

## ***Session 4 The Primary and Secondary Causes of a National Crisis***

### **I. THE DAY OF THE LORD JUDGMENTS ARE SENT BY GOD**

<sup>15</sup>*Alas...the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty. (Joel 1:15)*

<sup>25</sup>*I will restore to you the years that the...locust has eaten... great army which I sent... (Joel 2:25)*

- A. Undoubtedly, many in Israel were offended at Joel's interpretation of the crisis as coming from God. He proclaimed that the locust plague, the drought, the raging fires, the famine, and the starvation were part of the day of the Lord judgments—God sent it.
- B. The end-time message will be offensive to many in the generation Jesus returns. God does not apologize for His judgments, but takes responsibility for them. He is not pleased when His servants yield to fear and refuse to speak clearly about God's judgments.
- C. Many in Israel interpreted the agricultural crisis as simply a "natural disaster." Then Joel prophesied that a military invasion was also coming as a "day-of-the-Lord" judgment (Joel 2:11). Why? God wanted them to know that just as the locust invasion was more than a natural disaster, so also, the Babylonian military invasion would be more than a political power play. They were both sent by God to cause a wicked, oppressive, and rebellious nation to repent. After God used Babylon to discipline Israel, God judged Babylon for her wickedness (Isa. 47:4-11; Jer. 25:9-14).
- D. Destruction was coming; thus, God sent Joel to sound the alarm to wake them up. Joel cried out "Alas!" or "Woe!" to the inhabitants of the land. We can feel the burden of Joel's heart in this single word. There was a sense of shock and terror in Joel's heart because he understood what was going to happen. He wanted the crisis to be understood so the people would respond to God. Joel sought to summon the full attention of the people.

<sup>15</sup>*Alas...the day of the LORD...shall come as destruction from the Almighty. (Joel 1:15)*

- E. Joel described Israel's day of destruction as coming from the Almighty. This name of God in Hebrew is *El Shaddai*, the all-sufficient God. This was one of God's covenant names. In other words, the God who made covenant with Israel is the same God who removed His protection and provision because of their persistent rebellion. God had not forgotten His covenant in sending judgment, but He was expressing His zeal for the covenant by removing all that hindered love.
- F. When the Lord identifies a national crisis as a "day-of-the-Lord judgment," then He is identifying Himself as the primary orchestrator of the crisis. Neither the locust plague nor the Babylonian invasion was Israel's greatest problem as long as they continued in sin. ***It was God.*** All other sources of trouble are secondary ones. God's unrelenting love and fiery zeal that His people love Him in return are the real issues. God can easily remove the foreign armies that rise up against Israel.
- G. God called the wicked army of Babylon (Joel 2:11) and the locust invasion (Joel 2:25) "His army," because both were instruments that God raised up to discipline Israel, whom He loved.

<sup>11</sup>*The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great... (Joel 2:11)*

<sup>25</sup>*“I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you.” (Joel 2:25)*

- H. God wants His people to know that He is the One who acts in judgment. If the people do not know that God is behind the crisis, then they will not respond to God in the right way.
- I. God’s normal mode of leadership is to restrain His intensified judgments against rebellion.
- J. God fights against His enemies. God’s main enemy is sin. Israel made herself God’s enemy by living in continual rebellion (Isa. 63:10). God was at war with the deep sin in Israel. They set themselves in an adversarial relationship with Him.

<sup>10</sup>*They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them. (Isa. 63:10)*

<sup>4</sup>*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (Jas. 4:4)*

- K. God’s judgment is controversial in the Church. He takes no pleasure in judgment (Ezek. 33:11). God uses the least severe means to reach the greatest number of people, at the deepest level of love, without violating anyone’s free will.

## **II. FOUR FACTORS WORKING TOGETHER IN A NATIONAL CRISIS**

- A. Four factors often overlap and work together in a national crisis—God’s zeal for relationship and to deliver the oppressed, Satan’s rage, man’s sin, and creation’s groan.
- B. God’s zeal for relationship leads Him to discipline His people as He removes all that hinders love. God’s zeal to deliver the oppressed leads Him to destroy oppressors.
- C. The second factor contributing to the end-time crisis is Satan’s rage. God will allow Satan to vent his fury in the end times more than at any other time in history. God sets the boundaries in which Satan can operate. God both limits it and permits it to be expressed.  
<sup>12</sup>*“Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” (Rev. 12:12)*
- D. The third factor is the role that man’s sin plays. Men act in violence toward one another. They do this to individuals and sometimes to nations, as in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. God has given the human race the dignity of free choice. We can use this for good or for evil. Free will gives us the ability to make real choices that affect real life. For instance, terrorists can really use their free will to do evil and when they do, it brings death and destruction to others.

- E. Man's free will provides the legal entry point for both angels and demons to be much more active in the natural realm. When people choose righteousness, they open up legal access for angelic activity into the natural realm. When people choose rebellion towards God, they open up legal entry points for demonic activity to be heightened in the earthly arena. Decisions that we make today affect our life in this age, they affect those around us, and they also affect our life in the age to come—in eternity. What we choose now counts forever.
- F. The fourth factor contributing to pressure in the nations is creation's groan. One reason that earthquakes, volcanoes, and violent weather patterns occur is because creation groans under the weight of man's sin (Rom. 8:21-22). There is a mysterious yet glorious connection between the action of the human race and the condition of natural creation (land, vegetation, etc.). When Adam sinned, a curse came upon the land (Gen. 3). That curse has been escalating as man's sin escalates. The earth's convulsions will increase as sin ripens in the earth (Isa. 24:5-6, 20).
- <sup>21</sup>Creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now... (Rom. 8:21-22)*
- <sup>5</sup>The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws...  
<sup>6</sup>Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left. (Isa. 24:5-6)*
- G. These four factors work together for good under God's sovereign and wise leadership.
- <sup>28</sup>We know that all things work together for good to those who love God... (Rom. 8:28)*
- H. The Church talks about Satan's role, and sinful man's role, yet we are rightly cautious when talking about God's role in causing crisis. We need the Spirit's help to discern this. We must actively seek insight into this. Sometimes He causes crises in a direct way and, at other times, He works indirectly, allowing other forces to bring about the events. These are secondary causes.
- I. God's zeal for relationship and zeal to deliver the oppressed is the primary cause. It is the most powerful of the four causes of crisis.
- J. How are the redeemed to respond? First, we receive God's correction in humility. Second, we resist Satan's activity by faith. Third, we repent of sin.
- K. Jesus, as the Lamb of God, is the primary actor in God's judgment in the book of Revelation.
- <sup>1</sup>The Lamb [Jesus] opened...the seals [of judgment]...<sup>7</sup>for the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Rev. 6:1, 17)*

- L. Jesus, not the devil, takes the scroll and breaks open its seven seals that release His end-time judgments (Rev. 6). In releasing His judgments, He reveals Himself as the Lamb. The Lamb is the One who poured out His soul to death for the sake of love. Jesus, the Lamb, loves people more than any person in history. He could say, “Look at My scars, I am a slain Lamb. I am judging the earth as a Lamb to remove all that hinders love.”
- M. The Lord will be deeply involved in the end-time judgments that create crisis across the earth.  
<sup>7</sup>***“I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.” (Isa. 45:7)***

<sup>6</sup>***“If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it? (Amos 3:6)***

### III. THE MOST TERRIFYING PROBLEM FOR A NATION IN SIN

- A. The biggest problem for a nation in persistent rebellion against God is not Satan, or the violent acts of terrorists, or even natural disasters, but the zeal of God.
- B. In His zeal, God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to discipline rebellious Israel in Joel’s day.
- C. We call people to repent and cry for God’s mercy and favor in the time of judgment. The greatest need in a national crisis is God’s favor. Money cannot buy it and nothing can substitute for it.

### IV. THE CHURCH IS THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

<sup>14</sup>***“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chr. 7:14)***

<sup>17</sup>***For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Pet. 4:17)***

- A. The Church, as the covenant people in the land, is the first line of defense. They have the most responsibility before God to pray and raise a standard against sin and oppression.
- B. God’s requirement in Joel’s day was that God’s people humble themselves in obedience before Him. This was the same in Solomon’s day (2 Chr. 7:14) and is the same today.  
<sup>12</sup>***“Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting...”*** <sup>13</sup>***Rend your heart...return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful...and He relents from doing harm. (Joel 2:12-13)***
- C. Disaster causes people to go to places of prayer to cry out to God for help and mercy. For three days after September 11, 2001, many prayer rooms across America were full.

- D. Secondary causes for a national crisis are things like terrorist activity, the unrighteous policies of governments, a financial crisis, or terrible storm, etc. We often focus on the secondary causes that cause a nation to be shaken instead of the primary one. The secondary causes are real, but a national crisis cannot be solved by only seeking to remove its secondary causes.
- E. If we focus only on secondary causes, then we only come up with secondary solutions. For example, we can march on Washington, picket abortion clinics, call our senators, write appeal letters, etc. These can make an impact in righteous legislation being established. When a military crisis occurs, leaders rightly gather for peace-talks. These are important, but they are not enough. We must not minimize the secondary solutions, yet we know they cannot take the place of the primary ones.
- F. God often uses pressure to restore His people to a right relationship with Him. Therefore, the primary solution is for the Church to repent and return to God with wholeheartedness, then to stand in the gap in intercession for unbelievers and even for oppressors.
- G. Joel called God’s covenant people to repent and cry for mercy (Joel 1:13-14, 19). To receive mercy is to receive the goodness of God that we do not deserve. If we refuse God’s mercy then we will receive what we deserve. In essence, the Lord says, “If you do not want My mercy, then I will give you the only alternative, which is justice without mercy.”
- H. God’s zeal in judgment is the proof of *His commitment to contend for relationship with people*. When God intervenes to discipline His children, it is a manifestation of His love (Heb. 12:5-12).  
<sup>12</sup>*Whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights. (Prov. 3:12)*

**V. PROGRESSION OF JUDGMENT: FROM LOCUST TO MILITARY INVASION (DEUT. 28)**

- A. Deuteronomy 28 gives us insight into the judgments seen in the book of Joel. We often only study the first fourteen verses of Deuteronomy 28, which speak of God’s covenant blessings. We rightly love the blessing of God. However, we cannot dismiss the other fifty-four verses in this chapter that equally express God’s heart.
- B. The judgment process that Moses prophesied in Deuteronomy 28 parallels what happened in Joel 1-2, and what will happen in the end times. Initially, God promised Israel that He would send a bronzed heaven, which included drought with its scorching heat.  
<sup>23</sup>*Your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron.* <sup>24</sup>*The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed. (Deut. 28:23-24)*
- C. Later in the prophecy, Moses warned Israel that God would send a locust plague to them.  
<sup>38</sup>*You shall carry much seed out to the field and gather but little in, for the locust shall consume it...* <sup>42</sup>*Locusts shall consume all your trees and the produce of your land...*  
<sup>45</sup>*Moreover all these curses shall come upon you and pursue and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD... (Deut. 28:38-45)*

- D. The progression to a military invasion is the most severe form of judgment for a nation.  
*<sup>49</sup>“The LORD will bring a nation [Babylon] against you from afar...as swift as the eagle flies...<sup>50</sup>a nation of fierce countenance...<sup>51</sup>they shall eat the increase of your livestock and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed. <sup>52</sup>They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls...come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the LORD your God has given you. <sup>53</sup>You shall eat the fruit of your body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters...in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you.” (Deut. 28:49-53)*
- E. Moses’ prophecy in Deuteronomy 28 was well known in Joel’s day. A locust plague (Deut. 28:38, 42) was to be followed by a military invasion (Deut. 28:47-57). The progression of judgment from locust to a military invasion was too clear for them to miss. It was a prophetic sign to Israel. The point of understanding this progression is to see God’s hand in these judgments. He pled with Israel to obey Him in light of these warnings. Moses foretold of something far greater than a locust plague. He told of a military invasion by a nation far away (Babylon) that the Lord would bring against Israel (Deut. 28:47-52). They would take ownership of all of Israel’s gates and devastate the land. Israel gave way to cannibalism in the midst of the sieges as Moses prophesied (Deut. 28:52-53). Then the Lord scattered them (Deut. 28:64).
- F. Babylon was the only nation that destroyed all the fortified walls throughout all Israel. Babylon did this over a 20-year period (606-586 BC). Just over a century earlier, Assyria had besieged and defeated various Israelite cities, but had not defeated Jerusalem. Moses’ prophecy in Deut. 28:52 was only partially fulfilled by Babylon—its complete fulfillment will be in the end times.
- G. Even though Moses prophesied a locust plague (Deut. 28:28-42), when it came in Joel’s day, Israel still did not believe it was from the hand of God.
- H. The Lord later scattered Israel (Deut. 28:64).
- I. Moses foretold exactly what happened in the Babylonian invasion, which probably occurred a few decades after Joel’s ministry. The Babylonian siege of Jerusalem took place in 586 BC. The same thing happened again in 70 AD when the Romans came against Jerusalem. Once more, Moses’ words were fulfilled precisely. What happened with Babylon in 586 BC and with Rome in 70 AD was a foreshadowing of what will happen in the generation in which the Lord returns. These events were not the complete fulfillment of the prophecies spoken by Moses. For example, Moses’ prophecy of a siege in Israel (Deut. 28:52) will occur in the end times (Zech. 12-14).  
*<sup>52</sup>They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the LORD your God has given you. (Deut. 28:52)*
- <sup>2</sup>“Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone...all nations of the earth are gathered against it.” (Zech. 12:2-3)*

***<sup>1</sup>The day of the LORD is coming...<sup>2</sup>I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken [captured]...half of the city shall go into captivity. (Zech. 14:1-2)***

J. Moses prophesied that if they did not obey God, plagues seven times worse would come.

***<sup>21</sup>“Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins.” (Lev. 26:21)***

K. Because of God’s patience in judging sin, the wicked assume His judgment will never happen. Solomon affirms this reality, revealing that when God’s sentence of judgment is delayed, many misunderstand and continue in sin.

***<sup>11</sup>Because the 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)***

L. Zephaniah warned Israel not to settle in complacency by refusing to take God’s judgments seriously. They said that God would not do good in sending revival, neither would He do evil in releasing judgments. They assumed that God was passive concerning the actions of men.

***<sup>12</sup>“It shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will He do evil.’” (Zeph. 1:12)***

M. Moses made a startling statement that God’s judgments were prophetic signs. They are supernatural works and miracles, containing a prophetic message.

***<sup>46</sup>They shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder...on your descendants forever. (Deut. 28:46)***

N. The book of Revelation describes the supernatural work of God in releasing disaster. Much of Revelation is a prophecy of supernatural events that will come from God’s hand. They are intended to be signs and wonders, or devastations that have a prophetic message in them. The prophetic judgments against the Antichrist in Revelation are more than natural calamities taking place; they will be the work of God’s hand that conveys a prophetic message.

***<sup>8</sup>Come, behold the works of the LORD, who has made desolations in the earth. (Ps. 46:8)***

***<sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” (Rom. 9:17)***

O. God caused drought in Amos’ day as a prophetic sign. He caused rain to fall on one city and withheld it from another city so it would be evident that a supernatural work was occurring.

***<sup>7</sup>“I also withheld rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. <sup>8</sup>So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water...yet you have not returned to Me,” says the LORD. (Amos 4:7-8)***

- P. He sent rain on the cities that sought Him and withheld rain from wicked cities. To one city, the rain was a sign of supernatural blessing. To the other city, it was a sign of supernatural judgment. Some saw in the crisis only negative weather, and thus, missed the divine message in the sign.
- Q. Each “day of the Lord” in history is designed to prepare the human heart for the ultimate Day of eternal judgment after we die. In other words, they are to prepare people before the great white throne judgment when they will no longer have opportunity to repent. Between now and eternity, we can change. God desires to transform us by manifestations of His judgment. It is God’s mercy to visit a nation with judgment before the great Day of eternity when the judgment is final.
- R. God’s judgment has many layers of purpose. In human terms, He plays ten-dimensional chess. We do not comprehend all His ways; He works on multiple levels to achieve His objectives.
- <sup>5</sup>*As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything. (Eccl. 11:5)*