

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF THE WRATH OF GOD

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PREFACE

In this lecture I have endeavoured to draw attention to some of the Biblical evidence, present in both the Old and New Testaments, which reveals God as a God of wrath as well as a God of love. It is an axiom of the Bible that there is no incompatibility between these two attributes of the divine nature; and for the most part the great Christian theologians and preachers of the past have endeavoured to be loyal to both sides of the divine self-disclosure. In more recent years, however, there has been widespread neglect and indeed denial of the doctrine of the divine wrath; and emphasis has been placed almost exclusively upon the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In consequence the severity of Biblical Christianity has largely been lost sight of, with far-reaching and disastrous results in many spheres of life, as Dr. D. M. Lloyd Jones in his book *The Plight of Men and the Power of God* has clearly shown. It is surely time that the balance was redressed, and that a generation which has little or no fear of God should be faced with the reality of His wrath as well as with His loving-kindness.

The so-called 'moral' objection to the doctrine of the divine wrath has no substance when it is realized that the Bible, containing as it does a revelation of God to *man*, must use the language of the human emotions in speaking of God; but that, just because God is God and not man, divine love transcends human love, and divine wrath transcends human wrath. There is in the love of God none of the fickleness, the waywardness, and the weakness of human love; and these features are also absent from His wrath. But just as human love is deficient if the element of anger is entirely lacking (for as Lactantius wrote in the third century, '*qui non odit non diligit*'), so too is anger an essential element of divine love. God's love is inseparably connected with His holiness and His justice. He must therefore manifest anger when confronted with sin and evil.

The doctrine of the wrath of God safeguards the essential distinction between Creator and creature, which sin is ever seeking to minimize or obliterate. Without a realization of this wrath we are unlikely to have that 'fear of God which is the beginning of

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wisdom'. It is with a consciousness of this truth, and with a desire to be faithful to the Biblical revelation as a whole, that I offer this study as a contribution to the series of Tyndale Lectures.

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THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF THE WRATH OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

OUR investigation into the Biblical doctrine of the wrath of God should, I suggest, begin with a careful exegesis of Romans i. 18. In this verse the apostle writes, 'for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness'.¹ The main points at issue in the interpretation of these words are, first, whether the sentence is coordinate with the previous sentence; and, secondly, what is the exact significance of the present tense 'is revealed'. On the supposition that the two sentences are coordinate, verse 18 would supply another reason why Paul is 'not ashamed of the gospel'. He is unashamed, because in it a revelation is made not only of the righteousness but also of the wrath of God. In favour of this view, it has been suggested that the form of the two sentences suggests parallelism; and that, on the assumption that it is in the gospel alone that God's wrath is adequately revealed, there is no contradiction between i. 18 and the further statement of the apostle in iii. 25 that 'God set forth [Jesus] to be a propitiation, ... because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God'. The revisers were almost certainly right in translating διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν in this verse, 'because of the passing over of sins' and not, as the A.V. (following the Vulgate *propter remissionem*) translated, 'for the remission of sins', i.e. 'in order to bring about

the remission of sins'; for, although the word *πάρεσις* is used once in secular literature for the remission of debts, there is no evidence that it is a synonym for *ἄφεσις*. In the light of the R.V. translation of Romans iii. 25, it is accordingly urged that in Romans i. 18 also the apostle is saying that before the redemptive activity of Christ there was no full expression of God's wrath. In other words the peculiar characteristic of the whole pre-Christian era was that God in His forbearance tended to overlook the transgressions of men, and not to inflict upon them the full punishment that they merited. But because He is absolutely righteous such a *πάρεσις ἁμαρτημάτων* could not be permanent. Sooner or later

¹ All quotations are from the Revised Version unless otherwise stated.

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it was inevitable that He should manifest to the *full* His divine wrath, particularly as many were misunderstanding the nature and purpose of His forbearance, and were fondly supposing that He was 'such a one as themselves' (Ps. 1. 21), — an easy-going God, who would forget their offences and so remit them. Hence it was necessary, 'because God had passed over the sins done aforetime', to show His righteousness by 'setting forth Jesus to be a propitiation': and it is this truth, so it is alleged, which is also presented in the apostle's words in i. 18.

Such an interpretation of i. 18 is also said to be consistent with two statements found in addresses delivered by Paul before pagan audiences; the first at Lystra, in Acts xiv. 16, that God 'in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways'; and the second at Athens, in Acts xvii. 30, that 'the times of ignorance therefore God overlooked'. It is also said to be in accordance with the Septuagint version of Jeremiah xxxi. 32, quoted in Hebrews viii. 9, where God says, 'They continued not in my covenant, and I disregarded them (*ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν*)'. But while this is certainly the right exegesis of Romans iii. 25, where the apostle is obviously drawing attention to the necessity for the full satisfaction of the divine justice in the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus, just because that justice had in fact never been fully satisfied before (for God had, to use the language of the prophets, never 'made a full end' in the infliction of punishment on His people), I would suggest that such an interpretation of Romans i. 18 does not really fit the context. The R.V. is surely right in regarding this verse as beginning a new paragraph. Paul is in effect here laying down the essential foundation for the doctrine of grace by a general statement of God's *permanent* attitude to sin; for it is only when men are fully conscious of this attitude that they are inclined to, or indeed are able to accept the good-news of the revelation of God's righteousness revealed in the saving death of Christ. To realize that we are under God's wrath and in disgrace is the essential preliminary to the experience of His love and His grace. In this respect the Christian gospel is bad news before it is good news. And this revelation of the divine wrath has been made in varying degrees and in various ways and at various times ever since the fall of Adam. I would therefore interpret *ἀποκαλύπτεται* in Romans i. 18 not as a prophetic present, 'is going to be revealed', with reference to the final and perfect manifestation of the divine wrath on what is called in Romans ii. 5 'the day of wrath'; nor as a strict present, 'is at this moment being revealed', with sole

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reference to the conditions prevalent in the Roman Empire of Paul's own day. Nor would I confine it to the revelation of the divine wrath in the passion of Christ when He drank to the dregs on behalf of sinners the cup of God's wrath. Rather would I construe it as a frequentative present, 'is continually being revealed', covering in its sweep the whole field of human experience, especially that delineated in the Old Testament Scriptures. We may note in passing that this *permanent* element in the divine wrath is a characteristic which differentiates it from sinful human wrath. The latter is fitful, wayward, and spasmodic; while the former is stable, unswerving, and of set purpose. 'Man is a creature of time', wrote Lactantius, 'and his emotions are related to the passing moment. His anger, therefore, ought to be curbed because he is often angry and angry unjustly. But God is eternal and perfect. His anger is no passing emotion but is always of set purpose and design.'¹ A perfect example of this aspect of *human* anger is given by the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. xv. 28). He was angry with the wrong people, at the wrong time, and for the wrong reasons.

Paul adds in Romans i. 18 that this revelation of the divine wrath is made 'from heaven'. He does so perhaps not merely to emphasize still more strongly that this wrath is divine in origin and in character; but also, as Calvin suggested, because it is universal in its scope, for 'so far and wide as are the heavens, is the wrath of God poured out on the whole world'. C. Hodge, in his commentary on Romans, also pertinently suggested that Paul added these words, 'because like the lightning from heaven God's wrath forces itself on the most reluctant vision'. Men may be deaf to the divine voice speaking within them in conscience, but they find it difficult to escape that same voice when it calls to them through the providential 'chances and changes' of their experience.

Paul also adds that this revelation is 'against all impiety and unrighteousness of men who hold down the truth in unrighteousness'. The words translated 'impiety' and 'unrighteousness', ἀσέβεια and ἀδικία, are not synonyms. Rather does the apostle show, by the choice of these particular words and by the order in which he places them, that ἀδικία, human injustice,

¹ Lactantius: *De Ira Dei* (ch. xxii): *Possem dicere quod ira hominis refraenanda fuerit, quia in iuste saepe irascitur, et praesens habet motum, quia temporalis est ... deus autem non ad praesens irascitur quia aeternus est perfectusque virtutis et nunquam nisi merito irascitur.*

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man's inhumanity to man, and the unnatural and worse than bestial behaviour to which he often sinks has its deepest roots in ἀσέβεια, in his failure to give to God the honour and the reverence which the all-sovereign Creator has the right to demand from His creatures. The sin which permanently evokes God's wrath, because it is the root of all other sins, is the wilful suppression of such truth about Himself as He has been pleased to reveal to men, and of which they can never plead ignorance.

The truth about the divine nature, which is available to *all* men through the evidence of God's created works, is necessarily more limited and circumscribed than the special revelation which He has chosen to make through the particular people whom He called to receive it. It is a revelation of His sovereignty and His creative power rather than of His mercy and His saving grace. We may therefore find it helpful as an aid to handling in a necessarily limited way the large amount of Biblical material relevant to our subject, to consider first the manifestation of the divine wrath to those who are outside the covenant relationship, which God established with His people Israel; then to notice the particular forms which such manifestation took, and the causes which gave rise to them, when God directed His anger to His chosen people; and finally to consider how the divine wrath is revealed in Jesus Christ; under the new covenant which He inaugurated; and on the final Day of Wrath.

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I

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE DIVINE WRATH TO THOSE OUTSIDE THE COVENANT

The *locus classicus* in Scripture for the manifestation of the divine wrath to the heathen world is Romans i. 19-32. Here Paul insists that the non-Jewish world cannot offer the excuse that it has no knowledge of God because it has not been favoured with the special revelation granted to Israel, and that therefore it is quite undeservedly the object of His wrath. For, though invisible to the eye of man, God has manifested through His created works 'his everlasting power and divinity'. It is evident, in other words, that the power which made the sun, the moon and the stars is an *eternal* power possessing the qualities of perfection and deity. In a real sense, therefore, the pagan world had knowledge of God; but the sin, which is inherent in every child of Adam, led men to fail to deduce from this knowledge the obligation which was laid upon them to glorify, and render praise and thanksgiving to the Creator. Their knowledge of God became, as a result, so perverted that in Ephesians ii. 12 Paul can describe them as being without God altogether, ἄθεοι ἐν κόσμῳ, though in that κόσμος God's everlasting power and divinity were visible. For, when men exchange such truth about God as has been manifested to them for a false conception of His character, they lose the sense of the fundamental difference between creature and Creator; and thereby fall into the cardinal sin of idolatry and give the creature the worship that should be given only to the Creator. They 'turn his glory into the similitude of a calf that eateth hay' (see Ps. cvi. 20). And to be an idolater, whatever form the idolatry may take, is to be under the wrath of God.

Because the entry of sin into the world was due to the unwillingness of Adam to accept his creaturely estate, and to his desire to become as God, the wrath of God has been directed against mankind ever since. 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men' (La. iii. 33); but so and only so can His sovereignty be vindicated. One of the primary purposes therefore of the opening chapters of Genesis, even though the actual expression 'the wrath of God' does not occur in them, is to record the

divine judgments and the punishments which God was impelled to inflict upon men in order that His absolute

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sovereignty and justice might be demonstrated. The pronouncement of the sentence of death upon Adam, the cursing of the earth for his sake, and the banishment of Adam and Eve from the earthly paradise are all manifestations in word and deed of the divine wrath; and, it is important to notice, *they are recognized as such by other writers of Scripture*. The Psalmist for example, when he meditates on the inescapable fact of death, says 'We are consumed in thine anger, and in thy wrath are we troubled' (Ps. xc. 7). It is 'in Adam', Paul says, 'that all die'. 'Death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression', i.e. over those who had not disobeyed specific commandments as Adam did, but whose heart was nevertheless as a result of Adam's fall desperately wicked (Rom. v. 14). The effects of the curse laid upon the earth for Adam's sake are destined, Paul points out, to remain till the final manifestation of the sons of God: for the groaning and travailing creation, with its marks of frustration, change, and decay, is what it is because it has been deliberately subjected to vanity by its Creator (Rom. viii. 20). As R. Haldane commented, 'The same creation which declares that there is a God and publishes His glory, also proves that He is the enemy of sin and the avenger of the crimes of men, so that the revelation of wrath is universal throughout the world and none can plead ignorance of it'.¹

The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the earthly Paradise led directly, in the Genesis story, to that succession of evils which Paul enumerates as characteristic of human life in Romans i. 29 and 30. Special attention is drawn in this record of the earliest days of human existence to the destructive nature of sin in the murder of Abel by Cain, the first of many Biblical illustrations of the truth that 'the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God' (Jas. i. 2); to the inherent restlessness of man as he becomes 'a fugitive and a wanderer over the face of the earth'; and to the incestuous marriage of 'the sons of God and the daughters of men', a violation of the order of creation which God had established which resulted in wickedness so great that 'God repented that he had made man upon the earth', and was moved to destroy by water the whole race of men with the exception of Noah and seven others. In the Biblical perspective this is the most significant example of the divine wrath in the pre-Christian era: it is a manifestation of the judgment of God

¹ *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 55.

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so outstanding that it has no parallel except the judgment which God will pass upon sinners on the final 'day of his wrath'. Not merely does the second Epistle of Peter draw attention to this parallel in the words 'the world that then was, being overflowed with water perished; but the heavens that now are, and the earth ... have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men' (2 Pet. iii. 6, 7), but the Son of God Himself places these two judgments side by

side when He says: 'As were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man' (Mt. xxiv. 37).

In the mercy of God a new beginning seemed possible for mankind after the salvation of Noah and his family; and it is probable that Scripture implies that Noah made known to his contemporaries a fresh revelation of the sovereign justice of God, for he is described in 2 Peter ii. 5 as 'a preacher of righteousness'. But the inherent pride of man led him once again to forget his creaturely estate and to seek to obliterate the distance between heaven and earth, i.e. between God and himself, by the erection of the tower of Babel. Trading upon the mercy of God revealed in the salvation from the flood, men succeeded only in evoking a fresh expression of the divine wrath, which resulted in the confusion of human speech and in the rise of the numerous languages which have caused so much misunderstanding and been such a divisive factor in human life.

It is clear from these opening chapters of Genesis not only that the wrath of God manifests itself especially in the confounding of human pride whenever it asserts itself, and in the inflicting of suffering and death as just punishments; but also that man by sinning is plunged into further sin and into all the misery and distress which sin brings in its train. This is the truth to which Paul gives explicit utterance in the last section of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, to which we must now return.

The various acts of uncleanness mentioned by the apostle in Romans i. 24-27, some of them the very acts which led to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,' which the Lord overthrew in his anger and his wrath' (Dt. xxix. 23), are the effects both of the idolatry which brings down upon mankind the wrath of God, and of the essential corruption of the human heart. Paul speaks in these verses of God giving men up to 'uncleanness' and to 'vile passions'. God is therefore directly operative in this process of moral decline, though He is not responsible for moral evil. We should do well to bear in mind the comment of Haldane on this difficult passage. 'We must distinguish', he wrote, 'be-

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tween man's abandonment by God and the awful effects of that abandonment. The abandonment proceeded from divine justice, but the effect from the corruption of man, in which God had no part. The abandonment is a negative act of God, or rather a negation of acting, of which God is absolutely master, since, being under no obligation to confer grace upon any man, He is free to withhold it as He sees good, so that in this withholding there is no injustice'. There comes a point at which 'God ceases to strive with man any longer' (see Gn. vi. 3).

The reason why sins of moral uncleanness are given such prominence in this section of Romans is probably not merely because they were especially prevalent in the Roman world at the time when the Epistle was written, but because they are the sins which are so often directly associated with idolatry. The truth thus becomes apparent that when man degrades God he also degrades himself beneath the level of the beasts. The apostle accordingly states in verse 28,' Even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind, to do the things which are not

fitting'; which Hodge well paraphrased, bringing out the play on the Greek words: 'As they did not approve of God, He gave them over to a mind which no one could approve'.

In the light of the language used in this first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans it is unsatisfactory to limit the meaning of 'the wrath of God' in the New Testament solely to the effects which follow upon sinful actions. We feel, therefore, the inadequacy of such a statement as that of Professor C. H. Dodd that 'Paul retains the concept of "the wrath of God" not to describe the attitude of God to man but to describe the inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe'.¹ 'The wrath of God', as has been well said, 'is an *affectus* as well as an *effectus*, a quality of the nature of God, an attitude of the mind of God towards evil'.

Throughout this section of Romans emphasis is laid upon the essential justice of God's dealings with the heathen. The exhibitions of His wrath are not arbitrary, for God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezk. xxxiii. 11), nor are they made for any other purpose except to vindicate His sovereign rights as Creator. Men have fully merited the misery which their sin has brought upon them. 'Knowing', Paul states in i. 32, 'the ordinance of God, that they which practise such things are worthy of

¹ *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 23.

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death, [they] not only do the same, but also consent with them that practise them'. Their conscience, as is made clear in ii. 14, though dulled by the moral corruption into which they have sunk, has not obliterated the knowledge that they are moral beings with a moral sense; for they pass moral judgments upon one another, 'their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them'. This is evidence that, though they have no special revelation of a moral law such as has been revealed to Israel, they possess by nature a knowledge of the difference between right and wrong. They are in a real sense 'a law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law [the moral law] written in their hearts', however much they may fail to act in accordance with its dictates.

The essential truth of the matter therefore is that though men possess by nature a moral sense they have in fact not only failed to glorify God and to act in a manner pleasing to Him, but have become incapable of doing so because of the sin resident in their members. They are therefore, to use the language of Romans ix. 22, 'vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction'. To this truth witness is again borne by the apostle in Ephesians ii. 3 where he states that he himself and his fellow-Jewish Christians were, apart from the grace of God received at their conversion, τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς by their very nature the objects of God's wrath, as were the rest of mankind. There has been a manifest reluctance on the part of modern commentators to give this expression its obvious positive meaning. Some indeed, because of the absence of the word θεοῦ after ὀργῆς, have supposed that Paul is saying no more than that the Gentiles were liable to violent bursts of *human* anger. Such an interpretation would not only strip the passage of its obvious solemnity, but the words would add little to the previous clause; and there are several places in the New Testament where the word ὀργή seems

clearly to refer to God's wrath even though the word 'God' is not mentioned. Other commentators, who recognize that the reference is to the divine anger, seem anxious to tone down as much as possible the meaning of φύσει. Thus Armitage Robinson interprets the expression negatively and paraphrases it by the words 'in ourselves', i.e. because we lacked divine grace. But the word φύσις should refer to what is innate or ingrained and not to something which is due to a defect caused by particular conditions or circumstances. In this passage therefore it draws attention to the essential constitution of fallen man, which is both the cause of the evil practices into which he has sunk, and the means by

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which they are persistently maintained. Just as by virtue of their original creation in the image of God men are endowed with a moral sense and the gift of conscience, as Paul has stated in ii. 14; so too because of their fallen nature they are inevitably involved in behaviour which renders them the objects of the divine wrath. The conclusion therefore is that, apart from the gospel, all mankind that is engendered of the seed of Adam is τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς. 'God's displeasure', as Knox translates Ephesians ii. 3, 'is their birthright'.

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II

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE WRATH OF GOD UNDER THE OLD COVENANT

In the last half of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Romans Paul is concerned to show that the children of Abraham, who in virtue of their privileges as the chosen people of God were apt to assume that they had a right to pass judgment on the rest of mankind, so far from being exempt from the wrath of God which is the birthright of every child of Adam, were especially the objects of it. Bearing the name of Jew, resting his confidence upon the Mosaic law and the superior knowledge which it gave him of divine things, conscious that his vocation was to be a guide of the morally unenlightened and the ethically immature, 'an instructor of the foolish and a teacher of babes', the Israelite was in fact the victim of that self-deception which blunts a man's sense of the reality and the gravity of his own sin. The apostle, it would appear, is thinking in Romans ii. 16-19 not merely of the Israelites of his own day, but of the Israelites throughout the whole of their past history, which has shown them to be guilty of the very sins which they condemn in others. Paul here specifies some of these sins which can be illustrated in detail in the Old Testament.

For all his alleged horror of stealing the Israelite had often been guilty of such things as dishonest trading, which is a violation of the eighth commandment, 'making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit' (Rom. ii. 21; Am. viii. 5). For all their professed abhorrence of adultery, the sin of David with Bathsheba stood as a standing record of the fact that the best of Israelites had committed the sin which was recognized as a characteristic sin of heathendom; and

because he had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme David had inevitably incurred His wrath (2 Sam. xii. 14). Moreover, God had protested through the mouth of Jeremiah that the response of His people to His goodness had been to turn the very prosperity which He had given them into an instrument for the committal of this particular sin. 'When I had fed them to the full, they committed adultery, and assembled themselves in troops at the harlots' houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord:

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and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?' (Rom. ii. 21; Je. v. 7-9).

For all his detestation of idolatry the Israelite was guilty, Paul assents, of 'robbing temples',¹ even, it would seem, the temple of his own God! For had not God through Malachi denounced the laxity with which the Israelites performed the sacrifices demanded by the ritual laws of the old covenant in the words 'Will a man rob God? yet ye rob me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with the curse; for ye rob me, even this whole nation' (Rom. ii. 22; Mal. iii. 8, 9)? For all his glorying in the law the Israelite, by transgressing it, had dishonoured the God who gave it, particularly in the eyes of the surrounding nations, amongst whom his lot had been cast (Rom. ii. 23; Ezk. xxxvi. 20, 23). And for all his pride in being circumcised the Israelite had tended to forget that there was no inherent security in circumcision against God's wrath. Circumcision was a sign or seal of the covenant; but, if the moral obligations imposed by the covenant were disregarded, circumcision was as unavailing as uncircumcision (Rom. ii. 25). Nor did membership of the visible congregation of Israel necessarily carry with it membership of the true Israel, in which something more was required from the worshipper than the punctilious observance of the letter of the law. God demanded an inner worship of the heart such as He alone could recognize and appraise (Rom. ii. 28, 29).

Throughout the series of dramatic rhetorical questions in the closing verses of Romans ii Paul is, in effect, drawing attention to the truth that those who prided themselves on being the people of God, were even more subject to the divine wrath than those who were outside the privileges of the divine covenant. For 'to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more' (Lk. xii. 48). The judgment which 'begins at the house of God' (1 Pet. iv. 17) is for that very reason more searching and severe. The tragedy was that the Israelite had never really recognized his sin and was too ready to class the rest of mankind as sinners. The pathetic trust which in Paul's day he had come to place in

¹ Paul does not accuse the Jew of 'idolatry' because since the exile idolatry had become increasingly abhorrent to Israel. In the Old Testament, however, idolatry, particularly in the form of Baal-worship, had again and again provoked the Holy One of Israel 'to anger'. (See e.g. Dt. xxxii. 16, 21, xxix. 24-28.)

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the outward and visible signs of his religion, was the climax of the continuous spiritual decline depicted in the Old Testament.

As he surveys the story of Israel Paul is led, it would seem, to ask why this moral decline was not, and indeed could not be, arrested in spite of the punishments which God in His wrath had again and again inflicted upon His people, and in spite of the fact that in the law of Moses (that unique gift of God to Israel) a great revelation of the wrath of God against sin had been made; for, as Paul says in Romans iv. 15, 'the law worketh wrath'. Just because it requires perfect obedience to its commands, it must at the same time, by the very penalties it exacts for disobedience, render the offender more subject to the divine wrath. Paul concludes that the main reason for the failure of Israel to arrest this process of moral decline lay in its wrong reaction to the forbearance of God, when so often He refrained from punishing them to the extent they deserved. When God, in the words of Psalm 1. 21, had 'kept silence' after the covenant had been violated by wickedness in Israel (and the sins which the Psalmist mentions in the previous verses of this Psalm are precisely those enumerated by Paul in this passage of Romans), the Israelites fondly supposed, as we have already noticed, that God was 'even such a one as themselves', easy-going and tolerant of evil. Failing to understand that His goodness in delaying to inflict full punishment and to execute His wrath to the uttermost was designed solely to give further opportunity for repentance (Rom. ii. 4¹), they despised 'the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering', and concluded that He was never going to 'make a full end'. How often, as soon as He turned away His anger, remembering that they were but flesh, had they proceeded to 'turn again and tempt God and provoke the Holy One of Israel' (Ps. lxxviii. 38-40)! They had disregarded the prophets who assured them that just because God was 'gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repented him of the evil' (i.e. refused to display at present His wrath to the uttermost) they should 'rend their hearts ... and turn unto the Lord their God' (Joel ii. 13). And because 'they mocked God's messengers, and despised his words and scoffed at his prophets' the wrath of God arose against His people till 'there was no remedy' (2 Ch. xxxvi. 16).

¹ ἄγει in the expression εἰς μετάνοιάν σε ἄγει should be interpreted as a conative present. 'The goodness of God is intended to lead thee to repentance.'

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Paul also insists, in the same way as the chronicler of old, that this abuse of God's mercies, so far from staying the avenging hand of God, must result in an accumulation of offences which will finally receive in full the punishment they deserve. If men fail to use the opportunities for repentance; if they persist in hardening their hearts as Pharaoh hardened his heart; and if, in spite of the fact that God has 'stretched out his hand all the day long' to them (Is. lxxv. 2) they remain a rebellious people, then their hard and impenitent hearts are treasuring up for themselves wrath in the final day of wrath and of the righteous judgment of God (see Rom. ii. 5). This is the only *abiding* wealth that the wicked possess. It is not because God has laid aside His wrath, but because He has willed to show His wrath and to make His power known on the great 'day of wrath' that He has 'endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction' (Rom. ix. 22¹). In that final display of wrath His righteousness will be vindicated and His name glorified. The goodness of God can never therefore secure

impunity to sinners; and their abuse of it must of necessity aggravate their guilt and their punishment.

Both the evidence then of the Old Testament and the state of the Jews in Paul's own day bore witness to the truth that Jews as well as Gentiles were the object of the divine wrath, from which nothing but the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ could rescue them; for 'none was righteous, no not a single one' (Rom. iii. 10). Those who receive special knowledge of God and are the peculiar objects of His love must also, as the prophets insisted, be the special objects of His wrath if they disregard that knowledge and despise that love. 'You only', says God through Amos, 'have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities' (Am. iii. 2). And Amos proceeds to describe in chapter four some of the ways in which God would 'visit the transgressions of Israel upon him'. Moreover once God has decided to execute His wrath upon His people nothing that they can do can withstand it. So Ezekiel prophesies the futility of any defence by the inhabitants of Jerusalem against the Babylonians; for the downfall of the city has been decreed by God. The inhabitants of Jerusalem have indeed made preparations for defence, but they lack courage to face the enemy just because the wrath of God has predetermined their defeat.

¹ The participle *θέλων* in this verse I assume to be causative and not concessive.

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'They have blown the trumpet, and have made all ready; but none goeth to the battle: for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof' (Ezk. vii. 14). 'Who', asked the Psalmist, 'may stand in thy sight, when once thou art angry?' (Ps. lxxvi. 7).

It was not however to be inferred from this long story of a disobedient and backsliding people that God's election of Israel to be a chosen instrument of His purpose had failed. If there was no ground for any boastful sense of superiority on the part of the Jew, so too there was no ground for any boasting on the part of the Gentile. God's plan for the salvation of His elect could not be rendered void either by the disobedience of the chosen people; or by the arrogance of their oppressors; or by those whom God had called to be the instruments of His avenging wrath, but who had boasted of their own strength and assumed glory for themselves. If His anger is kindled against His own people, it is also kindled against those who sought to prevent the execution of His will for Israel. An outstanding instance of such an attempt to thwart the purposes of God is the stubbornness of Pharaoh. Yet the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the subsequent punishment inflicted upon him were the means by which God's power was shown and His name published abroad in the earth (see Rom. ix. 17; Ex. iv. 16). Similarly because 'Amalek set himself against Israel in the way when he came out of Egypt' Saul is bidden to be the minister of God's avenging wrath by smiting Amalek and utterly destroying 'all that they have' (1 Sa. xv. 2, 3). And when Saul disobeys this command by sparing Agag and the best of the spoils he learns that he himself has become hostile to the Lord because 'he did not execute the fierce wrath upon Amalek' (1 Sa. xxviii. 18). 'The kings of the earth who take counsel together against the Lord', said the Psalmist, 'shall be had in derision by the Lord, who will speak unto them in his wrath and vex them in his sore displeasure' (see Ps. ii. 1-5).

As for those whom God had summoned to inflict punishment upon Israel, such as the Assyrians, God speaks to them through Isaiah in this fashion: 'Ho Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation! I will send him against a profane nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets'; but the prophecy continues : 'I will punish ... the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he hath said, By the strength of my hand have I done it, and by my wisdom; for I am pru-

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dent' (Is. xx. 5, 6, 12, 13).

The prophecy of Nahum, which predicts the destruction of Nineveh the Assyrian capital, whose crimes have merited its downfall, is prefaced by a remarkable introductory poem descriptive of the manifestation of God's wrath in the convulsions of nature. 'The Lord is a jealous God and avengeth; the Lord avengeth and is full of wrath; the Lord taketh vengeance on his adversaries ... the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers... . The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt; and the earth is upheaved at his presence... . Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?' (Na. i. 2-6). This wrath is soon to be turned against Nineveh 'the bloody city ... all full of lies and rapine'. Because 'the prey departeth not' and Nineveh is always plundering, it will itself be the prey of the plunderer. Because 'through the glamour of its power and the speciousness of its statecraft it has seduced to their ruin the peoples that entered into relations with it ... it will undergo degradation parallel to that inflicted upon an unchaste woman'.¹

Similarly, when Habakkuk complained to God that the Chaldeans whom God had raised up to punish His people were themselves a wicked people, he was told that, because the soul of the Chaldean was puffed up and not upright in him (see Hab. ii. 4); and because he had used his victories as occasions for evil gain and tyrannous oppression, he too would become the object of the divine wrath. The third chapter of Habakkuk contains a poem descriptive of God marching forth to execute His wrath against all peoples who thwart His purposes. 'Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the nations in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, for the salvation of thine anointed' (Hab. iii. 12, 13).

Another very vivid description of God's vengeance upon the enemies of Israel is to be found in Isaiah lxiii. 1-6. The prophet sees God coming 'from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah' stained with the blood of His enemies; and God tells him that He alone 'in the greatness of his strength' could so succour His people in their distress. 'I have trodden the winepress alone; ... yea, I trod them in mine anger, and trampled them in my fury;

¹ G. W. Wade's paraphrase of Nahum iii. 4, 5 in *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, p. 592.

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and their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments... . For the day of vengeance was in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come'.

These last two passages remind us that, though God's people deserve and receive in part punishment at the hands of God, who is angry when faced with sin, and who must give expression through His anger to His sovereignty and His justice, nevertheless in His dealings with Israel under the covenant relationship He is concerned to make ready the way (if need be by the extermination of His enemies) for the execution of His plan for the salvation of His elect. The love of God does not eliminate His wrath, but it prevents Him from giving *full* expression to it in His dealings with Israel. In His loving mercy He has chosen Israel to be a peculiar people, the people of the covenant; and that covenant relationship can never be abandoned till a new covenant has been established. However much Israel may sin, it was called out of Egypt to be the son of God's love (Ho. xi. 1). Samaria, the city where Israel dwelt, could never therefore become as Sodom or as one of the cities of the Plain. Such is the burden of God's tender pleadings in Hosea xi. 8ff.: 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God and not man'.

But the most tender, perhaps, of all such expressions of God's love for Israel, which leads Him to refuse to abandon the covenant relationship with His chosen people, and necessitates a limitation of His anger, is that contained in Isaiah liv. 8, 10: 'In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee *for a moment*; but with *everlasting* kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy redeemer... . For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.' Or, as the same truth is expressed in Micah vii. 18, 'He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.'

We can sum up this part of our study by saying that under the old covenant the nature of sin was made clear; and men were forced by the destructive manifestations of God's power to recognize that His attitude towards sin can only be one of wrath. The old covenant could not, however, save men from sin, nor put

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them right with God. But when through the revelation given in the law and the prophets, and through the unmistakable signs of the divine wrath in the providential ordering of human affairs, God had revealed Himself in His absolute sovereignty, His perfect holiness, and His unflinching justice, — then the old covenant had done its work, and the way was open for the establishment of the new. In other words, when the truth had at least partially been learned, as Job eventually learned it, in the bitter school of suffering, that man must not contend with God his Maker; that all human pride must be crushed before Him who reveals Himself in the whirlwind; and that the sinner must be humiliated and 'abhor himself and repent in dust and ashes' (Jb. xlii. 6), — then the

infinite pity and mercy of God, of which the Old Testament so often speaks, could break through into human history in the person of His incarnate Son. In Jesus the loving purposes of God set forth in the Old Testament, come finally to fulfilment; but not, let us notice, by any abandonment of the reality of His wrath or by any refusal to display it. The God revealed in Jesus Christ is the same God who challenged Job to pour forth, if he could, the overflowings of his anger, and look upon every one that is proud and abase him and bring him low (see Jb. xl. 11, 12). To manifest anger effectively against the pride which constitutes human sin is still, and must always be the sole prerogative of almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our next task therefore must be to see how in Jesus Christ we have a revelation from heaven not only of the goodness, but also of the severity of God.

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III

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE WRATH OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

Enough has already been said in this study to indicate that the view advocated so persistently and so thoroughly by Marcion in the second century, and consciously or unconsciously echoed in much so-called 'Christian' teaching in recent years, that the Old Testament reveals solely a God of wrath and the New Testament solely a God of love, is completely erroneous. It can easily be disproved by anyone who is prepared to give more than superficial attention to the text of the Bible, unless resort is made to the use of the critical knife in order to eradicate evidence which conflicts with the presuppositions of the critic. As a matter of observed fact, we do not find any gradual declension in the degree of emphasis which is placed on the wrath of God during the period of revelation with which the Old Testament is concerned; nor do we find that the revelation of God as a loving Father is confined to the New Testament, though it is in the Person and work of Jesus the Christ that that revelation is uniquely and supremely made. There are few more beautiful expressions of the love of God than that contained in Psalm ciii, especially in verse 8, where we read: 'The Lord is full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always be chiding; neither will he keep his anger for ever.' Yet within the same Psalter we also read 'God is a righteous Judge, yea, a God that hath indignation every day' (Ps. vii. 11). It is moreover a *New Testament* writer who, when he speaks of God as Father, emphasizes in the same breath His work as Judge before whom men must live in fear (1 Pet. i. 17); and it is another *New Testament* author who, echoing the words of Deuteronomy iv. 24, says 'Our God', i.e. the God whom we Christians worship, 'is a consuming fire' (Heb. xii. 29).

Nor is it only in the Old Testament that we read stories about sudden destruction overtaking as a divine punishment those who thwart the purposes of God or flout His mercy — stories such as that of the mauling by bears of the forty-two young hooligans at Bethel, who taunted Elisha with the words 'Go up, thou bald head' (2 Ki. xii. 22-24).¹ In the New Testament Herod Agrippa,

¹ For a full and careful exegesis of this much misunderstood narrative see *The Severity of God*, D. E. Hart-Davies, pp. 47-65.

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the murderer of the apostle James and the persecutor of the apostle Peter, who so gloried in the outward apparel of his royalty and was so corrupted by human pride that he gladly received the idolatrous flattery of his subjects, when they declared that he spake not as a man but as a God, was struck suddenly by a devastating mortal disease (Acts xii. 22, 23). Similarly Ananias and Sapphira are punished by sudden death for 'tempting the spirit of the Lord', even as the Israelites tempted God in the wilderness and were destroyed by serpents (Acts v. 9; 1 Cor. x. 9). Each of the two Testaments contains revelations of both 'the goodness and the severity of God', for these two attributes of the divine nature cannot in fact be separated. As A. G. Hebert has recently written, 'The love of God demands as its correlative the wrath of God, just because God does care and because He is man's true God, and He has called man to fellowship with Himself, and man's rejection of that fellowship is his ruin and perdition. Because the New Testament emphasizes the love of God it also emphasizes His wrath, and the evangelists repeatedly show our Lord as righteously angry.'¹ This last sentence would appear to be a truer evaluation of the evidence of the Gospels than that made by Professor C. H. Dodd when he writes: 'The concept of the wrath of God does not appear in the teaching of Jesus unless we press certain features of the parables in an illegitimate manner.'²

When we consider carefully the evidence of the Gospels it is clear that the revelation of the wrath of God in Jesus Christ is in fact to be found as part both of His prophetic and His priestly ministry. As the proclaimer of 'the words of eternal life' He reveals the divine wrath first by calling upon men, as John the Baptist had done before Him, to repent in view of the inevitable 'wrath to come' which would fall upon the unrepentant. That Jesus taught no doctrine of universal salvation, but that He rather bade men fear the final day of God's wrath is clear from such sayings as: 'Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him' (Lk. xii. 4, 5). And 'those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent,

¹ *The Authority of the Old Testament*, p. 252.

² *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 23.

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ye shall all likewise perish' (Lk. xiii. 4, 5). What Jesus saw to be awaiting the generation which He was addressing was for the most part not salvation but condemnation. It would be better, He said, for Tyre and Sidon, heathen cities, in the day of judgment than for the cities wherein His mighty works had been done (Lk. x. 14). It is noticeable that Luke the evangelist, whom Dante called '*scriba mansuetudinis Christi*', does not hesitate to record all these sayings; and he also alone

notes that Jesus spoke of the disaster which would descend upon God's people in the destruction of Jerusalem specifically as a manifestation of His wrath (Lk. xxi. 23).

A similar revelation of the divine wrath is made in some of the parables of Jesus, especially those which are concerned with God's judgment. It is true that the details of these parables cannot always be pressed allegorically; but some scholars are perhaps guilty of unduly abandoning the allegorical element, which would seem clearly to be present in some of them. Thus, in speaking of the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew xxii, Professor Dodd writes: 'To find the character of God exhibited in the King who destroys His enemies is as illegitimate as to find it in the character of the Unjust Judge.'¹ It should be pointed out, however, that at the conclusion of the parable of the Unjust Judge our Lord makes it perfectly clear that the judge is not to be interpreted allegorically, but that the argument implied is *a fortiori*. We may paraphrase Luke xviii. 6, 7 as follows: 'The Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge [who in this isolated instance has shown some "regard for man"] said. And shall not God [whose character is so wholly different from that of the unrighteous judge] avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night?' In the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew xxii on the other hand no such explanation is given; and the hearers would naturally suppose that in verse 7 Jesus was making a prophecy of the destruction which awaited the holy city as a sign of God's anger. 'But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.'² In the parallel parable of the Great Supper

¹ *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 23.

² Many modern critical commentators regard this passage as a *vaticinium post eventum*; but, even if this subjective criticism is accepted, it remains noticeable that the evangelist, who makes this 'insertion', seems not to have felt that there was anything incongruous in the identification of the angry King of the parable with God Himself.

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in Luke the host is similarly described as 'being angry' with the guests who refused the invitation to the banquet (Lk. xiv. 21). In the other parable, in which definite reference is made to the anger of the chief character in the story, the parable of the Unforgiving Servant, our Lord definitely asserts that God will deal with those unwilling to forgive in the same way as the king in the story dealt with the unforgiving slave. He Himself allegorizes the story. 'And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. *So* shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts' (Mt. xviii. 34, 35).

Secondly, Jesus reveals the wrath of God in the undisguised expressions of His anger, to which the evangelists draw attention on specific occasions in His prophetic ministry. The only *certain* passage in the Gospels where Jesus is *explicitly* stated to have been angry is the Marcan account of the healing of the man with the withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath, where we read: 'And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their heart, he saith to the man, Stretch forth thy hand' (iii. 5). Matthew has no parallel to the first part of this sentence; while Luke, who seems to be following Mark closely, says, 'And he

looked round about on them all, and said unto him, Stretch forth thy hand' (Mt. xii. 13; Lk. vi. 10).

It is Mark who, as so often in his Gospel, draws attention to the human emotions of Jesus, though they are never merely human emotions, for in them is revealed the divine reaction to men's words and deeds. Commentators have drawn attention to the fact that the participle expressing the angry look of Christ in this incident is in the aorist tense (περιβλεψόμενος), while the participle expressing the sorrow of Christ is in the present tense (συνλυπούμενος), the deduction being that the anger was expressed in one passing indignant glance, while the sorrow was persistent. Even so, the fact of the anger of Jesus on this occasion remains. It would seem to have been roused not merely by the desire of those present to find reasons for accusing Him, but also by their failure to face up to the fact that mere abstention from wrong-doing (in the legal sense) was no adequate interpretation of the divine command to do no work on the Sabbath. 'They remained silent' when Jesus asked them the pertinent question, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath-day to do good or to do harm? to save a life or to kill?' They failed to understand that there were occasions when not to act was in fact to do evil; and

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when to refrain from healing was in effect to commit murder. And how could an interpretation of the duty of Sabbath observance be justified which led to a violation of the sixth commandment? It is true that the Rabbis permitted acts of healing to take place on the Sabbath if it was believed that life was in immediate danger; and the Pharisees may well have thought that in this case the life of the man with the withered hand was not immediately in danger. Our Lord however seems to be angry that *they* should claim to be able to decide whether or not a human life was in danger. This was part of the arrogance due to sin, which blinds men to the realization that they stand in jeopardy every hour, and have no life at all apart from Him who is the Lord and giver of life. And it was this blindness (the true meaning of πώρωσις in Mark iii. 5) which angered and grieved the Christ.

If in Mark i. 41 the reading ὀργισθεῖς 'being angry' (found in the Codex Bezae, three old Latin MSS, and in Ephraem's commentary on Tatian's *Diatessaron*) is original, we should have in this evangelist's account of the cleansing of the leper a second specific reference in the Gospels to an actual display of anger by Jesus. This reading, on the grounds of internal evidence, has some claim to be considered original; for, as C. H. Turner remarked, 'It is inconceivable that any scribe should have substituted anger for compassion [the alternative reading being σπλαγχνισθεῖς], while the converse is intelligible'. The anger of Jesus might indeed have been aroused by the uncertainty expressed in the leper's words, as to Christ's willingness to heal. For, as Turner added, 'to acknowledge His power but to doubt His good-will was to display the same temper as that of the scribes from Jerusalem who admitted His power but denied that it came from God'.¹ (See Mk. iii. 22ff.) Ephraem's comment is worth recalling, '*Quia dixit "Si vis" iratus est; quia eddit "potes" eum sanavit*'.² But in the absence of stronger external attestation the reading ὀργισθεῖς cannot be considered certain.

In Mark x. 14 we read that Jesus was 'moved with indignation' (ἠγγανάκτησεν) with His disciples for rebuking those who brought little children for Him to 'touch'; or, as Matthew says, 'that he should lay his hands upon them and pray' (Mt. xix. 13). The indignation of Jesus on this occasion was called forth, it would seem, not merely by humanitarian motives. Jesus was

¹ *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, p. 56.

² Quoted by Swete in *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, p. 29.

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indignant, I would suggest, because the thought that lay behind the disciples' words probably was 'What have these children *done to merit* a blessing at the Master's hands? Later on, when they have some good deeds to their credit, they may come and justly claim a blessing but not now.' It was just this way of regarding the relationship between God and man which evoked the indignation of Jesus with His disciples. They were showing themselves to be Pharisees at heart. How could He refrain from bestowing His blessing upon little children, when, as He at once proceeds in effect to point out, they were living parables of the essential truth that He had come to proclaim, — the truth that, just because sin renders man so proud and self-sufficient, a new birth, brought about by the creative activity of God Himself, is necessary before the human heart can receive the reign of God within it? Man has to *receive* salvation, which he can never merit however long he may live, and receive it as willingly as a little child receives the gifts that are offered him.

Just as the evangelists, in the incident of the children brought to Jesus, draw attention to this indignation with His disciples for their failure to understand the truth stated in Romans iii. 20 that 'by works of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight'; so too do they show Him displaying righteous wrath in cleansing the Temple. The cause of His wrath on this occasion was the blind trust that the Pharisees had come to put in the Temple sacrifices as the means by which the covenant-relationship with God could be maintained and they themselves delivered from the wrath to come. They failed to see the temporary nature of the Levitical system, and knew not the truth stated in the Epistle to the Hebrews that 'it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins' (Heb. x. 4). The Temple moreover had failed to be 'a house of prayer for all nations'; but had become increasingly since the Exile the outward symbol of the exclusiveness of Israel. It had also been turned into 'a den of robbers' (see Je. vii. 8-11), where men thought they could salve their consciences after fraudulent transactions within the very house of God itself. When Jesus in St. John's Gospel, on the first visit to Jerusalem recorded by that evangelist, 'made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers' money, and overthrew their tables', He was not only, as the disciples came to see, 'eaten up with a zeal for the Lord's house' (see Jn. ii. 17); but was also, though the evangelist does not record this prophecy, fulfilling the words of Malachi iii. 1, 2: 'The Lord ... shall

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suddenly come to his temple ... But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire'. In the Synoptic Gospels the cleansing of the Temple is one of the last prophetic acts of Jesus and leads directly to His death and resurrection; or, to state the matter theologically, the destruction and rebuilding of the temple of His Body, of which the Johannine account of the incident speaks (Jn. ii. 19-22), were the means by which a purer and universal worship would be rendered possible within the shrine of the hearts of the redeemed. In Mark and Matthew the incident is also closely connected with the mysterious cursing of the fig-tree. Israel had been meant to be like a tree planted by the water-side which would bring forth fruit in due season. It had however become like the fig-tree which Jesus cursed. For its appearance gave the impression that it was bearing fruit while in reality it was bearing no fruit at all. Instead of bringing forth fruit worthy of repentance, which would enable it to 'flee from the wrath to come', by its showy legalism and the false security of its temple worship Israel had rendered itself liable to God's curse.

The third way in which Jesus manifested the divine wrath in His prophetic ministry was by the severity with which He denounced those whose behaviour and beliefs were contrary to what they knew to be the expressed will of God, or who deliberately rejected the divine grace which was being offered to them in His own Person and work.

One of His sternest sayings was directed against those who deliberately placed stumbling-blocks in the way of an immature believer. 'Whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea' (Mt. xviii. 6). 'The sin of sins', it has been well said, 'is that of leading others into sin, especially the weak, the untaught, the easily perplexed, the easily misled'. The Pharisees (and later the Judaizers, who tried to rob Paul's converts of the liberty which they had in Christ Jesus) were especially guilty of this sin. It is not therefore surprising that some of the most angry denunciations of Jesus are levelled against the Pharisees; and the series of woes which occupies Matthew xxiii is a most thorough and searching description of the kind of sinful behaviour, of which respectable and 'religious' people are capable, when they are still fundamentally unrepentant and therefore blind to the power of sin within them which is vitiating

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their intentions and their actions. The contents of Matthew xxiii apply therefore not only to the Pharisees who first heard them, and who despised all whom they classified as 'sinners' because they either could not or would not keep their traditions, but to all whom Jesus satirized as 'the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance'. The contents of this chapter have been well summarized by James Denney as follows:

'To keep people ignorant of religious truth neither living by it ourselves, nor letting them do so (verse 13); to make piety or the pretence of it a cloak for avarice (14); to raise recruits for our own faction on the pretext of enlisting men for the Kingdom of God (15); to debauch the simple conscience by casuistical sophistries (16-22); to destroy the sense of proportion in morals by making morality a matter of law in which all things stand on the same level (23ff.); to put appearance above reality; and reduce

life to a play, at once tragedy and farce (25-28); to revive the spirit and renew the sins of the past while we affect a pious horror of them; to crucify the living prophets while we build monuments to the martyred (29ff.) — these are the things which make a storm of anger sweep over the soul of Jesus and burst in this tremendous denunciation of His enemies.¹

But the 'woes' of Jesus, so eloquent of the wrath of God, are pronounced not only upon the Pharisees and all who manifest a Pharisaical spirit, but also upon those who pride themselves upon their material possessions or their personal achievements; those who are self-satisfied; those who are gay because they are blind to any need for repentance; and those who imagine that their life must be good because it wins the approval of their fellows. The wrath of God, it is implied in Luke vi. 24-26, is upon all who are in this sense 'rich' or 'full' or who 'laugh' or who are 'well-spoken of by men'.

It was just because this was the condition in which all men lay, though most of them were unaware of it, that Jesus, because He had come to reveal the love as well as the wrath of God, had to do something more than give utterance as a divinely commissioned messenger to the doom which awaited the unrepentant and the unbelieving at the hands of a righteous and angry God. In addition to a prophetic ministry He had a priestly work to perform; a work which involved nothing less than drinking to the dregs the cup of divine wrath, 'the cup of his fury', as it is called in Isaiah li. 17. He drank that cup in Gethsemane and on

¹ *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, p. 61.

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Calvary, when God 'laid upon him the iniquity of us all'. It was the knowledge of the bitterness of the contents of this cup that led Him to pray that 'if possible the cup might pass from him' and to utter, or at least to contemplate the utterance of the prayer, 'Father, save me from this hour' (Mt. xxvi. 39; Jn. xii. 27).

When Paul says that 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us' (Gal. iii. 13) and that 'Him who knew no sin God made to be sin on our behalf' (2 Cor. v. 21), he is in effect saying that Christ, sinless though He was, experienced the wrath of God towards sinners which rendered them liable to the death which was pronounced by the law to be accursed. We are not of course to suppose that in drinking this cup of wrath Jesus felt that God was angry with Himself. How could the Father be angry with 'the beloved Son in whom he was well pleased', who arose from His knees in Gethsemane with the words 'Thy will not mine be done' on His lips; and who knew that God could only be supremely glorified by the passion of His Son? (Jn. xii. 31). But He did experience the misery, the affliction, the punishment and the death which are the lot of all sinners subject, as sinners must be, to the wrath of God who, just because He is all holy and all righteous, must punish sinners. It is therefore very natural that Christians should feel, when they contemplate the passion of Jesus, the relevance to His sufferings of the words put by Jeremiah into the mouth of the stricken city of Jerusalem, when God visited His wrath upon her in the Babylonian invasion: 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted

me in the day of his fierce anger' (La. i. 12). It was, moreover, out of the horror of experiencing that complete separation from God which is the inevitable and permanent state of the wicked that the cry of the Psalmist was heard once again in the darkness of the first Good Friday as the cup of wrath was being drained to the dregs by the Saviour, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Ps. xxii. 1; Mt. xxvii. 46).

This drinking of the cup of the divine wrath on behalf of those for whom it was prepared was an essential part of His 'Father's business' which Jesus had come into the world to perform: and, when Peter sought to dissuade Him from fulfilling this vocation,

¹ It is uncertain whether these last words should be regarded as a question or a statement, i.e. as a projected prayer or a spoken prayer.

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the Lord spoke to him with a vehemence difficult to dissociate from wrath: 'Get thee behind me, Satan'. All who would not accept Him as the Lamb of God, by whose sacrifice the guilt of sinners was to be removed, were in effect choosing damnation rather than salvation, darkness rather than light, death rather than life. This is made abundantly clear in many of the sayings of Jesus recorded in St. John's Gospel; and in none more explicitly than in John iii. 36, 'He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him'. Equally severe is the saying recorded in Matthew xxi. 44, when Jesus refers to Himself as the Stone rejected by the builders which had nevertheless become the chief cornerstone in that new temple, where alone men can find security and obtain release from the divine wrath; and then adds: 'He that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust'. Because the Jews had 'fallen on this stone', Jesus prophesied that the kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (see Mt. xxi. 43). To fail to recognize that the mighty deeds of Jesus were in fact a divine assault upon the citadel of evil; and to attribute them to some malignant power, as the scribes who came down from Jerusalem to Galilee did, was to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit; and 'whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' (Mk. iii. 29). Similarly, to refuse to see Jesus for what He was, i.e. the Son of God sent to proclaim the words of God and to do the works of God, rendered the Jews no longer the children of God but the children of the devil, doomed to 'die in their sins' and so receive the punishment prepared for the devil and his angels (see Jn. viii. 42ff.).

These are sayings of terrible severity, but they are just as much part of the revelation of God made known in Christ Jesus as those sayings and deeds of the Master which so conspicuously display the divine love and mercy. To thrust these severe sayings on one side and to concentrate attention solely upon passages of the Gospels where the divine Fatherhood is proclaimed is to preach a debilitated Christianity, which does not and cannot do what Christ came into the world to do, viz. save men from the wrath to come. In this connection we may welcome the words of a recent writer who remarks:

'Those who perceive only the love of God avert their eyes from the uncongenial doctrine of the wrath of God. But in eliminating the wrath or dis-

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grace of God they have also eliminated the grace of God. Where there is no fear there can be no rescue. Where there is no condemnation there can be no acquittal. Love must be based on justice, else it degenerates into mere affection.¹ Or we may put this vital truth a little differently by saying that by seeking to eliminate Hell we must in effect also eliminate Heaven, which, in the words of the *Te Deum*, Jesus by His death and resurrection 'opened up to all believers'.

The resurrection is the abiding evidence that the priestly sacrifice of Jesus has been accepted by the just and holy God. The New Testament makes it quite clear that the good news of the first Easter day was not just that a man had been raised from the grave, but that the sacrifice of Christ the true Passover Lamb had received divine approval, and that therefore all who accepted it in faith as the means of salvation were placed in a new status with God, the status not of dis-grace but grace, and were no longer of necessity the objects of His wrath, but able to enter into the divine glory as redeemed sons of God. Jesus is consequently proclaimed in the apostolic gospel as He 'that delivers us from the wrath to come' (1 Thes. i. 10). 'Being now justified by his blood', Paul tells the Romans, 'we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him' (Rom. v. 9). The believer can therefore await with confidence and assurance the day on which that wrath will finally and fully be revealed, knowing that God has not appointed him 'unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thes. v. 9). For, though the wrath of God is always being revealed to a greater or less extent in the judgments of God that find expression in the providential ordering of human history, the history both of nations and of individuals, it remains true that in His mercy He endures 'with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction' (Rom. ix. 22). In consequence there must be, and the Bible again and again affirms that there will be, a final day of judgment which will prove a day of full salvation for the believer, but will be a day of the uttermost wrath for the wicked.

¹ F. C. Synge, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 46.

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IV

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE DIVINE WRATH UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that those who responded in faith to the apostolic gospel, and came under the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of Christ, were conscious of a change so great that the only human language adequate to describe it was the language of birth and resurrection. They had been 'born again'; they had 'passed from death to life'. God had delivered them 'out of the power of darkness and translated them into the kingdom of the Son of his love' (see Col. i. 13). An essential

element in this conversion experience was the knowledge that they were no longer under wrath but 'under grace'. The New Testament is very far, however, from asserting that the Christian is automatically, as it were, removed from any manifestation of the divine anger. The burden of its message is that the justified sinner must become the sanctified sinner. He is called to abide in the divine love. The essential difference between the believer and the unbeliever is that, while the latter, whether he realizes it or not, is inevitably subject to God's wrath, the believer, by continual submission to the Holy Spirit, remains under grace, and so escapes that wrath.

Paul was much concerned to warn the Christians of the danger of being deluded by a false sense of security. Because they lived by faith in Christ who had sacrificed Himself for them, they were under an obligation, he reminded them, to offer themselves as a sacrifice untainted by any uncleanness or covetousness; for any such moral stains would render them not, as they now had the right and the power to be, 'sons of God', but the 'children of disobedience' subject to the wrath of God (see Eph. v. 1-6). Because after formerly being 'darkness' they were now 'light in the Lord' they must 'walk as children of light' and bring forth that fruit of light which consists of moral goodness (Eph. v. 8, 9). Because they were 'risen with Christ' and were able by virtue of Christ's resurrection to enjoy the benefits of His passion, they must 'seek the things that are above ... and mortify their members upon the earth'; and these 'members' are stated to be in particular sensuality, and 'covetousness which is idolatry':¹ and Paul adds that it is because of these things

¹ A possible explanation of Paul's identification of 'covetousness' with 'idolatry' is given by E. F. Scott: 'Probably the true explanation is to be found in a Hebrew mode of speech which enforced the gravity of an offence by assimilating it to one which everyone would recognize as a very serious one' (*Epistle to the Colossians, Moffatt Commentary*, p. 67). Paul may however be implying that the wealth, the power, the influence which men covet tend to become their idols. There is a similar close association of covetousness and idolatry which provoke the Lord to anger in Isaiah lvii where, after a graphic description of idolatry in the first half of the chapter, God says in verse 17, 'For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him; I hid my face and was wroth.'

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that 'the wrath of God cometh upon the sons of disobedience' (Col. iii. 1-6). Because they were 'not under law but under grace' they must not forget that there is a 'law of Christ' which has to be kept (Gal. vi. 2). Because they had 'put off the old man and put on the new man' they needed to remember that the new man must be 'renewed unto knowledge after the image of him who created him' (Col. iii. 9-11). It was true, Paul tells the Thessalonians, that God 'appointed them not unto wrath but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ'; for this very reason therefore they need to respond to the call to be 'sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation' (1 Thes. v. 8, 9).

Many of the Corinthian 'Christians' in particular failed to see that Christianity was very different from the Greek mystery religions. It was not an *opus operatum* rendering them permanently secure. Those who were 'in Christ', members of the new

Israel, and children of the new covenant, were not free from the obligation of worrying about moral behaviour. If it was true that 'all things were lawful unto them', it was also true that 'all things were not expedient'. Paul in his attempt to disillusion them on this vital matter recalls the fate which overtook the majority of the Israelites during their journey from Egypt to Canaan. In so doing he makes it clear that the God with whom these ancient Israelites had to deal is the same God who has made the Corinthian Christians part of the new Israel, and established with them a new covenant inaugurated by the blood of Jesus. The story of the old Israel has been written down not just as a matter of antiquarian interest, but because it is an inspired record containing a word of God relevant for God's people at all times. 'These things', Paul asserts, 'happened unto them by way of example, and they were written for our admonition' (1 Cor. x. 11). They were historical incidents of unique significance because in them the living God acted in

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order to reveal to mankind an essential element in His nature.

These Israelites of old, Paul reminds the Corinthians, were a privileged people no less than the Christians. They were 'under the cloud' of divine protection. They too had a saviour and experienced salvation, for they were redeemed from bondage in Egypt and enjoyed the leadership of Moses, a man endowed with supernatural power. They too had their sacraments, for they were fed with bread from heaven and drank of life-giving water from the rock. Nevertheless they were on many occasions subject to remarkable and devastating visitations of the divine wrath. 'With most of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.'

In the Old Testament accounts of almost all the examples referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians x. 1-10 explicit mention is made of the wrath of God with Israel. When the Lord had sent quails amongst them when they lusted after flesh, we read that 'while the flesh [of the quails] was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague' (Nu. xi. 33). When Aaron erected the golden calf and said, 'These be thy gods, O Israel'; and 'the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play'; the Lord said unto Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them' (Ex. xxxii. 4, 5, 9, 10). When the people committed 'whoredom with the daughters of Moab: for they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods; and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods ... the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel ... and those that died by the plague were twenty and four thousand' (Nu. xxv. 1-3, 9). When Israel tried the patience of God and spake against Aaron and Moses saying, 'Wherefore have you led us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?' the anger of the Lord (though this actual phrase is not used at this point) found expression in the plague of fiery serpents, until through the intercession of Moses relief was obtained by the erection of a brazen serpent to act as the medium of God's saving grace (Nu. xxi. 5-8). When, after the earth had swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram because they had rebelled against their divinely appointed leaders, the congregation of Israel again 'murmured against Moses and Aaron', the

outbreak of the plague which fell upon the people is heralded by Moses in the words 'there is wrath gone out from the Lord' (Nu. xvi. 46). Paul clearly im-

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plies in his references to these incidents in 1 Corinthians x that penalties of equal severity to those exacted by God from the ancient Israelites are liable to fall upon the Christians if they think that they are inevitably secure. 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall' (x. 12). The Corinthian Christians, moreover, doubtless prided themselves that they were no longer heathen and profane. But Paul reminds them that the partisan loyalties which exist among them are signs that they are, in fact, sacrilegious. They are desecrating the temple in which God is now pleased to dwell. And he warns them in no uncertain manner that 'if any man destroy the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are' (1 Cor. iii. 17).

It is noticeable that the Epistle to the Hebrews also draws attention to the visitation of the divine wrath upon Israel during the period of their wanderings. As a result of persistent disobedience, the author reminds his readers, as he quotes Psalm xcv, God 'swore in his wrath' that the people should never enjoy His rest in the land to which they were journeying. And although that rest remains as a hope for the children of the new covenant, nevertheless the opportunity of enjoying it can be lost for ever, if the readers should apostatize as they were in danger of doing (see Heb. iii. 7-12 and Heb. iv). The danger of 'falling into the hands of the living God' who is 'a consuming fire' is just as real under the new covenant as under the old (see Heb. x. 31 and xii. 29).¹

When Paul reminds his readers so emphatically of the danger in which they stood he is, it would appear, not merely proclaiming a truth which is self-evident in the Old Testament, but also speaking from his own experience as a Christian. Because of these persistent warnings which he gives to his fellow-Christians, if for no other reason, those interpreters would seem to be right who assume that in the dramatic description of the inner struggle in Romans vii the apostle is in fact speaking of his own experience *since* and not before his conversion. In his pre-conversion days Paul, though separated by God from his mother's womb for the great work which awaited him (Gal. i. 15), had been all the time under the divine wrath. But so far from realizing this, he had been conscious of being a blameless Pharisee (Phil. iii).

¹ For a fuller discussion of the 'severe' passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews reference may be made to my monograph *The Gospel in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Tyndale Press), pp. 47-50 [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/hebrews_tasker.pdf].

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6), full of zeal for God. He had kept the strict letter of the law; but that law had never really influenced the inner springs of conduct but had only fed the flames of his pride. Nevertheless he had been happy in his very self-righteousness, for he had fondly supposed that he was doing God's will. When therefore he looked back on this period of his life, which had culminated in the supreme sin of persecuting the church of God (1 Cor. xv. 9) under the delusion that he was doing God's work, he could say, 'I was

alive apart from the law once' (Rom. vii. 9). The essential mark of the unregenerate man lies in this disclosure. He thinks he is wholly alive, when he is in fact spiritually dead. He assumes that he is the object of God's love, when he is in fact the object of His wrath. He has in a word no conception of the extreme gravity of his situation. After his conversion, however, Paul saw clearly that formerly he had been all the time a sinner, estranged from God, and in need of a salvation which he could never achieve for himself. But now that that salvation had come to him in the mercy of God, he was conscious of a moral struggle such as he had never known before. Hitherto he had been *wholly* 'carnal', uninfluenced by the divine spirit; and so there had been no struggle of a divided self. As a Christian he is acutely conscious of such a struggle. He knows of two forces at work within him, a 'flesh' which is still very active; and a higher self, an 'I' so influenced by the divine Spirit that his mind is now sensitive to God, hating sin, and delighting in the divine law. Between this 'flesh' and this 'I' there is perpetual conflict; but potential victory now rests with the 'I', because the 'I' is no longer just 'I' but, as he puts it in Galatians ii. 19, 'not I but Christ who lives in me'. As a result of Paul's conversion, as R. Haldane well stated, 'sin had been displaced from its dominion but not from its indwelling'.¹

When therefore Paul cries out, 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' he can at once assert, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord'. But that the moral struggle goes on even after delivery from the dominion of sin the apostle makes clear by adding *after* his grateful cry of release the words, 'So then I myself with the mind serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin'. The attempt of some scholars, e.g. Moffatt, to simplify the whole passage by transferring this last sentence of verse 25 to the end of verse 23, so that it may harmonize better with the interpretation

¹ *Commentary on Romans*, p. 294.

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which assumes that Paul is describing his *pre*-conversion struggle, has no MSS evidence in its support: and as the particular interpretation which it is meant to illuminate is, as we have seen, not the most probable in the light of Paul's teaching elsewhere, it should be rejected as arbitrary and improbable. As Karl Barth has well said with reference to Romans vii: 'What Paul is here asserting was well understood by the Reformers; but it is misunderstood by those modern theologians who read him through the spectacles of their own piety... . How vast a gulf separates the nineteenth-century conquering-hero attitude to religion from that disgust of men at themselves which is the characteristic of true religion!'¹

We have seen that under the old covenant those who sought to thwart the purposes of God and to frustrate His plans for the salvation of His elect were subjected to His wrath in the disasters which befell them. Paul is equally certain that the divine wrath will descend upon those who, as he says in 1 Thessalonians ii. 15, 'both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove out us, and please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved'. Such wrath is due to fall upon them, because, as the apostle says, they are 'filling up the measure of their sins'. It is more than once stated in the Bible that God delays the display of His

wrath till offenders have reached a kind of saturation point, beyond which they may not pass. Thus in Genesis xv. 16 Abraham is warned that 'the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full'. In the same way our Lord intimated that the Pharisees of His generation must fill up the measure of the sins of their fathers before they would receive 'the judgment of hell' from which they could never escape (Mt. xxiii. 32, 33). That time, Paul implies in 1 Thessalonians ii. 16, is now imminent. 'The wrath', he states, 'is come upon them to the uttermost'. The word ἔφθασεν here used would seem to denote that the wrath is so certainly and so soon to happen, that it can be almost said to have already happened. The words were fulfilled, though not completely, in the disaster of the destruction of the holy city in A.D. 70. That was indeed a day of wrath, as Jesus specifically calls it in Luke xxi. 23, where, after prophesying the siege of Jerusalem, He says, 'there shall be great distress upon the land [i.e. the land of Palestine] and wrath unto this people [i.e. the Jewish people]'. The setting of this prophecy of the destruction of

¹ *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 269-270.

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Jerusalem in Luke xxi within a wider eschatological framework makes it clear that Jesus regarded that event as a forerunner of the final day of wrath, when He will return again to execute final judgment. To a further consideration of the biblical revelation concerning that day we must now return.

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V

THE FINAL DAY OF WRATH

The expression 'the day of the Lord' at the time of the rise of the great prophets of Israel denoted an event to which the Israelites were looking forward as the day of Jehovah's final vindication of the *righteousness of His people* against their enemies. One of the tasks of the prophets was to insist that in fact 'the day of the Lord' would be a day on which God would vindicate '*His own righteousness*' not only against the enemies of Israel, but also against Israel itself. This 'day of the Lord' throughout Old Testament prophecy remains a future reality, though there were events within the history covered by the Old Testament story which were indeed days of judgment both upon Israel and upon the surrounding nations which had oppressed her.

The certainty of this *final* 'day of the Lord', in which through the now *unrestrained* display of His wrath His absolute justice will be completely vindicated, passes over into the New Testament: and this is one of the many factors which gives unity to biblical theology. There is still a 'wrath to come', when John the Baptist begins his mission, which inaugurates the age of fulfilment to which the Old Testament is pointing. It is a fulfilment which is not finally achieved however till the *second* coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; for there is still a 'wrath to come' when the New Testament closes with the words, 'Even so come, Lord Jesus'.

The main purpose of John's mission was to enable his contemporaries to escape from that final wrath by pointing them to Jesus as the Lamb of God, through whose atoning sacrifice the sins of the world would be taken away (see Mt. iii. 7; Jn. i. 29). But this Lamb of God was also destined to be, as is stated in John v. 22, the divinely appointed agent of God's final judgment upon men. 'All judgment has been given by the Father to the Son.' For this reason that 'day of the Lord', which is still awaited at the close of the Old Testament,¹ 'the day of wrath and righteous judgment of God', as Paul designates it in Romans

¹ See Mal. iv. 1: 'For, behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace; and all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.'

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ii. 5, is in the New Testament synonymous with the return of Jesus the divine Son of Man in glory. And an essential element in the salvation experienced by those under the New Covenant is the eager and fearless expectation by the believer of this final appearing of the Saviour. The Thessalonians, Paul assures them, if they remain faithful, will find on that day complete deliverance from the wrath to come (see 1 Thes. i. 10). God who had called them had not appointed them unto wrath but unto the obtaining of final salvation through their Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Thes. v. 9). Those who at the moment were persecuted but were faithful under persecution would find 'rest at the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven with the angels of his power' (2 Thes. i. 7). But, on the other hand, to those who knew not God and obeyed not the gospel of the Lord Jesus that day would be a day of wrath, in which they would suffer 'the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might' (2 Thes. i. 9, R.S.V.).

In the New Testament, therefore, the final day of judgment can be called not only 'the day of the Lord' but, as it is called in Revelation vi. 17, 'the day of their wrath', i.e. the wrath of God and of the Lamb; or, as some MSS read in this verse 'the day of His wrath'. In the Apocalypse of John the point is stressed that, because Christ Himself has drunk the cup of divine wrath against sinners in His atoning passion, He has been entrusted with the task of being the agent through whom the divine wrath will be finally expressed. This would seem to be the main reason why believers are warned in the New Testament not to attempt to avenge themselves. By so doing they would be usurping the function which belongs to God and His Christ. In so far, however, as those who legitimately exercise authority in secular affairs are restraining evil by the punishment of transgressors, they can be said to be performing a ministry of God which, in the case of those who do evil, is a ministry in which the divine wrath is at least partially manifested (see Rom. xiii. 4).

But when Paul bids the Romans in Romans xii. 19 to 'avenge not themselves but give place unto wrath' it is almost certain that the reference is to the manifestation of the divine wrath in the fullest sense on the final day of wrath. The presence of the definite article in this verse before the word 'wrath', and the fact that Paul follows his

injunction with the quotation from Deuteronomy xxxii. 35, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith

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the Lord', would seem to place this interpretation beyond dispute.

The final divine 'repayment' comes when, as the seer of Revelation is privileged to witness, the risen and ascended Lord opens the seals of the divine book of destiny, in which the last judgments of almighty God stand written. The risen Christ alone is worthy to open this book, because He is at one and the same time the Lamb that has been slain, and the all-powerful Lion of the tribe of Judah, who has purchased unto God with His blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (see Rev. v. 9). The fact that the Lamb is also the Lion adds to the terribleness of His wrath, when He opens the seals of the book and releases the final woes and plagues which are to usher in the end. From this wrath of the Lamb all those who have had special responsibility for the conduct of human affairs, but have acted in a manner contrary to God's purposes, are pictured as hiding themselves in caves and in the rocks of the hills. For, as Swete well commented on Revelation vi. 16, 'What sinners dread is not death but the revealed presence of God'. 'There is', he adds, 'deep psychology in the remark of Genesis iii. 8, "And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." ... The Apocalyptist foresees the same shrinking from the sight of God in the last generation of mankind which Genesis attributes to the parents of the race. But there will then be a further source of terror: the end brings with the revelation of God "the wrath of the Lamb"'.¹

He it is, the holy Lamb of God, who through His ministering angels is pictured as gathering the vintage of the *earth* (so-called because it is the fruit of a vine in direct contrast to the True Vine whose branches bear fruit unto God), and casting it into the winepress, the great winepress of the wrath of God (see Rev. xiv. 9). He it is, the Word of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who treads the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God (see Rev. xix. 13, 15, 16). And He it is who gives the nations to drink of the wine that this winepress produces, the deadly wine of the fierceness of God's wrath. All who have worshipped the Beast, or some substitute for the true God, and all who have persecuted God's people, 'will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed [i.e. in full strength] in the cup of his anger' (Rev. xiv. 10). At xv. 7 a somewhat different

¹ *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. 94, 95.

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metaphor is used. The seven angels are given seven incense bowls laden with the wrath of God, and are bidden to pour out their contents upon the earth. Thus in an unmistakable manner is the final and complete effusion of God's anger symbolized.

The twenty-four elders, representing the true Church of God, are pictured as giving praise to God that this supreme vindication of divine justice has come; that the divine wrath has proved stronger than the futile raging of the nations; and that God's

servants, and prophets and saints, both great and small, have received their due reward (see Rev. xi. 18). For whatever disasters may fall upon the earth, as the death-bringing contents of the vials of wrath are poured out, they cannot touch God's servants whose foreheads are sealed with the blessed name of their Redeemer, and whose names stand written in the Lamb's book of life (see Rev. vii. 3; iii. 5). For them there awaits a return to that Paradise from which Adam was banished and an entrance into conditions of indescribable bliss, as having been brought to glory they worship God and enjoy Him for ever.

'They are before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes' (Rev. vii. 15-18).

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