**Temporal Judgment of the King**

Jesus once said, “I have come to cast fire upon the earth” (Luke 12:49). This language suggests judgment and punishment (Ezekiel 10:2; Revelation 8) which raises the question: Why would Jesus be talking about bringing His judgment on the earth? No doubt He will one day come with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey His gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). But in Luke 12, Jesus is talking about earthly judgment after He has died on the cross (v. 50). What’s that all about?

If you have a mental image of Jesus as a one-dimensional figure, spending His time coddling children and healing people, passages like Luke 12:49 may seem confusing. But if we understand all that the Scriptures have to say about the character of Messiah (God’s Anointed), His statement makes perfect sense.

Read Psalm 2 sometime. To summarize very briefly, the kings of the earth decide to rebel against the authority of the Creator, God scoffs at their foolishness and reveals that He has installed His own Son as King on His holy mountain. He then tells His Son that He has given Him dominion over all the nations of the earth, to break with a rod of iron and shatter like earthenware. The kings of the earth are admonished to do homage to the Son that He not become angry. In Revelation 17:14 and 19:16, the Christ is aptly called “King of kings and Lord of lords”.

This sovereignty to build up or tear down carried a special significance with regard to the nation of Israel. Jesus’ ministry was focused exclusively on the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24) to give them one last chance to repent and be faithful, but they failed (Matthew 21:33-46). Because of the general rejection of the Son by God’s chosen people, the King of kings was about to bring judgment on the Jewish nation in general and the city of Jerusalem in particular.

In Matthew 23:38-39, Jesus said, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’” He immediately proceeded to describe in detail the suffering associated with the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Romans. A short 40 years after Christ’s crucifixion, the Roman general, Titus, completely destroyed Jerusalem, including Herod’s magnificent temple. The King of kings brought judgment on the Jewish nation through the agency of the Roman government.

Romans 11:22 says, “Behold then the kindness and severity of God.” This description applies to all three members of the Divine Nature including the Son. It is no surprise, then that Jesus would tell His Jewish audience, “I have come to cast fire upon the earth.”

Jesus redeemed us from sin at great cost to Himself because of His great love for us. But that same Jesus will one day sit in judgment and condemn many to eternal damnation. Each of us may enjoy the kindness of the King rather than His severity if we give Him the honor He so richly deserves.

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