

REDEMPTIVE PURPOSES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. Introduction: We are talking about God’s wrath and judgment in the Old Testament as part of a larger discussion of God’s wrath and judgment at the second coming of Jesus.
1. We’ve made the point in previous lessons that for many people, the God of the Old Testament seems angry, vengeful, arbitrary, and very scary—very different from Jesus in the New Testament.
 - a. To rightly interpret God’s actions in the Old Testament we must think in terms of what the writings meant to the first readers and hearers.
 - b. We have problems with God’s wrath in the Old Testament because we interpret it through a 21st century western mindset instead of understanding it in the context in which it was written.
 - c. In these lessons we are considering principles of interpretation that will help us understand how the first readers heard the Old Testament and, as a result, help us better understand what we read.
 2. The Old Testament is primarily the history of Israel (the Jews, the Hebrews), the people group through whom Jesus came into this world. It is redemptive history. It doesn’t record everything that happened, only events and people related to redemption (God’s plan to deliver people from sin through Jesus).
 - a. During the period of history covered by the Old Testament the world was polytheistic—with the exception of Israel. And they struggled greatly with idol worship.
 - b. God’s main purpose in this period was to show a world of idol worshippers that He is the only God and the greatest power. This is why we see so many power demonstrations in the Old Testament.
 1. The Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew. It was a common idiom in the Hebrew language to use a causative verb in a permissive way. The text literally says that God killed someone, but the original readers understood it to mean that God allowed someone to die.
 2. In the Old Testament God connected events to Himself that He did not cause so that men would realize that He is the only God and the greatest power.
 3. In addition to giving history, the Old Testament pictures and foreshadows important aspects of Jesus and His work, along with important aspects of God’s plan of redemption.
 - c. A vital key to accurately reading the Old Testament is learning to filter it through the greater light of the New Testament. The Bible is progressive revelation.
 1. God has gradually revealed Himself and His plan of redemption through the pages of Scripture until we have the complete, full revelation given in Jesus. Heb 1:1-3; John 14:9-10
 2. The New Testament helps us understand how the first readers assessed God’s expressions of wrath and judgment in the Old Testament. We have more to say this week.
 3. For the past two weeks we have focused on God’s dealings with the generation of Israel that He delivered from Egyptian slavery through a series of plagues and then guided to the land of Canaan.
 - a. I Cor 10:1-4—We pointed out that, according to the New Testament, Jesus was with that generation: And all of them (the people delivered from Egypt) 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).
 - b. Jesus, before He took on flesh, was very interactive with His people in the Old Testament. This means that He was involved in all the troubling incidents recorded in the Old Testament about that generation—fiery serpents, destructive fire from Heaven, etc. Num 11:1-3; Num 21:4-6
 - c. Paul the apostle, who was raised as a Pharisee and was well familiar with all the Old Testament incidents that trouble us, wrote this passage in I Corinthians 10.
 1. But there is no hint of wondering how a loving God could do such things. In fact, Paul had great revelation of God’s love for him personally and for His people. Rom 8:37; Eph 3:18-19
 2. Paul declared that these events were recorded to help later generations not make the mistakes Israel made—idol worshipping and related sexual immorality, doubting God’s care, and expressing ungratefulness for their deliverance through complaining. I Cor 10:6-11

3. Paul concluded by reminding his readers that God always provides a way of escape for His people so that we don't have to succumb to these temptations to sin. I Cor 10:12-13
- B. Let's look at some other New Testament references to some troubling Old Testament incidents so that we can better understand how the first readers and hearers understood them.
1. After Jesus returned to Heaven following His resurrection, His apostles went out to proclaim the gospel (the good news of salvation from sin through Jesus) and establish communities of believers (churches).
 - a. As Jesus predicted before He left this world, Satan came to steal the Word of God (Mark 4:15). Within a fairly short time false teachers arose who perverted the truth and proclaimed false gospels. Both Jude's epistle and Peter's second epistle were written to address the issue of false teachers.
 1. Jude warned of ungodly men, false teachers who used grace as an excuse for immorality. Jude 4
 2. Peter warned of false teachers with damnable heresies who denied the Lord that bought them and made merchandise of believers (II Pet 2:1-3).
 - b. There are lots of lessons to be learned from these epistles. But here's the point for our discussion.
 1. Both men referred to specific instances in Israel's historical record where we find the kind of events that make modern readers ask: How could a loving God do such a thing?
 2. Both Jude and Peter refer to these events in the context of what is going to happen to false teachers who pervert the gospel and destroy men and women through their false teachings—not what will happen to Joe Blow Christian who struggles in some areas as he serves the Lord.
 - A. Jude referenced the generation that God delivered from Egypt (the ones who refused to enter Canaan once they reached its border), the angels who left their first estate (we'll discuss them next week), and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude 5-7
 - B. Peter referred to the wicked angels and to the flood of Noah (both topics for next week) as well as Sodom and Gomorrah. II Pet 2:4-5
 - c. When we examine these historical incidents we find that redemptive issues were at stake and that God worked to save (not destroy) as many people as possible because His purposes are always redemptive. That's how first century Christians viewed these events.
 2. According to Jude 5, although God delivered Israel out of Egypt, He later destroyed those who did not believe, those who refused to enter Canaan. Destroyed them doesn't mean He killed them. He sent them back to the wilderness to live as nomads until the adult generation lived out their lives and died.
 - a. The Greek word translated destroyed means destroy fully (literally or figuratively). This word is translated perish in John 3:16 and lost in Luke 19:10 in connection with those who die without Jesus.
 1. The ultimate destruction anyone can experience is eternal separation from God which renders you lost to your created purpose—sonship and relationship with God. In II Thess 1:9 the word destruction means ruin. It is from the same word used in John 3:16, Luke 19:10, and Jude 5.
 2. It was God's will for that generation that they enter and settle Canaan. However, because of their unbelief they were lost to that purpose. Heb 3:19
 - b. This generation changed their minds and decided to cross the border the next day. God did not help them and they were defeated by the people of Canaan. Num 14:26-35
 1. There is a redemptive purpose in God's refusal to allow these people to enter Canaan. This incident pictures what happens when men refuse to come to God on His terms in an effort to wake men up before they experience the ultimate consequence of unbelief—eternal separation from God in Hell.
 2. God (Jesus before He took on flesh) remained with them throughout their forty years of wilderness life and met all their needs. And all who put faith in Him (responded to the light of Christ given to their generation) are in Heaven today. Deut 32:10-11
 - c. I Cor 10:9-11—Note that Paul attributes the destruction these people experienced on their journey

(snakes, fire, sickness) to the destroyer.

1. The first readers understood that God didn't bring calamity; the destroyer was behind it.
 2. Keep in mind that this is redemptive information, not an explanation for why you had a car wreck or your uncle got sick (lots of lessons for another day).
3. Both Jude and Peter referenced Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of what will happen to the false teachers that were infiltrating the churches (Jude 7; II Pet 2:6). Once again, this was a real event, but it also pictured redemptive information, and we find God's mercy in the midst of it.
- a. Sodom and Gomorrah were part of a group of cities (including Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar) in the Valley of Siddem (part of the Jordan River Valley) at the southern end of the Dead Sea (Gen 13:12; Gen 14:3). According to Gen 19:24, God rained down fire and brimstone and destroyed the cities.
 1. The region where these cities were located abounded in bitumen (or asphalt) pits in Old Testament times. The ancients used it to waterproof boats (Noah used it on the ark, Gen 6:14). The Egyptians used it in their embalming processes. The area also had numerous sulfur springs. Sulfur is a flammable substance used, among other things, in making gunpower.
 2. The Jordan Valley has a major fault line running through it and much of the area was an active volcanic region in ancient times. Archaeologists believe that a massive volcanic explosion occurred and destroyed these cities. Evidence of this eruption is still visible at the south end of the Dead Sea in the area where the plain cities were believed to be located. The earthquake caused a violent explosion. Asphalt and sulfur went into the air red hot, coming down as fire.
 - b. Remember, in the Old Testament God is said to do what He in fact only allows. God connected natural events with Himself—not because He made them happen—but for redemptive purposes.
 1. Both Peter and Jude referred to the incident as an example of what will happen to the ungodly. They were destroyed by fire. Neither one was referring to God sending calamity on people in this life. Jude said that the Lord Jesus will come to carry out justice. Jude 14-15
 2. Jude 7 makes the point that the fire on these cities pictures the punishment that awaits false teachers. Vengeance in the KJV is from a Greek word justice, implying punishment)—These cities were destroyed by fire and are a warning of eternal fires that will punish all who do evil (NLT)
 - A. It was a real, historical event, but it became a picture of the final judgment on the wicked. Jesus Himself made that point. Matt 10:15; Matt 11:24-25
 - B. This was part of Israel's national psyche. They understood what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah to mean destruction for persistent idol worship and all its associated immorality.
 - C. When Israel was in idol worship in Old Testament days, God, through His prophets, called them Sodom and Gomorrah. Isa 1:9-10; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46-56; Amos 4:11
 - c. Jesus was involved in what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. Gen 18 reveals that the Lord appeared to Abraham while in route to Sodom. Abraham had many interactions with Preincarnate Jesus (lots of lessons for another day). This is one of them. Jesus is the visible manifestation of the Invisible God, Old Testament and New. Note these points.
 1. The name Jehovah is used twelve times of this being (v1; 13; 14; 17; 19-20; 22; 26; 30-33). Abraham addressed Him as *Adonay* twice (v3; 27), a term used only as a proper name of God. The Lord made a statement that only God can make and knew Sarah's inner thoughts (v10-13).
 2. The Lord interacted with Abraham. He ate with him (v8) and communed with him (v33). The Lord walked with Abraham (v16) and came to discuss what was going to happen to Sodom and Gomorrah (v17).
 3. When they finished speaking, the Lord went on His way and Abraham returned to his place. Perfect love went on to Sodom before its destruction. Remember, at the Last Supper, when Jesus offered Judas the sop (bread dipped in wine)? It was one last opportunity for Judas to

change his mind about betraying Jesus. Did anyone respond to Jesus' visit to Sodom? Only eternity will tell.

- d. We see the mercy of God in this account. He delivered righteous Lot from the destruction.
 1. Peter emphasized this point and made a clear distinction between those who are God's and those who aren't. II Pet 7-9
 2. Jude did the same, stating that the Lord Jesus will one day come to carry out justice against all the ungodly, forever separating them from Himself, His family, and His kingdom. Jude 14-15
4. Consider one more New Testament reference to a troubling Old Testament incident—the time that the ground opened up and swallowed a bunch of people. Num 16
 - a. Jude 11—Jude stated that these false teachers who were invading the churches would perish like Core because of their gainsaying (disobedience). Core is the Greek name for Korah, a man who opposed the authority of Moses, along with Dathan and Abiram.
 - b. Korah was a cousin to Moses and Aaron (Ex 6:21; Num 16:1). All of them were Levites (the tribe the priests came from) but they had different functions in the Tabernacle depending on which family in the tribe that they were from.
 1. The high priests came from Aaron's family. Korah's family was assigned more menial duties in the Tabernacle. Korah accused Moses and Aaron of taking privileges belonging to others.
 2. Besides Dathan and Abiram, 250 other prominent people joined him in rebellion. The rebels also accused Moses of bringing Israel out of Egypt to die and blamed him for their failure to enter Canaan. Num 16:1-3; 12-14
 - c. Moses responded: Tomorrow you will burn incense before the Lord and He will tell us who can enter His presence as priests. By the next day Korah had stirred up the entire community and everyone showed up to see what would happen.
 1. Moses was angry and asked God to reject their sacrifices. Moses declared that if the ground opens up and swallows these men who have provoked (scorned, reviled, rejected) God, then all will know that the Lord has sent me. Num 16:15-17; 28-30
 2. The Lord said that He would consume these wicked men. The word translated consume (v21) means to complete or end. God told everyone to get away to avoid being destroyed with the rebels. The rebels and their families came out of their tents. The ground opened up and they all went into the pit.
 1. Pit is the word *sheol* which can mean Hell, but it usually means the grave or the ground. In this case, the ground became their grave.
 2. Fire burned up the 250 rebels in front of the Tabernacle. Their censors were made into plates to form an outer covering to the altar as a warning of the just judgment of God.
 - d. Did an earthquake take place or did God open the ground? Whatever happened here, it isn't inconsistent with what Jesus shows us about God—because Jesus (before He took on flesh) was present with them when this happened. We read this and ask: How could a loving God do this?
 1. But we miss the big picture. This is redemptive history and major issues are at stake. This is the people group through whom Jesus will one day come into the world. But they're headed back to the wilderness for refusing to enter Canaan because of unbelief. They haven't learned their lesson yet. This new rebellion must be rooted out so that God's plan is not thwarted.
 2. Moses was a real person, but he was also a type or picture of Jesus. Their rejection of Moses is a picture of rejecting Jesus. There is only one way to God—through Jesus and His sacrifice.
 - e. The first readers of this account understood the seriousness of preserving the line Jesus will come through—the salvation of the human race was at stake. It's bigger than this doesn't seem fair to us!

C. Conclusion: We have more to say next week. But we are out of time and out of space on the outline.