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Israel's Ogre, Revealed

A couple of weeks ago I heard a local pastor, with whom I am acquainted, preach on Lamentations chapter 3. In his message he proceeded to portray Israel's God as a very angry, out-of-control "ogre" committed to vengeance against sin and anyone who disobeyed.

As I listened I had to ask myself, is God really this way? Is he the source of the treachery that Israel is experiencing?

The words recorded by Jeremiah are quite staggering and downright depressing. I feel like I need Prozac just from reading the passage. One could get the impression that God hates humanity.

Is God the source of affliction as stated in verse 1? Does God pour out hardship and bitterness on those that fall short as stated in verse 5? Is God's demonstration of love revealed as a bear lying in wait, ready to devour (verses 10-11)? Does He despise sinners so bad as to break their teeth with gravel, (verse 16)? Is this a true perspective of God and his attitude towards sinners?

To correctly unwrap this passage we must understand it through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus declares that he is the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17).

To understand the words of the "weeping prophet" we must understand God as revealed through Jesus Christ. It is a fundamental mistake to interpret the New Testament from the Old when it should be the other way around.

In Colossians 1 we read:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Col. 1:15-20, NIV)

None of what we read sounds like Israel's perception of God. There is no mention of a God hell-bent on making the paths crooked, causing darkness, and destroying the teeth of children.

If the Israelite's perception of God is correct, wouldn't that make him the worst cosmic child abuser? If anyone of us were to treat our children this way we would be incarcerated for months, if not years, in a penal system where the most heinous criminals hate child abusers. Are murderers, rapists and thugs more righteous than God?

Israel's perspective of God is shrouded in darkness. With their fallen mind they attribute their sorrow, crooked paths, and gravel-broken teeth to God.

This is much like those of the religious community that said God caused the September 11th

attacks or the hurricane that destroyed New Orleans. These are illustrations of the depth of man's fallen mind.

Continuing in Colossians 1, Paul confirms the state of man's perspective on God. In verse 21 we read, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior."

Evil behavior has two definite results. The first is a wrong understanding of God and his nature. We have a sense of separation and a sense that God is our enemy.

"In their mind" Israel perceived God in this way. Jeremiah sees the fallen mind of Israel. Israel's "ogre" God is a concoction of that fallen mind

The second result of evil behavior is the consequence of the transgression. God does not take away the reaping of what has been sown. Israel is its own source of affliction.

Jeremiah does have an enlightened view of God, though. He writes:

This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great *is* Your faithfulness. (Lam. 3:21-23, NIV)

I, like Israel, have had wrong thoughts about God. I have perceived Him to be harsh, angry, and ready to kick butt and take names at the drop of a hat. In the revelation of Jesus we have the understanding that he not only loves us but likes us.

So great is his faithfulness that no harm will ever come to us from Him.

I find it easier to trust in a God like that than in one who would break my teeth.

~ Rick Stillwell