

## The Wrath Of God

**A Focus of Trumpets**

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Anger is not a pretty emotion. You probably know that. All of us have become truly angry at some point in our lives. We have seen others become angry, either at us or at someone else, and we can tell just from observing it that that is not very pretty either. Perhaps we have even seen somebody legitimately furious about something to the point that they are on the verge of madness, as the British would say, almost insane with rage. The angry person, if you think about it, would not want his picture snapped at that moment. The blood begins surging, the face flushes, the nose scrunches, the eyes draw together, lips curl, and quickly unmentionable words spew from their mouth.

Like I said, rage, anger, wrath is not pretty, but some anger is justified. As a real emotion it is not a sin in itself to become angry, but it is a ready platform for sin if we allow it to rage unchecked. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:26, "Be angry, and do not sin." Actually he is there quoting directly Psalm 4:4, which says of course the same thing, and a few other scriptures make very similar statements. They say "cease from anger" or "cease from wrath" or some something very much like that. Psalm 37 has a few of those statements.

But the next thing that Paul writes in Ephesians 4:27 is, "nor give place to the devil" comes right after that. So "Be angry and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath" immediately followed by "nor give place to the devil." Anger, if not controlled, opens a crack for Satan to exploit. He gets a foot in or gets a hand in and he begins at that point to expand his influence, and the opportunity for sin skyrockets. Because not only do we have our own anger fueling this, but now we have Satan's anger, and all his devious ways flooding into our minds through his own hostile spirit.

To be honest, anger scares me. Now, I am speaking about my own anger specifically. But in others, anger certainly makes me worry. I do not like being around angry people. There is a proverb to that effect, I believe. My

own anger puts me on edge because I know, because of certain experiences that I have had, that I have a terrible temper. You may not think that, but I know it. I know it in my heart of hearts, as it were, that I could get enraged very quickly and it is just like a volcano going off.

I have been aware of it since I was 16 years old and probably knew about it before then. But when I was 16 things happened that made me aware of that anger brewing inside me. And since that time, I will not tell you how many years, but it is several decades now, I have seriously sought to tamp it down, control it, because I do not want it coming out again. I cannot say that I have done it successfully all the time, but most of the time I have.

My dad was witness to one incident, the one I am thinking about in 1982. I was 16 years old. And I played Colt League Baseball out in Lexington, South Carolina. The previous year I had thought that I was going to quit my baseball career at Pony League, but the coach that I had played Little League for had gone up to the Colt League ranks with his son, and he convinced me to play for him. I was having a terrible year at the plate. It was really bad. I could barely put the bat on the ball. My average was in the low one hundreds and I am sure it dipped below 100 at one point. I was consistently striking out. I could not hit the ball! Only my fielding, which was better than average, was keeping me in the lineup. And actually the coach's kindness too, I guess he was having some pity on me. But I was batting 9th every day, every game.

I have to admit the pitching was better in Colt League, much better than in Pony League. The boys' arms were better, they were faster, their fastballs were faster, and they were beginning to develop some really nasty breaking pitches about that time. It was a bit out of my league, pardon the pun. I was not aware of it at the time though, but most of my problem was that I really needed glasses. I was terribly nearsighted, I could not see the ball coming out of the pitcher's hand for the life of me. It was on me before I really recognized it. All it was was a white blur and so I was just up there flailing away, guessing where the ball might be. Now even a blind squirrel finds a nut every once in a while, so I did get a hit now and then, but it was just absolute chance.

Well, during the late innings of a game, I cannot remember the exact situation, but I do know that it was a close game and that a base hit would

have been a great help. So I walked up to the plate and I told myself that now would be a great time to break out of my slump and I proceeded to strike out on three or four pitches. Like I said, I was just flailing away and I was furious at myself, seeing red, you know, the proverbial seeing red—I saw red. It just rose up in me and I was so enraged at myself that I took one step out of the batter's box and I swung my bat up against the chain link fence that was around home plate there. The umpire looked at me and he said, "This is a warning. You do that again, you're out of here." And that calmed me down quite a bit because I like playing ball.

But I was immediately ashamed that I had done it. I realized right then that that is how fast anger can rise and make you do something that you will eventually regret, or very quickly regret in my case. My dad was sitting in the bleachers that evening; he must have driven over to see me play after visiting a member in the Columbia church, and all he said to me about it after the game was, "I don't want to see you do that ever again." And I have not. I have never thrown a bat since in rage or otherwise. (laughter)

Since that time, I have been very aware of my tripwire anger and I do my best to remain calm and unruffled in trying circumstances. And I cannot say that I have always been successful. I have let it rise up a time or two and I am very sorry about that. But overall, after all these years, I am far from being an angry person. I would rather laugh than get angry and I tamp the anger down as soon as I feel it rise and I am usually pretty successful at controlling it.

But our human experience of anger, especially my stupid anger that I had struck out for the 19th time or whatever it was, it stands in stark contrast to divine anger, the wrath of God. Our wrath is selfish. It is irrational. It is often uncontrolled and it does great harm. On the other hand, God's wrath is just and it is impartial, it is measured, it is usually very quick, even though it may be very destructive while it is being poured out.

God's wrath, though, is not an insignificant subject. We tend to like to emphasize His kinder virtues, but the Bible talks about God's wrath quite a bit. Phrases like God's anger, God's wrath, God's fury. Or maybe it will change the title. Maybe it will be the Lord's wrath, the Lord's anger, the Lord's fury. However it is set up, it is mentioned 64 times in the New King

James version. This does not include the 56 times that the possessive pronoun His is used. So it is His anger, His wrath, His fury. And together, that is 120 times that it is mentioned in just those phrases. Another 100 or so verses have the words anger, wrath, or fury with reference to God in other kinds of phrases that you have to really figure out how to set up all those phrases to find them, but you have about 220 or so mentions of God's wrath in the Scriptures.

I would like to begin in Psalm 103. If you know your psalms, you know that Psalm 103 is a praise of God for all His blessings and mercies. By the time you get to verse 8, it is talking about His mercy and His grace.

**Psalm 103:8** The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy.

So you have that one view of Him here from a man (this is a psalm of David), who looked at God and did not see an angry God, but he saw His grace and mercy. He saw that God could have easily become angry with him on many occasions very quickly. Well, think of his adultery with Bathsheba. How long did God forbear with him and did not get angry with him? We know the birth of the child took place right about the time that Nathan came and told him, "You've sinned a great sin," and gave that parable about the sheep. And so that was nine months or so that God forbore with him and did not get angry. But of course God's wrath descended upon him and that child died.

But let us balance this out a little bit. Let us go back to Psalm 7. Notice this part of God's character.

**Psalm 7:11** God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

Even though God's anger did not manifest to David, He was angry at his sin. He had done great wickedness and He let David stew in those juices for a long time to see what David would do. And it took quite a jolt for David to repent of that sin. So we can be happy, like David was in Psalm 103, that God gives us a chance to repent before He lays down the boom, if you will.

Now, we have to think about this. These seeming opposites—the wonderful mercy and His slowness to wrath—has to be set side-by-side with the fact that He is angry with the wicked every day. These are two intrinsic parts of God's divine holy, righteous character: His love and mercy and grace on the one hand, and His terrible wrath on the other. His justice, as it says. He is a just judge and He gets angry as a judge for the sins that are committed.

Let us go to Romans 11, and we will read verses 21 and 22. There is a great deal in the book of Romans about God's wrath and His justice—His judgment. Here Paul brings out the seeming dichotomy.

**Romans 11:21-22** For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness [on the one side] and the severity of God [on the other]: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

So God has given us a measure of His goodness, great goodness, by calling us and granting us repentance and giving us all of those good things through His Spirit, especially the revelation of Himself and giving us the opportunity to have a relationship with Him. But he says we have to continue in that because if we do not, we are going to taste some of that severity.

Now these two sides, this goodness and severity, two attributes of God's nature, cannot be separated. You cannot have one without the other because, in actuality, God's wrath is an aspect of His love. God's severity is an aspect of His goodness, if you will, using the terms Paul uses there in Romans 11. It is an act of love for God to punish sinners in wrath, to provide true and equitable justice, to eliminate evil. That love that is from God for His people to eliminate evil from their environment. He does not do it all the time and He does not do it completely all the time in this age. But ultimately He will. That is one of His great goals—to eliminate all evil until all is holiness and righteousness and then the Father can dwell with us.

He wants to not only eliminate evil, but He wants to spur repentance. He would rather spur repentance than eliminate an evil person. He would rather that evil person change and become good. So He becomes angry for good ends. He wants to produce righteous character in everyone and He will do it

by love or He will do it by wrath, whatever it takes and everything in between too. He is willing to do all of those things to get us to change.

You are probably aware that early in the 20th century, late in the 19th, and even in some denominations up to now, the mainstream Protestant churches have been very eager to minimize the doctrine of God's wrath. They have been overemphasizing the love of God, not realizing that wrath is part of that love. And so a commentator named F. C. Synge, in his *Epistle to the Ephesians*, writes this:

Those who perceive only the love of God avert their eyes from the uncongenial doctrine of the wrath of God. But in eliminating the wrath or disgrace of God, they have also eliminated the grace of God. Where there is no fear, there can be no rescue. Where there is no condemnation, there could be no acquittal. Love must be based on justice else it degenerates into mere affection.

He is telling us that our relationship with God must include the possibility of God's wrath or else it loses its effectiveness. If it is only based on the goodness of God, it tends, like he says, to devolve into mere affection and we try to get away with as much as possible. We need the fear of God as well as the love of God, the grace of God, if you will.

Well, it is the Day of Trumpets, is not it, and that is the day in which God's wrath comes into focus. The holy day encompasses the events at the close of the age leading up to the return of Christ, and a significant part of that time is the time of God's wrath, more commonly called the Day of the Lord. We will look at God's wrath a bit more closely today because as we approach Christ's second coming, the wrath of God is going to become a great deal more important to us and to this world. We are going to have to come up against it, as it were, keep it in the forefront of our minds because God is acting and we need to make sure we are on the right side of history, as it were.

Let us go back to Leviticus 23. I always like to touch base with the holy day and the giving of the law here about this particular holy day. So we will read what is said about the Feast of Trumpets here in Leviticus 23:23. It is an easy

one to remember. It is one of the shortest ones that is given and thus the Day of Trumpets is the most mysterious of the holy days unless you know the plan of God.

**Leviticus 23:23-25** Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a Sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord.'"

God's command, of course, is to observe this day, the first day of the seventh month, first day of what is called Tishri. It is a Sabbath rest. So it is another Sabbath that we keep during which we are not supposed to do our customary work, work that we do for a living work, work that we do around the house, those sorts of things, those things should be done on the other days. This is a day that is dedicated to the Lord. It is a holy convocation, like we are doing right now, hearing the words of the Lord, and it is a memorial of blowing of trumpets. Other versions say it is a memorial of the shout of the shofar or maybe even more literally, a remembrance of shouting, a memorial of shouting.

Now I want to focus in on the trumpet imagery a little bit. If we were to go to Numbers 10, it has a whole list of the ways trumpets were used in the camp of Israel. Mostly it is talking about the silver trumpets and such there, but some of these can apply to this day as well. I just want to give a general idea of what trumpets were blown for. They could be used as a cry of an alarm. "Hey, someone is attacking the camp, be ready!" Or it could be, going further, a call to arms, "Everybody grab up his sword or a spear and get ready to fight." It could be a calling to assembly, like calling to a holy convocation. The trumpet would be blown in a certain way and people would know to gather. It would be therefore a calling to worship as we are doing here.

Trumpets were used in the camp to give instruction for movement. So they blow a certain way and they would say, get ready, take down your tent, we are going to go, and then blow it another way and it would mean move out to the various certain tribes as they went in their order across the wilderness. It

is also a way to announce certain events such as a feast day. It was blown a certain way to say, "hey, this is the holy day." Or it was blown on the Jubilee or it was blown when a king was being coronated. So lots of different ways that the trumpet was used in ancient Israel. Like I said, these can be found in Numbers 10 and in other contexts where trumpets are blown.

We know from the New Testament, specifically Revelation 8 and 9, that trumpets will be used to announce plagues, steps in God's wrath, as it were, against this world and its evil. Specifically in those chapters, it is the plagues of the Day of the Lord. And the sounding of the seventh trumpet is particularly significant. So we are going to go there to Revelation 11. There is a bit of a gap between the trumpets being blown in 8 and 9 and then Revelation 10 is an inset chapter and so is most of chapter 11. And then we get to the end of chapter 11 and we find the seventh trumpet blown.

**Revelation 11:15-19** Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that you should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth." Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

So this trumpet announces the return of Jesus Christ, the beginning of His reign on earth. And also it announces as we see here that the time of His great wrath has come. Now we know this is the way it is. It is verified in Jesus' Olivet prophecy. Please go back to Matthew 24 with me. We will see some convergence here.



**Matthew 24:29-31** "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

It also is verified in Paul's prophecy about the resurrection from the dead at His coming. And we will go look at that in I Corinthians 15.

**I Corinthians 15:50-52** Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

And there is a similar prophecy in I Thessalonians 4.

**I Thessalonians 4:13-18** I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [that is, those who have died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

These validating prophecies are rather benign compared to the terrors described in the book of Revelation, and elsewhere, regarding the Day of the Lord. Let us look at some of those. I am not trying to scare anybody here, but God's wrath is real!

**Revelation 14:17-20** [It sets up the seven last plagues. John writes here,] Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

This is talking about a terrible battle in which millions of gallons of blood are shed up to the horses' bridles. That is deep, four or five feet of blood in the valleys there outside Jerusalem. That is pretty gory. God is not happy. He has had it up to here with mankind and his sins, his rejection of Him, and He lets it out. He has had enough.

Now, this is not the only place where such things are mentioned. Let us go to Zechariah 14.

**Zechariah 14:1-5** Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My

mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You.

**Zechariah 14:12-15** And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths. It shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the Lord will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbor, and raise his hand against his neighbor's hand; Judah also will fight at Jerusalem. And the wealth of the surrounding nations shall be gathered together: Gold, silver, and apparel in great abundance. Such also shall be the plague on the horse and the mule, on the camel and the donkey, and all the cattle that will be in those camps. So shall this plague be.

Very gruesome, but that is the sort of thing that God is going to do at the end. Remember, He is slow to anger, but it has been building against mankind because they refuse to repent. They refuse to change. And when they see His Son coming in the clouds, as it said there in Matthew 24, they will mourn. They will be in terror of Him. And what will they do rather than go down on their knees and worship Him? The Bible tells us that they gather together and fight Him. And so what happens is overwhelming devastation and death. Total obliteration of that army that is coming up against Him. That is part of the wrath of God that we need to investigate because it seems so opposite to what we think of God. But it is not. The wrath of God is part of His love.

Now the wrath of God, and even the term Day of the Lord, is also associated with historical events. It is not just the time of the end, and these are recorded in Scripture. Certainly things like the destruction of Israel and the destruction of Judah were days of the Lord. He had had it up to here again with them. So we will look at some of them. We call these things by various names, but they are definitely examples of God's wrath in history. So let us go back to Genesis. God's wrath came early.

**Genesis 6:5-8** Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

**Genesis 6:11-13** The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth."

So obviously He did the Great Flood, Noah's Flood we call it. It was not Noah's Flood. It was God's Flood and He did it as a an instrument of His wrath upon evil mankind.

**Genesis 18:20-21** And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know."

**Genesis 19:12-13** Then the men [these are the angels that came to Lot] said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city—take them out of this place! For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it."

**Genesis 19:23-25** The sun had risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zoar. Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom

and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens. So he overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

He totally obliterated those cities of the plain there where the Dead Sea now is. He did it because their sin once again was very grievous before Him and He had to do something to stop it. And so His wrath ensued.

Now to the book of Numbers, chapter 11. Here is another one where God's wrath came against His own people in the wilderness.

**Numbers 11:1-6** Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched. So he called the name of that place Taberah, because the fire of the Lord had burned among them. Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"

**Numbers 11:31-34** Now a wind went out from the Lord, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. And the people stayed up all that day, all that night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.

That was not fun. Here they were having a great feast out there thinking that they had finally forced God into giving them food to eat that they would appreciate. And while it was still between their teeth, He sent this plague among them and killed a great many people for their sin.

Let us go to Judges 2. The hits keep coming here, and I am leaving a lot of them out. This one is kind of a summary of the way He has dealt with Israel.

**Judges 2:11-15** Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. [Notice that. The Lord has sworn that He would do this to them if they had failed Him.] and they were greatly distressed.

This happened through the whole period of the time of the judges for about 400 years, where they would go and they do okay for a while under a good judge, and then they would slacken off and become evil once again and God would send something against them, some other nation against them in His wrath to bring them around so that they would follow Him. And He would also, as it goes on to say, raise up judges. If it was a good judge, they had peace for a while, and if not, it would continue to get worse and worse for those people because God's wrath was not appeased.

Let us now go to II Kings. This is probably the one that we think of most often in terms of God's wrath in the Old Testament.

**II Kings 17:7-18** For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of

the land of Egypt [sounds a whole lot like Judges there], from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right [Look at that. They were trying to hide it. They were doing secretly.], and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger [What this is is an indictment here. The chronicler, or whoever is doing this, is listing out all of the things that the people had done to show that God was very much justified in what He did.], for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this thing."

Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, in which I sent to you by My servants the prophets." [God had done His due diligence. He had tried to bring them around ever since the covenant had been made with them and they continually refused Him.] Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God [There is that, they left them all.], made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven and serve Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the Lord was

very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.

And let us go and see the end of the story in II Chronicles 36. Because though Judah was left, they did exactly as Israel had done, even worse actually, Ezekiel tells us.

**II Chronicles 36:15-21** And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people [remember that love, that goodness] and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. [It got to the point where there could not be repentance from them. There was not going to be any change and so God struck.] Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, or the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword, he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

So, He did this not only to the tribes of Israel, but He did it to Judah, Levi, and Benjamin as well. And all the tribes of Israel were removed from the land. He did this in His wrath and in His goodness because He will work with the children of Israel at another time.

As we saw in all those verses that we read, the anger or the wrath of God is cited as the cause of the destruction and death. He had reached a point where He had to act. He was *slow* to wrath. How long did He give those people



before the Flood? It was somewhere around 1,600 years and they reached a height of violence and sin, wickedness, that He said, "I've had it! We've got to start over with Noah, who has found grace in My sight. Start with a good foundation again and start over." And I did not read Genesis 11 because by the time you get to the Tower of Babel, they were at it again. And He used a more benign means at that time, dividing their languages to bring about a cessation of a lot of that so that they scattered around and things quieted down quite a bit.

But the same thing happened with His own people, Israel. And He finally, after several hundred years, reached the point where He said, "I have to act again." Because this is a normal tendency of human nature to do this. Even starting out as well as possible with people like Noah and Moses and Joshua, even having great men like David and all the prophets, that did not help. I mean, it might have helped for a time, but people did not follow them for very long. The book of Joshua, or maybe it is the first part of Judges, says that as long as Joshua was alive, people did pretty well. All those elders that had gone through the wilderness and lived into Joshua's time, things were okay. But as soon as they died, they went into sin and they went into sin very badly and God had then, of course, to call up judges and we have all that going on in there in the book of Judges.

But God has a breaking point, as it were, where it just boils over and He has to act, He has to end things for the time being so that He can establish righteousness again and start the next generation off right. And He will do that at the end time. That is what He is doing there. He is going to come back in great wrath, get rid of a great amount of people who are making this society what it is today, and He is going to start off with a righteous generation in the Millennium, with Him in control. And we know that goes for a thousand years, and what happens? As soon as Satan's influence is brought back, he is released from his prison, the same cycle of human nature begins again. And what does God do? He wipes them out! And we start the one hundred years or however long the Great White Throne judgment period will be, with all those people who went through it once before. But this time they are going to have God there and they will have to make their decision.

But this is the way it works. That is how God has chosen to work with mankind and He is doing it in righteousness because that is how it has got to

be. There must be punishment, there must be discipline, there must be an end to evil, and He will bring it about through His wrath and through His grace.

Let us go to Amos 3. This is a very important passage here, especially for us and for Israel. But it is an overall principle of life.

**Amos 3:1-2** Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore [notice this, because I have known only you of all the people on the earth] I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Because of who they were and mostly it was because of who they had dealt with all those years, and because of all that He had given them, they had to be punished. Remember the famous truth Peter Parker's Uncle Ben told him after he got his Spidey powers? "With great power comes great responsibility."

By the way that quotation does not begin with Stan Lee. He was a great copier of things. The oldest attestation of that quotation comes from a 1793 French National Convention decree. This was during the French Revolution. They put out a decree and part of it said they must consider that great responsibility follows inseparably from great power. And similar things have been said by other people like Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And you know what? The oldest attestation that I was able to find was about, oh, 30 AD. When Jesus Christ said in Luke 12:48, "To whom much is given, from him much will be required." Same principle.

Now these verses in Amos 3 could be summed up as, "With great favor and knowledge of God comes great responsibility." God tells His chosen people that because He had revealed Himself and His will only to them out of everyone that was on earth, and He bestowed on them such great blessings and loving favor for hundreds of years, they had the responsibility to love and obey Him. That is all He asked. "I will give you wealth. I will give you land. I will give you health. I will give you all of these blessings."

We could go back to Psalm 103 again and read all those blessings that God gives to His people and all they had to do was obey Him and love Him. Do what He said, revere Him, fear Him, worship Him. That is not asking a whole lot. Of course He wanted them also, just as they feared Him and loved Him, that they should love their neighbors as themselves. That they should be kind to one another. That they should not steal from one another, murder one another, or commit adultery or lie, or covet their neighbor's wife or donkey or maidservant or manservant. You know, all those things in the Ten Commandments. It is not a whole big list. It does not require a whole lot of brain power. You could memorize them when you are five years old. It is not that hard and that is all He asked of them.

They were, because they had said, "Hey, all this we will do" there in the wilderness, sprinkled the blood on the covenant and it was ratified, everything was closed, and said, "Okay, this is what you've agreed to do." And you know what? They failed *miserably* in all of that. They were legally bound by the covenant to do these things and they could not even do that, those simple things. And they really are simple things. They are not hard. But they always wanted to go their own way.

They failed so miserably in that sacred duty that they had. That because of the language that was in that covenant, they instead became the special objects of His wrath. That is what Amos 3:2 says. "Because you only I have known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." It is one thing leading inexorably to another because of human nature. They did not have the Spirit of God. They did not follow His way. Therefore He had to punish them. It was just the way things work with human beings, even those human beings that have all of this head start, all of this knowledge, all of His favor.

How many battles did He win for them? How much influence did He have in keeping the other nations away? He gave them peace and prosperity. He gave them good leaders which He raised up and trained Himself. And still they could not do those things. They failed. And so God said, "Read the covenant. I told you way back then that if you don't do this, I am forced to do

that." And He did. He did exactly what He said. He kept the terms of the covenant to the letter, unlike them who could not even keep the letter of the law.

Think of it this way: God was bound by the same covenant to punish them for all their iniquities. It was written right there in the covenant. Do this, I will bless you. Do not do these things, I will curse you. I will bring all these things against you and you will die, you will be scattered, you will be put in exile, you will have all of these bad things happen to you—and He followed it right down the line.

See, that is God as compared to we humans. We always fiddle with things and try to get around Him. We try to use courtroom antics or legalese to get in the loophole and figure out ways that it is going to benefit us. God does not do that. God does exactly what He says. He is going to do mostly because we do not do what we say we are going to do.

A similar covenantal principle exists not only between God and Israel, but also between God and all mankind—between the Creator and His creation. I bet a lot of you are going to say between Him and us, right? Well, I want to go a little wider before we bring it back to us personally. Let us go to Romans 1. Remember I told you earlier, that Romans contained a lot about God's wrath and His judgment and His justice.

**Romans 1:18-26** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and [divine nature or divinity rather than Godhead], so they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies

among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions.

**Romans 1:28-32** And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful [Boy, that Paul. He is a thesaurus, is he not?]; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

The key here is verse 20. Being mankind's Creator, God can expect His creations to revere and obey Him. It is just plain—a creator has power over his creations. I mean, we do not even have to talk God and humanity here. We talk anybody who is a creator of something. He has the power over his creation just by merely being the one who created them. He can, that is, God, expect their thanks for creating them and for giving them a wonderful environment in which to live and the stars at night and cool breezes in the heat of the day. But it is this law, if you will, that the lesser respects the greater. Since He is our Life-giver and Master, He can expect that we will do these things—that we should love Him and obey Him.

But despite giving oodles a proof of Himself and His power in the creation and all the things we see, and not only that, He has given a Book full of instructions, yet in wickedness they suppress the truth to give themselves a license to do whatever they pleased. They just totally rejected Him. Forgot about Him, suppressed Him. But Paul says here that there is so much proof out there that they have no excuse. They have no reasonable justification for what they did. In turn, God let them experience the deadly and bitter fruits of their many sins and perversions.

Remember, God is *always* righteous. He always does what is good and so He is justified in His judgment of death. That is what he gets to verse 32. He is saying there, God is justified in giving a death sentence to every single person on this earth because of the wickedness of mankind, because we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We all have black marks under our names. We are all crossed out, as it were, in the Book of Life until He calls us. Or our names are not written at all there, which is even worse. But then He calls and things change. But before we get to that, I want to go through a few principles about God's wrath that Paul talks about here in Romans 2. Because he goes from this overall statement of God's righteousness in giving this sentence of death, and then he lays down these principles.

**Romans 2:1-16** Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

For as many have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the

doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

We have here in this long section, certain principles of God's wrath that are sprinkled throughout. So I want to give you a list of five principles that I have found in here.

First, *God's judgment, and thus His wrath, is based in truth.* Hebrews 4:13 tells us that all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. And because it is impossible for God to lie, which is said in Hebrews 6:18, He deals in reality, not in any shading of the truth by any means. So His judgment is always correct.

Second, *God's judgment, and thus His wrath, fall only after man rejects God's goodness and exhausts His forbearance and longsuffering.* During that time in which He is forbearing, He works out of His goodness to lead sinners to repentance. But since all have sinned and fall short of God's glory, that is Romans 3:23, all humanity deserves death.

Third, *God's judgment, and thus His wrath, are reactions to real human deeds.* He bases His judgment on actual human sinful behavior and His evidence therefore is a mile high because the behavior of mankind is so evidently evil. In other words, He does not have to do any judging, we condemn ourselves. Unlike some churches out there that call themselves Christian, it is not a blanket condemnation nor a hereditary consequence of original sin. Each person's deeds condemn him. He does not need to condemn all mankind just in a general way because we are all going to be evil, right? No, He actually knows that each one of us has sinned ourselves.

Fourth, *God's judgment, and thus His wrath, are impartial.* He cannot be bribed or swayed by any kind of clever legal arguments. You could get the best lawyer in the world and you would still be condemned. He calls them as He sees them, which that umpire did with me when I threw my bat. He

should have thrown me out. But God judges perfectly. He does not give a pass to the rich or to the poor. He does not give a pass to people who are high in status or low. He does not give the popular or the obscure, the Jew, the Gentile, the slave or free, man or woman, any outs. He judges with equity, that is, all are equal under the law. And we cannot do anything to change that in a human sense. And if some do not know the formal law, he says there as he gets towards the end of that passage, they are judged according to the law written in their hearts, which condemns them. Their own hearts condemn them. They know by nature that the things that they were doing were wrong, they were doing were wrong. And so they too are judged as wicked and sinful, like the rest of humanity.

Fifth, *All men, all women, must stand before God's judgment*. No one gets a pass on that either. Let us go to II Corinthians 5, verse 10. That is where I got this principle.

**II Corinthians 5:10-11** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. [We might as well read verse 11 just to get the instruction.] Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; for we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known to your consciences.

So, if you know the wrath of God, then that should spur you out of the fear of God, the fear of the Lord, to make those changes that are necessary. Even those who are called and are converted and under God's grace are still under judgment.

**I Peter 4:17-18** For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?"

This is something we need to remember. We are under judgment right now. This is our day of salvation. This is when we must show God that we are on His side, that we are going to obey the terms of the covenant. And so, because we are under the judgment of God right now, we must endure to the



end. Someone very famous said that—Jesus Christ Himself—in Matthew 24:13. The reason we must endure to the end is because our period of judgment lasts our entire lives and God wants to know, He wants really to know, like He wanted to know with Abraham when Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. Remember what He said after Abraham completed that test? He said, "Now I know" that he was going to be faithful to God. So God wants to know if we will maintain our faith and our love for Him to the end. Are we going to remain loyal?

**Hebrews 3:14** For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

He does not want people necessarily that have a flush of zeal at the beginning and then peter out for the rest of their lives. He is not real big on deathbed repentances—when somebody suddenly sees "I'm dying!" and they give their heart to the Lord—without any proof or any time of experience in which to show that they are loyal. Maybe there are some that have done that. I do not want to say that that is not a possibility. But God tends to like to see long-term loyalty, long-term results. He wants to see if we are going to stay the course no matter what comes up. That is why He gives us three score years and ten, and maybe 80 if we are healthy, by reason of strength.

Let us conclude in I Thessalonians 5. Remember we read the end of I Thessalonians 4 where he had comforted the people there concerning those who had fallen asleep and he gave them good news. "Look, God has reserved them. They will arise and meet Him in the air when He returns." Now, at the beginning of chapter 5, he is encouraging those who remain in their present position before Jesus Christ. Let us look at the first eleven verses here.

**I Thessalonians 5:1-11** But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the

night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

So, this is our present status before God. As long as we maintain our faithful relationship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ, we are not under wrath, but under grace. I Thessalonians 1:10 says that Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come, and Romans 5:9 says we shall be saved from wrath through Him. He is our connection to life, not wrath; to grace, not death.

Salvation is ours at the sound of the seventh trumpet of God, the fulfillment of this Feast of Trumpets when we will rise to meet Christ in the air and live with Him for all eternity in His Kingdom.