

## Week Three: Who is Like Yahweh?, part 2

***“... abounding in lovingkindness... yet He will not leave the guilty unpunished”***

*Hesed and justice*—ethical dimension of God’s lovingkindness

- “Let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on the earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord. Jeremiah 9:24
- “O continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart. Psalm 36:10
- The Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him. Isaiah 30:18
- Justice and righteousness
  - *mishpat* (just) and *tsadaq* (righteous) and *hesed* (faithful or merciful)
    - Justice usually relates to the quality of an *action* and righteousness relates to the *character* of the individual.
  - The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just, a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He. Deuteronomy 32:4
    - To judge justly is to discern between good and evil and is rooted in God as only true and enduring source (see 1 Kings 3:9).

*Justice is a relational concept*

- Religious sacrifice vs. internal obedience
  - You are justified why You speak and blameless when you judge... You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Psalm 51:4,16,17
- Justice is hesed in *pursuit*
  - Justice, doing good, is an active obligation.
    - Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek justice, seek humility. Zephaniah 2:3
    - For I, the Lord, love justice. Isaiah 61:1
  - Loving neighbor as self involves *positive* not merely negative obligations.
- Justice means to love kindness
  - God “delights in doing good, in justice and righteousness” (Jer. 9:24)
  - He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

- This imperative asks for more than mere obedience, it asks for love. To love implies an insatiable thirst, a passionate craving. To love means to transfer the center of one's inner life from the ego to the object of one's love... the validity of justice and the motivation for its exercise lie in the blessings it brings to man." --Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, 265
- What implications for our closest relationships to "do justice and love kindness"!
- What would that look like? How are compassion and mercy related?
- Justice as a witness to God
  - Justice glorifies God
    - Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of our harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:23,24
    - His glorious disclosure is not in a display of miracles, evoking fascination, but in establishing righteousness, evoking appreciation. Why and for what purpose was Abraham chosen to become a great and mighty nation, and to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth? Not because he knew how to build pyramids, altars, and temples, but "in order that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:18,19)... God's love and kindness indicate a road. --Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, 269
  - What does the imagery of streaming water suggest about justice? How different is this than the "scales of justice" imagery?
- Justice and salvation—a time of blessing
  - The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. And He will be the stability of your times, a wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge... Isaiah 33:5,6
  - Because of God's *hesed*, his *righteousness* is our *salvation* (Is. 56:1; 33:6)
    - Harris, Archer, Waltke, *TWOT* 1:698-700

### *Jealousy*

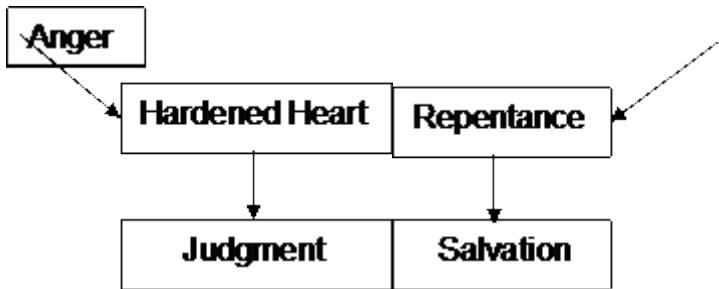
- "The Lord whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" Exodus 34:14
- [P]raiseworthy zeal to preserve something supremely precious... to protect a love relationship or to avenge it when broken. --J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 170
  - What's the difference between praiseworthy zeal and jealousy in the negative sense?
  - When would a *lack* of zeal be inappropriate, even wrong?
- "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us" James 4:5
  - What might a lack of zeal imply about God's people? (Rev. 3:15-19; 2 Cor. 7:9-11)

## *Anger and jealousy*

- “Thus My anger will be spent and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I will be appeased; then they will know that I, the Lord, have spoken in My zeal when I have sent My wrath upon them.” Ezekiel 5:13
- “I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name. Ezekiel 39:25
- Anger is righteous indignation (Psalm 7:11).
  - Not to show partiality is an essential attribute of a judge. But to be impartial to people, one cannot be impartial to evil. In the Bible, a judge is not merely a person who has the cognitive faculty to examine a case and pronounce a sentence; he is also a person who is pained and distressed when injustice is done. God’s concern is the prerequisite and source of His anger. It is because He cares for man that His anger may be kindled against man. Anger and mercy are not opposites but correlatives. Thus Habakkuk prays, “In wrath remember mercy.” (Hab. 3:2). Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, 363,4
    - What does indifference in the face of evil mean? To understand wrath it is crucial to understand evil.
    - How are anger and mercy correlatives?
- “slow to anger”
  - God is patient, forbearing. See Num. 14:18; Jer. 15:15; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Ps. 86:15...
  - Patience is not apathy, but restraint. But there is a limit beyond which patience is no longer a blessing or virtue. “Severity must tame whom love cannot win.”
- Anger lasts a moment, love endures forever
  - I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with lovingkindness. Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt. Jeremiah 31:3,4a
  - He does not retain His anger forever because He delights in unchanging love. Micah 7:18
  - For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid My face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer. Isaiah 54:7,8
- Respond to the objection, “I simply can not believe that God is all loving and merciful since he is also full of wrath!” What would you say about a God *without* wrath? How is wrath reconciled with mercy and love?
- God’s wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is only angry where anger is called for. --J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 151

## *Anger and judgment: retribution*

- ... yet I will not leave the guilty unpunished..." Exodus 34:7



- *Conditions of blessing*

- To the nations: "I will bless those who bless you, and the ones who curse you I will also curse. Genesis 12:3
- To Israel:
  - "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land..."
  - But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all the commandments, if , instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all my commandments, and so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will see uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up. I will set My face against you so that you will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you. ....And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you seven times for your sins. I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands... I will destroy your high places... I will lay waste your cities... I will make the land desolate... I will scatter you among the nations... Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths.
  - If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers,,.. then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember the land... Leviticus

26:3-5; 14-34; 40-42

- *denunciation:* God’s “case” against His people:
  - Hear now what the Lord is saying. Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Listen, you mountains, to the indictment of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth, because the Lord as a case against His people, even with Israel he will dispute. My people, what have I done to you, and how have I wearied you? Answer Me. Micah 6:1-3
  - “Woe,” “listen,” “taunt,” “hear,”...
- *call for repentance:*
  - The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, who can endure it? Yet even now, declares the Lord, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him... Joel. 2:11b-14a
- *judgment and contingency:*
  - The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, “Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will announce My words to you.” Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. The word of the Lord came to me saying, “Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as the potter does? Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which had promised to bless it. So no then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, ‘thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.”’ Jeremiah 18:10-11
- See also Ezekiel’s stirring plea to repent and God’s reluctance to judge: Ezekiel 18

*Case Study: Conquest—John Wenham, “The Abominations of the Heath”*

*Israel's foreign policy (Deut. 20:10-18)*

These directions are represented as the most solemn commands of God. If they are in fact so, we have a

deep problem to grapple with. If on the other hand they are merely directions which Moses wrongly attributed to God, or if they are directions such as a later generation thought God ought to have given to Moses, there is no problem at all. It is simply a case of fallible men misrepresenting God—one more example of a religious man sincerely believing that by an evil act he was doing God a service.

John Wehham, *The Goodness of God*, 124

- "Far off nations." Proclaim terms of peace. If they wish to enter into a pact, then leave them alone.
- "Cities in Canaan." These cities are subject to the "ban." Ban is complete annihilation. The entire Canaanite population is to be utterly destroyed.
- Why the ban? The ban raises significant questions in the mind of most readers. Could the God of grace and mercy really demand such extraordinary measures? It conjures up images of Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and solidifies the impression that the God of the Old Testament is a wrathful God, in sharp contrast to the God of the New Testament. Let's take a closer look at the legislation and the Canaanite culture.

Canaanite culture. Canaanite culture, like all of the cultures of the ANE, centered around its religion. By all standards of comparison, the Canaanite religion was enormously dehumanizing.

Molech's outstretched arms:



El was the primary god of the Canaanite pantheon. He is a creator god. Creation occurs by sexual procreation with female deities. Thus, worship of El takes on sexual form. Priestesses were essentially sex slaves of the cult.

Ba'al or Hadad. Son of El. He was the head of the Canaanite pantheon. He was younger and more

verile than El. He is the god of rain, and therefore, like El, tied to fertility.

Annat, wife of Astarti. Very similar to Kali of India. She was the goddess of sex, war and fertility. She is both sensuous and dangerous. She is a sacred prostitute for the gods, terms, "holy one." Shown riding naked on a lion with a flower in one hand and a serpent in the other. She delights in blood. A very violent and fickle goddess. Human heads form a necklace in depictions of her. There was both the practice of ritual prostitution and human sacrifice to Annat and El.

Read: John Bright, *A History of Israel*, pp. 118,119

- Revelation of God to the Canaanites. The annihilation of Canaanite cities occurred after many years of rejecting the revelation God gave them.

Gen. 15:16. God would not give the land to Abraham, because the "iniquity of the Amorite was not yet complete." That is, they had not, as a culture, gone beyond the point at which they could respond to God.

The Canaanites had witnessed the willingness of God to judge those who resisted him personally on several occasions. Eg: Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). Also, Josh. 2:10-14 makes it clear that 40 years prior to its destruction, Jericho knew of God's deliverance from Egypt.

- Conquest was judgment on the *culture*. The intent of the ban was that, "they might not teach detestable things" (Deut. 20:18). It must be recognized that the failure to complete the conquest set the stage in later generations, under the era of the judges, for a resurgence of Canaanite religion, with its devastating consequences for Israel. (see Judges 2:1-3, 10-15, 19-23).
- Judgment on a culture is not the same as God's eternal judgment on all of the individuals within the society. Those who were unable to make moral choices or comprehend what the culture stood for would not be held accountable before God (see 2 Sam. 12:22).
- While God used the Hebrews as his instrument in judging the Canaanites, it does not follow that the Hebrews are characterized as meriting the land (Deut. 7:7-11). The land was given simply because God is faithful to his promises.
- God does not delight in the destruction of any person or culture. He executes temporal judgment only when his greater redemptive plan requires it. See, for example Jonah 4:4-11.
- *Judgments in the Old Testament are temporal*

A final reflection:

No doubt it is true that the subject of divine wrath has in the past been handled speculatively, irreverently, even malevolently. No doubt there have been some who have preached of the wrath and damnation with tearless eyes and no pain in their hearts. No doubt the sights of small sects cheerfully consigning the world, apart from themselves, to hell has disgusted many. Yet, if we would know God, it

is vital that we face the truth concerning his wrath, however unfashionable it may be, and however strong our initial prejudices against it. Otherwise we shall not understand the gospel of salvation from wrath, nor the propitiatory achievement of the cross, nor the wonder of the redeeming love of God. Nor shall we understand the hand of God in history and God's present dealings with our own people... nor will our evangelism have the urgency enjoined by Jude—"same some, by snatching them out of the fire" (Jude 23). Neither our knowledge of God nor our service to him will be in accord with his Word.

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 156

*Next two weeks: the meaning and means of salvation*

Assignment:

Read Fishbane, "The 'Exodus' Motif: Paradigm of Historical Renewal"

Briefly define: what is the "Exodus motif"?

In what specific ways does Jesus complete this motif? Make sure to cite each point from scripture