

John Flavel's "Warning to an Ungodly Nation"



John Flavel (1627–1691) was an English Puritan Presbyterian minister and author. I first heard about him and his message from Christian J. Pinto's [Noise of Thunder Radio podcast](#).

What is happening today in the country of my birth, the United States of America, that was *not* happening when I was a young boy in the 1950s?

- Extreme weather: heat, cold, snow, floods, increased destruction from tornadoes and hurricanes.
- A great increase in the occurrence of wild fires
- Greatly increased crime
- Indiscriminate mass shootings

The government blames the first two on "climate change" but from a Christian biblical point of view, could you not say these are the judgments of God?

When I was only 6 years old in the big city of Chicago, I used to walk to school and back unaccompanied by an adult. Do parents allow their kids to do that today?

The American government promotes abortion rights, rights for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and other immoral activities which the Bible clearly condemns. There is no longer a defined standard of moral right and wrong in America. The Bible is rejected and replaced with moral relativism. And worse yet, some people are calling good what the Bible says is evil, and calling evil what the Bible says is good.

The churches in America have failed to influence the nation for good since the 20th century. True revival is not a prolonged church worship ceremony, it's a recognition of sin by the general public and repentance from it as Nineveh did under the prophet Jonah.

Warning to an Ungodly Nation



John Flavel

As Paul had many clear premonitions and fore-notices of the sufferings that should befall him at Jerusalem, that he might not be surprised by them when they came, so it is usual with God (though not in such an immediate and extraordinary a manner) to admonish the world, and especially His own people of great trials and sufferings before hand (Amos 3:7). "Surely the Lord will do nothing, but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the prophets."

Thus, when He was about to bring the flood upon the world, He gave one hundred and twenty years warning of it before it came (Gen. 6:3), and when He was to destroy Sodom, He saith (Gen. 18:17), "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" And the like discovery He made about the same judgment to Lot (Gen. 19:12-14). So when the captivity of the Jews was nigh at hand, the people had many forewarnings of it; God forewarned them by the prophets (Ezek. 3:17), "Hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me." And when the time drew nigh to execute the judgment determined upon Jerusalem and the temple, how plainly did Christ foretell them of it! (Luke 19:43, 44)! "Thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee."

And when the storm was just ready to fall, their own historian (Josephus) tells us, a voice was heard in the temple, saying, *Migremus hinc* (Let us go hence). *"Which voice Tacitus also mentions in his annals, affirming it to be more than a human voice, telling them God was departing, and that it was accompanied with a rushing noise, as of persons going out. These were extraordinary warnings."* The like signs have been given to divers other nations, by dreadful eclipses of the heavenly bodies, portentous comets, earthquakes, and other signs of judgment.

Now, though we have no ground to expect such extraordinary warnings, yet we have the most apparent and certain signs of approaching calamities; after which, if they surprise us, the fault must lie in our own inexcusable negligence; for we have a standing rule to govern ourselves in this matter,

and that is this:

When the same sins are found in one nation, which have brought down the wrath of God upon another nation, it is an evident sign of judgment at the door; for God is unchangeable, just and holy, and will not favour that in one people which He hath punished in another, nor bless that in one age which He hath cursed in another.

Upon this very ground it was that the apostle warned the Corinthians by the example of the Israelites, whose sins had ruined them in the wilderness (I Cor. 10:6): "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted." As if he should say, look upon those dead bodies which are, as it were, cast up upon the Scripture-shore for a warning to you. Follow not the same course, lest you meet with the same curse; if you tread the same paths, expect the same punishment. God is as righteous now as He was then: He hates and will punish sin in you as much as He did in them.

Let us therefore consider what those provocations were that hastened the wrath of God upon His own Israel, a people that were nigh and dear unto Him: a people upon whom He spent as much of the riches of His patience as upon any people in the world, that so we may reckon whereabouts we are at this day, and what is like to be the lot of this sinful and provoking generation; and we shall find, by the consent of all the prophets, that these sins were the immediate forerunners and proper causes of their overthrow.

1. ***The great corruption of God's worship among them*** kindled His wrath and hastened their ruin (Psa. 106: 39–42). "Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions. Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against His people, insomuch that He abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand." They that will not bear the golden yoke of Christ shall be galled with the iron yoke of men. Nothing more provokes the anger of God than the adulterating of His worship; a man will bear a thousand infirmities in the wife of his bosom, but unfaithfulness in the marriage-covenant breaks his heart. After the manner of men, so abused and grieved, the Lord expresseth Himself (Ezek. 6:9), "I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from Me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols." Men cannot invent a surer and speedier way to their own ruin than to bring their own inventions into God's worship.
2. ***Incorrigible obstinacy and impenitency***, under gentler strokes and lesser judgments, make way for utter ruin and desolation (Amos 4: 6-12). Scarcity, mildews, pestilence and sword had been tried upon them, but without effect; for the remnant that escaped those judgments (although plucked as so many brands out of the fire, in which their fellow sinners perished) were not reformed by those gentler and moderated judgments.
3. ***Stupidity and senselessness of God's hand, and the tokens of His anger***, were provoking causes and forerunners of their national desolation; they neither saw the hand of God when it was lifted up, nor humbled themselves under it when it was laid on. The hand of God is then said to

be *lifted up* when the providences of God prepare and posture themselves for our affliction; when the clouds of judgment gather over our heads, and grow blacker and blacker, as theirs did upon them, and do upon us at this day, but they took no notice of it (Isa. 26:11): "Lord, when Thy hand is lifted up, they will not see"; and (which is the height of stupidity) they all remained senseless and regardless, when the hand of God was laid upon them (Isa. 42:24, 25): "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, He against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, neither were they obedient unto His law. Therefore He hath poured upon him (them) the fury of His anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart." O prodigious sottishness! It was not some small drops of God's anger, but *the fury of His anger*; not some lighter skirmish of His judgments with them, but *the strength of battle*. It was not some particular stroke upon single persons or families, but *it set him on fire round about*, a general conflagration; yet all this would not awaken them.

4. ***The persecution of God's faithful ministers and people*** was another sin that procured, and a sign that foretold the destruction of their nation (2 Chron. 36:15,16); "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy." There were also a number of upright souls among them, who desired to worship God according to His own prescription; but a snare was laid for them in Mizpah, and a net spread for them upon Tabor (Hos. 5:1), and this hastened judgment towards them. Mizpah and Tabor were places lying in the way betwixt Samaria and Jerusalem, where the true worship of God was; and in those places spies were sent by the priests to observe and inform against them; so that it became very hazardous to attend the pure and incorrupt worship of God, which quickly hastened on their ruin.
5. ***The removal of godly and useful men by death***, in more than ordinary haste, was to them a sign of desolation at hand (Isa. 57:1); "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." In this case God acts towards His people as the husbandman in a gathering harvest doth by his corn; he hurries it with a shuffling haste into the barn when he sees a storm coming; or as a careful father with his sons that are abroad at school, who sends his horses to fetch them home speedily, when he hears the plague is begun in the place. Upon this ground the prophet Micah bewails himself (Micah 7:1); "Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer-fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the first-ripe fruit." Alas! alas! What miserable days are at hand! What miseries must I expect to see! The pleasant clusters (i.e. the societies of the saints) are gathered away by the hand of death; there are but few that remain, here and there a single saint, like grapes after the vintage is done, two or three upon the utmost branches.

6. **The general decay of the life and power of godliness** among them that were left foreboded destruction at the door: this is both a provoking sin, and a forerunning sign of national calamity (Hos. 4:18): "Their drink is sour" – a metaphor lively expressing the deadness and formality of the people in the worship of God. It was like sour or dead drink, which hath lost its spirit and relish, and is become flat. Such were their duties; no spiritual life, affection or savour in them. They heard as if they heard not, and prayed as if they prayed not; the ordinances of God were to them as the ordinances of men, of which the apostle saith, that they perish in the using.
7. To conclude: **Mutual animosities, jars and divisions** were to them manifest symptoms of national calamities and desolations: for then Ephraim envied Judah, and Judah vexed Ephraim (Isa. 11:13, Hos. 9:7); "The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense are come; Israel shall know it: the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred."

When such symptoms of God's indignation do appear upon any people, the Lord by them, as by so many glaring meteors and blazing comets, forewarns the world that His judgments are near, even at the door. These signs all men ought to observe and behold with trembling.

If you ask, Why doth God usually give such warnings of His indignation before it comes? The reasons are:

1. **To prevent the execution**
2. **To make them more tolerable**
3. **To leave the incorrigible inexcusable**

First, Warning is given with design to prevent the execution of judgments (Amos 4:12): "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel"; i.e. Prepare thyself to meet Me in the way of My judgments by humiliation and intercession to prevent the execution. And what else was the design of God in sending Jonah to the great city Nineveh but to excite them to repentance for the prevention of their ruin. This Jonah knew to be the Lord's meaning, how positive soever the words of his commission were; and therefore he declined the message to secure his credit, knowing that if upon warning given they repented, the gracious nature of God would soon melt into compassion over them, and free grace would make him appear as a liar; for so we must expound his words (Jonah 4:2); "Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." Yea, Lord, I knew beforehand it would come to this. Thou sendest me positively to denounce Thy judgments to Nineveh, meantime desiring nothing more than the execution of them might be prevented by their repentance. And thus Thy mercy hath exposed my reputation, in saving them from destruction.

Secondly, God forewarns His people of judgments to make them more tolerable

when they come. Expected evils are nothing so heavy as those that come by surprise; for look, as the expectation of a mercy makes it less sweet, our thoughts having anticipated and sucked out much of the sweetness beforehand, so the expectation of judgments before they befall us make them less bitter and burdensome than else they would be, the soul having inured and accustomed itself to them by frequent thoughts, and prepared and made ready itself to entertain them. To prevent the disciples' surprise and offence at those days of persecution that were coming upon them, Christ foretold them, and gave the fair warning beforehand.

Thirdly, He forewarns His people of approaching dangers to leave the incorrigible wholly inexcusable, that those who have no sense of sin, nor care to prevent ruin, might have no cloak for their folly when judgments overtake them, "What wilt thou say when He shall punish thee?" (Jer. 13:21). As if He should say, "What plea or apology is left thee, after so many fair warnings and timely premonitions? Thou canst not say I have surprised thee, or that you wast ruined before thou was warned. Thy destruction therefore is of thyself."