



## Major Lessons From Minor Prophets Lesson 3 2013

### Lesson 2 Clarification

How many were here last week? My responses raised some questions and confusion online and I received multiple inquiries I need to clarify.

Evidently, my responses regarding the flood and Sodom led some to think I teach that God never used his power to put people into the grave. Let me clarify.

I believe God hasn't used his power to punish sin. But God has used his power therapeutically, intervening to save the human race, and at times has put people in the grave:

- First born of Egypt
- Sodom
- The platoons that came to arrest Elijah
- Nadab and Abihu

But none of these were punishments for sin. They were various types of therapeutic interventions.

Doctors don't punish patients for non-compliance, but doctors do amputate gangrene limbs, excise cancerous lesions, and confine and restrain psychotic violent patients. In history, there are times God has acted to limit the spread of wickedness in order to keep open the avenue for the Messiah to come. But this is not punishment for sin. It is grace, mercy and love stooping to do what needs to be done in order to save.

I have done a lot of thinking after last week's lesson and the text that kept coming to mind was John 15:15 "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

- What is the mindset of a slave?
- Why do slaves obey?
- Because the master said it and if you don't obey what happens?
  - Punishment
- How does a slave view the law of the master?
  - Imposed rules enforced by punishment.
- Jesus said, I don't want you to be my slaves, I want you to be my friends! Don't think of me like a slave master.

So what about a friend? What is the difference between the way a slave and a friend think?



A friend understands the master. He understands how the master has built things to operate. It isn't "do it because the master says so or else," but because one understands all the damage and destruction that will happen if one steps out of the master's plan. What kind of law is this? Natural law.

God is longing for us to come to know Him, to know His design, methods, principles and stop relating to Him like slaves! Satan wants us to be nothing more than mindless slaves.

## A Holy and Just God

### SABBATH

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What comes to mind when you hear the lesson title for this week?

Last week we explored Biblical justice, contrasting it with justice of the world. We explored how justice in any system is based on the laws or rules of that system.

We saw that there are two ways to conceive of God's law – the design protocols life is built upon – natural law, and an imposed Roman type law construct.

We explored that if one views God's law as a Roman imposed law then in that model justice requires imposition of punishment by the ruling authority.

But we also noted that if one views God's law as the protocol upon which he built life to operate then justice requires the Designer to heal and fix what is broken. We reviewed texts like:

- "Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy." (Ps 82:3)
- "Wash yourselves clean. Stop all this evil that I see you doing. Yes, stop doing evil and learn to do right. See that justice is done---help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows." (Is 1:16-17 – GN)
- "The LORD is waiting to be kind to you. He rises to have compassion on you. The LORD is a God of justice." (Is 30:18 – GW)
- "This is what the LORD says to the dynasty of David: 'Give justice each morning to the people you judge! Help those who have been robbed; rescue them from their oppressors.'" (Jer 21:12 – NLT)

We discovered that God's justice, according to Scripture is, *delivering the oppressed not punishing the oppressor.*

Thoughts or questions thus far?



But we also enjoyed the company of Andrew and Lily who had multiple questions. They are not alone. I really appreciated their input and questions last week because they represent so many who see the universe and God's government through the lens of imposed law.

They cited the passage in Romans, "vengeance is mine says the Lord" and we explored that Biblical vengeance is destroying sin, cleansing the sinner. God takes vengeance on sin like a doctor takes vengeance on polio. What are doctors working to do with polio? Destroy it! Are they working to destroy those infected with polio? NO!

God hates sin but loves sinners. Satan wants to confuse our thinking so that we think of sinners as sin – not the same.

But, many people struggle with these concepts, many struggle with how to deal with people who mistreat others here, like a murderer or rapist. I received the following email awhile back and wanted to share a little more of how we deal with this in my new book:

Previously I attended your class for two weeks back in 2009. You might remember that I was previously a [Christian] pastor for 15 years. I am currently enrolled [in] law school...

As I was reviewing this week's outline where you stated:

"When one accepts that God imposes law, then one must conclude that the consequences one experiences for disobedience to God's law is imposed by God, or that God's wrath is something that he inflicts to punish for sin."

Since I am [in law school I am] developing my views of criminal punishment and civil sanctions. Should I relate my view of God into the courtroom? More specifically, there are two views of punishment, Utilitarianism and Retributivism.

Utilitarianism seeks to reform the criminal, reason with the criminal, and the focus is on therapy and psychiatric care. This view also incarcerates the criminal to convince the general community to forego criminal conduct in the future. Finally it teaches the convicted what conduct is impermissible.

Retributivism seeks to punish the criminal for freely violating the rules. This view gratifies the passion for revenge. Retributive punishment is the means of securing a moral balance in society where the inmate pays his debt to society. Retributivism seeks punishment as a way to right a wrong and corrects the claim.

It appears that the wrong view of God has much in common with the Retributivism view of criminal punishment. While the utilitarianism view of criminal punish has much in common with the restoration view of salvation.



But should I look to the heart-wise, healing, loving picture of God view when it comes to criminals? Should my decision of how I view God relate to what punishment a murderer, rapist, burglar, and thief receives? In other words, should I be using my influence to end punishment of criminals? So criminals can be set free from prison and be placed in rehabilitation groups, therapy, etc. Or suppose criminals were not sent to jail, just allow them to reap the natural consequence of their sins?

What would you say to him? How do you answer such questions? What is justice to a criminal on earth?

“Many people get confused about God’s law because God, just like a loving parent, has used imposed rules as stopgaps to help his immature people.

When a mother puts a rule in place not to play in the street lest the child get spanked, the real problem in breaking the rule is not the spanking (imposed penalty), but the violation of the natural law of physics when a car collides with the body of the child. The imposed rule, with its imposed penalty, is intended to protect the child, the unknown driver, and even the parent from the result of violation of natural law if the child is hit by a car. The spanking is not intended as retribution, but is a stopgap to help keep the child safe until the child is mature enough to govern itself and not play in the street... *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life* p. 189

Does retribution:

- Do good to those who have been offended
- Resurrect the murdered person
- Heal the broken bone
- Restore one’s innocence
- Recover stolen goods
- Or heal, develop, save, or transform the sinner/criminal

So what is the purpose of retribution? Does it serve love or does it serve selfishness?

Does that mean we should ignore criminals? Let them get away with it?

First, do they get away with it? Why or why not?

- Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, **from that nature will reap destruction**...Gal 6:7,8
- We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. **Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again.** By choosing to sin, men



separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death. {1SM 235.2}

When we sin we actually damage ourselves. Why? Because God's law is a natural law. It is the law upon which life was built to operate. One doesn't have to punish those who violate it because the violation destroy the very faculties that respond to love and truth, the consciences become seared, the character warped, the reason impaired, until those who persist in it become nothing but brute beasts.

So, when a earthly government steps in to arrest and incarcerate a person who has lost self-governance and is acting out to hurt others in society, that act can be done with a desire to seek vengeance, but it can also be done with a desire to protect society, AND the criminal from damaging themselves further. Incarceration can give the criminal time to reflect and consider their course and repent and become a friend rather than an enemy. This is God's justice, healing and delivering those oppressed by sin, AND turning enemies into friends:

Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ *changed us from enemies into his friends* and gave us the task of *making others his friends* also. Our message is that God was making the *whole human race his friends* through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and he has given us the message which tells how he makes them his friends. Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: *let God change you from enemies into his friends!* (2Co 5:17-20 GNT)

Thoughts?

What does a Just God look like? Like Jesus!

Read Memory Text: "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?" (Joel 2:11)

What does this text mean to you?

Read first paragraph, "In the massive locust plague..." thoughts?

Are they saying God brought the locust plague and draught? What do you think?

It can be confusing, because God did bring plagues in Egypt for what purpose? To expose the gods of Egypt as false.

God did hold the rain for Elijah, for what purpose? To show the impotence of Baal.

So, does that mean every plague in nature or every natural disaster is a direct infliction by God?



Here is one view, do you agree with it, from *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 428:

Moses faithfully set before the people their great sin. It was God's power alone that had preserved them in "that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water." Deuteronomy 8:15. Every day of their travels they had been **kept by a miracle of divine mercy**. In all the way of God's leading they had found water to refresh the thirsty, bread from heaven to satisfy their hunger, and peace and safety under the shadowy cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Angels had ministered to them as they climbed the rocky heights or threaded the rugged paths of the wilderness. Notwithstanding the hardships they had endured, there was not a feeble one in all their ranks. Their feet had not swollen in their long journeys, neither had their clothes grown old. **God had subdued before them the fierce beasts of prey and the venomous reptiles** of the forest and the desert. If with all these tokens of His love the people still continued to complain, **the Lord would withdraw His protection** until they should be led to appreciate His merciful care, and return to Him with repentance and humiliation. {PP 428.3}

Because **they had been shielded by divine power** they had not realized the countless dangers by which they were continually surrounded. In their ingratitude and unbelief they had anticipated death, and now the Lord permitted death to come upon them. The poisonous serpents that infested the wilderness were called fiery serpents, on account of the terrible effects produced by their sting, it causing violent inflammation and speedy death. **As the protecting hand of God was removed from Israel, great numbers of the people were attacked by these venomous creatures.** {PP 429.1}

What did God do? Why did God do it? Was God inflicting punishment? Was God setting people free to experience what they persistent chose, rebellion from Him?

Do you think it was different with rebellious Israel and Judah later?

So God actively engages to expose false gods, and God actively engages to protect the avenue for the Messiah, and God withdraws and allows one to reap what they have chosen when rebellion persists....

## MONDAY

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Read last paragraph, "Throughout Scripture, God is described..." thoughts?

Is the lesson suggesting God sends natural disasters?

What do you think?

Any evidences?



Exodus – Nile turns to blood, darkness, hail that burns, locust, earthquake. What was the purpose of those disasters? To expose false Gods – to punish? Or to save? What was the intended effect? To deliver people's minds from believing a lie. These were given as evidences to break the people out of worshipping false God's, not as punishment.

What about the first chapter of Job – did natural disasters strike Job's family? Who brought them? Satan, who did Job's friends say did it? God!

When the disciples were on the lake and Christ was sleeping in the boat and a great storm came, so severe that fisherman who spent their lives on the lake were terrified, who do you think brought that storm? Was God behind it, or perhaps was Satan trying to destroy Christ and his disciples?

What about at the end of time, the plagues that happen in the future? The lesson suggested the Joel sees in the plagues a prediction of how it will be in the end. Is it God actively inflicting, or God withdrawing His protection?

Rev 7:1-3:

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. <sup>2</sup> Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: <sup>3</sup> "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

What do you hear this quotation saying?

So we have examples where God acted and we have examples where God stepped back and removed protection. What are the differences?

God's actions were always trying to stop rebellion, expose lies, and His withdrawal was always when no other intervention would work.

So, what about the end of time the troubles to come? Would this be a time when everything else has failed? Here is a quotation from one of the founders of our church that seems to be in harmony with Rev 7:1-3:

"I was shown that the judgments of God would not come directly out from the Lord upon them, but in this way;

"They place themselves beyond His protection. He warns, corrects, reproveth, and points out the only path of safety; then if those who have been the objects of His special care will follow their own course, independent of the Spirit of God, after repeated warnings, if they choose their own way, then He does not commission His angels to prevent Satan's decided attacks upon them.



"It is Satan's power that is at work at sea and on land, bringing calamity and distress, and sweeping off multitudes to make sure of his prey, and storm and tempest both by sea and land will be, for Satan has come down in great wrath. He is at work. He knows his time is short and, he is not restrained; we shall see more terrible manifestations of his great power than we have ever dreamed of."

Manuscript Release vol. 14, p. 3

If God's law is natural, does He have to inflict punishment for disobedience?

Do we do God good service or misrepresent Him and obstruct his purpose and even delay his return if we say, "Katrina was God's punishment on New Orleans for its wickedness?"

## SUNDAY

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Read 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraphs, "Joel uses four..." thoughts?

What do you understand regarding the hardships of Israel? Why did they go through so much?

What was God's purpose for Israel?

Last week Collegedale Church put on its annual Easter Pageant. What is the purpose of that pageant? It is a theatrical enactment in which people can participate, for what purpose? To teach people.

Does that pageant save anyone? Can a person be saved by dressing up and participating in the pageant?

The nation of Israel were actors – they had a grand stage, great costumes, and a very detailed script. They were to enact, through drama, the plan of salvation. Was salvation found in dressing up in their costumes and performing their rituals?

Could people be saved, before Christ became incarnate, without participating in the Jewish theater? What about Enoch? How about without, as far as is recorded in the Bible, sacrificing animals to God? What about the widow of Sarepta who sheltered Elijah or Naaman?

The widow of Sarepta and Naaman the Syrian had lived up to all the light they had; hence they were accounted more righteous than God's chosen people who had backslidden from Him and had sacrificed principle to convenience and worldly honor. {AA 416.3}

So, God's purpose was for Israel to act out the plan and stay faithful and receive untold blessings, which would reveal God's plan to heal and save. But they chose to follow their own script, do it their way. They accepted Satan's view of God and so what did God do? He used their choices to still teach the truth, but all in symbol and theater – how?



By demonstrating that choosing Satan's way results in pain, suffering, loss, famine, desolation and even death. When they refused God's way He removed His protection and Israel reaped what they chose and they ended up in captivity, just as when we choose to violate God's design we end up captive to sin, addiction, fear, and disease.

So, divine judgments, are they punishment for sin upon Israel, or God's judgment of what was necessary to wake them up to their foolishness, and teach the truth that God's law is a natural law and behavior has consequences. If you choose rebellion God sets you free to reap what you have chosen.

## TUESDAY

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The lesson talks about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and the latter rain before Christ returns.

What do you think obstructs this from happening? What would be necessary for it to happen?

Will God pour out His Spirit upon individuals to empower them to misrepresent Him? Here are four quotes from one of the founders of our church:

- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the former rain, but the latter rain will be more abundant. **The Spirit awaits our demand and reception.** Christ is again to be revealed in His fulness by the Holy Spirit's power. {COL 121.1}
- The third angel's message is swelling into a loud cry, and you must not feel at liberty to neglect the present duty, and still entertain the idea that at some future time you will be the recipients of great blessing, when without any effort on your part a wonderful revival will take place. . . . **Today you are to have your vessel purified, that it may be ready for the heavenly dew,** ready for the showers of the latter rain; for the latter rain will come, and **the blessing of God will fill every soul that is purified from every defilement.** It is our **work today to yield our souls to Christ,** that we may be fitted for the time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord--fitted for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. . . . {Ev 701.4}
- **The Holy Spirit is waiting for channels through whom to work.** If all would do the work to which they were appointed, thousands of people might be saved. Satan will not always triumph. The Spirit of God will be poured out upon the church just as soon as the vessels are prepared to receive it. . . . {Christ Triumphant 45.2}
- **The disciples did not ask for a blessing for themselves. They were weighted with the burden of souls.** The gospel was to be carried to the ends of the earth, and they claimed the endowment of power that Christ had promised. **Then it was that the Holy Spirit was poured out, and thousands were converted in a day.**--Southern Watchman, Aug. 1, 1905. {Christian Service 252.9}



Thoughts? Is there anything we can do to prepare for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Are we ready? Will the Spirit enable us if we are ready to tell the truth about God?

Perhaps we should not ask for the Holy Spirit, but ask to be ready for the Holy Spirit.

## WEDNESDAY

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Read first paragraph, "The darkening..." thoughts?

What do you hear? Do you hear a suggestion that the historic interpretation of these signs being fulfilled more than 150 years ago and in some cases more than 250 years ago, are being relinquished and a more metaphorical interpretation is being used?

I think they might be on to something. Prophecies are highly symbolic. What do you think of the idea that the pagan god constructs will be turned to darkness?

The middle of the lesson asks, "While Christ's appearance will terrify the unrepentant, how will the righteous welcome their Lord?"

Thoughts? Why will the appearance of Christ terrify the unrepentant, because He is terrifying, or because of something within the unrepentant that causes the terror?

Why is there fear of God?

- When the people heard the thunder and the trumpet blast and saw the lightning and the smoking mountain, they trembled with fear and stood a long way off. They said to Moses, "If you speak to us, we will listen; but we are afraid that if God speaks to us, we will die." Moses replied, "Don't be afraid; God has only come to test you and make you keep on obeying him, so that you will not sin." But the people continued to stand a long way off, and only Moses went near the dark cloud where God was. Exodus 20:18-21

Thoughts? Why were the people afraid but Moses was not? Was God showing one thing to the people and something different to Moses? Were the people hearing thunder and Moses hearing the tympany section of the heavenly orchestra?

Listen to this commentary on those verses:

- During that long time spent in communion with God, the face of Moses had reflected the glory of the divine Presence; unknown to himself his face shone with a dazzling light when he descended from the mountain. Such a light illumined the countenance of Stephen when brought before his judges; "and all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." Acts 6:15. Aaron as well as the people shrank away from Moses, and "**they were afraid to come nigh him.**" Seeing their confusion and terror, but ignorant of the cause, he urged them to come near. **He held out to them the pledge of God's**



**reconciliation, and assured them of His restored favor. They perceived in his voice nothing but love and entreaty, and at last one ventured to approach him.** Too awed to speak, he silently pointed to the countenance of Moses, and then toward heaven. The great leader understood his meaning. **In their conscious guilt, feeling themselves still under the divine displeasure, they could not endure the heavenly light,** which, had they been obedient to God, would have filled them with joy. **There is fear in guilt. The soul that is free from sin will not wish to hide from the light of heaven.** {PP 329.5}

Where does fear of God originate? In our guilt, in our misunderstanding of Him, on our self-condemnation we project our own self-dissatisfaction onto God and believe Him to be of the same selfish character as we are.

In other words, unremedied sin is the source of fear. God is love!

After Adam and Eve sinned they ran and hid why? Where did their fear originate? Where was the source of their fear? Was God being terrifying? Was He threatening? Yet they were still terrified? Why?

## THURSDAY

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Read first paragraph, “Biblical prophets...” thoughts? What would you say to someone who presents God in this light?

What does God destroy? Sin, pain, suffering, selfishness, death, the grave, lies. How?

Truth destroys lies  
Health destroys disease pain and suffering  
Life destroys death  
Love destroys selfishness

So how does God destroy? By being Himself, the source of truth, love and life!

Read third paragraph, “The Lord sustains...” thoughts? Does the Lord desolate the earth or is the earth desolate because the Lord let’s go and allows Satan to have his way?

Why does the earth lay bare for 1000 years? Because the Lord and all those in whom the Spirit of the Lord dwell are gone and Satan has full control of the planet!

## FRIDAY

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Read and discuss questions 2-5



Brad Cole posted this on an online forum recently:

“A choice is made to come to God or to turn away from God. Those who turn away are united to the ways of Satan's kingdom which is selfish and violent to the core. Since sin entered the universe, God has been restraining the winds of destruction for humans and even for rebellious angels - giving rain to the righteous and the unrighteous. When all "rebels" are finally and fully left to their own ways, unrestrained by God's loving protection, there is violence, death and destruction. Separation from God does lead to death - Sin leads to death. EGW describes this chaos as breaking out, "His power is at an end. The wicked are filled with the same hatred of God that inspires Satan; but they see that their case is hopeless, that they cannot prevail against Jehovah. Their rage is kindled against Satan and those who have been his agents in deception and with the fury of demons they turn upon them." (GC pg. 671-2). She then quotes Ezekiel 28..."they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit." And then she quotes Isaiah 9:5, "Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood..." So, there is God's fire, but there is also another fire at work. The passages I quoted in Revelation suggests to me that we are missing something to our picture of things if we don't also incorporate this aspect. For me, this view of the end does not support Satan's original claim that sin does not lead to death.”