

GOD'S WRATH AND REDEMPTION
ZECHARIAH 9:1-8

Unbelievers have many complaints against God. But I suspect that one of the main complaints against God is that He is wrathful — and particularly that He would judge sinners and condemn them to eternal Hell. You've heard the criticism: "How can God send anyone to Hell and still be loving?"

The skeptic [Bertrand Russell](#) said the primary reason he could never believe in Jesus was that Jesus "so clearly believed in the wrath of God." He called it "the one profound defect in Jesus' character."

Even C.S. Lewis struggled with the truth of God's wrath: "There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than [God's wrath], if it lay in my power."

But God *is* wrathful. If He was not wrathful, it would mean that He did not care about justice, unrighteousness, or sin. It would mean that He doesn't care about people who suffer from sinners. It would mean that He was complacent about correcting wrongs. It would mean He was uncaring and unjust. And unbelievers know this ([Rom. 1:18-19ff, 32](#)). One of the reasons sinners object to the wrath of God is that they want to be able to continue in their sin without concern about God's judgment.

Believers also struggle about the justice and the wrath of God — sometimes because it seems to come so slowly. And believers are tempted to wonder, "does God even care?" (Cf. Ps. 37:1ff). It is this theme that Zechariah addresses in his prophecy in 9:1-8 —

BE ENCOURAGED, BECAUSE GOD'S WRATH IS GOD'S ULTIMATE PROTECTION OF HIS PEOPLE.

It is tempting to think about God's wrath and redemption as competing truths or even contradictory truths. But they are presented in this passage for what they are — **complementary truths**.

As we come to this passage let me also orient you to the flow of the book:

- ✓ Chapters 1-8 are focused on the issues of Zechariah's day, relating to the rebuilding of the temple
- ✓ Chapters 9-14 are written later and concerned about the future ("that day" is used 19x)
 - The "burden" of chs. 9-11 is the judgment of the Gentile world (and the first advent)
 - The "burden" of "chs. 12-14" is concerns Israel (and the second advent)

1. God Will be RIGHTEOUS in His WRATH (vv. 1-6)

- ✓ God's wrath against Syria
- ✓ God's wrath against Phoenicia (vv. 2-4)
- ✓ God's wrath against Philistia (vv. 5-6)

2. God Will be GRACIOUS in His REDEMPTION (vv. 7-8)

- ✓ God's grace to the nations (v. 7)
- ✓ God's grace to Israel (v. 8)

1. God Will be RIGHTEOUS in His WRATH (vv. 1-6)

- Verse one begins with the declaration ***the burden of the word of the LORD is against...***
 - **Burden** is something spoken (it's the "word of the Lord") — so it's a pronouncement.
 - It is authoritative — and that it comes from YHWH means it is especially authoritative
 - But it is also something weighty and heavy. This is no glib or easy statement. It is God's declaration that He is against someone (nation in this case) which is weighty, indeed.
 - There is a soberness to messages of judgment; Zechariah feels the weightiness of what he is about to reveal, and he wants the readers/hearers to understand that as well.
 - The term is also used in **12:1**; here it is about the nations, and there about Israel, which gives us the two primary divisions in the last chapters of this book.
 - In this burden, God initially has things to say against three groups/nations —
- God's wrath against Syria (v. 1)
 - ✓ The first city mentioned is **Hadrach** — this is the only mention of it in the OT and for most of history was unknown. Ancient secular writings now reveal that it was north of Israel (two possible locations, somewhere between 15 and 50 miles **north of Damascus**). [Cf. map]
 - ✓ To say that the burden is against Hadrach and that Damascus is its **resting place** means that God's judgment starts to the north and then will move south and rest on Damascus.
 - ✓ These cities were significant in the Assyrian empire (which took the 10 northern tribes of Israel into captivity) — and Zechariah means Israel to understand that God will be thorough in His judgment against the nations that oppressed Israel. No one will be omitted.
 - ✓ **What would happen** as a result of this judgment? The people would **look to the LORD**.
 - The word "for" in this instance probably has the idea of "result" — because of this judgment, people — especially **of all the tribes of Israel** — turned toward God.
 - This is a reminder that the truth of God's wrath is given not just to "scare" people, but to produce repentance — so that people recognize that they need God's salvation...
 - This was a song of Israel as they proceeded to worship (**Ps. 123:1-2**) and this is the way it will be at the end of time when Christ comes (**Rev. 1:7**).
 - ✓ Assyria had taken the tribes captive some 300 years earlier; Zechariah is anticipating a final day when the tribes will return and these lands will be enfolded into the promise of God (**Ezk. 47:15ff**).
 - ✓ Lesson: God's wrath is not only righteous, but it is restorative.

- God's wrath against Phoenicia (vv. 2-4)

- ✓ **Hamath** was far to the north of Israel (125 mi. north of Damascus). Jeremiah also promised the judgment of Hamath (Jer. 49:23).
- ✓ More noteworthy is **Tyre and Sidon**, cities on the Mediterranean coast, west of Damascus.
- ✓ Notice the characteristics of these two cities —
 - **They are very wise** (v. 2) — they were economically savvy and their wisdom was characteristic of the "wisdom" of Satan in the fall (**Ezk. 28:12-15**). So they are also symbols of pride.
 - **Tyre build for herself a fortress...silver...** (v. 3). Tyre was militarily and economically strong.
 - ... While on the coast, Tyre was actually built by King Hiram, a contemporary of King David.
 - The city was on an island about ½ mile offshore meaning she could see to defend herself from attacks in any direction.
 - ... Tyre withstood a 5-year siege by Assyria and a 13-year siege by Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon).
 - ... Her wealth was uncountable — like **dust** and **mud** in the streets (which would have been made of dirt in that day).
 - ... It has been noted that had to be discouraging for Israel — "how can the unrighteous prosper so greatly?" — which is still a lament as we look at the wicked and ungodly (**Ps. 37:1ff**).
 - ... As Feinberg has noted, "Tyre's mistake has been that of many a strong city before her and many since: she thought wealth would answer all purposes." God was not thwarted...
- ✓ **Behold** ("look," "pay attention..."), **the Lord will dispossess her...**
 - One of only 4x in the book that Zechariah uses "Lord" (Adonai, not YHWH), to refer to His mastery. God is the victor over His foes, including powerful Tyre.
 - Tyre thought she "possessed" wealth that would protect her; God "dispossessed" the wealth — removing her power by throwing the wealth into the sea. Irony: the sea which was her protection instead became her downfall. Neither riches nor power could preserve her.
 - Further, her wealth was removed and **she will be consumed with fire** — she will be destroyed. For the city to be burned pictures total loss and complete destruction. Nothing is left.
 - And that is exactly what happened. Alexander the Great said of Tyre that her island would one day become a continent (approachable), and while others couldn't defeat Tyre, in 332 B.C., Alexander conquered and destroyed the city in five months. The leaders were executed and the citizens enslaved, so that Tyre never regained its previous stature.
 - Through Alexander, God accomplished His promised judgment of Israel's oppressors. Just as God predicted in Ezk. 28, Tyre would be cast down and destroyed (and so will Satan be destroyed).
 - This is a hopeful reminder to believers that unrighteousness does not and will not prevail. "Wisdom, riches, and strength are of no avail against the judgment of God." [Feinberg]
 - This a sober reminder to unbelievers that unrighteousness does not win. You cannot persist in rebellion against God without ultimate and final consequences (**Rom. 12:19ff**).

- God's wrath against Philistia (vv. 5-6)

- ✓ Philistia is the closest of the nations being judged, and the greatest immediate problem to Israel.
- ✓ The cities mentioned in vv. 5-7 are four of the five most prominent cities in Philistia (the fifth, Gath, is unmentioned, perhaps because it was already insignificant).
- ✓ These cities are fearful because they saw Tyre's "impossible" fall and are aware that they also will be judged (cf. Amos 1:6-8; Zeph. 2:4; Jer. 25:20).
- ✓ How thorough will the destruction of Philistia be? Note the progression...
 - **Ashkelon will be afraid...** Observing Tyre will produce fear in Ashkelon...
 - **Gaza will writhe in great pain** — Also in 332 B.C., Gaza tried to resist Alexander and was overcome in five months and after executing thousands of citizens, he killed Batis, king of Gaza in a particularly brutal and public way. While most conquered kings were allowed to remain alive and give tribute to the conquering king (serving "king of kings") this king was executed.
 - **Ekron's expectation has been confounded** means there was complete loss of hope.
 - **A mongrel race will dwell in Ashdod** (v. 6) — not only are the natives destroyed, but "illegitimate" foreigners will come in and inhabit the land (Nebuchadnezzar).
 - **I will cut off the pride of the Philistines** — Zechariah uses the first person and God speaks directly, giving a summary commentary of Philistia — utter humiliation.
- ✓ While other nations would come in and destroy Israel's oppressors, God makes clear that He is behind these actions. This is all God's sovereign plan and sovereign accomplishment.
- ✓ God is behind every action of every army (**Prov. 21:31**; Ps. 33:16-17; **2 Kings 5:1** [Naaman]). God "alone is sovereign, and there is no hope and no security apart from Him." [MacArthur]
- ✓ While there are historical references to the destruction of these cities, Zechariah is still anticipating a final destruction at the end of time (Amos 1:7-8; Zech. 14).

- The wrath of God is God's righteous (holy) retribution against all that is wrong, against "all that has defiled his world, all that has defied his law, all that has rejected his rule, and all that has spurned his love expressed in Christ. It is the pure reaction of God to all that is impure." [Wells, *Whirlwind*.]
- ✓ We can be content that there is never any unrighteousness that will be unpunished — either personal or societal. God will address all sin.
- ✓ But there is a personal (implied) warning here as well — no personal sinner will escape the wrath of God. If you are a sinner (and you are) and you have not repented of your sin and turned to God in faith (believing in Christ as your payment and freedom from sin), I urge you to do so today. God will not be mocked and ignored. He is patient, but only so that you can repent (**Rom. 2:4**).
- ✓ And you *can* repent, which is what the next verses expose...

2. God Will be GRACIOUS in His REDEMPTION (vv. 7-8)

- Despite God's judgment on Philistia (and the other nations), there is hope for them. "Mercy follows judgment." One theologian has said, "When logic of the situation demands that He should take action against the sinner, and He yet takes action for him, then and then alone can we speak of grace." [Morris]

• God's grace to the nations (v. 7)

- ✓ When Zechariah speaks of the **blood [in] their mouths** and **detestable things** it refers to "abominable" religious practices including eating unclean meat (Is. 66:3; Dt. 29:17). Flagrant rebellion against God's law and replacing God with any other kind of idolatrous worship.
- ✓ **I will remove...** That is, God will take away their sin and their idolatry.
- ✓ Not only will He take away their idolatry, but **they also will be a remnant for our God.**
 - We speak often of the remnant of Israel that God has preserved (e.g., Rom. 9-11).
 - But here (in the OT), He also has a remnant among the Gentiles that He will save.
 - And this remnant will come from the most despicable of the nations. (God loves to save sinners and even His enemies — which is good news for us!)
- ✓ Not only will there be a remnant, but they will be preserved **like a clan in Judah** — Philistia will become like a family in Judah.
 - Further, **Ekron (will be) like a Jebusite** — the Israelites did not eradicate them when they came into the land after leaving Egypt, so they were enfolded into Israel (1 Kg. 9:20-21).
 - This is only will happen because God graciously enfolds Gentiles into His promises to Israel (Eph. 2:13-14; Rom. 11:30-32).
- ✓ God is opposed to all sin, but He is also gracious to all sinners. Even though He has a particular plan for Israel, there will also still be blessing to the nations (**Rev. 7:9**).
- ✓ The breadth and depth of our sin is incomprehensible. And God's grace is so great that it infinitely supersedes every aspect of our horrid sin.
- ✓ Whatever your sin, however much your sin, you can repent and God will forgive. Good news indeed.

• God's grace to Israel (v. 8)

- ✓ Not only is God gracious to the nations, but He is also gracious to Israel.
- ✓ **I will encamp around My house...** — God guards and protects His people. "House" could refer to the temple, but given that He is guarding because of an "army," it probably refers to the land.
- ✓ The point is that no **oppressor** will overwhelm or defeat Israel. They have been oppressed in the past; but that will **not** happen again, **anymore**, which points to an eternal provision. God used Alexander as a temporary protection for Israel; the King is coming as a permanent provision.
- ✓ And God has **My eyes** on them; He is the One watching, guarding, and protecting His people. He omnisciently sees their distress and He responds to preserve (e.g., Ex. 3:7; Ps. 121).
- ✓ "There is no safety comparable to that enjoyed under the gracious eye of our loving God." [Feinberg]

- ✓ In this passage, God started far to the north and removed Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Ture, Sidon, and Philistia — and He will enter Jerusalem in triumphal procession (v. 9). All the while He has had His eye on His people, protecting and keeping them.
- ✓ Whatever is happening in this world or to God's people, if they are His, His eye is on them and they are safe. If you belong to Him, even if you are suffering, He is watching and you are safe.

CONCLUSION: Four considerations —

- ✓ *If you are suffering, be comforted that it will not last and God will recompense.*
- ✓ *If you are inflicting suffering, know that God will hold you accountable.* No sufferer permanently escapes God's wrath. He will account for every sin that has ever been committed. No one escapes.
- ✓ *If you are inflicting suffering, know that God is patient, but only for one reason* — to lead you to repentance (and you can repent).
- ✓ *There is opportunity for joy for both the sufferer and the one who causes suffering.*

COMMUNION PRAYER

BENEDICTION (Rob Treat): Jude 24-25