People, who preach that Jesus Christ never lifted a hand or had an angry look in His eye, are quite wrong.

Mark 3:1-5 And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward." Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent. And when He had looked around at them with anger [because they were not doing justly], being grieved by the hardness of their hearts [which is sin], He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

Our God was **angry** when the people would not "do good" for one who was suffering on the Sabbath day. Mark 11 is one of the accounts of Christ going through the temple and cleaning it out. As we go through these few verses, wonder whether He did this with a smile on His face?

Mark 11:15-17 So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. [He was standing there, at the entrance, with a whip; and not allowing anybody by. "Don't you bring your goods through My Father's house."] Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

And I do not think He said that with a wimpy voice.

Matthew 10:34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword."

Luke 12:49, 51 "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! [Did your know that your God said that, while He stood here?] . . . Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division."

It does not sound like 'Jesus, meek and mild" does it? It does not sound like the effeminate man that you see in pictures, or hanging on crosses. He was a Man of action! A Man of fierce emotions (when needs be). A Man who wished the Day of the Lord was kindled. How about them apples? Hebrews 13:8 maybe says it all.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He does not change! The same Creator God, the same God Almighty, the same covenant God, the same El Shaddai (I could go through all of His names) is the same as Jesus Christ, the Man, and Jesus Christ, our God—the One who now stands at His Father's right hand.

In the Gospel accounts, we do not see Him often doing things powerfully—except preaching. He spoke as one having authority. But, as a Man, He was relatively ineffectual because of His humanity. I mean, being this God of wrath. He could not do it, because He did not have the power. He was under authority Himself. But He is God now, again, in all His fullness. All the prerogatives of God were given back to Him when He ascended back to His Father. And now He can display His wrath in the way that He wants to.

He does say, in John 18:36, that if His Kingdom were of this world, His servants would **fight!** He tells Pilate that, very bluntly. "If My kingdom was of this world, My angels [or, saints] would come in here with an army that you could never oppose. And they'd win. And I would not be allowed to die." But He knew His purpose. He did not come then to be the God of wrath of the Day of the Lord. He came to be our redemptive Lamb—our

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Savior—and to train as our High Priest.

Let us close in Acts 17. This is the last part of what Paul preached to the Athenians. He had just talked about "in Him we live and move and have our being."

Acts 17:29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

Jonathan Edwards had something interesting to say on that. He says: "God is not altogether such an one as themselves, though they may imagine Him to be so."

That is the same thing that Paul said. Whatever we have *devised of our own mind*, outside the revelation of God, is wrong. That is not God. The God who is revealed in the pages of His Word is God—and not just one part of His Word, but the God who is revealed through all the pages of the Old and New Testament.

Acts 17:30-31 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained [Jesus Christ]. He has given assurance of this to all [everyone] by raising Him from the dead."

First, Paul says, "Look. Your gods are nothing. Everything that you've devised and thought God to be, forget it—because God is not like wood, or stone, or gold, or silver, or anything that you could devise or imagine. He is far different. He's holy. He's righteous."

Second, he assures them that God has mercifully considered their ignorance. God is not so unjust as to think that they are so deserving of death that they should be held accountable for the whole of His revelation, which has not really been revealed to them. He understands that. So He is merciful. He forgives, in part, their ignorance. But He nevertheless *demand*s and *command*s everyone, everywhere, to **repent**. Paul said this to the pagan Athenians. And he tells them, "God now is demanding of everyone repentance."

And third, he warns them that a day is coming in which they will be held accountable for their conduct. On the one hand, there is *reward*; and, on the other hand, there is *rebuke*.

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Which is it going to be? As generously as He rewards the faithful, He will with equal effort punish the sinful.

And it is very interesting. I do not know if you were aware of this. It never entered my mind before, even after reading this for many years. But the resurrection was not only a guarantee of the hope of our resurrection. It is also a guarantee that He is coming back as our Judge—either to reward or to punish.

That is what Paul said. He has given reassurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead. Because Christ was raised from the dead, we can be raised from the dead too—and enter into His Kingdom. But, because He was raised from the dead, He also assured that He is returning with power and great might—at the head of an army, to establish His Kingdom in righteousness.

We could go through Revelation 6:12-17, which talks about the Lamb of God and His wrath. It is funny to think of a lamb being wrathful. But He is—this Lamb. Revelation 14:17-20 talks about the winepress of His wrath being full of blood. And the last verse talks about blood up to the bridle of a horse. That is deep, folks. The World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks were nowhere close to the way it will be in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Blood up to the bridle of a horse. Can you imagine? That is roughly about 4 feet high.

Revelation 19:11-21 is Christ's return. And He invites all the birds of the world to the supper of the great King. Do you know what they are doing? They are feasting on flesh! We have seen nothing yet, if this does not get turned around in repentance.

I said that we would close there in Acts 17; but I think it is much better if I close by just reading Joel 2. I want to really show you that even though God, through Joel, talks about all this destruction and Christ at the head of an army, I want to give you what He says to do. I do not want to leave that hanging.

Joel 2:12-13 "Now, therefore, " says the LOORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LOORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

I have spoken a lot today about God's wrath, and how angry He can get, and how strongly He will react to sin. But this is the side that we have to remember, and that we

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can call upon in repentance.

Joel 2:14-17 Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him—a grain offering and a drink offering for the LOORD your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast [which we will do, in ten days], call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room. Let the priests, who minister to the LOORD [And we have been hearing about our function.], weep between the porch and the altar. Let them say, "Spare Your people, O LOORD. And do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, "Where is their God?"

So we all have a part to do in this. Instead of condemning the people for their sin, let us—as priests—go between them and God, and beseech Him to have mercy upon His people, Manasseh.

That is all of my sermon for today. I hope that I did not depress you too much. That was not my purpose at all; but I did want to give you a counter to some of the things that we have been hearing on the TV and on the radio.