

## GOD'S WRATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. Introduction: God's message to His people is always: Fear not. We have been talking about why we do not need to be afraid of God. Christians are afraid of God for several reasons. We have been focusing on the fact that many Christians are afraid of God of His righteousness, justice, and wrath.
1. The righteousness, justice, and wrath of God are not things be feared (afraid of). God is a just, righteous Judge who has wrath against sin. But, those qualities are all expression of the perfect love of God. And, perfect love casts out fear. I John 4:18
    - a. We're afraid of God's righteousness, justice, and wrath because we don't understand them.
    - b. So, we are talking time to study God's word to help us understand God's righteousness, justice, and wrath to help us see why we do not need to be afraid of them.
  2. Righteousness is rightness. Justice is doing what is right. God is right and God always does what is right. He is righteous and just.
    - a. Because God is righteous and just He must respond to sin, to man's rebellion. It is right, it is according to justice, that wrong be punished.
    - b. Wrath is God's right response to sin. Wrath is God's just response to sin. Wrath is the loving response of a just, righteous God to human disobedience.
  3. The thought of God having wrath against sin scares us because we impose human emotions on God and think of Him in terms of what it means when a human is angry and wrathful.
    - a. But, God's anger at man's sin cannot be thought of in terms of human anger. God's wrath works righteousness. The wrath of man does not. James 1:20
      1. We are not saying that God does not have emotions. Clearly, God does express emotions, and, certainly, God is "not happy" about sin. But, when we are talking about God's emotions we are talking about something beyond our understanding at this point in our existence.
      2. We can only think in terms of human emotions which arise out of sinful motives, emotions which can get out of control, emotions which can drive us to sin. Human emotions can be arbitrary, changeable, and unpredictable..
    - b. God's wrath is not an emotional response to sin. It is the right response to sin. It is a righteous, just, response to sin. Anger and wrath are God's judicial responses to sin.
      1. Wrath is the judicial consequence, the response of justice, to law breakers. Rom 4:15--For where there is law there is wrath (Norlie)
      2. They are the response of justice to sin in the same way the response of civil government to lawbreakers is an expression of wrath. Rom 13:3-5
      3. We've all heard this statement before on TV or in a movie: A judge says to a criminal found guilty of a crime, "You're going to feel the full wrath of the Law on you". It doesn't mean the judge is mad at you and you're really going to get it, it means: You're going to receive the full penalty for your crime under the Law. God's wrath is not like the wrath of men.
  4. We think of punishment as an emotional response to wrong because that's how we do it. But God makes it clear that He doesn't deal with wrongdoing like we do.
    - a. A primary theme in the New Testament is: Don't pay people back for doing wrong to you (Matt 5:39; Rom 12:17; I Thess 5:15: etc.). Let God take care of it because He does it righteously.
    - b. Vengeance, to us, means pay back, revenge, getting even, etc. all of which come out of a self-focused, emotional response to being wronged in some way. We assume God responds like that.
    - c. But, vengeance, in the Greek in connection with God, means to execute justice. It is penal rather than emotional retribution. It is a carrying out of the law.
      1. Governors punish evil doers (I Pet 2:14) Punishment is the same word as vengeance.

2. Rom 12:19--Never take vengeance into your own hands, my dear friends (Phillips) but let the wrath of God its way (Moffatt), leave room for God's anger (Goodspeed); allow retribution to run its course (Knox).
- B. You may be thinking, "That's all well and good. But, what about the Old Testament and all those times when God got ticked off and blasted people?! Is that what He's going to do to me?" We need to talk for a moment about God's wrath in the Old Testament. (Wrath and anger are used interchangeably in the Old Testament).
1. The Bible is progressive revelation. God has gradually revealed Himself to man through the pages of scripture. Many things are not fully stated in the Old Testament.
    - a. We must interpret the Old Testament in the full light of the New Testament. In the Old Testament we do not yet have the full, complete picture of God which is revealed to us in and through the Jesus in the New Testament. Heb 1:1-3; John 14:9
    - b. The New Testament tells us that God's wrath is not like the wrath of man. Therefore, no matter how it looks in the Old Testament, we have to give the revelation in the New Testament the greater weight.
      1. According to the New Testament God's wrath is not an emotional response to sin but rather a judicial response to sin.
      2. Therefore, because God does not change, God's wrath in the Old Testament was a righteous, judicial response to sin as opposed to an arbitrary, emotional response.
  2. What, exactly, is the wrath of God? No one can fully answer that question at this stage of our existence, but consider this point. The wrath of God is not God exploding and letting people have it. The wrath of God is allowing people to reap the consequences of their actions.
    - a. Isa 10:5 calls Assyria the rod of God's anger. II Chron 12:7 calls King Shishak of Egypt the instrument of God's wrath.
      1. When Israel entered the promised land God told them that if they worshipped the gods of the people around them they would eventually be overrun by their enemies. Deut 4:23-31
      2. Both Assyria and Egypt at various times attacked Israel when they abandoned God just as God said they would. But, their actions are called the wrath of God.
    - b. In the Hebrew language there is a verb tense which is permissive rather than causative. God is said to do what He in fact only allows. For example, we read: God brought sickness among the people. It is in fact: God allowed sickness among the people.
      1. The tense is similar to an idiom in English. Take the phrase, "It's raining cats and dogs". We know that phrase doesn't mean that cats and dogs are falling from the sky. It means "It's raining heavily". In the same way, Hebrews understood "God did" to mean "God allowed".
      2. We must be clear what we mean by "God allows". We sometimes hear it as "because God didn't stop it, He willed it". God allows people to sin and go to hell. That does not mean He is for it or behind it.
    - c. When the Old Testament says Assyria was the rod of His anger it does not mean God manipulated them or motivated them. They acted out of free will.
      1. In the Old Testament God connected events and happenings to Himself -- even though He was not behind them in any way -- because He wanted His people to understand that troubles come when you are out of right relationship with Me. When enemies overran them it is called God's wrath. When sickness came into the camp it is called God's wrath.
      2. One of God's primary goals in the Old Testament was to show an idol-worshipping world that He is the only God, He alone is God Almighty. That's one reason why there are so many

power demonstrations directly connected to Him.

3. In the Old Testament God gave a very clear expression of His Law through Moses. Remember, the term Law is used in scripture to mean the revealed will of God with respect to human conduct.
    - a. The Law was given to show men their sin (Rom 3:20) and to show men their need for a Savior (Gal 3:24). The punishments or consequences spelled out in the Law were given to show men the destructiveness of sin (Rom 6:23).
    - b. Why is there so much talk about God's wrath and anger? To show men that God is not pleased by sin. It is not simply a case of following a code of rules. God wanted His people to see that they were obligated to obey Him, both as their Creator and as their Covenant maker.
    - c. We can't look at every incident in the Old Testament where the wrath and anger of God are mentioned. But, these guidelines we have mentioned can help us see that the wrath of God expressed in the Old Testament is not a contradiction of what we see in the New Testament.
  4. Consider this point as well. God's wrath and anger in the Old Testament are always mentioned in connection with gross sin, primarily Israel abandoning God to worship idols.
    - a. Ps 78 gives a summary of Israel's behavior after God delivered them from Egypt. In the face of tremendous demonstrations of God's power they refused to believe Him, they tempted Him, they complained about His care and provision of them. It is in that context that we see a number of incidents called the wrath of God where people died (Num 11:1, etc.)
    - b. None of these things can be fully explained by us at this point in our existence. But, we can't throw out what we clearly know and understand about the wrath of God for what we don't know and understand (Deut 29:29). When we do that we undermine our own confidence in God.
      1. The wages of sin is death. God allowed them to reap the consequences of their sin. God clearly connected it to Himself because He wanted them to understand: You are out of right relationship with Me and that is the source of your trouble.
      2. Ps 78:38,39 says that when He could have rightly, justly destroyed them (expressed His wrath, His judicial response to their great sin), He did not. He turned His anger away many times.
      3. God is slow to anger, slow to carry out His righteous response, His just response to sin. Why? Because He destroys men whom He loves. Ps 103:8; 145:8
    - c. When we look at this psalm we can see clearly that God's wrath is not like human wrath.
      1. What if you or I had done all the good for this group of people that God did and they responded to us as they did to God -- abandoning Him, tempting Him, complaining to Him.
      2. Our human response would have been: How dare you treat me like that!! I'll kill you!! But God is not like that.
- C. God does not express wrath against sin because He is punitive or vengeful. He does it because it is right, because it is just. Wrath against sin is right. We don't like to hear that because we know we aren't right and we know what we deserve, and that makes us afraid of God.
1. But, remember, the wrath of God consumes evil. The wrath of God is the remedy for sin.
    - a. When we look at outpouring of the wrath of God (His righteous, just, judicial response to sin) in the Old Testament it consumed evil. The "problem" with the expressions of God's wrath in the Old Testament is that the sinner was often consumed with the sin.
    - b. Destroying sin in the flesh destroys the sinner. So God came up with a plan to deal the fact that the remedy for sin also destroys the sinner. He took on flesh and took our place at the Cross. The wrath necessary to obliterate my sin went to Him and was fully exhausted without destroying me.
      1. Heb 9:26--Jesus came to put away or abolish sin. Sin was abolished at the Cross when Jesus experienced the full wrath of God against sin. The wrath of God obliterated sin.

2. The wrath of God for our sins went to Jesus and it produced wholeness for us. Isa 53:5--The chastisement needful to obtain peace and well-being for us was upon Him, and with the stripes that wounded Him we are healed and made whole. (Amp)
  - c. The judicial response of the Law for sin (wrath) went to Jesus. Isa 53:6 says our iniquities were laid on Jesus. That word in the Hebrew is one of four main Hebrew words that can be translated punishment, AVON. It includes the sin and the punishment that goes with it. The punishment that went to him made us whole.
  2. God is not doling out His wrath on a sin by sin basis. God poured out and exhausted His wrath against your sin and my sin on Jesus. God was not mad at Jesus, He was carrying out justice.
    - a. Through the Cross of Christ God satisfied His own justice and is able to justify us (Rom 3:24). To justify means to acquit. Acquittal or justification is a judicial deliverance from a criminal charge. It means all charges are dropped.
    - b. God's righteous wrath toward sin has been expressed but you must receive that expression in order for His wrath to be removed from you. You receive it by receiving Jesus. If you have not received Christ and His sacrifice then God's wrath remains on you. John 3:36
      1. This does not mean that God now deals with unsaved people in wrath. He deals with them in mercy. God gives men a lifetime to repent. II Pet 3:9
      2. If a person never believes on Jesus he does face the wrath of God when He leaves this earth -- the judicial response to his sin which is eternal separation from God.
  3. God created men for relationship, fellowship, sonship. God's goal was not, is not, to punish us, but to remove sin so relationship is possible. God has not appointed us to wrath. I Thess 1:10; 5:9
    - a. In I Thess 2:14-16 we find another comment about God's wrath. Referring to the Jews who have rejected Christ and were actively opposed to the spread of the gospel, Paul said God's wrath was on them.
      1. Their present attitude is in opposition to both God and man. They refused to let us speak to those who were not Jews, to tell them the news of salvation. Alas, I fear they are completing the full tale of their sins, and the wrath of God is over them. (Phillips)
      2. But the wrath [of God] has overtaken them to destroy them. (Coneybeare)
    - b. What does it mean that the wrath of God was on them? It means they were about to reap the consequences of their actions. When God judges people, when He administers justice, He allows them to reap the consequences of their actions.
      1. In the Old Testament God told Israel: If you reject Me, I will allow your enemies to overrun you and drive you out of the land. Deut 4:23-31
      2. Jesus told the Jews before they crucified them that there would be severe consequences if they rejected Him. Matt 23:37-39; 24:1,2
      3. In 70 A.D. the Romans overran Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and put the Jews out of their land. Multitudes of Jews were killed.
    - c. This is the just, righteous consequence of their sin of rejecting Jesus their Savior in the face of God's greatest power demonstration ever, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.
      1. This has nothing to do with God getting ticked off and letting them have it. This has to do with them choosing independence from God and reaping the consequences.
      2. God's emotional response to their conditions was sorrow. Jesus, who shows us God, wept over Jerusalem about this. Luke 19:41-44
- D. Conclusion: We have not said all there is to say, but hopefully, you are beginning to see that the wrath of God against sin is a good thing. More next week.