

Week 31

July 30 - August 5

2 Kings 22:3-24:4; 2 Chronicles 34:8-36:5; Jeremiah 2:23-6:30; 22:1-23; chs. 25-26, 36, 45-48; Nahum 1-3; Habakkuk 1-3; Zephaniah 1-3

This week's theme has to do with the justice and wrath of God. Charles Swindoll wrote the following;

Surely this phrase, "the wrath of God," is greatly misunderstood. Many, invariably think of some sort of peeved deity, a kind of cosmic, terrible-tempered Mr. Bang, who indulges in violent, uncontrolled displays of temper when human beings do not do what they ought to do. But such a concept only reveals the limitations of our understanding. The Bible never deals with the wrath of God that way. According to the Scriptures, the wrath of God is God's moral integrity. When man refuses to yield himself to God, he creates certain conditions, not only for himself but for others as well, which God has ordained for harm. It is God who makes evil result in sorrow, heartache, injustice, and despair. It is God's way of saying to man, "Now look, you must face the truth. You were made for Me. If you decide that you don't want Me, then you will have to bear the consequences." The absence of God is destructive to human life. That absence is God's wrath. And God cannot withhold it. In His moral integrity, He insists that these things should occur as a result of our disobedience. He sets man's sin and His wrath in the same frame. (Living Above the Level of Mediocrity)

July 30th

Jeremiah 2:23-5:19. "Catch Me, Now!"

When I was three-years-old our family was playing in the swimming pool at the trailer court where we lived. My dad was in the pool catching me as I jumped from the side. This continued for quite some time until my dad started playing with my younger brother. Dad had told me he was going to play with Tim, and had warned me not to jump. But there I was, and he had his back to me, but somehow, I still figured he would catch me if I jumped in. He didn't... but fortunately a long-armed friend was there to pull me up from the bottom of the pool. When I came up, I was mad. My dad had abandoned me to die a horrible death (at least that was my perspective).

That's the kind of perspective that Israel had. "Why do you accuse Me of doing wrong? You are the ones who have rebelled, says the LORD" (2:29). We often get mad at God because He doesn't continue to catch us even though we may not be obeying.

July 31st

2 Kings 22:3-20; 2 Chronicles 34:8-28; Jeremiah 5:20-6:30. "Rewarded Repentance"

The scroll containing the Book of the Law was found in the Temple and read to King Josiah. After hearing the words, Josiah humbled himself before God in sorrow and repentance and tore his clothing and wept. His immediate response had a bearing on God's response. Josiah pleaded with the high priest to speak to the LORD on behalf of himself and the entire nation. Josiah instantly knew that the nation had not followed the LORD and His Word for many generations, and that God's wrath had been poured out against them as a result.

The Lord told Josiah that because of how he responded He would not bring disaster to him or the nation during his reign. It's important to note that Josiah didn't recline after hearing that and breathe a sigh of relief. No, instead he summoned the nation—every leader, priest and commoner—to come to the Temple and listen to the words of the Book of the Law. He pledged to obey every word in it, and asked the nation to make a similar pledge. How does God's Word affect you?

August 1st

2 Kings 23:1-28; 2 Chronicles 34:29-35:19; Nahum 1-3. "His Wrath"

"When God saw that the Ninevites from Assyria had put a stop to their evil ways, he had mercy on them and didn't carry out the destruction he had planned." That is a quote from the book of Jonah 100 years before Nahum, and 150 before the fall of Nineveh and Assyria. Jonah had preached the gospel to the 120,000 who lived in the city and they repented.

The Assyrians were a great but evil empire, but things changed for a time, long enough for God to temporarily put off his judgment. Yet after the passing of a generation or two they returned to their evil ways, and were in fact the tool God used to conquer Israel in 722 BC. Assyria was a proud and wicked empire and Nahum prophesied that God's wrath was about to bring about their destruction, but listen to how Nahum describes God's justice; "The LORD is slow to get angry, but his power is great, and he never lets the guilty go unpunished" (1:3). It's slow but sure, great but direct, severe but fair.

August 2nd

Habakkuk 1-3; Zephaniah 1:1-2:7. "Questions and Answers"

Imagine the opportunity to physically sit across from God and ask Him questions. Many times, I've yearned for that kind of opportunity. Habakkuk is describing that kind of situation, via a vision.

Habakkuk asks God if He's even been listening to his calls for help. Habakkuk asks God if He's aware of all the sin and violence taking place in Judah. God answers with a yes, and that He is sending the Babylonians to punish Judah. I don't think Habakkuk liked the answer he got because his next questions were asking God why He would not protect and help Judah. That's often typical of us—sometimes we don't like the answer we get.

The majority of the first chapter contains the questions Habakkuk asked God, and the second chapter contains God's answers and what He will also do to Babylon. In the third chapter Habakkuk concludes the book with a prayer of triumph. His questions were answered and he rejoices in his new understanding of God's love, power, and sovereignty. Through faith and trust may our appreciation of God grow each day.

August 3rd

2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27; Jeremiah 47-48; Zephaniah 2:8-3:20.
"My Decision"

Zephaniah's prophetic message contains words of warning and judgment for Judah if they don't repent and humble themselves before God. It also contains words of judgment against the enemies of Judah. By the end of the book a powerful message of hope becomes very clear. God is watching out for His people and in the end they will be brought home and restored before the LORD.

However, in the midst of this message there is a small unassuming phrase that represents the core of this week's theme. God has been discussing His plans in the prior passage and then He makes the comment in the middle of 3:8, "For it is My decision to..." Although some people may think that sounds insensitive, I find it reassuring. The God of creation who can see to the end of time has everything under control and His plan will not be changed by our mortal short-sighted wishes to see something different. It is His decision. Trust Him with whatever you are struggling through right now.

August 4th

2 Kings 23:31-24:4; 2 Chronicles 36:1-5; Jeremiah 22:1-23; 25:1-14; 26:1-24. "It's in the Application"

Jeremiah 26 elaborates on the evil of King Jehoiakim and the nation at that time. The prophet Jeremiah does exactly as God asks of him and stands before the leaders announcing the judgment of God if they do not change. For their wickedness God was to destroy the temple at Shiloh. But what was the response after Jeremiah shared the message? "Kill him!" they shouted, and the people mobbed him. They threatened him and accused him of being a traitor, a capital offense.

Jeremiah reminded them that if they repented God would not bring about this disaster, but if they killed him it would only prove their evil. Some of the old men remembered how King Hezekiah had listened to a prophet and his kingdom was saved from disaster after they repented. So, they let Jeremiah go. But they missed the point! They let Jeremiah live but they did not change, they did not repent. And within a very short amount of time they were conquered by Babylon. Lesson: Don't miss the point. Apply things personally.

August 5th

Jeremiah 25:15-38; 36:1-32; 45:1-46:28. "The Purpose of His Wrath"

"...The cup of anger from the LORD..." (Jer. 25:17)

If we were to make a list of what brings about God's wrath what would it contain? In our reading up to this point here are some of the items we have read that have brought about His wrath: Apostasy (2 Chr. 34:24-25), Sympathy with evil (Lev. 10:1-6), Unfaithfulness (Josh. 22:20), Provocations (2 Kings 23:26), Fellowship with evil (2 Chr. 19:2), Mockery (2 Chr. 36:16), Idolatry (Judg. 2:111-14; Ps. 78:58-59), Intermarriage (Ezra 10:10-14), Profaning the Sabbath (Neh. 13:18), Speaking against God (Ps. 78:19-21), Sin (Num. 32:10-15), Unbelief (Ps. 78:21-22), Error (2 Sam. 6:7), Disobedience (Josh. 7:1, 11-12).

God's wrath appears when His desires are ignored, yet even in that there is purpose. "According to the Scriptures, the wrath of God is God's moral integrity." His wrath is that attempt to bring man back on course when he takes a dangerous path. Though God's wrath is powerful and great it is also slow, fair, and just.

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General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

Wrath = anger, indignation

Justice = fairness, merited reward or punishment

How are these two words similar and how are they different?

What is your reply to someone who struggles with the violence in Scripture that was the result of God's punishing a nation or people?

"I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord." (Rom. 12:19)

How would you explain God's avenging characteristic to the unsaved?

Is there a way to avoid God's wrath?

Is there a way to avoid God's judgment? (Mt. 16:27)

Many people struggle with the idea that God's choices and decisions have a greater influence in our life than the decisions we make. Why is it uncomfortable to acknowledge that God has the right to do with our life whatever He wants? (see August 3rd devotional)

Have you ever found yourself doubting whether or not God was making the best decisions? What makes us prone to do that? How do we change, or what must develop in our life to lessen this tendency?

Personal application: August 4th's devotional could be elaborated on and personalized as you think of any time in your life when after reading some "do" or "don't" in Scripture that you first thought of how someone else could apply it, and not you. List as many dangers as you can to this way of thinking.