

### 314 Love and wrath – Part 3

On the basis of Jesus' teaching about his heavenly Father, I find it difficult to see 'wrath' as God literally punishing people. Maybe we need to read our Bibles more relationally and less in literal, logical, mechanical (LLM) ways; as Jesus says, 'Do you think the eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, but you need to repent.'<sup>Luke 13:4</sup> Stop thinking literally, 'God punishes sinners'; instead think, 'I need to (constantly) turn back to God.'

To take an almost random OT example, how do we read this verse? *Therefore the Lord rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers (Babylon), until he thrust them from his presence.*<sup>2 Kings 17:20</sup> Is this a literal, mechanical action of 'what God did'? Does that view fit with the character of the prodigal father as portrayed (and mirrored in his life) by Jesus?

Jersak and Boyd both see God's wrath more in line with Paul's view: God *gives people over* to the *consequences* of their own sin.<sup>Romans 1</sup> As Jersak says:<sup>1</sup>

God doesn't actively investigate, arrest, convict sentence and punish sinners. There's no need and, in fact, that's not God's heart at all. Here's the bottom line: sin carries its own penalty. This is what Boyd means by saying wrath is organic or intrinsic.

They agree on that, but then – at least according to Jersak – they begin to differ. As I understand it, Boyd says that, as Israel goes on sinning, God eventually decides that enough is enough and, to teach them that sin is a really bad idea, withdraws his protection. So, in my OT verse above, God didn't actively *send* Babylon to punish them; rather he stepped back and *allowed* Babylon to take them into captivity. That feels a lot more like a prodigal father's action. But Jersak disagrees:

Boyd describes the process this way: God in his patience allows sin to go on and on. His mercy continues until he must finally withdraw it. Finally, God pulls back his mercy and gives us over to our self-destructive stubbornness.

As Jersak sees it, this implies that God decides *sometimes* to protect and sometimes *not*. Really? If a loving father *can* protect his child, would he sometimes *not* protect his child? I'm torn between Boyd and Jersak.

Stupid boy! I'm using LLM principles again to try to 'understand' how God works! Maybe I should just use the Tutu principle?<sup>2</sup> If we cooperate with God, maybe we can protect each other (to some extent) from the forces and effects of evil. In other words, perhaps if Israel had prayed and cooperated with God, together could they have resisted Babylon's attacks?

The Bible is adamant about God's faithful, covenant love and mercy, so let's keep turning back to God, keep repenting, keep loving. Maybe even pray for our enemies – 'those evil people' whom we tend to think God *ought* to punish?

Paul Bev. 26.2.24

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<sup>1</sup> Brad Jersak *A More Christ-like God* p195f.

<sup>2</sup> Desmond Tutu:<sup>[303]</sup> 'For whatever reason, since humankind showed up on the scene, God does nothing without a human partner.'