

THE PROBLEM OF FEAR: Study 2

The Place Of Fear In God's Workings

The Bible repeatedly describes situations where God makes use of calamities and disasters to accomplish his purposes among nations.

Example: The prophet Habakkuk is sickened by the corruption and violence he sees in Judah. So he asks God....

Hab 1:2-4 How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? ³ Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. ⁴ Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

God answers: I see it, and I'm taking care of the problem.

Hab 1:5-11 "Look at the nations and watch-- and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. ⁶ I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. ⁷ They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. ⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; ⁹ they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. ¹⁰ They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them. ¹¹ Then they sweep past like the wind and go on-- guilty men, whose own strength is their god."

Habakkuk is shocked by God's answer. It sounds to him like the cure is worse than the disease. He replies to God....

Hab 1:12-2:1 O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish. ¹³ Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? ¹⁴ You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler. ¹⁵ The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. ¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. ¹⁷ Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy? ^{2:1} I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

God answers back. Don't worry, let me tell you what will happen to the invaders (Babylon)!

Hab 2:4-14 "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith-- ⁵ indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples. ⁶ "Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, "Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?" ⁷ Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim. ⁸ Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. ⁹ "Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin! ¹⁰ You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. ¹¹ The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it. ¹² "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! ¹³ Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? ¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

What do you make of this?

What does this story tell us?

What questions does it raise?

God's judgement of the nations: When does God judge a nation? How does He do it, and why?

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Lev 18:24-19:1 "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. ²⁵ Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. ²⁶ But you must keep my decrees and

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my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, ²⁷ for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. ²⁸ And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. ²⁹ "Everyone who does any of these detestable things--such persons must be cut off from their people. ³⁰ Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God." ^{19:1} The LORD said to Moses,

Lev 26:3-22 "If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, ⁴ I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. ⁵ Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land. ⁶ "I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. ⁷ You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. ⁸ Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you. ⁹ "I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. ¹⁰ You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new. ¹¹ I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. ¹² I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. ¹³ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high. ¹⁴ "But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, ¹⁵ and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, ¹⁶ then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. ¹⁷ I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your

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enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you. ¹⁸ "If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. ¹⁹ I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. ²⁰ Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit. ²¹ "If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. ²² I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted.

Isa 8:12-13 "Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. ¹³ The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread,

Isa 26:9-10 ...When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness. ¹⁰ Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the LORD.

Joel 2:11-13 The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who

obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it? ¹² 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' ¹³ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Ezek 18:25-32 "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear, O house of Israel: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? ²⁶ If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed he will die. ²⁷ But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has

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committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. ²⁸ Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die. ²⁹ Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Are my ways unjust, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? ³⁰ "Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. ³¹ Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

What does this section tell us about God?

What does it tell us about ourselves?

The Fear of the Lord.

This is a healthy kind of fear. What do you think it means?

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Psa 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

Psa 112:1-8 Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. ² His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. ³ Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. ⁴ Even in

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darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. ⁵ Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. ⁶ Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. ⁷ He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. ⁸ His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.

The following passages are a case study on King Uzziah and the Fear of the Lord. What do they teach us about the importance of fearing the Lord?

2 Chr 26:3-5; 16-21 Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jecoliah; she was from Jerusalem. ⁴ He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done. ⁵ He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success.

¹⁶ But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. ¹⁸ They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God." ¹⁹ Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the Lord's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. ²⁰ When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him. ²¹ King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house -- leprous, and excluded from the temple of the LORD.

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Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land.

Isaiah was a young man who watched Uzziah deteriorate and die. That experience probably prepared him for the encounter described in the next paragraph.

Isa 6:1-8 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." ⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

What effects did this encounter have on Isaiah?

When we really understand who God is, and how holy He is - our response will be fear. The contrast between His perfection and our sinfulness becomes intolerable. God is righteous and just, and we are not. How is this tension resolved?

Go through the following verses and underline the word, "righteousness" to find the answer.

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Psa 96:13-97:2 they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. ¹The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. ²Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

Isa 11:1-4 (A prophecy about Jesus Christ.) A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- ³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

Mat 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Mat 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Rom 10:3-10 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. ⁵Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." ⁶But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷"or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up

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from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Phil 3:9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

How do we resolve the tension? How can a person be acceptable to a righteous God?

Conclusion:

How would you define the Fear of the Lord?

What effect does the Fear of the Lord have on us; on all our other fears?

What happens when a person doesn't Fear the Lord?