

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class

“The Justice of God in the Punishment of His Enemies”

Introduction:

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack upon our nation, we were asked to consider two extreme responses. On the one hand, some said that people such as those who supported, planned and carried out this violent act could never be forgiven or loved by God and thus we should not forgive or love them either. On the other hand, some Christian church leaders said that our nation should only forgive these people, should overlook their terrible acts of terrorism, and should not retaliate or seek to bring them to justice in any way.

Those who reacted in either extreme need to learn the Bible's teaching of God's two kingdoms as defined so well by the reformer Martin Luther. God's left hand kingdom is the civil realm in which human laws and punishments are administered and peace and order are maintained by an earthly government (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). God's right hand kingdom is the spiritual realm, where His Word is preached and His sacraments are administered among His people gathered in the Holy Christian Church.

I. *Catechism Review* “The Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer and Meaning

P: Thy kingdom come. What does this mean?

C: The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. P: How does God's kingdom come?

C: God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.

God's three-fold kingdom: 1) Kingdom of Power (over all the world; “left-hand”); 2) Kingdom of Grace (over the church on earth; “right-hand”); and 3) Kingdom of Glory (over His saints and angels in heaven). (For more review see the *Small Catechism*, 1991 edition, pages 178-179.)

II. *The Conquest of Canaan*

The terrorist attackers and their supporters share the Islamic faith. While some claim that this is a peace-loving religion with peaceful adherents, there are many clear and forceful statements in the Muslim holy book, the *Koran*, which incite Muslims to hate and even kill the “infidels,” that is, non-Muslims.

But before we latch on to these statements and judge this entire religion and all its adherents as being vicious killers, we must realize that our own holy book, the Bible, has its own share of violent words, wars, and bloodshed. One such section centers around the conquest of Canaan, the land God had promised to Abraham, by Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, at the time they entered this land after their slavery in Egypt (around 1400 BC).

A) **Numbers 31:1-12**

What instructions did God give to Moses? _____

How is the Israelite attack on Midian described in verses 7-10? _____

See verses 16-18: Why were the Israelites to do this to the Midianites? _____

In Numbers 25 the Midianite women seduced the Israelite men into idolatrous worship of the “Baal of Peor” at the recommendation of the psychic Balaam. Numbers 25:16-18: “The Lord said to

Moses, ‘Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them, because they treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the affair of Peor.’”

B) Deuteronomy 7:1-6

Verse 2: What does God want the Israelites to do to the nations then living in the land of Canaan? _____

Verses 2-3 What must the Israelites not do with them? 1) _____

2) _____ 3) _____

Verses 4 and 6: Why is God so harsh here? _____

See verse 16: What are God’s three commands here? 1) _____

2) _____ 3) _____

What is God’s reason for these harsh commands? _____

Verses 22-26: Who is going to be the active agent in the destruction of these nations? _____

C) Deuteronomy 9:1-6

Verse 3: What is God going to do to the strong nations of Canaan? _____

Verse 4: What is the reason God is going to do this? _____

Verse 5: What is not the reason God is going to do this? _____

Verse 6: How does Moses describe his own people? _____

D) Deuteronomy 32:39-43 *The Song of Moses (farewell)*

Verse 39: What is God’s law and gospel promise? _____

Verse 41: Against whom does God direct this violence? _____

Verse 43: On whose behalf is God fighting? _____

E) Matthew 5:29-30

How do we know that Jesus is not being literal here? _____

So what is Jesus trying to teach us here? _____

See verse 48. What is God’s desire for us? _____

III. *Imprecatory Psalms*

There is a type of Old Testament psalm in which the author asks God to punish His enemies and the enemies of His people. These psalms (35, 58, 69, 83, 109, and 137) are called “imprecatory” psalms.

A) Psalm 35:1-3: What does God’s defense of His people say to the souls of His faithful ones?

Verses 27-28: What response do friends give when they see God defending His faithful ones?

B) Psalm 137:7-9: The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, Jacob’s twin brother. They did not get along well with their neighbors/relatives, the Israelites. The Edomites cheered the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. (The short book of Obadiah is a prophecy against Edom for this.) Though the Babylonians were God’s agents in punishing Judah for its unfaithfulness, the day of Babylon’s own judgment from God was coming.

C) Psalm 139:19-22: What have these people done to incur David’s, and God’s, wrath?

1) _____; 2) _____; 3) _____

Conclusion:

As the right hand kingdom of God, the Christian Church has God’s command to extend His forgiveness to the repentant sinner and thus to absolve him of his guilt and the punishment of his sin in the sight of God. However, when that sinful action also has broken a law of the left hand kingdom of God, that is, the civil authority, even the repentant and forgiven sinner will have to endure rightful human justice and retribution.