

THE GOD OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

- A. Introduction: For the past few weeks we have been talking about God’s actions in the Old Testament as part of a larger discussion of God’s wrath.
1. The second coming of Jesus is near, possibly within the lifetime of many of us. The Bible makes it clear that there will be a time of wrath and judgment in connection with the Lord’s return.
 - a. As we’ve pointed out in previous lessons this wrath and judgment are part of the process of restoring earth to pre-sin conditions so that God and His redeemed family can live on earth forever.
 - b. People struggle with the wrath of God because there seem to be so many harsh demonstrations in the Old Testament. Not only do these harsh events scare sincere believers, they seem inconsistent with the loving God who is revealed in the New Testament. We are taking time to sort this out.
 2. We don’t have time to address every troubling incident in the Old Testament. Instead, I’m giving you some principles of interpretation that will help you better understand disturbing incidents when you come across them. We’ve covered these principles thus far.
 - a. The Old Testament is primarily the history of the people group through whom Jesus came into this world—the descendants of Abraham who grew into the nation of Israel (the Jews, the Hebrews).
 - b. One of God’s primary purposes in the time period covered by this historical record was to reveal Himself to a world of idol worshippers as God Almighty—the Only, All Powerful God.
 1. In the Old Testament God connected many destructive events with Himself, not because He was behind them, but to help Israel and surrounding nations recognize that there is no other God, no other power. That’s one reason why there are so many power demonstrations.
 2. In the Old Testament God is said to do what He in fact only allows. The original Hebrew text literally says that God sent sickness among the people, but the original readers understood this to mean that God allowed sickness among the people.
 - c. We must consider what we read in terms of how the people of that time understood the information. We interpret these accounts through a 21st century western mindset and ask: How could a loving God do or allow some of the events recorded in the Old Testament. But that’s not how the first people involved in these incidents assessed them or the first readers heard them.
 1. In the last lesson we looked at the plagues of Egypt, events that persuaded the pharaoh to let Israel leave Egypt. Consider what actual eyewitnesses said about God’s actions.
 2. After Israel made it through the Red they had a victory celebration and sang about how God delivered them from bondage and defeated their enemies by His power. They sang: Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders (Ex 15:11, ESV).
 - d. There is no contradiction between the God of the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament God is the same loving God who is revealed in Jesus.
 1. The Bible is progressive revelation. God has gradually revealed Himself and His plan of redemption until we have the full revelation given through Jesus. Heb 1:1-3; John 14:9-10
 2. If we see something in the Old Testament that seems to contradict what Jesus shows us about God, we must presume that we don’t yet have full understanding of the Old Testament passage. Don’t throw out the New Testament information. Wait for more understanding of the Old.
 3. God’s purposes are always redemptive in both the Old and New Testament. God is working to save, not destroy, as many people as possible.
 - a. The Bible is redemptive history. It gives information about people, places, and events that are directly involved in God’s unfolding plan to deliver sinners from sin, corruption, and death and transform them into His sons and daughters through Jesus.
 - b. The written accounts are not meant to be detailed descriptions of everything that happened, but to

convey certain redemption information. We're going to focus on this principle tonight.

- B. We begin the lesson by amplifying and adding to some points we made about God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Through a series of power demonstrations more commonly known as plagues Pharaoh was persuaded to release Israel from Egyptian bondage.
1. These demonstrations occurred over a nine month period of time. Up until the final one, they were annoyances (as opposed to deadly)—the water of the Nile turned to blood, frogs overran the countryside, millions of lice (or gnats) and flies, disease that killed the livestock, boils and sores on men and animals, hail, locusts, thick darkness.
 - a. Theologians debate over the nature of each of these plagues. Did God make the frogs converge on Egypt? Did He call them into existence when He needed them? Did He know that there would be an abundance of frogs that year and work it into His plan?
 - b. Such speculation misses the redemptive point—God's people were protected from the plagues because they belonged to Him.
 1. When Abraham's family moved from Canaan to Egypt in the days of Joseph they settled in a region known as Goshen, in the northeast section of the Nile delta region (Gen 46:28). When Egypt experienced plagues there were none in Goshen (Ex 8:22-23; Ex 9:4-7; Ex 9:26; Ex 10:23).
 2. Ex 8:22-23—Note that God through Moses told Pharaoh that there would be no flies in Goshen so that you will know that I have power, even in your land. I will put a distinction between my people and yours (the Hebrew word is redemption). His purposes are redemptive.
 - c. Before the hail fell, God through Moses told Pharaoh and the Egyptians: I could have killed you all by now. I could have attacked you with a plague that would have wiped you from the face of the earth. But I have let you live for this reason—that you might see my power and that my fame might spread throughout the earth (Ex 9:15-16, NLT).
 1. Why did He preserve idol worshippers up to this point? So that they would have opportunity to believe on the only God. The Bible records that Egyptians did come to faith in the Lord.
 2. For example, Pharaoh's own magicians told him that this was the work of God (Ex 8:19). Those who believed God's word that hail was coming brought their cattle inside (Ex 9:20-21). When Israel left Egypt a mixed multitude (different ancestry) went with them (Ex 12:38).
 2. People struggle with the death of the firstborn—how could a good God allow this to happen? God allows many things that He is neither behind nor approving of. He allows men to sin and go to Hell.
 - a. Human beings have free will or the power of choice. With free will comes not just the choice, but the consequences of the choice—going all the way back to the first man, Adam. Sickness and death are present in the earth because of Adam's sin. Rom 5:12
 1. Theologians speculate over the nature of the plague. Did God pass through Egypt and kill people? Did He send a disease? Was it some type of plague that was more destructive to certain types of people (like the current corona virus)?
 2. Once again, people speculate about information that is not included in the account and miss the redemptive information that is given. At the outset, God described His deliverance of Israel from bondage as redemption (Ex 6:6). Although it is a real, historical event, it pictures what Jesus would do (and has done) through His sacrifice on the Cross.
 - b. Here's what we know for certain: The destruction came from the destroyer and all who were covered by the blood of Passover lambs were protected and delivered (Ex 12:23). These lambs were types (pictures) of the final Passover Lamb, Jesus (I Cor 5:7). Consider what other verses say.
 1. Ps 78 was written to teach Israel important facts about their history and God's interaction with them. It says of this incident: He (God) dispatched against them a band of destroying angels

...he did not spare the Egyptians' lives but handed them over to the plague...But he led his own people like a flock of sheep...He kept them safe (v49-53, NLT).

2. Note this New Testament statement: By faith he (Moses) kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them (Heb 11:28—ESV).
 3. Ps 103:4 says that Almighty God redeems men from destruction. The word destruction literally means pit. The ultimate destruction is eternal separation from God in Hell.
 - A. In the Old Testament God connected destructive events to Himself to try to wake men up to the reality of this ultimate destruction if they did not turn to Him, the Only True God.
 - B. Real people and real lives were affected by this event, and we see God's mercy extended to the Egyptians. He warned them ahead of time and gave instructions on how to be safe.
 - C. Did any Egyptians heed the warning? As noted above, some Egyptians heeded God's earlier warnings. There's no reason not to think that some of them did listen this time.
- C. Let's pick up the historical record after Israel left Egypt. It took Israel two years to make the journey from Egypt back to Canaan. During much of this period, Israel camped while Moses met with God on Mt. Sinai.
1. God gave Israel His Law as well as instructions for building a Tabernacle (a tent that could be put up and taken down on the way to Canaan). God planned to meet with them in the Tabernacle. Ex 19-40
 - a. Israel did as God directed and constructed the Tabernacle along with all the necessary instruments and utensils needed to carry out a system of animal sacrifices, as per the Lord's instructions.
 - b. The completed Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month of the second year after their deliverance from Egypt. The visible presence of the Lord covered that Tabernacle and filled it.
 1. For the rest of their journey to Canaan the cloud rested on the tent in the day. At night there was fire in the cloud which all could see.
 2. When the cloud lifted, the people dismantled the Tabernacle, closed up camp, and followed the cloud. Ex 40:34-38; Num 10:11-36
 2. To reach Canaan, Israel had to pass through an arid, mountainous wilderness. It was a difficult and dangerous place. Once in route, the people began to complain about the hardships of the journey.
 - a. Num 11:1-3—The Old Testament text says that just a few days into their journey God sent His fire on the people because of their complaining. How could a good and loving God do such a thing? Remember, that in the Old Testament God is said to do what He only allows.
 - b. What happened here? Israel was in the middle of a rocky desert where hot, suffocating winds were (are) common. A fire broke out at the edge of their camp due to a lightning strike (also common). Natural disasters are the result of the curse of corruption and death in the earth because of Adam's sin.
 1. The Old Testament often connects natural disasters to God to help people see that calamity comes when men don't listen to Him, in the hope of waking them up before something worse happens.
 2. Israel had an ongoing habit of complaining. Complaining is the voice of unbelief. It looks only at what it sees and feels without taking God into account. This habit will cost Israel the land of Canaan. They will refuse to enter because of unbelief. Heb 3:19
 - c. When Israel reached the edge of Canaan twelve spies were sent into the land. Based on their report of walled cities, formidable tribes, and giant men, Israel refused to enter the land. Heb 4:6
 1. God declared that none of this generation would be allowed to enter the land. Then He sent them back into the desert to live as nomads. Num 14:22-35
 2. For the next 40 years they wandered in the wilderness between Canaan and Egypt until that entire adult generation died off.
 - A. God wasn't being mean. What happened to them really happened, but it was also a picture

of the negative consequences of disobedience and of refusing to take God at His Word.

B. Why? To wake men up before they experience the ultimate consequence. And, their experiences were also meant to be examples for each subsequent generation. I Cor 10:6-11

3. Deut 1:31-33—God did not abandon them and continued to care for that rebellious generation. He provided for their needs and all who put faith in Him are in Heaven today.

3. In the first month of the fortieth year after leaving Egypt, Israel arrived at Kadesh Barnea on the southern end of Canaan to begin their second attempt to enter the land. Once again, they complained and the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people. Num 21:4-6

a. Remember all that we have learned up to now. In the Old Testament God is said to do what He only allows and He connects the trials of life in a fallen world to Himself to make redemptive points.

b. The fiery snakes were not supernatural. They were poisonous snakes common in the region. This region had (has) snakes whose bites produce heat, violent inflammation, and thirst in those bitten.

1. Num 21:7-9—The Lord helped His people when they cried out to Him. And He used this incident for redemptive purposes. He instructed Moses to make a brass serpent and put it on a pole. All who looked (gazed intently) on the brazen serpent were made well.

2. This brazen serpent was a picture (a type or foreshadowing) of Jesus on the Cross, delivering men from sin, corruption and death through His sacrifice. John 3:14

3. In this incident, God provided for His people in a fallen world as His redemptive purposes played out.

4. The New Testament reveals that Jesus was involved in all the incidents that we have covered tonight.

a. In I Cor 10:1-4 Paul made reference to the generation that God delivered from bondage in Egypt and stating that Jesus went with them on their journey: And all of them drank the same miraculous water. For they all drank from the miraculous rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ (v3-4, NLT).

1. Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God. He did not come into existence in the womb of Mary. Rather, He took on a full human nature and was born into this world so that He could die as a sin sacrifice. Before He took on flesh, He was very interactive with His people in the Old Testament (lessons for another day).

2. He did not take the name Jesus until He was born into this world (Matt 1:21). In the Old Testament He is most often called the Angel (messenger) of the Lord. Jesus is not an angel—He is the Creator of all, including angels (Col 1:16). Jesus is the visible manifestation of God in both the Old and New Testament (many lessons for another night).

b. Ex 3:1-6—It was Preincarnate Jesus (Jesus before He took on flesh) who called Moses to lead Israel out of Egyptian slavery. The text clearly identifies this being who spoke to Moses as Almighty God.

1. Heb 11:26 says that Moses was able to leave the wealth and privilege of Egypt behind to join with his people because he valued Jesus as of greater worth. He met Jesus in the burning bush

2. Ex 13:21-22 says that when Israel left Egypt the Lord went with them as a pillar of cloud and fire. Ex 14:19-20 identifies the cloud as the Angel of the Lord—Jesus.

3. The Exodus account reveals that Israel tempted God numerous times by doubting His care for them (Ex 17:2-7; Num 14:22). I Cor 10:9 states that they actually tempted Christ.

D. Conclusion: We have more to say about all of this, but consider these thoughts as we close this lesson.

1. The God of the Old Testament is the same God revealed in the New Testament. Once we understand how to read the Old Testament as the first readers would have understood it, this becomes clear.

2. Ps 103:8—Just like Jesus, the God of the Old Testament is slow to anger, merciful and gracious, plenteous in mercy and loving kindness—because the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament.