

## UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God*  
**IN KING JESUS.**

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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by – Stuart H. Pouliot

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### **August 24, 1814—197 Years Ago Today**

Did you know that 197 years ago today, on August 24, 1814, British troops marched on Washington, D.C., captured it, and burned several public buildings?

This episode in the history of our nation is called the ***Burning of Washington*** that took place during the ***War of 1812*** between the British Empire and America. For the first time and the only time since the American Revolution, a foreign nation occupied the nation's capital.

During this brief occupation, the British army burned the White House, the US Capitol, the Library of Congress, and several other public buildings. The exterior structures remained but the interiors were pretty much destroyed. A torrential rainfall during this time may have saved the buildings from total destruction.

But here is the interesting thing about this historic event: Shortly after the attack, **a tornado hit the area**, resulting in deaths of both the British and the Americans. Fortunately, the rain helped to put out the fires. However, military equipment was tossed about and the British suffered damage to their ships. The British occupation of the capital lasted only 26 hours, and the US government, along with President Madison, was restored to its capital quickly.

Was this a judgment of God upon the young nation? Was it the providential hand of God that protected our capital from total destruction, even overthrow of our government by the British? Was it both? Perhaps!

As I see it, most people fall into one of two groups.

They deny altogether the providential hand of God in the history of men and nations, including the possibility that God is speaking through natural events, which are often called either *acts of nature* or *acts of God*. In the case of the latter, it is another way of saying acts of nature and does not necessarily imply the judgment of God. After all, if God is not in the history of men and nations, then how could He be in the cause and effect of natural events?

Others don't deny the hand of God in the history of men and nations. They might attribute really bad things that have happened to God's doing, but when they do, they often see these things as punitive rather than corrective on the part of God. They attribute man's "get even" anger and vengeance to God, as if He were like man rather than the God of love [*God is love*] who disciplines those He loves. Let us not forget that God so loves the world. Who and what nation do we want to leave out of His love?

It seems that those in the second group pick and choose the events they ascribe to God's judgment, and that they see them applying to the other guy (as in nation, region, etc.) and not to them. Especially when it comes to the overall nation, it seems that people don't want to acknowledge the possibility that God might be trying to get their attention or that they are suffering through some event or crisis because, as a nation, they have broken some divine law of God. Simply, they are so self-centered that they are blind to the sins of the nation and what part they might have played in bringing on judgment.

If you have a difficult time grasping this concept, then you are encouraged to study the history of ancient Israel and Judah. God told them what He would do if they broke His divine law or His covenant with them. He was true to His word regarding every breach of His law and covenant to the point of even divorcing Israel. Consider the ten tribes of the house of Israel that were removed from their land and cast out among the nations. They lost their national identity as the nation of Israel. As a reminder, the modern-day state of Israel is not an indication that the tribes

have regained their name, as if they have been found. Modern Israel has usurped the birthright name *Israel* that was given to Joseph and his two sons. Today, the lost tribes of Israel are to be found in most of the western nations. In fact, America was founded by descendants of the lost tribes and, as such, is more an Israelite nation today than modern Israel in the Middle East, which should more rightly be called Judah or even Judah-Edom.

The point I want to make is that God's judgments are a good thing, even though they might seem severe at times; nevertheless, they are meant for good for those who discern His hand in them as well as His lesson. Consider what Isaiah had to say about His judgments.

Indeed, while following the way of Your judgments, O LORD, we have waited for You eagerly; Your name, even Your memory, is the desire of our souls. At night my soul longs for You, indeed, my spirit within me seeks You diligently; for when the earth experiences Your judgments [*mishpat*] the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. Though the wicked is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness; he deals unjustly in the land of uprightness, and does not perceive the majesty of the LORD. (Isaiah 26:8-10 NASB [added])

The Hebrew word *mishpat*, translated as *judgments*, signifies a *judicial verdict*, like a sentence or formal decree for a crime. Thus, it is a legal term and refers to a ruling in a court of law. In this case, the court of law is the righteous throne of God that renders judgments based on the divine law of God.

But take special notice of the reason behind God's judgments. When the earth experiences His judgments, it is for a purpose, and that purpose is to learn righteousness. This sure does not sound like a vengeful God who simply desires to punish people who don't agree with Him and His law. His judgments are so that people will learn righteousness. This is a good thing!

But there is more, for, according to Isaiah, the wicked have a hard time learning this lesson, even though in good times they are shown favor (grace). Instead, they continue on in their unrighteousness and fail to behold or perceive the other lesson of God's judgments, that is, to perceive the majesty of the Lord.

So, the inhabitants of the earth experience God's judgments in order to learn His righteousness so that through His righteousness they will behold His majesty. What a loving God the world has!

Now, I must conclude with a brief word about the number 197.

"Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel [gematria = 197]. (Isaiah 7:14 NASB [added])

Truly, God's judgments are a sign, but He gave us the greatest of all signs when He gave His only begotten Son to the world. In the above verse, the word *Immanuel* has a gematria of 197. As if God wants to drive home the point, if we take the entire surface of the earth and smooth it (i.e., remove mountains and valleys), the entire surface area of the earth would be 197 million square miles. Coincidence or the hand of God pointing to His Son? I'll take the latter.

I am not trying to connect the event that occurred 197 years ago to our day. However, what I do want to leave you with is this: **The next time a national event occurs, either in the natural realm or man's realm of governments and institutions, don't be so quick to pass it off as just another event in the life of a nation. Turn to God and seek Him for understanding of His judgments. Is it a sign?**

Then, praise God that He has given the world the greatest of all signs in His Son, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords.