

BIBLE OVERVIEW 13: WARNING OF JUDGEMENT TO COME

The history of God's people in the Land is one of an overall spiral downwards (with occasional but brief reversals).

Over 400 years:
(Why such a long time?)
The nation firstly splits into 2.

The Northern Kingdom, Israel more quickly degenerates and gives itself over to apostasy – turning from God (Yahweh) and worshipping the gods of the nations.

The Kings are morally and spiritually corrupt and lead the nation astray.

Despite the warnings of the prophets of God's coming judgement and the need to repent, the drift continues until the northern Kingdom is defeated by Assyria in 721 BC – never to reappear

"The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them until the Lord removed them from his presence, as **he had warned through all his servants the prophets**. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria and they are still there" 2 Kings 17:22-23.

Northern Prophets such as Hosea – warned the nation to turn back to God.

Hosea 1-3

Remarkable story of Hosea serves as powerful visual aid to Israel.

Hosea 1:2-3 (900) Hosea instructed to marry as 'adulterous' woman paralleling Israel's 'spiritual adultery'.

Hosea 3 His wife Gomer living with another lover, Hosea called to go and love her again and bring her home. "Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites" (3:1)

This is 'hesed love'.

Yet the names given to his children – display both the warning of God's judgement and the promise of his restoring grace.

See 1:6-7, 9 but also v10-11

God's Word of judgement is never his last word.

Important Principle:

Expect and embrace seeming paradoxes in the Old Testament! They should be there and they ought to cause the reader to scratch his head and ask, "How can that be?"

Why?

Because "all God's promises are 'yes' in Christ"! Until Christ comes they are unfulfilled. The Old Testament is full of unanswered questions, unfulfilled promises, seeming paradoxes – don't panic – they are meant to point us to Jesus!

(Last Sunday's question about contradictions in the Bible – some are meant to be there because they find their resolution in Christ)

Hosea gives us one of the most beautiful pictures of God's steadfast love/grace. The imagery of marriage to depict the relationship between God and his people helps us to understand the horror of idolatry, the fiercely jealous love of God (see James 4:4-5, and NIV footnote) and his persevering love despite our constant waywardness.

The Old Testament keeps posing this question:

Which will win out: - our rebelliousness or God's hesed love? Will he give up on us or will we give up our adulterous ways? (Note the beautiful 2:6-8, 14-15, 19-20, 23) will it end in judgement or grace for God's people?

1 Peter 2:9-10 (written to gentile believers)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy"

Who did Hosea minister to?

Who was his book written for? (1:1)

What is the significance of that?

The Principle of “Accumulative Authentication”!!

Group ‘A’ + warning if ignored = judgement

Group ‘B’ – remember ‘group A’ + warning if ignored = judgement

Group ‘C’ – remember ‘group A’ + remember ‘group B’ + warning if ignored = judgement

Principle at work all the way through the Bible (partly helps to answer the question “if the Bible is our ultimate authority because it says it is, isn’t that a circular argument? And if so – how can you get into the circle?”)

Matthew 23:37-24:2 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to kill you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look your house is left to you desolate.... Do you see all these things,” he asked, “I tell you the truth not one stone will be left on another; every one will be thrown down”.

Isaiah:

One of the greatest of all the Old Testament Prophets, ministering at the same time as Hosea but in Judah, the southern Kingdom.

Isaiah 6 – the Call of Isaiah

- Who does Isaiah see? (v1,5 – see also John 12:38-41)
- What is his response? What is so significant about v5 for Isaiah in particular?

His sin is atoned for and responds to the voice of God asking ‘whom shall I send? Who will go for us?’ (Note the plural)

- V9-13 What will be the outcome/consequence of Isaiah’s ministry?
- Is there any hope?

Isaiah 1-39 – dominant theme = God’s Judgement

40-66 – dominant theme – God’s Salvation

"Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for" Isaiah 40:1

The importance of the 'Servant of the Lord':

Chapter 49: 6

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

50:6-7

"I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me; I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near"

52:13-53:12

Note:

- Not physically impressive, no beauty or majesty
- Despised and rejected by men
- He will suffer for the sins of the people but the people will think he suffers because of his own sin
- His punishment will bring peace to God's people
- At his death he will not seek to vindicate himself
- He will be given a grave among the rich (Matt 27:57-61)
- God's plan is for him to suffer and be crushed
- He will justify many and bear their sin
- He will have many offspring

This 'Servant' figure – will suffer and die, he will be punished by God not for his sin but for the people's sin, he will be misunderstood, despised and rejected.

For a 'good' Jew like Peter – the promised King of 2 Samuel 7 – whose kingdom will be established forever and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who will have no majesty, but will suffer and die – are necessarily two different figures – hence his vehement response to Jesus in Matthew 16:22.

What does Peter, at this point, fail to understand? (John 18:36, which is understood so remarkably by the dying thief Luke 23:42-43 and beautifully portrayed by John in Revelation 5 p1237)

Isaiah's vision of renewed heavens and earth 65:17-25

(Nb Heavens here used to describe universe, as in Genesis 1:1, not what we think of when we use the word 'heaven')

The enlargement of the prophetic vision – not just God's people in the land of Canaan – but new heaven and earth (see Revelation 21)

The Reality of God's Judgement

Jeremiah:

Jeremiah prophesied up to and into the Exile – in his lifetime he warned of God's judgement and then lived to experience its reality as it fell upon Judah and Jerusalem.

Major theme in Jeremiah:

Conflict between Jeremiah and the 'false prophets'

"From the least to the greatest all are greedy for gain, prophets and priests alike all practise deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say when there is no peace" 6:13-14

"Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes...they keep saying to those who despise me, 'The Lord says: You will have peace' and to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you' 23:16-17

Jeremiah – sensitive. Called to deliver a 'hard message' that brings him great personal conflict, opposition and suffering, yet has great love for his people and agonises over the reality of the coming judgement.

"Oh that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people" 9:1

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the Exile is all God's doing. He uses Babylon to bring his fierce judgement upon his people.

"This is what the Lord says: 'At this time I will hurl out those who live in this land; I will bring distress on them so that they may be captured'" 10:18

"Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the Lord says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you'" 18:11

The Book of Lamentations gives a very graphic description of the reality of the awful wrath of God falling upon a people

Principle of accumulative authentication:

- The Old Testament both warns of and experiences a taste of the reality of the judgement and wrath of God.
- What we see in the Old is 'amplified' in the New
- What we see of God's wrath in the Old Testament is a shadow/foretaste of the fuller wrath of God that will be experienced on The judgement Day, when Jesus returns to 'judge the living and the dead'.
- We need to heed the warnings of God's coming wrath because we can learn from the OT

"If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" Matt 5:30

"In the past God overlooked all such ignorance but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed." Acts 17:30-31

"Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgement will be revealed." Romans 2:5

"This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ as my gospel declares" Romans 2:16

"Like the rest we were by nature objects of wrath" Ephesians 2:3

"They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" 1 Thess 1:10

"The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men" 2 Peter 3:7

"Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand?' Rev 6:15-17

"Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron sceptre'. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' Revelation 19:15-16

As Jeremiah and others were called to warn and plead people to repent and turn back to God – so too are we

"We implore you on Christ's behalf; be reconciled to God.... I tell you now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation" 2 Cor 5:20, 6:2

Ezekiel: The Watchman (Prophesying at the time of the Exile)

Ezekiel 3:16-27

What is the role of the watchman?

Who is the approaching enemy?

Why is that extraordinary?

What is Ezekiel's responsibility?

What will happen if he neglects that?

Jesus has entrusted his gospel to the church (Matt 28) – we are called to be 'watchmen' – both warning of judgement and proclaiming salvation by grace

The Cup of God's Wrath

"The cup of the Lord" – an image used to describe God's judgement, 'drinking from the cup' describes experiencing God's wrath.

Jeremiah 25:15-38

"Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you, drink it" 25:15

The Lord commands "You must drink it!" (25:28) – it cannot be ignored.

This is the background to Jesus' struggle in the garden of Gethsemane

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death....my father if it is possible may this cup be taken from. Yet not as I will but as you will" Matt 26:38-39

It is so fierce and dreadful, that Jesus is almost crushed simply by contemplating tasting it!

The concept of the wrath of God is unpalatable today – but it always was (Jeremiah).

But – to deny it is not loving but cruel in the extreme - Jeremiah/false prophets.

If the Church will not speak of the reality of God's wrath – God will hold her accountable like the watchman who failed to warn the people of the enemy at the gates.

To deny the reality of the wrath of God is to despise the suffering of Jesus.

Into the furnace of the cross, God the Father poured the infinite weight of his wrath upon God the Son whom he loved; Jesus experienced fury of an eternity of wrath – that was why he shrank back from the cross.

- To deny God's wrath renders the cross meaningless
- To deny God's wrath weakens the sense of urgency about evangelism
- To deny God's wrath minimises and belittles the suffering of Jesus
- To deny God's wrath minimises and belittles the love of Jesus, one reason why so many Christians have so little grasp of the depths of God's love for us is because we have such a small grasp of the reality of his wrath
- This leads us to doubt him, fail to trust him and be confused by our own suffering
- To deny God's wrath denigrates the cross and turns God into a 'sadistic father' – why because God could have taken the cup away to bring salvation to the world but chose not to – that would be sadistic.

This understanding of the cross – so clear from Scripture is always under attack, even in the church and it so today.

"John's gospel famously declares, "God so loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). How then, have we come to believe that at the cross this God of love suddenly decides to vent his anger and

wrath on his own Son? The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse – a vengeful Father punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed.... Such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement "God is love" Steve Chalk

Even the verse Chalk picks negates his argument, it continues..."that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" – clear implication – if we do not believe – we will perish, what does that mean? End of the same chapter in John

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life but whoever rejects the Son will not see life for God's wrath remains on him" John 3:36

But in fact, the cross displays God's love in that Jesus is willing to endure such awful suffering because he loves us so much, amazing though that is

"Christ was going to be cast into a dreadful furnace of wrath... God first brought him and set him at the mouth of the furnace, that he might look in and stand and view its fierce and raging flames...the anguish of Christ's soul at that time was so strong... but his love to his enemies, poor and unworthy as they were, was stronger still. The heart of Christ at that time was full of distress, but it was fuller of love to vile worms... Christ's soul was overwhelmed with a deluge of grief, but this was from a deluge of love to sinners in his heart sufficient to overflow the world and overwhelm the highest mountains of its sins"
Jonathan Edwards

There is a danger that because we find the concept of God's wrath so difficult, rather than deny it explicitly, we simply ignore it – at great cost to the world we are called to love, serve and proclaim Christ to

"Today the majority of Christian missionaries find themselves primarily involved in feeding the hungry, caring for the sick through hospitals, housing the homeless or other kinds of relief and development work... if we intend to answer man's greatest problem – his separation from the eternal God – with rice handouts, then we are throwing a drowning man a board instead of helping him out of the water... the accent must first and always be on evangelism and discipleship." KP Yohanan

Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied;
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid—
Here in the death of Christ I live