

GOD'S WRATH

“the propitiation for our sins”

Key question

What is the extent and nature of God's wrath in the context of the Cross?

Key text

I John 2:2

“and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

Introduction

1. A decade ago it could be said that the greatest popular misconception of God was that He was a harsh, impossible to please, wrathful, angry being to be feared. Today, the situation has changed dramatically. Now the greatest misconception of God is that he is a forgiving, tolerant, and infinitely gracious being without wrath or judgment for anyone but a very small number of particularly despicable beings. “
2. H. Richard Niebuhr once observed that the theology of liberal Protestantism was “A God without wrath who brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” Today, some evangelical groups could be put in this same category.
3. Divine wrath can be defined as God's righteous anger and punishment, provoked by sin and expressed toward sinners.
4. A study of any concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of god, than there are to His love and mercy.
5. A proper respect for God's wrath is linked to a proper view of human sin and God's holiness (glory).
 - **Ex.33:18–34:7** “¹⁸ Then Moses said, “I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!” ¹⁹ And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” ²⁰ But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” ²¹ Then the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; ²² and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My

back, but My face shall not be seen.” 34:1 Now the Lord said to Moses, “Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. 2 So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. 3 And no man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain.” 4 So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand. 5 And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the Lord. 6 Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth; 7 who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

A. The wrath of God presents a challenge to modern moral sensibility.

1. God's wrath seems inconsistent with His goodness and love.
2. For this reason, some interpreters have viewed those parts of the Bible that refer to God's wrath (usually portions of the Old Testament) as imported from human (not divine) sources and thus not to be considered inspired or authoritative.
3. While this approach may seem attractive to our modern sensibilities it faces a greater obstacle than just the Old Testament. The concept of God's wrath is seen throughout the Old and New Testament. Jesus often speaks of God's wrath as to the Apostles.

B. God's wrath is pictured as a major part of God's character and posture.

- **Zeph.1:14-15,18** (NIV) “The great day of the Lord is near--near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the Lord will be bitter... That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish... In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth.”
- **Isa.66:15-16** (NIV) “See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord...”
- **Ps.2** “1 Why do the nations rage and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” . . . 4 “But He that sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His great displeasure.” “12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little.”
- **Ps.69:24** (NIV) “Pour out your wrath on them, let your fierce anger overtake them.”
- **Ps.76:10** (NIV) “Surely your wrath against men brings you praise, and the survivors of your wrath are restrained.”

- **Ps.78:49** “He cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. He made a way to His anger; He spared not their soul from death but gave their life over to the pestilence; and smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham.”
- **Nahum 1:2** (Amp) “The Lord is a jealous God and avenging, the Lord avenges and He is full of wrath; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and reserves wrath for his enemies.”
- **Jer.21:14** (NIV) “I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the Lord.”
- **Luke 12:49** (NIV) “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!”
- **Ps.90:11** (NIV) “Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.”
- **Isa.13:6-16** “⁶ Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. ⁷ Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man’s heart will melt. ⁸ And they will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of them; They will writhe like a woman in labor, They will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. ⁹ Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. ¹⁰ For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, And the moon will not shed its light. ¹¹ Thus I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud, and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. ¹² I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold, And mankind than the gold of Ophir. ¹³ Therefore I shall make the heavens tremble, And the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts In the day of His burning anger. ¹⁴ And it will be that like a hunted gazelle, Or like sheep with none to gather them, they will each turn to his own people, And each one flee to his own land. ¹⁵ Anyone who is found will be thrust through, and anyone who is captured will fall by the sword. ¹⁶ Their little ones also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; Their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.”

NOTE: God’s desire for repentance

- **Eze.18:21,30** (NIV) “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?... Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall.”
- **Zeph 2:3** (NIV) “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.”

C. God’s wrath is displayed toward both those under the Covenant and outside the Covenant.

- **Num.16** “²⁰ Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²¹ “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.” ²² But they fell on their faces, and said, “O God, Thou God of the spirits of all flesh, when one man sins, wilt Thou be angry with the entire congregation?” ²³ Then the Lord spoke to Moses,

saying, ²⁴ “Speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Adiram’” ³¹ Then it came about as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground that was under them split open; ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah, with their possessions. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴ And all Israel who were around them fled at their outcry, for they said, “The earth may swallow us up!” ³⁵ Fire also came forth from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense.”

- **Deut.7:1-5, 16; see also 20:16-18** “¹ When the Lord your God shall bring you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and shall clear away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, ² and when the Lord your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. ³ Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. ⁴ For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you. ⁵ But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire ... And you shall consume all the peoples whom the Lord your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.”

D. Jesus expressed the same harsh warning that we see in the Old Testament Prophets.

- **Matt.24** “¹⁵ Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; ¹⁷ let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; ¹⁸ and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. ¹⁹ But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! ²⁰ But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath; ²¹ for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. ²² And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.” . . . “⁴⁸ But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ ⁴⁹ and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; ⁵⁰ the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, ⁵¹ and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth” (see also chapter 25).
- **Luke 21** “²⁰ But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of the city depart, and let not those who are in the country enter the city; ²² because these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled. ²³ Woe to those who are with child and to those

who nurse babes in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people, ²⁴ and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. ²⁵ “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

E. The reason for the display of God's Wrath

1. Punishment for sin

- **Leviticus 18:24-28** “Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. **Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.** . . . And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.”

2. Protection for God's people

- **Deuteronomy. 20:17-18** “**Completely destroy them** -- the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites -- as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, **they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods**, and you will sin against the LORD your God.”

3. Herem – (dedicated to destruction)

- “**Holy War**” is not a Muslim invention. Moses and Joshua were the first to engage in campaigns of “ethnic cleansing.” Cities outside the land of Palestine do not need to be entirely destroyed, but attacks on cities inside the land require destruction of all life (Deut.20:10-18). This practice is known as the "ban" (Mrh "herem") or "the law of anathema". To put a city under the ban was to devote its occupants to Yahweh for destruction. It is often translated "completely destroyed" or "devoted": Deut.7:1-2, 20:16-17 “When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations . . . then you must destroy them totally . . . and show them no mercy. Do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them . . . as the Lord our God has commanded you.”
- **Joshua 6:17-19** “The city and all that is in it are to be **devoted (herem)** to the LORD... But keep away from the **devoted things (herem)**, so that you will not bring about your own **destruction (haram)** by taking any of them... All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.”

F. The significance of the Cross

1. Jesus bore God's wrath on the Cross

- **Isa.53** “⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was

pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. ⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? . . . ¹⁰ But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. ¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.”

- **Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46** “My God, My God, Why has Thou forsaken Me?”
- **Rom.3** “²⁴ Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”
- **I John 2:2** “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” (The world here must mean both Jew and Gentile not every single person because there are clear references of God’s wrath associated with the final judgment.)
- **I John 4:10** “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

2. Christians escape God’s wrath.

- **John 3:36** (NIV) “Whoever puts his faith in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see that life, for God's wrath remains on him.”
- **I Thess.5:9** (NIV) “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- **Rom.5:9** (NIV) “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!”
- **I Cor. 3:14-15** (NIV) “If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”
- **I Thess.1:10** (RSV) “...wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”
- **Eph.2** “¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵

even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, that no one should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

C. God's wrath after the Cross

1. The Gospels warn of coming wrath.

- **Luke 3:7** (NIV) John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”
- **Luke 12:49** (RSV) [Jesus:] "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!

2. The Epistles warn of present wrath.

- **Rom.1** “¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. ²⁵ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. ²⁶ For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, ²⁷ and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. ²⁸ And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; {they are} gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³² and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”
- **Heb.12:29** “For our God is a consuming fire.”
- **Eph.5:6** “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

3. The Epistles warn of future wrath.

- **Rom.12:19** (NIV) “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath.”

D. The Christian’s relationship to God’s wrath

1. Because the wrath of God has been poured out on Christ at the Cross, those in Christ by faith escape it.
2. The propitiation of God’s wrath at the Cross is available to the whole world but (like eternal life) is applied only to those who by faith are “in Christ.” Those who are outside the Christian faith still may face God’s wrath.
3. Discipline, which is an expression of compassion should be distinguished from wrath which is an expression of judgment. Christians will experience discipline but not wrath.

Distinctions between “wrath” and “discipline.”

God’s wrath	God’s discipline
For Punishment	For Correction
Motivated by justice	Motivated by compassion
II Thess.1:8-9 Nahum 1:2	I Pet.4:17-19

E. The Imprecatory Psalms.

1. “Holy War” is not a Muslim invention. Moses and Joshua were the first to engage in campaigns of “ethnic cleansing.” Cities outside the land of Palestine do not need to be entirely destroyed, but attacks on cities inside the land require destruction of all life (Deut.20:10-18). This practice is known as the "ban" (**Mrh** "herem") or "the law of anathema". To put a city under the ban was to devote its occupants to Yahweh for destruction. It is often translated "completely destroyed" or "devoted": Deut.7:1-2, 20:16-17 “When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations . . . then you must destroy them totally . . . and show them no mercy. Do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them . . . as the Lord our God has commanded you.”
2. Examples of Psalms that call down God’s wrath on our enemies. (NIV)
 - *Psalm 5:10* 10 Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.
 - *Psalm 6:10* 10 All my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed; they will turn back in sudden disgrace.
 - *Psalm 7:6* 6 Arise, O LORD, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake, my God; decree justice.
 - *Psalm 9:19-20* 19 Arise, O LORD, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. 20 Strike them with terror, O LORD; let the nations know they are but men. Selah

- *Psalm 10:2* ² In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises.
- *Psalm 10:15* ¹⁵ Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out.
- *Psalm 17:13* ¹³ Rise up, O LORD, confront them, bring them down; rescue me from the wicked by your sword.
- *Psalm 25:19* ¹⁹ See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me!
- *Psalm 28:4* ⁴ Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work; repay them for what their hands have done and bring back upon them what they deserve.
- *Psalm 31:17-18* ¹⁷ Let me not be put to shame, O LORD, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave. ¹⁸ Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.
- *Psalm 35:1* ¹ Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me.
- *Psalm 35:4-8* ⁴ May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay. ⁵ May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away; ⁶ may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them. ⁷ Since they hid their net for me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me, ⁸ may ruin overtake them by surprise -- may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin.
- *Psalm 35:19* ¹⁹ Let not those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; let not those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye.
- *Psalm 35:24-26* ²⁴ Vindicate me in your righteousness, O LORD my God; do not let them gloat over me. ²⁵ Do not let them think, "Aha, just what we wanted!" or say, "We have swallowed him up." ²⁶ May all who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion; may all who exalt themselves over me be clothed with shame and disgrace.
- *Psalm 40:14-15* ¹⁴ May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. ¹⁵ May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled at their own shame.
- *Psalm 41:10* ¹⁰ But you, O LORD, have mercy on me; raise me up, that I may repay them.
- *Psalm 54:5* ⁵ Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness destroy them.
- *Psalm 55:9* ⁹ Confuse the wicked, O Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city.
- *Psalm 55:15* ¹⁵ Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave, for evil finds lodging among them.
- *Psalm 56:7* ⁷ On no account let them escape; in your anger, O God, bring down the nations.
- *Psalm 58:6-10* ⁶ Break the teeth in their mouths, O God; tear out, O LORD, the fangs of the lions! ⁷ Let them vanish like water that flows away; when they draw the bow, let their arrows be blunted. ⁸ Like a slug melting away as it moves along, like a stillborn child, may they not see the sun. ⁹ Before your pots can feel the heat of the

- thorns -- whether they be green or dry -- the wicked will be swept away. ¹⁰ The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked.
- *Psalm 59:5* ⁵ O LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors. Selah
 - *Psalm 59:11-14* ¹¹ But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, or my people will forget. In your might make them wander about, and bring them down. ¹² For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, ¹³ consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob. Selah ¹⁴ They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city.
 - *Psalm 63:9-10* ⁹ They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth. ¹⁰ They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals.
 - *Psalm 68:1-2* ¹ May God arise, may his enemies be scattered; may his foes flee before him. ² As smoke is blown away by the wind, may you blow them away; as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God.
 - *Psalm 68:30* ³⁰ Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations. Humbled, may it bring bars of silver. Scatter the nations who delight in war.
 - *Psalm 69:22-28* ²² May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap. ²³ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. ²⁴ Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them. ²⁵ May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents. ²⁶ For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt. ²⁷ Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. ²⁸ May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.
 - *Psalm 70:2-3* ² May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. ³ May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" turn back because of their shame.
 - *Psalm 71:13* ¹³ May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace.
 - *Psalm 74:23* ²³ Do not ignore the clamor of your adversaries, the uproar of your enemies, which rises continually.
 - *Psalm 79:6* ⁶ Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name;
 - *Psalm 79:10-12* ¹⁰ Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Before our eyes, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants. ¹¹ May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die. ¹² Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach they have hurled at you, O Lord.
 - *Psalm 83:9-18* ⁹ Do to them as you did to Midian, as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon, ¹⁰ who perished at Endor and became like refuse on the ground. ¹¹ Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, ¹² who said, "Let us take possession of the pasturelands of God." ¹³ Make them like

- tumbleweed, O my God, like chaff before the wind. ¹⁴ As fire consumes the forest or a flame sets the mountains ablaze, ¹⁵ so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm. ¹⁶ Cover their faces with shame so that men will seek your name, O LORD. ¹⁷ May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace. ¹⁸ Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD -- that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.
- *Psalm 94:1-4* ¹ O LORD, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth. ² Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. ³ How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant? ⁴ They pour out arrogant words; all the evildoers are full of boasting.
 - *Psalm 97:7* ⁷ All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols -- worship him, all you gods!
 - *Psalm 104:35* ³⁵ But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more. Praise the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD.
 - *Psalm 109:6-19* ⁶ Appoint an evil man to oppose him; let an accuser stand at his right hand. ⁷ When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him. ⁸ May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership. ⁹ May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. ¹⁰ May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes. ¹¹ May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor. ¹² May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children. ¹³ May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation. ¹⁴ May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out. ¹⁵ May their sins always remain before the LORD, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth. ¹⁶ For he never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the brokenhearted. ¹⁷ He loved to pronounce a curse -- may it come on him; he found no pleasure in blessing -- may it be far from him. ¹⁸ He wore cursing as his garment; it entered into his body like water, into his bones like oil. ¹⁹ May it be like a cloak wrapped about him, like a belt tied forever around him.
 - *Psalm 109:29* ²⁹ My accusers will be clothed with disgrace and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.
 - *Psalm 119:84* ⁸⁴ How long must your servant wait? When will you punish my persecutors?
 - *Psalm 129:5-7* ⁵ May all who hate Zion be turned back in shame. ⁶ May they be like grass on the roof, which withers before it can grow; ⁷ with it the reaper cannot fill his hands, nor the one who gathers fill his arms.
 - *Psalm 137:7-9* ⁷ Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" ⁸ O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us -- ⁹ he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.
 - *Psalm 139:19-22* ¹⁹ If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? ²² I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

- *Psalm 140:8-11* ⁸ do not grant the wicked their desires, O LORD; do not let their plans succeed, or they will become proud. Selah ⁹ Let the heads of those who surround me be covered with the trouble their lips have caused. ¹⁰ Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise. ¹¹ Let slanderers not be established in the land; may disaster hunt down men of violence.
- *Psalm 141:10* ¹⁰ Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.
- *Psalm 143:12* ¹² In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.
- *Psalm 149:5-9* ⁵ Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. ⁶ May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, ⁷ to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, ⁸ to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, ⁹ to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the LORD.

3. How are these Psalms to be interpreted?

a. **Carnal Vindictiveness**

This view interprets the imprecatory psalms to be uninspired examples of carnal rage. C. S. Lewis held this view.

b. **Poetic Hyperbole**

This view attempts to reconcile the imprecatory problem by simply attributing the forceful language to poetic hyperbole and exaggeration in order to make a point.

c. **Predictions of Doom**

This interpretation attempts to explain away all the imprecatory psalms as no more than a prophetic prediction of coming doom. This interpretation denies that the psalmist had any desire to personally see justice done in his time.

d. **Law Against Grace**

This interpretation states that the imprecatory psalms were fine examples of living under law instead of grace. But now that we are under grace instead of law, we should not consider these prayers to be valid.

e. **Incomplete Revelation**

This view states that the imprecatory psalms are examples of an incomplete revelation and Old Testament ethics and therefore are not worthy of imitation by New Testament Christians who have access to the fullness of God's revelation.

f. **Spiritual warfare against sin**

This view reads the imprecatory psalms and the “herem” passages as poetic hyperbole describing our struggle against Satan and sin. The objects of our wrath are not flesh and blood but the spiritual forces of darkness and sin. No matter what the original intent of the psalmist may have been, the reader who looks back through the lens of the Kingdom of God in Christ, uses the psalms as examples of spiritual warfare. These passages are also a powerful window into our understanding of the Cross, where Christ satisfied the just wrath of a holy God.

This is my view.

4. Propitiation means that the death of Christ fully satisfies the demands of a righteous God with respect to judgment upon the sinner.

- a. Key texts.
 - **Rom.3:25** “whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.”
 - **I Jn..2:2** “and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”
 - **I Jn.4:10** “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins.”
 - Heb..2:17; Lk.18:13; Matt.16:22; Heb.8:12
- b. The just wrath of God against sin requires satisfaction.
 1. The O.T. makes this clear. Job 21:20; Jer.21:12; Ezk.24:8,13
 2. The N.T. also speaks of God’s wrath. Mk.3:5; Lk.21:23; Matt.3:7; Lk.3:7; Jn.3:36; Rom.9:22; Eph.5:6; Col.3:6; Rev.6:16; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15
- c. The wrath of God in the Bible is distinct from the pagan concept of an angry god venting his temper on his subjects.
 1. It is not the question of satisfying a vengeful God, but satisfying a God who is just, righteous and holy in all of His dealing.
 2. This God not only demands complete satisfaction but is also the God of love who sent His Son to make propitiation.
 3. The picture of a human being placating an angry deity is not characteristic of N.T. teaching.
- d. The results of propitiation
 1. God is justified in forgiving sin.
 2. God is justified in bestowing righteousness.
 3. God is justified in bestowing all grace on sinners. There is no basis for double jeopardy. Our sin will not bring God’s wrath to us if we are in Christ.

F. A picture of the Cross

1. Like the Tabernacle in the Old Testament, the prescribed genocide (as an expression of God’s wrath) may be a “type” of the Cross.
2. As Christians look back and read of the acts of God which seem inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus in Matt.5:32-42, they are to appreciate the Cross where this wrath was emptied on Jesus for the sins of the world.
3. The prescribed genocide of Joshua is not a reason to dismiss the inspiration of the Bible. Nor is it an ethical guide for our conduct today. But rather, it is a reminder of the seriousness of God’s holiness, our sin, and the significance of the cross.