

CRUEL, FIERCE, WRATH

- A. Introduction: The second coming of Jesus is rapidly approaching, and the Bible predicts that the years leading up to His return will be perilous. Jesus Himself said that there will be tribulation unlike anything the world has ever seen. II Tim 3:1-5; Matt 24:21-22
1. Our country, along with the rest of the world, is experiencing increasing turmoil. For a number of months we have been talking about what is happening and why according to the Bible so that we can know how to deal with the months and years ahead.
 - a. As part of our discussion, we have been talking about the wrath of God because there is a time of wrath and judgment associated with the second coming of Jesus, Rev 6:16-17; Rev 14:7
 - b. Our purpose is to clear up misinformation about God's wrath and judgment that frightens people who have no reason to fear—as well as to educate those who do need to be afraid.
 2. We've made the point that the turmoil and challenges of the last few years of human history will not come from an angry God throwing down lightning bolts on a sinful world. The chaos will be the result of human choice and the consequences of those choices (see previous lessons for more details).
 - a. As part of our study we've been discussing God's wrath in the Old Testament where it seems that He does blast men with catastrophe when He is angry.
 - b. Last week we began to look at a passage in the Old Testament that refers to God's wrath as cruel and fierce, and then links it to the second coming of Jesus. Let's review some key points. Isa 13:6-13
 1. This passage was originally written to Israel when they were deep in idol worship and all its related wicked activities. Isaiah made short term predictions about what was going to happen to the people (v1-5) which flowed into long term predictions about the second coming (v6-13).
 2. According to Isaiah, the Lord will come with cruel wrath and fierce anger to desolate the land and destroy sinners out of it. Destruction is removal from the land. This is a dual reference.
 - A. The people of Israel would be forcibly removed from their by the Assyrians and the Babylonians and their land left desolate. The sinners are the idol worshippers.
 - B. But, there will come a time when the world (all humanity going back to Adam) will be punished for their evil and the heavens and the earth will be shaken. The New Testament clearly connects this time to Jesus' second coming. Matt 24:29; Acts 2:19-20; Rev 6:12-13
 - c. Many of us find Old Testament references to God's fierce, cruel wrath troubling because we hear it as: God is mean, arbitrary, and angry. But that's not how the first readers heard these statements.
 1. The Hebrew word that is translated cruel means terrible. God is called terrible in a number of places (Ps 68:35; Ps 99:3). Terrible means causing terror or awe. The idea is not that God is mean. The idea is that He is awe inspiring and deserves reverence. Context makes this clear.
 2. The word wrath means an outburst of passion, overflowing anger. The word anger literally means nose or nostril. To intensify its meaning, the word anger is often paired with the word fierce which means a burning anger. The point is that God is sorely displeased.
 3. Cruel and fierce does not mean that God drowns puppies and kittens. It means that He is awesome and powerful. He is the Almighty God. Let's examine this more closely.
- B. We first need to make some general comments about the wrath of God. We've already discussed many of these points in greater detail in earlier lessons. But a brief review will be helpful now.
1. The wrath of God is His response to sin. Although He certainly has extreme displeasure over sin because it is completely contrary to His holy, righteous nature, His wrath is not an emotional response, per se. Wrath is God's judicial response to sin.
 - a. The term wrath in the New Testament is used (through a figure of speech known as metonymy) for punishment or the carrying out of justice in regard to sin. Rom 13:4-5; Rom 4:15

- b. To be true to His righteous nature, God must punish sin. At the Cross God carried out justice against mankind's sin. On the Cross, Jesus became the substitute for every member of the race of Adam and was punished for sin. The wrath (or just punishment) due us went to Him. Isa 53:3-6
 - 1. To receive this benefit, an individual must acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord. Those individuals who don't do so will face the wrath of God when they die. John 3:36
 - 2. They will be eternally separated from God, first in a place called Hell, and then in the lake of fire which is also known as the second death. That is the wrath of God. II Thess 1:7-9
- c. In connection with the second coming, all who throughout human history refused to acknowledge the revelation of Jesus given to their generation will be brought out of Hell to stand before the Lord.
 - 1. It will then be clearly shown why it is right and just to forever consign them to the second death (eternal separation from God), and they will then be sent to the lake of fire. Rev 20:11-15
 - 2. The term wrath of God is never used in connection with Christians because we've been delivered from the wrath to come—eternal separation from God (I Thess 1:10; I Thess 5:9; Rom 5:9). The term wrath of God is used for the future fate of all who reject Jesus.
- 2. The statement that "Jesus is coming in wrath" means that He is coming to administer justice to every human being. He will reward those who are His with a home with Him forever. Those who do not belong to Him will be forever removed from His presence. Rev 11:18
 - a. The wrath of God makes sense when you consider it in terms of the big picture or the overall plan of God. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ and He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
 - b. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin beginning with Adam's sin. Redemption is God's plan to deliver both the family and the family home from sin through Jesus. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Eph 1:7; Heb 9:12; etc.
 - c. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross so that all who put faith in Him can be transformed from sinners into sons and daughters. He will come again to cleanse the earth and restore it to a fit forever home by removing all corruption and death. John 1:12-13; Rev 21:1-5
- 3. Following Adam's sin, God began to unveil His plan to restore the family and the family home. He promised a Redeemer who would undo the damage, the Seed of the woman (Jesus; Mary). Gen 3:15
 - a. God chose a particular people group to be the ones through which the Redeemer would come into this world—the descendants of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). To them and through them God gave increasing revelation of His plan and tasked them with preserving the written record—what we know as the Old Testament (Rom 3:1-2; Rom 9:4).
 - 1. From those earliest days of human history following mankind's descent into sin, corruption, and death, God has made it clear that there is coming a time of restoration which will include the removal of all sin and corruption.
 - 2. Along with this, God planted in the mind of His people that there are two groups—those who are His and those who aren't—along with the idea that those who aren't His will ultimately be removed from contact with Him and the family. They will experience the wrath of God.
 - b. When Jesus came to earth the first time He interacted with people familiar with the Old Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told them that the meek shall inherit the earth. Matt 5:5
 - 1. Because Jesus was quoting Ps 37, they were familiar His point. This psalm exhorts believers to trust God because there is coming a day when the wicked will be forever removed from contact with God and His family, and they will no longer be able to hurt or harm anyone.
 - 2. But the meek [in the end] shall inherit the earth (v11, Amp); For the Lord delights in justice and forsakes not His Saints; they are preserved forever, but the offspring of the wicked [in time] shall be cut off. [Then] the [consistently] righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell upon it forever (v28-29, Amp).

- c. Shortly after Jesus returned to Heaven, Peter told an audience that Heaven: must receive [and retain] Jesus until the time for the complete restoration of all that God spoke by the mouth of all His holy prophets for ages past—from the most ancient time in the memory of man (Acts 3:21, Amp).
 - 1. In our study we've been emphasizing how the early readers of the Old Testament (such as the people to whom Jesus first came) would have understood passages like the one in Isaiah.
 - 2. They understood that part of the restoration Jesus will bring when He returns includes forever removing those who do not belong to God. And that's a good thing.
- C. The Old Testament is primarily the history of Israel, the people group through whom Jesus came into this world. It is redemptive history. It doesn't cover everything that happened. It reports events and people that directly relate to and or picture important aspects of God's unfolding plan of redemption.
- 1. Consider what happened after Israel crossed the Red Sea. Three months out of Egypt, Israel reached Mount Sinai and Moses ascended the mountain to appear before God. The Lord gave him a message for the people: If you obey Me and worship no gods but Me you will be My personal possession. Ex 16:1-6
 - a. The people responded: We will. Moses took their answer back to the Lord who then told Moses that on the third day He would come in a cloud and speak to him so all could hear. v7-8
 - 1. The Lord gave Moses very specific instructions about how the people were to prepare: They had to purify themselves. Boundary lines were set up that couldn't be crossed or people would be killed. They were to stay away until they heard a blast from a ram's horn. Then they had to gather at the foot of the mountain. v9-15
 - 2. This is not an angry, touchy, easily upset God. God was giving purposeful instructions aimed at building certain concepts into Israel's consciousness for redemptive purposes:
 - A. Without cleansing you cannot approach Me. If you don't come in the proscribed way you will die. There is only one way to Me, one way to salvation from sin.
 - B. This is the same message that Jesus will bring when He comes to earth: I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me. He who does not believe on Me will not see life. He will perish. John 14:6; John 3:18; John 3:36; etc.
 - b. Ex 19:16-20—On the third day there was thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud descended on the mountain. A loud trumpet sounded and everyone trembled.
 - 1. The Lord descended in the form of fire and the whole mountain shook violently. The end result of this visitation is that the Lord gave Moses His Law (lots of lessons for another time).
 - 2. Heb 12:21—The New Testament calls this event terrible. The Greek word means frightful or formidable (or awe inspiring)—Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he said: I am terrified and trembling (NLT).
 - 3. This is Jesus (before He took on flesh). Remember, He went with them on their journey from Egypt to Canaan, appearing as a pillar (standing column) of cloud by day and of fire by night (see earlier lessons). I Cor 10:1-4; Ex 13:21-22; Ex 14:19-20; Ex 33:9-11
 - 2. Some of us find all this smoke, fire, lightning, thunder, and quaking earth upsetting. But these power displays were redemptive. Remember that one of God's primary purposes in the Old Testament was to show Israel and a world of idol worshippers that He is the only God and the ultimate power.
 - a. When God met with Israel at the mountain, they had just left Egypt, a land of idol worshippers and magicians. Many of the Israelites became entangled in idol worship in Egypt and had no doubt been awed by the magicians. Ezek 20:5-8; Ex 7:10-12
 - 1. Egypt's religion had a pantheon of gods. Egyptians believed that every object in nature and every natural phenomenon (lightning, thunder, fire, earthquakes) was the work of spirits.
 - 2. Egyptians believed that the god Thot gave magical arts to his worshippers who could then use these powers to work or fight for them. They believed that magicians could send sickness and

nightmares. The magicians used magic books to cast spells to invoke the gods to help them.

- b. God's power and His holiness were on display at Sinai for redemptive purposes—to demonstrate to all that there is no God but Him, He is the ultimate power, and only the holy can approach Him.
- c. The Lord was about to give Israel His Law, along with a system of blood sacrifice that will not only cover their sin, but picture the purification and inward transformation of sinners that Jesus will provide through His shed blood. The Law was to be a school master to lead men to Christ. Gal 3:24

D. Conclusion: When Jesus returned to Heaven two thousand years ago His first message to His followers was: I'll be back (Acts 1:9-11). They lived with the expectation of His soon return. Only three New Testament documents do not mention the Lord's return (Galatians, Philemon, II and II John).

1. These first believers knew from the Old Testament prophets, Jesus' own words, and the apostles' teachings that a time of calamity and turmoil will precede the Lord's coming.
 - a. If you recall, Isaiah predicted a shaking of the heavens and the earth at the return of the Lord (Isa 13:13). We'll discuss this in more detail next week, but for now consider one point.
 - b. Paul also wrote that the Lord will shake the heavens and the earth (Heb 12:26). Note that Paul said it in the context of what happened at Mount Sinai, the event we just discussed. (Heb 12:18-25).
2. How would the first Christians have interpreted God's dealings with His people in the Old Testament—as an angry, vengeful God who arbitrarily destroys people? No. They understood that what was recorded was not only a historical record but it pictured what God wants to do for His redeemed people.
 - a. Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery and their protection from destruction by the blood of the Passover lamb is an example for those who receive redemption through Jesus.
 - b. What happened to them is called redemption, and they were delivered from destruction by the blood of the Passover lamb. Ex 6:6; Ex 15:13; Ex 12:21-23
 1. The first time the word wrath is used in the Bible in connection with God's anger is in the account of Israel's deliverance or redemption. Once through the Red Sea, they had a joyous celebration. They sang that God's wrath destroyed their enemies. Ex 15:7
 2. They sang about a loving God who helped His people when they were in need: Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders...You in Your mercy and loving kindness have led forth the people whom you have redeemed (v11-13, Amp).
 - c. Ex 19:1-6—When Israel arrived at Mount Sinai God's first words to them were: You saw how I defeated your enemies and how I brought you to Myself, carrying you on eagle's wings.
 1. Some commentators (Adam Clarke, for one) believe this is a reference to bird common in the area (called rachama) which was known for its kind and merciful disposition in the care of its young and carrying them on its back.
 2. The Lord further said: If you will obey me and keep my covenant (worship no other gods) you will be my peculiar treasure or personal possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation [consecrated, set apart to the worship of God] (Amp).
3. We have more to say about this next week, but note two comments that Peter made. Remember that he is the one who preached that Jesus is coming to restore all things (Acts 3:21). He is also one of the apostles who heard Jesus talk about the tribulation coming on the earth before He returns. Matt 24
 - a. Peter wrote that Jesus died to bring us to God (I Pet 3:18), and that through Jesus' sacrifice believers have become: God's "chosen generation", his "royal priesthood", his "holy nation", his "peculiar people"—all the old titles of God's people now belong to you (I Pet 2:9, Phillips). In the context of Jesus' second coming Peter stated that He will keep us by His power until He come (I Pet 1:5).
 - b. Peter saw the turmoil, wrath, and judgment in the last few years of human history in terms of the big picture and it gave him peace and hope. It will do the same for us. Lots more next week!!