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GOD'S WRATH AS EXPRESSED IN A NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE
OF PUNISHMENT, PRESENT AND FUTURE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary
Wilmore, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Divinity

by
Darold L. Hill

May 1968

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Approved:

Albert R. Rose
Reader

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"The Pursuit of Pleasure," an hour documentary on the current state of American affairs, was presented on the NBC-TV network on May 8, 1967. The whole tone of the program was focused on the fact that people have more things than ever before, and yet enjoy them less. There were expert opinions on the topless bars, drug addiction, sex obsession and motorcycle clubs in addition to the mention of the upswing in men's cosmetics and hairstyling. The over-all picture of the people photographed was one of supreme sadness in its final result.

In commenting on this program, William Buckley got close to the heart of the matter by stating:

The last 150 years have been a sustained intellectual assault on the notion that kept people sane for generations and centuries, namely, that the reason why we are here is because we hope ultimately to be able to earn eternal life . . .¹

A frenzied intellectual attack has especially been made on the whole area of the theme under consideration in this paper, namely God's wrath. This is a doctrine which has a significant

¹Rick DuBrow, "An Intellectual Attack on Idea of A Hereafter," The Lexington Leader, May 9, 1967, p. 20.

relevance for temporal history, as well as for eschatology. Our American culture is now beginning to show the evidence of such an attack. Hedonism is the philosophy of the hour. The secular theologians of our day represent appalling evidence of the harvest being reaped as a result of a theology which does not seriously concern itself with the great eschatological themes of the Bible.

A study of the Christian doctrine concerning our ultimate destiny reveals that it is a subject which demands keen investigation and logical thinking. The field is large and difficult because of the various streams of belief that have come into the interpretation of the Biblical evidence. As J. H. Leckie said:

There can be no question that the field of eschatology, when viewed from a catholic and historical standpoint, presents an aspect of great confusion.²

There are many who are either confused or indifferent toward the subject of God's wrath, especially as it relates to one's destiny. The ultimate fate of the wicked is seldom dealt with by many of the ministers and theologians. People's minds have been turned from the world to come to the present.³

²J. H. Leckie, The World to Come and Final Destiny (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1918), p.6.

³John Baillie, And the Life Everlasting (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), p. 8.

In view of current confusion and neglect regarding eschatology, the author wishes to pursue a topic with definite eschatological significance. An attempt is made to examine the Biblical evidence for God's wrath, as it is expressed in a New Testament understanding of punishment. The study will not be strictly eschatological in nature. Special note is made of both the present reality and the future certainty of God's wrath. Little or nothing can be known about the reality and the nature of future punishment unless some association with present, historic punishment is made.

The scope of the material covered will be confined to the major writings of the New Testament. Some references will be made to contemporary interpretations of various passages, but the major emphasis will be on the Biblical evidence. It is hoped that an over-all view of God's wrath will be seen as it is expressed in various forms in the New Testament.

Following the basic methods of inductive Bible study, attention will be focused on God's wrath as it is expressed in the message of John the Baptist. Then God's wrath will be noted in the teachings of Jesus in the Synoptics, the Petrine writings, the Pauline writings, and finally, the Johannine writings.

Realizing the difficulty of having an objective interpretation of the Biblical data in such a study as this, some basic hermeneutical principles followed in this paper

are enunciated:

1. Exegesis is to determine theology, rather than the use of theology to determine one's method of exegesis.
2. Special note is to be made of the context of particular Scriptural teachings.⁴
3. Unless there is some reason intrinsic within the text which requires symbolic interpretation, or unless there are parallel passages which require symbolic interpretation, the passage is to be understood in a natural, literal sense.⁵
4. A "literal" interpretation refers to the usual or customary sense conveyed by words or expressions in their historical setting.⁶
5. A figurative expression should not be overlooked as not communicating any literal meaning. A figure is representative of some fact and is used to present a fact or concept in vivid imagery to arrest attention and establish the essential truth.⁷

With these basic guidelines before us, the further justification for such a study as this is explored. The hedonistic emphases of our day have already been explored. In Paul's day (Rom. 1:32), men knew the judgment of God against sin and yet continued in their sin and took pleasure in others who did the same. This seems to have been true in

⁴A. Berkeley Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 99ff.

⁵George Eldon Ladd, Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 141.

⁶Mickelsen, op. cit., p. 179.

⁷Joseph P. Thompson, Love and Penalty (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), p. 301.

Western culture. However, the picture appears to have changed. Men no longer ignore the doctrine of God's wrath, or sin in spite of it, rather, they deny it, dispute it and openly reject it.⁸

With the rise of Biblical criticism in the first half of the nineteenth century, many theologians have either repudiated the doctrine of the wrath of God as unworthy of God's character revealed in Christ or else tried to explain it away.⁹ Perhaps the first theologian of note to reject God's wrath as unworthy of inclusion in Christian theology was Albrecht Ritschl. He states,

The notion of the affection of wrath in God has no religious worth for Christians, but is an unfixed and formless theologoumenon.¹⁰

In current theological thought the wrath of God is also frequently excluded or minimized. Nels F. S. Ferre is a good example of one who believes in the reality of the punishment of sin, but cannot believe in the finality of

⁸D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, The Plight of Man and the Power of God (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943) p. 74.

⁹Anthony T. Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), ix.

¹⁰G. H. C. MacGregor, "The Concept of the Wrath of God in the New Testament," New Testament Studies, VII (January, 1961), p. 102.

such punishment on the basis of God's sovereign love.¹¹ The universalist sees only one thing about God and that is His sovereign love. The task of the theologian for the universalist is to describe God's love.¹² Since God is love He saves men, and since God is omnipotent love He saves all men.¹³ If God's wrath is not eternal, then it is a temporary tactic of His love. For the universalist, wrath is a temporary device of God's sovereign love.

Modern theology has had trouble with the doctrine of the wrath of God ever since Hegelian pantheism brought into the Christian movement the notion of man's divinity. Liberalism spurned the doctrine of the wrath of God as nothing but anthropopathy, with the resultant dismissal of divine wrath as wholly figurative.¹⁴

Neo-orthodox theology has revealed a higher respect for the reality of God's wrath than has classic liberalism. Emphasizing God's wrath, in view of man's sinfulness and God's righteousness, neo-orthodoxy still subordinates God's wrath to

¹¹Nels F. S. Ferre, "Universalism: Pro and Con," Christianity Today, VII (March 1, 1963), p. 24.

¹²J. A. T. Robinson, "Universalism--Is It Heretical?" Scottish Journal of Theology, II (1949), pp. 139-155.

¹³Joseph D. Bettis, "The Good News and the Salvation of All Men--A critique of the Doctrine of Universal Salvation" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Princeton University, 1964), p. 2.

¹⁴Frank E. Gaebalein (ed.), A Christianity Today Reader (New York: Meridith Press, 1966), p. 117.

His love, refusing to make any ultimate distinction between God's wrath and His love. Thus, Karl Barth's eschatology veers toward universalism and Emil Brunner's toward conditional immortality.¹⁵

Many theologians seem to see only God's love. They never mention His other attributes such as righteousness and holiness and justice. The ideas of equity, judgment and punishment are distasteful. Such an emphasis on the love of God gives the impression that there is no justice on God's part.

The effects of this exclusion of the wrath of God from modern theology have been widespread. The cross becomes nothing but a manifestation and a representation of the love of God. Any idea of a mighty transaction by God in which sin was dealt with and punished is scarcely known. Salvation is an action of man and God is seen to be patiently waiting in an attitude of love for man to return.¹⁶

It is obvious that the relative silence on the Biblical understanding of God's wrath is a position concerning it. Especially is preaching affected by this silence. John Sutherland Bonnell discovered that no sermon had been preached on this theme for over forty years at the Fifth

¹⁵Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁶Lloyd-Jones, The Plight of Man, p. 79.

Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York.¹⁷ As Lon Woodrum asserts at this point, "He (God) is the Cosmic Gentleman now. He never goes off on a tangent anymore. He wouldn't hurt an impenitent flea."¹⁸

This study is motivated by a genuine concern to regain the significance of a New Testament doctrine of God's wrath. One must not avoid the subject on the grounds that the idea of God displaying wrath is one of the lesser inspired themes of the Old Testament and is for the Christian ironed out by the generous Gospel of love found in the New Testament.¹⁹ Such an assertion is of such importance that we must go to the Biblical evidence for a first-hand look. We now go directly to the New Testament with the hope that the doctrine of God's wrath will become a live issue and that new insights will be discovered, revealing this to be a doctrine of vital significance.

¹⁷John Sutherland Bonnell, Heaven and Hell--A Present-Day Christian Interpretation (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 31.

¹⁸Lon Woodrum, "The Great Anger" (paper mimeographed for Biblical Theology class at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky), p. 1.

¹⁹R. P. C. Hanson, "The Wrath of God," Expository Times, LVIII (May, 1947), p. 216.

CHAPTER II

GOD'S WRATH AS EXPRESSED IN THE MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

All four evengelists agree in placing the beginning of Jesus' public ministry within the framework of the ministry of John the Baptist. The Baptist was a typical "holy man" of the Near East.¹ According to the Gospels (Matt. 3:1-6; Mark 1:6; Luke 3:1-6), John retired from society and lived like a hermit in the vicinity of the Jordan River. Taking Elijah for his model (II Kings 1:8), John wore rough garb and subsisted on the food available in the wilderness.

I. THE FACT OF WRATH IN JOHN'S MESSAGE

The source of John's message is clear, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John, he came for a testimony" (John 1:6). His message was built on the sure foundation of a Divine commission, giving it Divine authority.

Something of the nature of John's work is given in all three of the Synoptics, but only Matthew and Luke emphasize the stormy tone of John's message.² There can be little doubt that the keynote of John's teaching and preaching was

¹Bruce M. Metzger, The New Testament, Its Background, Growth and Content (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 108.

²Ernest Dewitt Burton and Edgar J. Goodspeed, A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek, Thirteenth Edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 13-17.

the proclamation of the imminent approach of the end of days and of the judgment.³ It was to a secure society, prosperous and luxurious, that John the Baptist came. He proclaimed their imminent danger of perishing from a hidden, festering disease. He preached to a religious community that presented the appearance of hopeless perversion and yet contained the germs of a possible regeneration.⁴ The call to "repent" was the great word of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2; Luke 3:3). It was a call for a change of purpose. It involved making the crooked paths straight and the rough ways of life smooth. John's concrete terms make the fact clear that true repentance must seek expression and bring forth altered conduct.

The announcement of the coming of the "Kingdom of Heaven" carried with it "sober news" as well as "good news." The deep concern over the seriousness of sin is pungently clear. Sin receives a stern condemnation. The inauguration of the Gospel includes the announcement of the wrath of God (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). Such statements as "coming wrath" (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7), "cut down and cast into fire" (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9), and "fire unquenchable" (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17), indicate the presence of God's wrath in the message of John the Baptist.

³Charles H. H. Scobie, John the Baptist (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 60.

⁴Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. I. New American Edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 255.

The wrath of God is not an irrelevant religion of the law dragged in from the Old Testament. The introduction of the Good News brought with it the very real sense of God's wrath.

II. THE NATURE OF WRATH IN JOHN'S MESSAGE

The larger portion of this section is devoted to the nature of wrath in the message of John the Baptist. Matthew and Luke give us a record of the vivid imagery as to the kind of punishment about to fall. Those who had come to the Baptist asked who had warned them to flee from the wrath to come. (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). Those who had heard of the "coming wrath", as preached by John, were undoubtedly drawn by mixed motives. Some were probably curious, neither decidedly in sympathy nor pronouncedly hostile.⁵ At any rate, they could not remain indifferent to such preaching as this. They seemed confident of their preparation for the judgment preceding the advent of the Messiah, but there may have been a desire to be baptized and outwardly conform to the message of John to possess perfect security. John immediately grasped the significance of their movement and cried, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

⁵A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, Fourth Revised Edition (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 82.

Like vipers, who flee for cover when danger is near without relinquishing their deadly venom, so the Pharisees and Sadducees apparently wish to be sheltered without repenting.⁶ The picture of a wilderness fire, in which dry grass and scrub brush can blaze for miles, sending scorpions and animals for safety, probably lay behind this saying. This is a warning of the destruction which will take place unless people repent.⁷

A second figure used to illustrate the impending wrath is that of the tree being cut down (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9). Like the action of the woodsman who cuts down the trees and uses the rotten wood only for fire, so "the axe is laid at the root of the trees" in the nation. The unworthy will be destroyed.⁸ A demand is made for the kind of "trees" that bring forth the fruit of repentance. John gives a scorching rebuke to those who are willing to remain fruitless. They stand under the wrath of God. If they would be saved from the "coming wrath" they must turn "about face".⁹ The cutting

⁶T. C. Smith, "The Meaning of *Ὀπίσθεοῦ* in The Pauline Epistles" (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1944), p. 72.

⁷Metzger, The New Testament, p. 109.

⁸Harold Guy, The New Testament Doctrine of Last Things (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 41.

⁹Charles Reynolds Brown, The Master's Way (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1917), p. 42.

of a tree is a symbol of punishment in the Old Testament. One of the most outstanding examples is that of Isaiah 10:33-34 which speaks of the judgment about to fall on the Assyrians:

Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power; the great in height will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low. He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.

C. H. Kraeling points out that in the Old Testament this figure is used only of judgment which will fall upon the Gentiles, while in the inter-testamental literature it is applied likewise to Jews.¹⁰

John further illustrates the coming judgment in terms which Palestinian peasants could comprehend. He compares the coming of the Messiah to a farmer using a winnowing fork to separate the wheat from the chaff; the wheat he would gather into his garner, but the chaff he would burn with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:17-18). Since God was soon to invade history, and since judgment was so near at hand, the Baptist's message took on a somber aspect. John tells his hearers they are utterly unprepared for such a catastrophic event. John called the entire nation to repent as an indispensable preparation for participating in this impending event. As an outward symbol of the inward change, he baptized in the Jordan River

¹⁰Carl H. Kraeling, John the Baptist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 44.

all who received his message in faith.¹¹

A grim picture is portrayed for those who reject John's call to repentance. The figure of "fire" is especially grim as it relates to the punishment of sin. Fruitless trees will be "thrown into the fire" (Matt. 3:30; Luke 3:9). The Messiah will baptize with the "Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). The Messiah will also burn the chaff with an "unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17). Many feel John is too harsh in his announcement of Christ's coming.

Judgment by fire is illustrated in the Old Testament by Amos 7:4 where God is pictured as "calling for a judgment by fire." In Ezekiel 38:22, the Lord rains down "Torrential rains and hailstones, fire and brimstone," on Gog and his hordes. According to Malachi 4:1, "the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all the evil doers will be stubble, the day that comes shall burn them up."

In the past Old Testament period, especially in the apocalyptic literature, the idea of the punishment of the wicked by fire was greatly developed and elaborated. Also in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the wicked are condemned to the gloom of the fire eternal and will be punished with fire and brimstone.¹²

¹¹Metzger, The New Testament, p. 109.

¹²Scobie, John the Baptist, p. 61.

For some, the current apocalyptic thinking is a strong influence in John's message.¹³ John seems to speak in words which had their roots in the preaching of the prophets, words which were simple, clear and direct and which would be readily understood by his audience.¹⁴

The imagery of fire is frequently used to describe the fate of the wicked in the Old Testament. The nature of John's preaching is to be seen in part in the Old Testament. The image of flood waters (cf. Joh 40:11) is mingled with that of fire (cf. Ezekiel 21:31; Ezekiel 22:31). This combination of images is suggested by the use of these elements in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. John the Baptist not only links the image of baptism by fire with the "coming wrath," but also his baptism by water.¹⁵

Although Alfred Plummer tells us that John's use of "unquenchable fire" has nothing to do about the duration of the punishment of the wicked,¹⁶ it is apparent that the agent

¹³Lily Dougall and Cyril W. Emmet, The Lord of Thought (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922), p. 83ff.

¹⁴Scobie, op. cit., p. 61.

¹⁵Gerhard Kittel, Bible Key Words, Vol. IV Tr. and ed. by Dorothea M. Barton and P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), pp. 113f.

¹⁶Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 29.

of the punishment endures. John does not clarify for us whether the wicked stay in the fire forever, nor does he say that they come out, or that they are annihilated. He understands the fate of the wicked to be "unquenchable fire." It is to be a fatal baptism of judgment. There is no inkling of escape for the wicked. John leaves the wicked burning in the unquenchable fire, and that is as far as he goes.

Paul S. Rees points out that Jesus' baptism "with fire" may well have been a baptism of cleansing as well as a baptism of destructive judgment.¹⁷ Leon Morris tends to think of the baptism "with fire," in this context, to be one of judgment.¹⁸ John's baptism is contrasted with that of the Coming One. The future baptism of fire is almost certainly to be understood in connection with the other references to fire in John's preaching, where fire is to be the instrument of punishment following the judgment. For John, it is only after a separation has been made between the good and bad trees, that the bad trees are thrown into the fire (Matt 3:10; Luke 3:9). It is only after the wheat and chaff have been separated that the chaff is burned with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12; Luke, 3:17). Upon the wicked, the Coming One

¹⁷Paul S. Rees, Fire or Fire (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1953), p. 15.

¹⁸Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), p. 20.

will pour out a "river of fire" to punish and destroy them, but on God's people, the Coming One will pour out God's Spirit and all the blessings which that entails.¹⁹ In a broader sense, the whole baptism of the Messiah was a baptism of judgment. It was a retributive judgment upon those firmly entrenched in their wickedness, however, upon the penitent, it was a remedial judgment.

John's proclamation of the coming Messiah and of the imminent judgment, was followed by a demand upon his hearers that they should respond in a certain way. His hearers must repent, they must be baptized and they must live holy lives. Sin was a serious thing to John. Luke alone records how thorough must be one's repentance if he is to avoid the consequent punishment upon his sin. Repentance must express itself in a changed conduct. The people must share things like clothing and food. The publicans must exact no more than their just dues, and the soldiers must refrain from violence, from extortion by false accusation and from discontent with their pay (Luke 3:10ff). John preached an uncompromising truth. Sin will be punished. This demand for repentance and the strong denunciation of evil reveals

¹⁹Scobie, John the Baptist, p. 73.

how seriously John viewed sin.²⁰ His message was not centered merely in terms of ethics and what man should do, as Josephus implies.²¹ John's ministry drew excitement because of the strong messianic hope present in his message.

The unique characteristic distinguishing John the Baptist from other "Semitic holy men" was his insistence that in the coming judgment the privilege of belonging to the chosen people would count for nothing.²² In effect, John denounced the whole nation and received back only those who would repent and be baptized. John forthrightly denounced the wickedness of his hearers and emphasized their need of repentance.

In summary of John's message, it is fitting to describe it as prophetic. His was a proclamation of imminent judgment. The picturesque metaphors of the tree being cut down, and of winnowing, were grounded in the same kind of preaching by the prophets. He demanded repentance in the face of approaching judgment and wrath. For him there were but two classes of men, the righteous and the wicked. The righteous would receive the Holy Spirit, but the wicked would be burned as the chaff with unquenchable fire.

²⁰Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, p. 49.

²¹Metzger, The New Testament, p. 109.

²²Ibid.

CHAPTER III

GOD'S WRATH AS EXPRESSED IN THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS IN THE SYNOPTICS

The way of life as expressed by Jesus is one of absolute and all-embracing love. In Jesus we have the revelation of God who loved us so intensely that He gave His only Son for our salvation. And yet, time and time again, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, God's attitude toward sinners is described as that of "wrath." The view so intensely advocated by Marcion in the second century that the Old Testament solely reveals a God of wrath and the New Testament solely reveals a God of love does not appear to be consistent with the Biblical evidence.¹ Let us view the evidence for the doctrine of God's wrath in the New Testament.

The task before us is to uncover the evidences of God's wrath in the Synoptics as embodied in the teachings of Jesus. Since Jesus used various methods to convey spiritual truth we shall first look at His direct discourses, the didactic teachings, secondly the parabolic teachings, thirdly the historic teachings and fourth, the prophetic teachings of

¹G. H. C. MacGregor, "The Concept of the Wrath of God in the New Testament," New Testament Studies, VII (January, 1961), p. 102.

Jesus. A final section will be devoted to an analysis of the key words used by Jesus in His presentation of God's wrath.

I. DIDACTIC TEACHINGS

In this division the direct teachings of Jesus are noted which have relevance to the subject of God's wrath as expressed in punishment. The greatest portion of the relevant material is found in Matthew's Gospel with a lesser amount of material in Mark and Luke. All material which is primarily parabolic, prophetic, or any historical incident relating to God's wrath is excluded from this section.

The first significant passage is discovered in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-26 with a related passage in Luke 12:58-59. First of all, Jesus says that one who is angry with his brother is liable to judgment. Secondly, a man who calls his brother "Raca" is condemned. The translation of this word is difficult but its whole accent is one of contempt. It is the word of one who despises another with an arrogant contempt.² Jesus goes on to speak of the man who calls his brother "moros." He will be in danger of the "Gehenna of fire." God's wrath is seen in varying degrees in this teaching. These external acts will be punishable

²William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. I (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), p. 136.

not only at human tribunals, but also the inner feeling that prompts such actions is liable to the verdict of condemnation which will be pronounced by God. Thus, here we have a climax: the local court, the Sanhedrin and the final judgment of God. The corresponding sins are anger, contempt and abuse.³ The reality of punishment in both its present and future aspects are emphasized by Jesus.

The next verses of significance in this same chapter are 25 and 26. A parallel thought is found in Luke 12:58-59. The thought seems to be that one should make peace with an opponent before the situation worsens and one finds himself in jail. Much is made of the phrase, "Truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny" (v. 26). Nothing is said about the possibility or impossibility of payment being made in prison, but the implication is that one would get out after paying the "last penny." This passage is often said to involve the doctrine of a purgatorial hell.⁴ To say that this highly metaphorical passage represents a second chance after death is highly precarious. It does seem to be a warning against the risk

³Willoughby C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, Third Edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p. 48.

⁴J. H. Leckie, The World to Come and Final Destiny (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1918), p. 155.

of appearing before God at the Judgment Day unreconciled to Him.⁵ The same thought is emphasized in Luke where the purpose seems to be to teach the necessity of settling all accounts without delay in view of the coming of the Son of Man.⁶ There is no indication as to the duration of the penalty. It is appropriate to paraphrase with William Barclay:

If you want happiness in time, and happiness in eternity, never leave an unreconciled quarrel or an unhealed breach between yourself and your brother man. Act immediately to remove the barriers which anger has raised.⁷

A second passage of relevance is Matthew 5:27-30. The main thought of the passage relates to a condemnation of the lustful look. Jesus expressed the danger involved with keen perception. This is a sin to be shunned at all hazards, even by excision, if need be, of the offending members.⁸ The seriousness of being thrown into Gehenna is emphasized by the fact that the loss of one of the members of the body is much better than the loss of the entire body. In verse thirty, both the word and order lays stress, not on the action of the Judge, but on the departure either from the things of

⁵Allen, op. cit., p. 50.

⁶Leckie, op. cit., p. 155.

⁷Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 143.

⁸W. Robertson Nicoll (ed.), The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), p. 109.

time and sense or from His presence.⁹

Another passage, Matthew 7:15-20, cautions against false prophets with the concluding note being that of punishment. Every tree which is bearing evil fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. This concept is reminiscent of the teaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:10). The terrible fate of those whose life is not good is expressed here. There is a sense of finality in the destination being that of "fire."¹⁰

Our Lord's solemn verdict on the utter ruin awaiting him who does not put his assent to Christ in action is vividly portrayed in Matthew 7:24-27, and in the parallel passage in Luke 6:46-49. The foolish Man's house not only fell, but "great was the fall of it" (v. 27). The ruin seems to be irremedial.¹¹ The well being or ruin of everyone of those who hear what has just been spoken is to depend upon whether they obey or disobey. Throughout this epilogue to the Sermon on the Mount Jesus divides men into two classes. They are either on the narrow or broad way, a good tree or a corrupt tree, a wise or foolish builder, in a word, either

⁹H. D. M. Spence (ed.), The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. XV, Large-Type Edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. E. B Erdmans Publishing, 1950), p. 164.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 285.

¹¹Ibid., p. 287.

for Christ or against Him.¹² Just as surely as a house without a firm foundation will suffer a disastrous fall through the force of the floods, so will those who listen to His words but do not obey them come to a fatal crash. He will be unable to stand in this life when the storms of life overwhelm him, but irretrievably so at the Last Judgment.¹³ Divine instruction, intended for building up must, if neglected, result in disastrous ruin. "Great was the fall of it," does not mean that the building was large, but rather that the whole edifice fell so that its ruin was complete.¹⁴

Another very interesting passage is Matthew 10:34-39, with its parallels in Mark 8:35-38 and Luke 9:24-26. The first verse is frequently misunderstood. The exact parallel for this verse is Luke 12:51. Jesus opens the paragraph by asserting that He came to bring a sword and not peace to the earth. This is probably a prediction of the bitterness that will result within family groups because of the Gospel, especially in light of the context. Dissension will spring

¹²Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 118.

¹³Norval Goldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 215.

¹⁴Plummer, op. cit., p. 119.

up because of Christ's demands on the lives of people.¹⁵ Persecution at the hands of near relatives will be caused by Christ's teachings within the family group.¹⁶ The Jews were mistaken about the effect of Jesus' coming. It was their general expectation that the Messiah would establish a reign of peace. But such a peace could not be enforced, for as long as man's will is opposed to the Gospel there can be no peace.¹⁷

Jesus then goes on to state that "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (v. 39). Self seeking ultimately means self destruction according to Jesus. Halford Luccock expressed it in his familiar cogent way, "Self-seeking has no centennial. It ends in a graveyard with the dismal epitaph 'He took care of himself.'"¹⁸ The contrast is sharpened in Mark 8:36 where Jesus asked: "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" Some have called this verse "the Parable of the Rich Fool in a nutshell."¹⁹ The

¹⁵Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁶Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, p. 110.

¹⁷Plummer, op. cit., p. 156.

¹⁸George A. Buttrick (ed.), The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 771.

¹⁹Ralph Earle, The Gospel According to Mark. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1957), p. 108.

word commonly used for "forfeit" in the Greek commonly means to lose by way of penalty.²⁰ The question continues: "For what can a man give in return for his life?" (Mark 8:37). This is the rhetorical form of saying that the loss is irrevocable. It is the finality of the loss that makes the gain to be nothing. The whole world, if a man had it, would not buy back his life, if he lost it. Everyone who tries selfishly to secure for himself pleasure and happiness will in fact doom his life to failure. He commits spiritual suicide.²¹

J. Arthur Baird has an interesting comment on these verses. He goes into some detail to show how Jesus felt the soul could exist apart from the body. The word "lose" (apollumi) occurs frequently in Jesus' teaching with reference to a rigorous physical destruction. Whoever would seek to save his life as a "psychosomatic actuality" will lose it as a "psychopneumatic potentiality."²² In short, Baird attempts to show that the only consistent interpretation of these verses is to say that to save one's physical life here, is to lose one's soul. The reality of punishment

²⁰Ezra P. Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 158.

²¹Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 276.

²²J. Arthur Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 163-167.

is crystal clear.

Another very significant passage in this didactic section of Jesus' teachings is Matthew 18:5-9, with its parallels in Mark 9:42-50 and Luke 17:1-2. This is one of the sternest sayings directed against those who deliberately place stumbling blocks in the way of an immature believer. "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."²³ The punishment for such a sin is severe.

"It would be better" is an indication of how severe the future penalty will be for such a sin. To be drowned in the depth of the sea would be better than to face God's punishment for this sin. It is not certain that the Jews punished criminals by drowning, but it is certain that other nations exacted this kind of punishment. The punishment seems to have been reserved for the greatest criminals. The size of the stone prevented any chance of the body rising to the surface for a respectable burial. The dread of this kind of death was especially great.²⁴ Jesus expresses the thought of punishment with strong expression, revealing the intense

²³R. V. G. Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God (London: The Tyndale Press, 1951), p. 33.

²⁴Spence, The Pulpit Commentary, p. 209.

abhorrence of such a penalty.²⁵ The thought here is that it is better to suffer a dreadful and ignominious death than to be guilty of any such sin at the Judgment. The punishment for such a sin will be more severe than annihilation of the soul.

The next section of thought is similar to Matthew 5:27-30. After warning of the severity of punishment awaiting those who mislead children, Jesus goes on to say that entrance into the Kingdom of God is so immeasurable a gain and the missing of the Kingdom so great a loss, that anything which might prevent the gaining of the Kingdom should be immediately sacrificed.²⁶ Whatever hinders entrance into the Kingdom of God is a fatal liability. This statement in Matthew 18:9 calls for a stress on the eternal distinction between good and evil. The fearful possibility of ultimate refusal remains clearly enunciated in these words:

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the Gehenna of fire.

In the passage under consideration, Matthew has "eternal fire" (18:8), while Mark has "unquenchable fire"

²⁵Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 237.

²⁶Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, p. 792.

(9:43). In both verses "fire" is opposed to "life," and therefore seems to mean the negation of life. The Jews of this age thought of endless torment as the portion of the wicked. Christ did not contradict current Jewish beliefs at this point.²⁷ In view of these verses it is interesting to note the thought of a Jewish rabbi of that period:

All the more should I weep now that they are about to lead me before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, who lives and abides forever, and forever and ever; whose wrath, if He be wrathful, is an eternal wrath; and if He bind me, His binding is an eternal binding; and if He kill me, His killing is an eternal killing; whom I cannot placate with words, nor bribe with wealth.²⁸

This gives evidence of the general understanding of contemporary thought on the subject of "eternal" and "unquenchable" fire. In view of this, there is no apparent justification to weaken the meaning of aiōnios in this passage.²⁹

A more detailed study of the meaning of aiōnios will be given at the end of this general section on the Synoptics. Apparently Jesus used an accepted idea of His time. He is not to be credited with later ideas of eternal punishment which are alien to His teaching, but on the other hand, it is difficult to explain His words away as mere picturesque

²⁷Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary, p. 250.

²⁸Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, p. 195

²⁹Ibid., p. 196.

metaphors. The contrast of the phrases "to enter into life" and "to go into Gehenna" indicates spiritual ruin and destruction.³⁰

The words in Mark 9:49, "For everyone will be salted with fire," in relation to the previous discussion cannot be taken to mean that the object of the penal retributions of Gehenna are to purify the soul.³¹ Salt is often understood as a purifying agent in the Bible. Some theologians conclude that the purifying salt and the destroying fire are brought together in this verse to teach that even the penal retributions of Gehenna are to purify.³² It is to be admitted that this is a difficult verse. Commentators have labored here without shedding a whole lot of light on the problem. A. F. Hort has probably come to the best conclusion by interpreting Jesus' words to mean:

I say "fire" advisedly, for it is with fire that every man shall be purified, i.e. everyone must pass through a "cleansing fire"; what this "fire" is may be seen from the Baptist's saying about Christ (Matt. 3:11), that He "shall baptize with the Holy Spirit" which shall purify away all dross, i.e. all that makes a man unfit for the "sacrifice" of himself to the service of Christ.³³

³⁰Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 411.

³¹Ibid., p. 413.

³²Gould, Commentary on Mark, p. 181.

³³Ralph Earle, The Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), p. 120.

The most natural interpretation of the passage would make the salting with fire an event which takes place in the now and not in the fire of Gehenna. This is especially true in the light of the general tenor of Jesus' teaching on the subject.

These significant verses may be summarized by saying that they indicate the reality of God's wrath upon the disobedient. The terrible fate of those who disobey is to be that of being thrown into the fire of Gehenna which is an eternal, unquenchable fire. "It would be better" to suffer the gruesome death by drowning with a millstone hung around the neck than to suffer the consequent punishment from causing a "little one" to go astray.

Several other passages are relevant to this didactic section involving the direct discourses of Jesus. In Mark 12:38-40, for instance, the scribes are to receive the "greater condemnation" for their hypocrisy, pride and undue advantage of the helpless. Almost identical words are found in Luke 20:45-47 where the thought of "the greater condemnation" appears. This is an illustration of the principle of degrees in punishment.³⁴ The sentence and penalty will be more severe for these hypocrites than for others who, though

³⁴Harry Buis, The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1957), p. 39.

they be sinners, practice no such hypocrisy.³⁵ Here again Jesus points out the fact of sure punishment on sin. The condemnation is to take place in the future. A note of terror is brought before these false religionists.³⁶ The vivid picture of Pharisaic piety in its vanity, avarice, and hypocrisy is under the condemnation of God's punishment.

The last significant passage is found in Matthew 12:33-37. Jesus speaks of the "day of judgment," and how present conduct will determine destiny on that day. This paragraph is similar to one in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:17-19, and also the parallel verses in Luke 6:43-45. The kind of words and acts men produce will make the distinction of whether they are good or bad. Every man's heart is a store-house and his words show what is kept there. Even for a "purposeless" word men will have to give account at the Day of Judgment.³⁷ Since speech is the outcome of the heart, no word is insignificant, not even that which is idle. While Matthew 25:31-46 stresses judgment by the presence or absence of kind deeds, judgment here is to be a judgment by words.³⁸

³⁵R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1946), p. 553.

³⁶George A. Buttrick (ed.), The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 358.

³⁷Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary, p. 181.

³⁸Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 190.

In summation of this section on the didactic, direct discourses of Jesus, it may be said that Jesus pronounces punishment upon both individuals and groups. Most of the teachings are deeply personal, in that present action determines future destiny. Jesus warns about the loss, destruction and everlasting fire that will come upon the individual unless the quality of a person's life is acceptable with God. The ensuing punishment is very personal. Personal responsibility is emphasized as a necessary deterrent to impending wrath and punishment. There is also the corporate aspect of punishment, as it is related to the scribes and Pharisees. They shall receive the greater condemnation for their sins.

As to the temporal element, most of Jesus' teachings are related very distinctly to the future. Where present illustrations of punishment are used, as in the case of agreeing quickly with one's adversary, they illustrate some fact of punishment in the future. The great emphasis is on the Gehenna of fire which is to come, the Day of Judgment, the eternal, unquenchable fire which is revealed with awful certainty for those who persist in wickedness.

Jesus used picturesque imagery to emphasize and illustrate these truths about punishment in both its temporal and future aspects. Even the most simple among His audiences would have understood His concrete word pictures and comprehend the significance of what He was saying.

II. HISTORIC TEACHINGS

Now the segment of Jesus' teaching is before us where He used both past and present historic facts to interpret God's wrath. First, the Biblical data will be noted, observing significant facts that relate to this topic, and then the findings will be summarized in the concluding part of the section. Some of the examples of temporal punishment are reserved for the prophetic section, since specific prophecy was given in relation to the historical event.

First, it is essential to notice God's wrath as it was expressed in the actions of Jesus. The only certain passage in the Synoptics where Jesus is explicitly stated to have been angry is Mark 3:5. This is the account of the healing of the man with the withered hand. Mark reports Jesus as being angry. "And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, Stretch out your hand." Matthew has no parallel to the first part of this sentence and Luke, following Mark closely, says: "And he looked round about on them all, and said unto him, Stretch forth thy hand." (Luke 6:10; cf. Matt. 12:13). Although these are human emotions, they are not merely human. In these words a vivid portrayal of the Divine reaction to sinful words and deeds is seen.³⁹ Anger

³⁹Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God, p. 29.

is a strong word, but evidently no other was strong enough to express Jesus' feeling. This manifestation of anger has been made one of the points of criticism by some who find flaws in the character of Jesus. For example, Bertrand Russell in his book Why I Am Not a Christian indicates this to be a major defect in Jesus' character.⁴⁰ Jesus' anger was not so much a human failing as a human endowment. The Word became flesh and was clothed with human capacities. Beyond this was the judgment of God.

What angered Jesus was the Pharisees' distortion of mind which elevated their own self-interest and tradition above human need. Against that Jesus blazed in anger. To some who find the idea of anger in Jesus a shocking thing, it is necessary to point out that one cannot love the right without hating the wrong.⁴¹ Christ manifests the character of God as holy love. His anger was the result of holiness, His compassion the result of love. This reference to the angry look of Jesus is in line with Mark's frequent allusions to the human emotions of Jesus. The anger, which has no element of personal rancour, is such as may justly be felt at the scene of men whose fidelity to the Law is matched by

⁴⁰Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 682.

⁴¹Earle, The Gospel According to Mark, p. 51.

blindness to moral values.⁴² This is anger at wrong. It is the sign of moral health.⁴³

The existence of grief and anger in the same heart is no contradiction. For Christ who was at once perfect love and perfect holiness, grief for the sinner must ever have gone hand in hand with anger against the sin. This was an anger against the sin which is the devil's corruption of God's creation.⁴⁴

Commentators have drawn attention to the fact that the participle expressing the angry look of Christ in this incident is in the aorist tense, while the participle expressing the sorrow of Christ is in the present tense. They conclude that the anger was expressed in one passing indignant glance, while the sorrow was persistent.⁴⁵ This does not mean, however, that Jesus would not have expressed the same anger in a similar later situation. If one takes this incident in the context of Jesus' other teachings, it would appear that this demonstration of anger is consistent with Jesus' total outlook on sin.

⁴²Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 222.

⁴³Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, p.53.

⁴⁴Richard C. Trench, Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 252.

⁴⁵Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God, p. 29.

Another example of Jesus' indignation is found in Mark 10:14. Jesus was "indignant" with His disciples for rebuking those who brought little children for Him to "touch," or as Matthew says, "That He might lay His hands on them and pray" (Matt. 19:13-15). The disciples whose thoughts were too busy with the important affairs of the kingdom rebuked the ones who brought little children to Jesus. Jesus was "indignant" because of this. This is a strong word.⁴⁶ The disciples had a wrong conception of the worth of children to the Kingdom of God. Jesus was indignant because of their wrong conception. They had failed to understand the truth. The reality of the divine reaction to such action is implicit here.

The cleansing of the Temple by Jesus is another indication of God's wrath as expressed in the actions of Jesus. The cause of His wrath on this occasion was the blind trust that the Pharisees had come to put in the Temple sacrifices as a means by which the covenant relationship with God could be maintained and deliver themselves from the wrath to come. They failed to see the temporary nature of the Levitical system.⁴⁷ More important, however, is the fact that the Temple had been turned into a "den of robbers." The details

⁴⁶Gould, op. cit., p. 187.

⁴⁷Tasker, op. cit., p. 31.

of this cleansing are recorded in Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19 and Luke 19:45-48. The scandalous abuse of the holy precincts needed to be excised. Jesus proceeded to remedy the crying evil. It was an unusual reaction that the greedy crew obeyed the order of this Man. They fled in dismay before the stern indignation of His eye, their own consciences burning within them as they scattered.⁴⁸

This action of Jesus was a spirited protest against the injustice and the abuse of the Temple. There is no doubt that pilgrims were fleeced by the traders and the priests were ultimately responsible for this thievery.⁴⁹ This is an impressive example of the authority of truth and goodness. It is an example of indignation springing from a deep holy righteousness.⁵⁰

Here Jesus represented Himself as the Divine Purifier. He is regarded as perfect in righteousness and holiness as well as love. He could not tolerate any deceit or unrighteousness. His actions in the cleansing of the Temple depict Him as one severe in dealing with sin. Holiness cannot tolerate sinfulness and corruption.⁵¹

⁴⁸Spence, The Pulpit Commentary, p. 316.

⁴⁹Taylor, The Gospel According To St. Mark, p. 463.

⁵⁰Gould, op. cit., p. 214.

⁵¹Goldenhuys, Commentary on The Gospel of Luke, p. 489.

The wrath of God is further to be seen in Jesus' curse on the fig tree as is recorded in Mark 11:12-14 and Matthew 21:18-22. The presence of leaves on the fig tree gave a false appearance for leaves on a fig tree are to be a sign of fruit. Jesus was on the evening of spiritual conflict with a nation whose prime fault was hypocrisy or false pretence. Here He found a tree guilty of the same thing. He sat in judgment on the fault. The position of the words and the double negative in the Greek make this curse weighty.⁵² No man would ever eat fruit from this tree. It was no hasty, impatient utterance, but a deliberately pronounced judgment. The application of the fate of the hypocritical fig tree to the fate of the hypocritical city was not immediately enunciated here.⁵³ However, the credibility of the cursing of the fig tree as symbolic of the Jewish people who had a great show of religion and no fruit of real godliness, is very plausible.⁵⁴

This curse was not an outbreak of unholy passion, but rather a dramatic object lesson. The tree was cursed not for being barren, but for being false.⁵⁵ This is one of the

⁵²Gould, op. cit., p. 211.

⁵³Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary, pp. 290f.

⁵⁴Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 264.

⁵⁵Philip Vollmer, The Modern Student's Life of Christ (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912), p. 214.

examples where Jesus manifested His power to destroy. The tree withered because it was untrue to reality. The implications of the ministry of Christ as a ministry of judgment are evident.⁵⁶ It is a solemn reminder of the "wrath of the Lamb." His Miracles of mercy are numerous. His miracle of destructive judgment is here seen as related to nature.⁵⁷ The symbolism represents the reality of God's wrath. All falsity and hypocrisy is under the judgment of God and will be punished. Israel had been meant to be like a tree planted by the water which would bring forth fruit. It had, however, become like the fig tree which Jesus cursed. Instead of bringing forth fruit worthy of repentance which would enable it to "flee from the wrath to come," it had rendered itself liable to God's curse by its showy legalism and false front.⁵⁷

Other historic examples of God's wrath as revealed in the ministry of Jesus are important to consider. The fear of the unclean spirit in the man at Capernaum as recorded in Mark 1:21-28 and Luke 4:31-37 is further evidence of God's judgment on evil. Originally the question may have been the terrified query of a partially demented man in the presence of a stranger, "Have you come from over the hills to harm

⁵⁶Trench, Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord, p. 345.

⁵⁷Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God, p. 32.

us here in Capernaum?"⁵⁸ As Mark understood the question the answer doubtless would be, "Yes, I have come to destroy the demons and undo their evil works."⁵⁹ As in the case of the legion of demons in the Gadarene demoniac, the unclean spirit feared the approach of Jesus. It was conscious of the superiority of divine power. It recognized Jesus as "the Holy One of God," in contrast to its own uncleanness.⁶⁰ The possessed man is conscious of a sense of menace in the person and teaching of Jesus and implicitly recognizes Him as the Messiah.

Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, charged it to be silent and come out of the man. The decisiveness of tone marks Jesus' strong sense of indignation aroused by this demonic possession. His refusal to permit the testimony of the possessed man is also an indication of His indignation.⁶¹ It may be true that the fear on the part of the demons was aroused by the sense that Jesus was not only going to cast them out but also remand them to the torments of Gehenna. This view is suggested by the account in Matthew 8:28 where the demons ask Jesus if He had come to "torment us before

⁵⁸Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 661.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Earle, The Gospel According to Mark, p. 36.

⁶¹Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 175.

the time?" Also, the fact that the demons specifically asked to be sent into the herd of swine may be an indication of their fear of being cast into Gehenna. The similar thought is expressed in the parallel passage in Luke 8:31 where the demons begged Jesus not to "command them to depart into the abyss."⁶²

The unholy who have resolved to remain unholy understand well that their death knell has sounded when "the Holy One of God" has come. The forces of evil shrink from the holiness of God. This is an essential element in a proper understanding of the New Testament concept of God's wrath.⁶³

Another of the most relevant passages in this historic section of the message of Jesus on wrath and punishment is Luke 13:1-5, the only record in the New Testament of the murder of the Galileans. The whole aim in Jesus' relating this historic event is to urge repentance. At a time when it was a generally accepted notion that calamities were visited upon people because they were exceedingly sinful, Jesus accepts the idea and warns the Jews that a similar disaster awaits them unless they repent. The murdered Galileans are not any more guilty than were the hearers.⁶⁴

⁶²Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, p. 23.

⁶³Trench, Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord, p. 179.

⁶⁴Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 370.

Like Job's friends, the informants wished to establish the view that this calamity was a judgment upon the sufferers for exceptional wickedness. Jesus condemns neither the Galileans nor Pilate, but warns all present of what must befall them unless they free themselves of their guilt. It is this approaching judgment that seems to occupy Jesus' thought here.⁶⁵ The Gospel is glad tidings, but only for those who leave the way that leads to destruction and come to true repentance. Those who remain unconverted are heading for inexorable destruction, they will "perish." Jesus sees in the fate of these few Galileans the coming doom of all who do not repent.⁶⁶ Jesus expressed this truth with great intensity.

After having answered the ones as to the significance of the murder of the Galileans, Jesus proceeded to give a moral on the catastrophe at Siloam. The same application is made of this historic event as that regarding the Galileans whom Pilate ruthlessly murdered. Jesus reminds the people that they are all sinners and that all sinners are debtors to Divine justice.⁶⁷ The judgment that will come appears to be more than an individual judgment. However, individual

⁶⁵Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), p. 338.

⁶⁶Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 564.

⁶⁷Plummer, op. cit., p. 339.

repentance is the only way to be protected from the consequences of sin. All will perish unless they repent.

Apparently Jesus could see condemnation for the most part on the generation which He was addressing, although the significance of the statement has eternal significance.⁶⁸

Another of the passages where Jesus pronounces judgment upon a group of individuals is His pronouncement of eight "woes" upon the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:13-36, with its parallel passages in Luke 11:39-52 and Luke 20:45-47. These passages include some of Jesus' most angry denunciations leveled against the Pharisees. This series of woes is a most thorough and searching description of the kind of sinful behaviour based on hypocrisy. These people are unrepentant religionists, blind to the power of sin within them which is vitiating their intentions and their actions.⁶⁹

"Woe," as used by Jesus here, is a warning of inevitable consequences to come upon those involved as the result of their attitude toward God and other people. The final issue in this case is the national disaster when the blood of the martyrs from Abel to Zechariah "will come upon

⁶⁸Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God, p. 28.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 33.

this generation" (Matt. 23:36).⁷⁰ Here a glimpse is seen of the law-wrath process in the background. The process of judgment unfolds itself. The sending of the prophets culminated in the sending of the Son and the killing of the Son was the "last straw." So the sending of the Son of God can be described as being for the purpose of exacting the blood of all the righteous slain from the time of the murder of Abel. The death of the Son was the climax which consummated the judgment. Both Matthew and Luke emphasize that this blood will be exacted from "this generation" (Matt. 23:36; Luke 11:51). The arrival of the Messiah consummates the judgment and the judgment is visible on the cross.⁷¹

It is impossible to note all the details here, but these are seven illustrations of the Pharisees' "saying" and not "doing."⁷² Jesus is severely critical of such hypocrisy. After stoutly denouncing seven particular sins, Jesus calls them a "brood of vipers" who will be sentenced to Gehenna if they persist in such conduct. The wrath of the Lamb is manifested in terrible certainty here. Many

⁷⁰Lily Dougall and Cyril W. Emmet, The Lord of Thought (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922), p. 245.

⁷¹Anthony T. Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb (London: S. P. C. K., 1957), p. 122.

⁷²Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, p. 245.

commentators will criticize the judgmental message of John the Baptist, but here is the sure word of God's wrath from the lips of the Son of God. The judgment of Gehenna is the judgment which is brought to bear upon the scribes and Pharisees for such wicked conduct. The question as it is posed here has no answer, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to Gehenna?" (Matt. 23:33). It is implied that they cannot escape this judgment.⁷³ Matthew 23:32 seems to indicate that there is a certain limit to their iniquity; when this is reached, punishment is inevitable. All the crimes committed by their forefathers will be visited upon this generation in the destruction of Jerusalem. The punishment is temporal, in the sense that Jerusalem would be destroyed, but it is also future in the sense that Jesus used Gehenna here.⁷⁴ James Denney summarizes the entire passage in a commendable manner:

To keep people ignorant of religious truth neither living by it ourselves, nor letting them do so (v.13); to make piety or the pretense of it a cloak for avarice (v. 14); to raise recruits for our own faction on the pretext of enlisting men for the Kingdom of God (v. 15); to debauch the simple conscience by casuistical sophistries (vs. 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 (vs. 23ff); to put appearance above reality; and reduce life to a

⁷³Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 321.

⁷⁴Spence, The Pulpit Commentary, p. 402.

play, at once tragedy and farce (vs. 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 (vs. 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.⁷⁵

These "woes" of Jesus, so eloquent of the wrath of God, are pronounced upon more than the Pharisees. It is also upon those who pride themselves upon their material possessions or their personal achievements; those who are self-satisfied; those who are happy because they are blind to their need for repentance; and those who imagine that their life must be good because it wins the approval of their associates.⁷⁶ The same "woes" are pronounced upon all such people.

God's wrath is pungently realistic in this passage. None dare overlook these verses lightly. Jesus makes it very obvious that sin will be punished. Those who persist in their ways of wickedness cannot hope to escape the sentence of Gehenna.

Attention is now turned to the references of the judgment of punishment upon Judas. The relevant passages

⁷⁵James Denney, "Anger," A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), p. 61.

⁷⁶Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God, p. 34.

are Matthew 26:20-25, Mark 14:17-21 and Luke 22:14-23. The significant statement is that by Jesus, "The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." All three of the Synoptics have this sentence with very little variation. The statement, "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born," is said by Jesus with the implication that Jesus knows of a fate beyond life which is worse than annihilation.⁷⁷ There is no hope of restoration for this man. No hope of any kind is offered. It is a rayless darkness of despair.⁷⁸ It is grammatically possible to make "for him" to refer to "the Son of Man." It would have been a happy thing for Jesus if there had been no Judas. But the context is against such an interpretation even if such a construction is grammatically possible.⁷⁹ Jesus was pointing out the miserable condition of the traitor, not His own sufferings.

Some would like to believe that Jesus is merely pointing to the suicide of Judas. Even so, it does not appear to satisfy the demands of Jesus that "it would have

⁷⁷Adam Clarke, Clarke's Commentary, Vol. V, New Edition (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), p. 249.

⁷⁸Spence, The Pulpit Commentary, p. 521.

⁷⁹Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 360.

been better" for Judas not to have been born. There is a definite eschatological thrust to this statement by Jesus. Judas was following an ugly flight of steps leading down toward final perdition.⁸⁰ The importance of this passage is seen by the seven-page analysis F. W. Farrar devotes to this passage in seeking to deny the doctrine of eternal punishment. After several pages, he comes to the conclusion that these ". . . stern, sad words to Judas are full of hope."⁸¹ There is no basis for viewing these words as anything other than a future devoid of hope for the Son of Perdition. J. H. Leckie dismisses the significance of this statement on the basis that this was a current saying as old as the second part of the Book of Enoch and such a proverb cannot be made into an argument for any kind of future punishment.⁸² It is difficult to conceive, however, that Jesus would make a statement of such a nature if He was not definitely referring to future punishment. The punishment for Judas would be worse than that of non-existence.⁸³

⁸⁰Charles R. Brown, The Master's Way (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1917), p. 505.

⁸¹F. W. Farrar, Mercy and Judgment, Second Edition (London: Macmillan and Company, 1882), p. 462.

⁸²Leckie, The World to Come and Final Destiny, p. 149.

⁸³Buis, The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment, p. 38.

The responsibility of Judas for this fate is affirmed because what will befall Jesus is not remorseless fate, but a destiny willed by God, freely chosen and accepted by Jesus Himself. As such it finds its expression in a course of historical events with which the act of Judas is connected and for which he is responsible in his own degree. He is not the instrument of blind fate. The "woe" pronounced over him is not a curse but a cry of sorrow and anguish. The saying, "it were better," is not a threat, but rather a sad recognition of facts. There is nothing to suggest a negation of Judas' direct responsibility for the fate which is to be the result of his sin. As Henry B. Swete observes:

Divine purpose does not palliate the traitor's sin or relieve him of responsibility in any degree . . . The Divine necessity for the Passion was no excuse for the free agent who brought it about.⁸⁵

It is interesting to note that Jesus' meeting and living with a man like Judas for three years did not make the man respond. To this point T. F. Torrance writes:

The only valid analogy we have is in the life and death of Jesus Christ and there we learn where divine love was poured out to the utmost that men

⁸⁴Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 542.

⁸⁵Henry B. Swete, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan and Company, 1898), p. 314.

in unbelievable hardening of heart rejected it to the very last.⁸⁶

Those who believe the love of God will ultimately win out in even the most difficult of cases do well to look at the Scriptural facts about Judas. There is a certain note of doom in these words of Jesus, "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." To evade this plain fact is to do injustice to the evidence at hand.

Attention is now turned to a passage of scripture that is undoubtedly the most controversial of all passages on punishment. It is the account of Lazarus and Dives in Luke 16:19-31. For the purpose of this paper, this passage appears in this section on historic events because there is no apparent reason to treat this passage as a parable. The names of people are used in a specific manner, as if to suggest these events belong to history. Whether or not this is a parable is not the essential point of this discussion. The facts are to be noted which point to an understanding of God's wrath.

The distinct theme of this story is the punishment of sin. Its emphasis is on the punishment of sin in the after-life. The interpretation of this story has been greatly influenced by Hugo Gressman's monograph on these verses

⁸⁶T. F. Torrance, "Universalism or Election?" Scottish Journal of Theology, II (September, 1949), p. 312.

which was published in 1918. He held that this story told by Jesus was a Jewish version of an ancient Egyptian tale still extant in a demotic papyrus of the first century.⁸⁷ This view appears to be more speculation than fact. Such an assertion is far from being conclusive to say nothing about being convincing.

Looking directly at the story, several distinct elements are seen. First, the unrighteous simply are buried at death while the righteous are carried by the angels to a place of bliss. Secondly, the place of abode after death for the sinner is Hades. Whether the righteous are in another section of Hades cannot be concluded from the evidence here. Thirdly, the righteous and the unrighteous are within sight of one another and may converse with one another but cannot cross over the great "chasm." Fourth, to the sinner, Hades is a place of torment made such by a consuming thirst and by a perpetual torture in flame. The contrasting situation of the righteous emphasizes the terrible fate of the wicked.

Now, one must ask how these facts are to be understood. Many will reject them on the basis that although the "parable" does show a fatal lack of sense for the figurative, Jesus did not intend that in any of its phases it should be taken

⁸⁷ Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII, p. 289.

as anything other than purely imaginative and symbolic.⁸⁸ Ernest F. Scott sees very little significant truth in this story and seems nonplussed at the punishment meted out to the rich man. He says,

The original meaning of the parable may have been little more than that earthly positions will be reversed in the coming age. But the rich man's fate is so presented that he seems punished simply because he is rich, while Lazarus is rewarded for his poverty. This false and puerile lesson cannot be that which Jesus intended.⁸⁹

If the story is taken in its context, there is nothing mysterious about the fate of the rich man. What it denotes is God's attitude toward a life of self-indulgence and indifference to human need and suffering. The rich man, to be sure, may not have been a drunkard, a philanderer, a horse thief or any other kind of conventional bad man. He was, however, self-centered and selfish, with a keen eye to his own pleasure and comfort, but blind to the needs of others.⁹⁰ Such selfishness stands under the condemnation of God's wrath, and will be punished. To miss this is to miss the whole point of the "parable."

Jesus had just finished giving the parable of the

⁸⁸Henry B. Sharman, The Teaching of Jesus About the Future (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909), p. 297.

⁸⁹Ernest F. Scott, The Ethical Teaching of Jesus (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), p. 91.

⁹⁰Ernest F. Tittle, The Gospel According to Luke (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 178.

unjust steward to encourage rich men to make a right use of their wealth. Here Jesus points out the consequences of the misuse of wealth.⁹¹ Jesus pulled aside the curtain that hides the world of the beyond and disclosed the view of the after-history of two men, one rich and selfish, the other poor and righteous. If the story merely exhibited the sudden and shocking reversal of human judgments and alteration of human conditions, it might justifiably be open to the charge that this is a mere condemnation of a wealthy man and the defense of poverty. But the story indicates the moral principle which determined the rich man's life, "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things."

While it is agreeable that the thrust of the story concerns the use that men make of their lives, the story is incomprehensible other than against a background of judgment. A serious fate for the finally impenitent is pre-supposed. Unless there is such a dread reality neither the rich man nor his brothers are in any danger. They might just as well continue in their godless living.⁹² Some who do not wish to gather dogmatic conclusions from the story will nonetheless

⁹¹Marcus Dods, The Parables of Our Lord (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 380.

⁹²Leon Morris, The Cross in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 71.

admit that Jesus is here teaching the "irrecoverability of lost opportunity" beyond death.⁹³ This is a piercing reality in this story.

The rich man appears to have gone directly to Hades upon his death. Hades is a place of torment for the rich man. Apparently Hades is the receptacle of all the departed unbelievers until the time of final judgment. It is a place of punishment. Hades is not to be confused with Gehenna, which Jesus frequently refers to as the final place of punishment for unbelievers.⁹⁴

The rich man is now punished for his heartless neglect of great opportunities of charity. That he was not punished simply for being rich is clear from the position of Abraham, who also was rich. On earth, Dives was not said to be arrogant. He did not drive Lazarus from his gate but he did neglect to care for the poor man. Now, in Hades, he is so humbled by his pain that he is willing to receive alleviation from anyone, even Lazarus. The smallest relief will be greatly appreciated. On earth no enjoyment was too extravagant, but now the most trifling is worth seeking.⁹⁵

⁹³C. Leslie Mitton, "The After Life in the New Testament," Expository Times, LXXVI (August, 1965), p.333.

⁹⁴S. M. Merrill, The New Testament Idea of Hell (Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1878), pp. 47ff.

⁹⁵Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 394.

The final note of this story emphasizes the fact that Dives had been warned of his selfish ways. He had Moses and the prophets to warn him. Even as he did not heed the warning, neither will his five brothers even if one would rise from the dead to proclaim the warning. As R. C. Trench observes:

A far mightier miracle than you demand would be ineffectual for producing a far slighter effect. You imagine that wicked men would repent on the return of a spirit. The history of the last days of Saul might have taught him better.⁹⁶

Abraham does not say that a short-lived sensation could not be produced. He does say that they would not be persuaded of the danger even if the request of Dives were granted.⁹⁷

After studying this story one has a sense of the stark reality of future punishment commencing immediately upon the death of the sinner. Charles Reynolds Brown has expressed this inexorable characteristic by saying:

There is a certain cast iron hardness about this parable. You cannot bend it or twist it to suit your personal preference. There is no soft spot in it where a selfish man can lie down and feel comfortable. It stands up grim, stiff, ominous.⁹⁸

Men may attempt to dismiss the import of this story, but it

⁹⁶Richard C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 357.

⁹⁷Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 590.

⁹⁸Brown, The Master's Way, p. 379.

still remains. The fire in Hades seems to indicate some sort of punishment for those confined to the intermediate abode of the wicked, but no indication is given as to the duration of this torment.⁹⁹ Surely this story cannot be made to settle the nature or duration of punishment, but it excludes that physical death is the extinction of being for the wicked, or that annihilation follows immediately upon death.¹⁰⁰ The story clearly teaches the torment of the wicked but cannot be used to support the doctrine of eternal punishment. The scene is given as that of Hades and not Gehenna which is the word used to denote the eternal place of punishment for the wicked.¹⁰¹

It is now helpful to summarize the findings of this section on the historic events which point to the reality of God's wrath as expressed in punishment. Here again in this section, it is seen that Jesus used the present to depict future punishment. He used the historic event of the Galileans who were murdered by Pilate to point to a fact of

⁹⁹Geerhardus Vos, "Eschatology of the New Testament," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 993.

¹⁰⁰James Orr, "Punishment, Everlasting," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 2505.

¹⁰¹G. L. Young, "Final State of the Wicked," Bibliotheca Sacra, LXXXIV (April, 1927), p. 187.

future punishment on all who do not repent. Both the fact of individual punishment and corporate judgment is also clear from this division. In the case of Judas Iscariot and Dives, the fact of individual punishment is made crystal clear. Corporate judgment is pronounced on the Pharisees, the money changers in the temple and the group of people who told Jesus of the murder of the Galileans. Jesus' anger was vividly demonstrated against the Pharisees when they opposed His healing of the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath. Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is representative of the kind of punishment to come upon those who are hypocrites. The act of destruction is seen when Jesus cast the demons into the swine that ran and drowned in the water. The final destruction of the demons is implied in their question, "Have you come to destroy us?" in Mark 1:24 and the other related passages. The whole mood of these historic events emphasizes the fact that sin will be seriously dealt with both now and in the future life.

It is justifiable to conclude that these historic examples of Divine wrath and punishment are integral to the whole emphasis of Jesus' message. No one dares to turn lightly away from such awesome Scriptural evidence.

III. PARABOLIC TEACHINGS

Our attention now turns to the parabolic teachings of Jesus. Several significant revelations of Divine wrath in the

parables are discovered which are especially essential to this study.¹⁰² Before beginning to take a first-hand look at the parables, it is helpful to discuss the definition of a parable since some would include all the similes and metaphors of Jesus in any discussion of the parabolic teachings.¹⁰³ In the more usual and technical sense of the word a parable ordinarily signifies an imaginary story, and yet one that in its details could have actually happened, with the purpose being to illustrate and inculcate some higher spiritual truth.¹⁰⁴ Jesus used these "stories" to teach spiritual truth.¹⁰⁵ An older definition of the parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." This definition contains truth, but one must guard against seeking an extreme allegorical meaning in every parable as was Augustine's habit.¹⁰⁶

It is generally true that the parable is held to be a

¹⁰²Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God, p. 28.

¹⁰³L. Mowry, "Parable," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. III (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 651.

¹⁰⁴G. H. Schodde, "Parable," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 2243.

¹⁰⁵A. Berkeley Mickelson, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 215.

¹⁰⁶Bruce M. Metzger, The New Testament, Its Background, Growth and Content (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 143.

story that is, or may be true and is used generally to teach some moral or religious truth.¹⁰⁷ Although little information can be gained from discussing the etymology of the word "parable," the verb from which it is derived means "to project," and the term itself means the placing of one thing by the side of another. No other mode of teaching was probably so common among the Jews as that by parables.¹⁰⁸ After a rather detailed discussion of the definition of a parable, Alfred Edersheim concludes:

In truth, Parables are the outlined shadows--large, perhaps and dim--as the light of heavenly things falls on well-known scenes, which correspond to, and have their higher counterpart in spiritual realities.¹⁰⁹

The difficult question as to how to interpret the parables is posed. This is already hinted at in the discussion of the definition of the parable, but it is essential to discuss what hermeneutical principles are valid. C. H. Dodd would have us dispense of any allegorical meaning in the parables.¹¹⁰ It is to be readily recognized that the details of the parables cannot always be pressed allegorically,

¹⁰⁷Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 166.

¹⁰⁸Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. I, New American Edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 580.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 582.

¹¹⁰C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, Revised Edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), pp. 1-12.

but some scholars are undoubtedly guilty of unduly abandoning the allegorical element which would seem to be clearly present in some of them. The parables are often mixed with allegorical elements and have features which can legitimately be interpreted allegorically as long as the main message of the parable remains clear.¹¹¹ Many Biblical scholars will trace only the most general correspondence between the sign and the thing signified, while others aim at running out the interpretation into the minutest detail.¹¹² Bruce Metzger gives us a sound approach to the problem:

The proper method of interpreting Jesus' parables is to make a thorough inquiry into the "life-setting" in his ministry when the parable was first uttered, and to seek out the chief point which it was intended to teach. Usually the details in a parable provide nothing more than the necessary background for the parable, and are not to be assigned special meanings in the fashion of an allegory. Jesus' parables usually teach either a certain kind of conduct which his hearers are to emulate or avoid, or they disclose something of the character of God and his dealings with men. The interpreter must be alert to discover in each case which is the primary intention of the parable.¹¹³

In addition to Metzger's suggestions, it is important to keep the "homeliness" of these parables in mind. The parables do not suggest the idea of strict scientific

¹¹¹Ronald S. Wallace, "Parable," Baker's Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 392.

¹¹²Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, p. 30.

¹¹³Metzger, The New Testament, p. 142.

accuracy, but popular pictorialness. It is not necessary to weigh every detail but attempt to grasp the total significance of what Jesus was intending to say.¹¹⁴

With these basic considerations in mind as to the general interpretative principle used in this study, note will be made of the general divisions used to facilitate the adequate treatment of the parables relevant to God's wrath as expressed in punishment.

For this study the seventeen parables to be analyzed are divided into four general classes. There are the four parables where God Himself is the King-Judge. The next parabolic section will deal with nine parables where the judge is a householder, or "the master of the house." The third section deals with one parable where the concept of judgment is present without any mention of a judge. The final division relates to the parables of the Wicked Husbandmen, where the judge is the owner of the vineyard.¹¹⁵

King-Judge Group

The four parables included in this division are those of the Two Debtors (Matt. 18:23-35), the Marriage Feast (Matt. 22:1-14), the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21), and the

¹¹⁴Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. I, p. 592.

¹¹⁵C. Ryder Smith, The Bible Doctrine of the Hereafter (London: The Epworth Press, 1958), pp. 194-197.

Importunate Widow (Luke 18:1-8). All four of these parables have one thing in common. God Himself is said to be the judge. It is He who challenges the Rich Fool. The parable of the Importunate Widow ends with the interpretative question, "Shall not God vindicate His elect?" In the parable of the Two Debtors the closing interpretative statement is "So shall my heavenly Father do unto you." It is God who makes the Marriage Feast and judges both the guests who make excuses and the man without a wedding garment. Since this common characteristic is found in all four parables, we treat them together in this section. With this common theme uniting them, we now turn to the particulars of each of the parables.

Parable of the Two Debtors (Matt. 18:23-35). There is very little difficulty in ascertaining the didactic impact of this parable. The moral it is intended to teach is indicated with perfect distinctness by our Lord in the last sentence in which He applies the narrative to the hearts of His hearers. Even without this final application the lesson of this parable is readily seen. After Peter had asked how often he ought to forgive his brother, Jesus gives this parable. The unforgiving debtor was given as an example of the severity of punishment that awaits any person who will not forgive

his brother.¹¹⁶

The severity of punishment for the sin of not forgiving others is seen in Jesus' statement:

And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart (Matt. 18:34-35).

Jesus expressed His deliberate approval of the sentence pronounced on the unmerciful servant. Nothing can be more explicit than this declaration that a policy of severity will be pursued by God against all who cannot forgive others.

This note of a person being punished by God for not being capable of forgiving others finds a note of agreement in Ecclesiasticus 28:1-4:

He that revengeth shall find vengeance from the Lord, and He shall surely retain his sins. Forgive thy neighbor the hurt that he hath done unto thee, so shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest. A man beareth hatred against another, and doth he seek pardon from the Lord? He showeth no mercy to a man who is like himself: and doth he ask forgiveness of his own sin?¹¹⁷

If one is hard, unrelenting and making no allowances for others, then one may be sure that he shall not find forgiveness from God, but rather suffer the direct punishment of God.

This teaching finds further expression in James 2:13

¹¹⁶A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, 4th Rev. Ed. (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 401.

¹¹⁷Dods, The Parables of Our Lord, p. 129.

where it is stated, "for judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy." This appears to be one of the laws of the Kingdom of God.

The phrase "till he should pay all his debt" in verse 34 has been used to express the doctrine that there is a limit to future punishment. In short, many use this phrase to establish further support for a kind of purgatory, whether in the Roman Catholic Church or in the Protestant Church.¹¹⁸ It is doubtful, however, if there is any validity in lifting such a phrase from a parable as a proof-text for an end to punishment beyond the grave. The main thought of the parable is to express the need for a person to forgive and to delineate the consequences that will be incurred by refusing to forgive.

The parable comes to dramatic climax with the full force of God's wrath brought to bear upon all such like "wicked servants." This element of wrath is given special emphasis by being placed at the conclusion of the story. Here is an expression of the dreadful destructive power of the wrath, the sphere in which those live who do not accept God's free grace.¹¹⁹ Anthony T. Hanson emphasizes that we cannot argue from the fact that these figures in the parables

¹¹⁸Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, p. 131.

¹¹⁹Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb, p. 120.

are described as angry to the conclusion that the evangelist intended to represent God as angry. He would rather see this as a process of sin and law to which unbelievers consign themselves.¹²⁰ The interpretative note at the end of this particular parable seems, however, to preclude such a view. It is true that there is an evident process of sin and law, but here the disciples are warned that the heavenly Father will do likewise to them if they sin in the same fashion.¹²¹

It is apparent that the reaction of our Lord to the rejected claims of His forgiving love is to be seen here. It is a broken fellowship. It is a man outside the true "servant" fellowship of the Kingdom. God's anger in this parable is represented as both a positive force and a negative abandonment.¹²² The man is cast into jail, but the real punishment is that he is excluded from the king's service.

God's wrath, even as His love, appears to be a conditional thing. Man's own freedom of decision will be the deciding factor as to whether God's love will be manifested to him, or God's wrath. "If" is the word that must not be overlooked in the final verse of this parable.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 121.

¹²¹Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 23.

¹²²Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, p. 66.

Parable of the Marriage Feast (Matt. 22:1-14). This segment of scripture is frequently treated as two distinct parables, Matthew 22:1-10 being called the Parable of the Marriage Feast and verses 11-14, the Parable of the Wedding Garment. For our purposes this passage will be treated as one parable.

It is obvious that there are two distinct thoughts in these two parables. In the first section, verses 1-10, the king becomes angry and destroys the ones who murdered his servants and invites those who were "bad and good" to the wedding. This might be regarded as a parable of grace while verses 11-14 are distinctly verses depicting judgment. It is true that there is both grace and judgment in each section, but we wish to note the major thrust of the parable.¹²³ The first is a judgment, but it is a judgment of grace for those who eventually filled the wedding hall. The grace extended to the original guests turned into a judgment of destruction because of their subsequent behaviour. The same principle of judgment is demonstrated in the second illustration of punishment. In this case, however, the punishment is meted out, not because of any specifically mentioned overt disobedience but simply because of a lack of proper attire. The main thought of this second section emphasizes the thought

¹²³Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, p. 461.

of being adequately prepared or punishment will be the result.

Jesus opened this parable by saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son." This gives us an orientation as to the proper interpretation of the parable. The first segment undoubtedly refers to those who have failed to fulfill their responsibility and thus judgment comes. This is an example of corporate punishment. The second part of the parable is that of individual judgment because of the failure at the point of individual responsibility. The terrible sentence is an indication of the kind of responsibility the individual possesses. The stern necessity for the wedding garment is crystal clear.¹²⁴ The guest without the wedding garment was bound "hand and foot" and thrown into the "outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." At first hand, it may seem that the punishment for this guest was too severe. Some commentators have soberly suggested that the chequered assembly at the marriage feast were not instantly "hurried into the great hall," but rather that adequate opportunity was given them to array themselves in the appropriate garments provided by the host.¹²⁵ All insincerity is robbed

¹²⁴G. Campbell Morgan, The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1943), p. 134.

¹²⁵George A. Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928), p. 228.

of disguise when the king enters. What an awesome picture of judgment Jesus paints for us in this parable.

The disrespect which is committed under the royal roof and in the royal presence by the lack of the wedding garment may be regarded as even more flagrant than the disrespect of rejecting the royal invitation. The Gentile who dared to come before the king while still defiled with all his pagan godlessness was condemned as decisively as the Jew who persistently and violently refused to come at all.¹²⁶ Within this parable is the implication of the present features of the Kingdom, but its main tenor is emphatically eschatological.¹²⁷

Anthony T. Hanson refuses to think that any association should be made between the king who was angry and the thought that God is angry. It is true that the king certainly does not give us a complete picture of the character of God.¹²⁸ However, the parable does give us somewhat of a glimpse of the character of God in dealing with sin. The implication is that God will actively enter in to the punishment of those who choose to refuse His free grace.

¹²⁶Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 303.

¹²⁷Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, p. 133.

¹²⁸Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb, p. 121.

The picture is anything other than God sitting idly by while the natural process of sin and law are worked out in history. C. H. Dodd also argues, "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."¹²⁹ The rationale for Dodd's argument is difficult to conceive in view of the parable discussed just previous to this one. Jesus definitely stated in the parable of the Two Debtors that God will deal with those unwilling to forgive in the same way as did the king in parable with the unforgiving slave.¹³⁰

Christ moralized the whole parable with these solemn words, "For many are called but few are chosen." The didactic drift of the whole parable is that many were invited to the marriage feast but in the end, either from a lack of will to be there, or from coming to the feast irreverently unprepared, few actually took part.¹³¹ The whole history of God's dealings with those under the Covenant of the Old Testament further exemplifies this truth. Those who were called back into Canaan from Egypt were not chosen in the end because of their disobedience. Jesus emphasized this

¹²⁹Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God, p. 28.

¹³⁰Ibid., pp. 28-29.

¹³¹Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 273.

solemn warning as a conclusion to this parable.¹³² The reality of God's wrath expressed in severe punishment is vividly portrayed in this parable.

Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21). This is another of the parables where God is seen by Jesus as one who actively pronounces His wrath in punishment. The general point of the parable illustrates the thought that life that is worth living does not depend upon wealth and that even mere existence cannot be held secure by wealth alone.¹³³

There is no hint that this man's wealth was unjustly acquired. While this is true, Jesus points out the essence of the rich man's sin in the verse preceding this parable, "Take heed and beware of all covetousness." This story is strikingly similar to the story of Dives and Lazarus and it is apparent that Jesus wishes to teach the dangers of covetousness in both. The fact of selfishness is vividly brought out by the rich man's use of thirteen personal pronouns in this three verse summary of his aspirations. The thing he neglected to remember was that he had no real authority over his life and possessions. All his plans collapsed with the announcement of his imminent death.¹³⁴

¹³²Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, p. 191.

¹³³Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 323.

¹³⁴Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p.355.

The key to the understanding of this parable is to note the context. Jesus had been warning of the dangers of covetousness and gave this as an illustration of the perils involved. The summary statement by Jesus at the close of the parable is also essential to its truest interpretation, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Some will interpret this to mean that Jesus exhorts us to be rich in a material way that pleases God. Others interpret it in a purely spiritual manner that we should be rich as regards the treasure laid up with God in heavenly rewards.¹³⁵ It is obvious that the truest meaning, in view of the context, is that to amass worldly wealth without honor to the God who bestows it is a hazardous thing.¹³⁶

The parable is a warning to us to have regard to the true values in life. Men's actions have eternal significance and it is regrettable when they hold so tenaciously to temporal things that they finally lose the things of eternal value.¹³⁷ There are these two basic contrasts in the parable. There are also two kinds of "life" and two kinds of treasure, both of which focus into bold relief the fact of man's

¹³⁵Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 558.

¹³⁶Plummer, op. cit., p. 325.

¹³⁷Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 71.

involvement in the judgment of God. There is a distinction between life (zoe) in verse 15 and soul (psyche) in verse 19. The zoe is the ideal which does not limit itself to earthly possessions but is also "rich toward God." The alternative to this kind of life is the psychosomatic man (psyche) who cares only for personal needs. The tragedy sets in when the soul (psyche) is required of this Rich Fool because his wealth in physical goods has suffocated his spiritual potential.¹³⁸ The use of these two synonyms for life is probably not accidental. Jesus says that by placing the things of this physical life (psyche) in highest esteem will result in the forfeiture of life (zoe) in a spiritual manner. To put highest significance on life (zoe) is the life of dependance on God and is to be rich toward God.

The word used for fool (aphrones) is pointed out by Alfred Plummer as one of the strongest of the four Greek words for "fool," which points out the intensity with which Jesus rebuked this kind of selfishness.¹³⁹ "Your soul is required of you!" This is a grim reminder that it is an awful tragedy for God to break in when one is living in self-centeredness. The words, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God," reminds one of the

¹³⁸Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, pp. 196f.

¹³⁹Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 554.

eternal significance of this parable.¹⁴⁰ One is equally senseless and in an equally precarious position if he is not "rich toward God."¹⁴¹

Again in this parable one is reminded of the sovereignty of God's wrath. He can break into the process of history at the most unexpected moment and exact punishment upon individuals for their spiritual near-sightedness.

Parable of the Importunate Widow (Luke 18:1-8). The last parable in this King-Judge division where God is definitely related to the parable, the significance of the parable of the Importunate Widow is studied. Here the necessity of staying with the main theme of the parable and keeping from pressing parabolic details is seen. To equate the judge in this parable as an exact representative of the character of God would place one on dangerous grounds because the judge "neither feared God nor regarded man," and is represented as being an "unrighteous judge." However, God is compared to the unrighteous judge in the sense that even as the judge vindicated the persistent widow, so He will vindicate the "elect" who persist in prayer and do not "lose heart."¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰Morgan, The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord, p. 191.

¹⁴¹Dods, The Parables of Our Lord, p. 289.

¹⁴²Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God, pp. 28f.

Jesus interprets the parable in such a way that the point cannot be missed. The introductory statement relates the parable to persistence in prayer, while the concluding statement points us even further to the eschatological theme of the Second Coming. When the fulness of time has arrived, God will suddenly and without delay put an end to the distress into which His chosen ones will be plunged by a hostile and evil world.

God is here seen to be One who will be faithful in overthrowing the forces of evil and vindicating the cause of righteousness.¹⁴³ Although the time of Christ's return to deliver His people is hidden from them, yet they must not cease to pray for deliverance. Both here and Luke 21:36 the command to be unremitting in prayer appears immediately after a declaration that the hour of Christ's coming is unknown.¹⁴⁴ God will judicially give the righteous a verdict against evil and one in their favor even as the unrighteous judge vindicated the widow.¹⁴⁵

The parable encourages patience on the ground that God will exact punishment on the persecutors of the faithful. Several theologians hold that it is not easy to read the

¹⁴³Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 447.

¹⁴⁴Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 411.

¹⁴⁵Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, pp. 158ff.

Sermon on the Mount and believe that Jesus encouraged this temper of mind.¹⁴⁶ Other scholars make much of the fact that Jesus is here speaking of the process of judgment rather than an emphasis on God's active intervention in judgment, because of Jesus' urging of patience. The parable would teach, in this view, that in the end the long process of justice will emerge and conquer all injustice.¹⁴⁷ To exclude the active participation of God in the vindication of the righteous seems unjustified in view of the sentence, "I tell you, He will vindicate them speedily." Apparently God is to be actively engaged in the vindication of the righteous.

Household-Judge Group

Attention is now turned to that larger grouping of parabolic teaching where the common "householder-judge" theme is common to these parables. To this group belong the three parables of the Watching Bondmen (Mark 13:34-37; Luke 12:35-48), the parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27), the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), the parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), the parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:24-30), the parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9), the parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-9), and finally, the Lukan parable of the Marriage Feast (Luke 14:15-24).

¹⁴⁶Dougall and Emmet, The Lord of Thought, p. 242.

¹⁴⁷Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb, pp. 123f.

A common feature to most of these parables is that while the oikodespotes is "lord" all the time, he is presently absent. In the parables of the Pounds and Talents, he has gone "into another" and "far country" (Luke 19:12; Matt. 25:14). In four other parables his absence is only to be implied (Luke 12:36,43; Matt. 20:8; 25:5). The same idea is apparent in the parables where the host awaits his guests at the "great supper" (Luke 14:17,24) and the sower of "good seed" awaits the harvest (Matt. 13:26,30).

Having noted some of the common features which seem to justify our grouping of these parables in this "householder-judge" section, we now proceed to note each of these parables individually except in the first instance where the parables of the Watching Bondmen will be treated as a unit because they are parallel passages.

Parables of the Watching Bondmen (Mark 13:34-37; Luke 12:35-48). These parables emphasize the importance of being watchful stewards while the master is gone. In Mark the idea of punishment is implicit in the statement, "Watch therefore . . . lest He come suddenly and find you asleep" (Mark 13:35-36). The thought seems to be that punishment of some kind will occur if one is caught sleeping upon the Lord's return. Luke gives an extended account of the servant who takes advantage of the master's absence and mistreats the other servants, gets drunk and has a merry time. For him a

sure and severe punishment is coming. When the master returns on an unexpected day, that servant will be punished and put with the unfaithful (Luke 12:46). The servant who ignores the master's will "shall receive a severe beating." The servants who sinned ignorantly shall receive light beatings. Jesus summarizes the lesson of the parable by indicating that there will be degrees of punishment according to the personal responsibility of each person for their sin.

Some scholars believe Jesus here indicates that all punishment will have an end because of the saying that some sinners will be beaten with few stripes and some with many. It is readily admitted that there will be degrees of punishment, but to admit that there will be an end to such punishment, either in destruction or the redemption of the wicked, is difficult to interpret from the context.¹⁴⁸

There are three distinct groups of people mentioned in this parable. First, there are those faithful servants who are rewarded when the master returns (Luke 12:43-44). There is a second group, the deliberately evil, who will be punished and placed among the unfaithful. A third group are those of lesser guilt who will receive a "light beating" (Luke 12:48). J. H. Leckie believes this suggests a threefold doctrine of destiny like that of the Rabbis.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸Leckie, The World to Come and Final Destiny, p. 154.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

R. H. Charles takes this passage to mean that there is a fixed and definite limited punishment for certain offenders and raises the possibility of moral change in the intermediate state. For him it is impossible to conceive of eternal torment under the figure of a few stripes.¹⁵⁰ This is pure speculation, however, and cannot be reconciled with the major teachings of Jesus on the subject of punishment. It is apparent that Jesus is simply stating the principle of degrees of punishment in accordance with the severity of one's sinfulness.

The essence of the punishment for the trusted servant responsible for the disobedience in his master's absence was to be a violent death. There is no example of this word (dichotomeo) to mean anything other than to "cut in two" a condemned person.¹⁵¹ The gradation of punishment is strikingly apparent: for tyranny there is death; for deliberate neglect many stripes; for unintentional neglect few stripes. It is significant that punishment is not inflicted as a result of some fit of rage by the master. Penalty is not inflicted as passion dictates but as principle demands.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰Robert H. Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life, Second Edition (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), pp. 399f.

¹⁵¹Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 332.

¹⁵²Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 562.

The idea of responsibility is also very clear. Those who have enjoyed fewer privileges will bear some degree of punishment in direct proportion to their privileges. It is clearly seen that this is not a capricious, vengeful punishment, but one justly executed on the basis of personal responsibility.¹⁵³

Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27). This parable comes immediately after the conversion of Zacchaeus as nearly as is evident from the context. The whole of this parable is similar in its impact to that of Matthew's parable of the Talents. It is a parable of individual responsibility in the face of privilege.

The parable is more difficult to interpret than some because there are no interpretative comments by Jesus. The motivation for the telling of the parable was ". . . because he was near to Jerusalem and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately" (Luke 19:11). There are three supposed reasons Jesus gave this parable. First, He wished to teach that the final revelation of the sovereign dominion of God was not to take place immediately. Secondly, that a great responsibility rests on each one of His followers to work faithfully until He comes and finally, that the full coming of the Kingdom of God is going to bring

¹⁵³Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 364.

along with it a time of judgment.¹⁵⁴

It appears that the main purpose in telling the parable was to teach the disciples the significance of this life. If the punishment which awaited the negligent servant is any indication of the kind of punishment to be received if this life is not taken seriously, one needs to learn how to live seriously.¹⁵⁵ This is a parable which teaches the lesson of making the best use of opportunity.

The servants endowed equally with one pound made an "unequal" use of their endowments and were rewarded accordingly. The servant who with one pound gained ten is made a ruler over ten cities. The servant who with one pound gained five pounds is made ruler over five cities. While the parable just previously considered taught the fact of degrees of punishment, this parable seems to teach that there will be degrees of reward according to our use of the opportunities we have.¹⁵⁶

The punishment for the servant who laid his pound away in the napkin is a punishment of deprivation. The enemies mentioned in verse 27 are to be slaughtered while this unfaithful servant is to be deprived of the pound which was

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 474.

¹⁵⁵Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII, p. 331.

¹⁵⁶Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, p. 223.

originally given to him. There is nothing here of the outer darkness or the gnashing of teeth.¹⁵⁷ The punishment is nonetheless real. As for the final verse of the parable, it is to be noted that the slaying of the king's enemies was a common occurrence in Eastern courts.¹⁵⁸ The punishment of the rebellious subjects and active opponents is far more severe than that of the neglectful servant. Alfred Plummer feels that the destruction of Jerusalem and the doom of all who deliberately rebel against Christ are here foreshadowed.¹⁵⁹ This is plausible, especially in the face of the fact that Jesus was nearing Jerusalem when this parable was given (Luke 19:11).

St. Augustine points to Luke 19:27 in answer to the objection that the severe God of the Old Testament cannot be identical with the God of love in the New Testament.¹⁶⁰ The very real evidence is seen that in the Synoptics, as in the Law, the severity of God's judgments against the willfully disobedient is plainly taught. The main point in this particular parable is that to neglect opportunities is to lose them and that to make the most of opportunities is to gain others.

¹⁵⁷Spence, The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. XVI, p. 137.

¹⁵⁸Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, p. 392.

¹⁵⁹Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 443.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

To have tried and failed brings no disgrace if one's best powers went into all the high effort. But never to have tried at all is unspeakable shame and results in deprivation of that which we already have.¹⁶¹

Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). This parable is very similar to Luke's parable of the Pounds but it has some distinct features which require that we treat it as a separate unit. The general theme and purpose of this parable seems identical to Luke's parable, however Jesus gives us more explanation here with the result that one can be more explicit in the interpretation. Jesus had just finished comparing the Kingdom of Heaven with the ten virgins and emphasized the need for constant alertness. This same theme continues in this parable, for it is introduced with the same comparison. Jesus then illustrates the fact of differing capabilities in different men. The talents were given on the basis of the servants' abilities (v. 15). The rewards were also given on the basis of each man's ability. The servant who hid his talent in the ground was punished severely. He had to surrender his talent and was then cast "into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (v. 30). Jesus' point is that talents are given to be used. Not to employ opportunity means to lose it and to suffer the

¹⁶¹Brown, The Master's Way, p. 408.

punishment of exclusion into the outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth. In a word, he who does not increase will decrease.¹⁶²

This parable shows that just as there are degrees of natural ability, so there will be degrees of reward in direct proportion to one's ability. If the deliberate burying of one talent was punished so severely, how terrible it would be to leave ten talents unimproved. If the mere keeping of the talent without using it was so grievous a fault, what would the consequence be to squander or destroy the talent?¹⁶³ In this case it is the Lord who is represented as the exactor and the stern judge.¹⁶⁴

The closing statement of the parable is the cause of consternation for many a theologian. Not only is the servant deprived of his talent, but also he is cast into "the outer darkness" where "men shall weep and gnash their teeth" (v. 30). Many say that this idea of such a severe punishment is a later addition and not an essential part of the original saying of Jesus.¹⁶⁵ Such a view would say that the destruction of enemies was clearly an obsession to that generation

¹⁶²Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 561.

¹⁶³Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 347.

¹⁶⁴Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb, p. 121.

¹⁶⁵Dougall and Emnet, The Lord of Thought, p. 241.

and the original parable had no such reference to so severe a punishment.¹⁶⁶ Others view this parable as being re-worked by the early Church. Their eschatological interests were so intense that they really missed the whole point of the parable. C. H. Dodd completes his section on this parable by commenting:

The study of this parable has revealed how subtly the changing interests of the Church have altered the application, while leaving the substance of the story unaltered. We may fairly suspect that the same thing has happened in other cases, where the course of development is perhaps not so clear.¹⁶⁷

Such a use of the critical knife to purge the parables of their eschatological and apocalyptic is a very dubious methodology of interpretation.

If the parable is interpreted according to the hermeneutical principles suggested at the beginning of this section, the awful doom of the unprofitable servant is clearly evident. Although the punishment is temporal in the parable, the overtones of eschatological punishment are certain. The contrast between the rewards of the faithful servants in their joy and the punishment of the unfaithful servant being cast into the outer darkness where there is intense agony and suffering is very sharply focused for us.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, p. 121.

¹⁶⁸Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, p. 206.

The process of justice is clear in this parable. In the beginning every man had some talent. No one was left empty-handed. There is no hint of favoritism here.¹⁶⁹ The unequivocal laws of justice are seen in bold outline here. God will reward the faithful and punish the faithless. Men will be judged according to the means at their disposal. Men must either be faithful in the use of their talent or it will cease to be. It must grow or it will die.¹⁷⁰

Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). The theme of this parable is also clarified by Jesus' opening and closing comments. The introduction clearly relates the parable to the Kingdom of Heaven. The conclusion exhorts watchfulness because of the uncertainty of the return of the bridegroom. The eschatological nature of the Kingdom of God is emphasized here. This is not to mean the exclusion of the Kingdom of God in its present sense, but the consummation of the Kingdom.¹⁷¹ It is clear that the parable is a warning to be prepared for the future coming of the Son of Man.¹⁷² The moment of crisis is here represented by the appearance of the bridegroom. All the vivid dramatic detail is intended to

¹⁶⁹Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus, p. 245.

¹⁷⁰Dods, The Parables of Our Lord, p. 234.

¹⁷¹Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, p. 129.

¹⁷²Dodd, op. cit., p. 137.

emphasize the folly of unpreparedness and the wisdom of preparedness for the day when the bridegroom comes.

Personal spiritual adequacy is here pictured by Jesus. All ten virgins had made some preparation but five of them had not made sufficient preparation. Their lack of having an additional supply of oil meant the difference between admission to the bright and joyous wedding feast and the fact that for them "the door was shut" (v. 10).¹⁷³ The closing moral given by Jesus, "Watch therefore," is not directed against sleep, but rather against lack of foresight.¹⁷⁴

The important fact to note is the shut door and the words, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you" (v. 12). The punishment here is again the punishment of exclusion. There is no hint as to the duration of this punishment, but we are left with the thought that there is no possibility of admission to the wedding feast for these five virgins.¹⁷⁵ The focus is again on the individual responsibility for preparedness when the bridegroom comes, a theme common to so many of the parables of this section.¹⁷⁶ The closed door meant security and gaiety to those who were ready for the wedding.

¹⁷³Brown, The Master's Way, p. 427.

¹⁷⁴Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 301.

¹⁷⁵Spence, The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. XV, p. 475.

¹⁷⁶Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 557.

To the virgins who were unprepared the closed door meant loss of opportunity and the punishment of exclusion.¹⁷⁷

The exclusion of the foolish virgins from the marriage feast was a stern and severe punishment. There is no indication that this exclusion will ever end. The judgment in this parable was a judgment of separation. The thought of two distinct classes, the prepared and the unprepared, is again presented with lucid reality.¹⁷⁸ There is no more opportunity for rectifying the lack of preparation.

Joachim Jeremias objected to the authenticity of Matthew 25:13 on the grounds that it missed the point of the parable.¹⁷⁹ He asserted that the punishment was given, not because of their failure for watching, but rather for their lack of preparation. It would seem, however, that Jesus' use of the word "watching" was a usage of a common symbol for spiritual preparedness and is to be understood in this sense here. The command to "watch" is simply a re-statement of the implied command to possess the oil of preparation and is to be regarded as an excellent summary statement of the meaning of this parable on the eschaton.

¹⁷⁷Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 346.

¹⁷⁸Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, p. 206.

¹⁷⁹Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, p. 132.

Here again the wrath of God is evident. The emphasis is not so much on God's active participation in punishment. The emphasis is more on the consequences of the process of sin. Sin is seen in its natural results here. A lack of personal preparation results in exclusion from the marriage feast.

Parable of the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43).

Attention is now focused on a parable couched in agricultural terminology, rather than in a life situation which was the setting of all the previous parables of this section.

Jesus introduces the parable by stating, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field" (v. 24). This gives us the general subject area to which this parable was addressed.

The scene is that of a farmer who sowed good seed. While he was sleeping an enemy came and sowed "weeds" among the wheat. These weeds are permitted to grow with the wheat until the time of harvest at which time the reapers are instructed to gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, while the wheat is gathered into the farmer's barn.

This parable is of great significance to the concern of this study because of Jesus' interpretation of the parable. The devil is the enemy who sowed the weeds. The weeds are the sons of the devil. The harvest is the consummation of

the age. The reapers are the angels who gather the weeds to be burned with fire at the close of the age. The final comment by Jesus is presented with lucid reality:

The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. (vs. 41-42).

Jesus indicates something of the awful destiny of the wicked in this picture of judgment. The imagery of fire is used to describe the fate of all evildoers. In the furnace of fire the wicked are said to weep and gnash their teeth, suggesting that the fire does not completely destroy the wicked immediately after the final judgment.¹⁸⁰ This is one of two passages where the expression "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is linked with fire (cf. Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). Recognizing the "furnace of fire" as a figure of speech, R. C. H. Lenski suggests:

Whatever "the furnace of fire" may mean here or "the lake of fire" (Rev. 19:20; 21:8), "the fire is not quenched" (Mk. 9:44), "the everlasting fire" (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 16:24), elsewhere, this of all events is certain, that they point to some doom so intolerable that the Son of God came down from heaven and tasted all the bitterness of death that He might deliver us from ever knowing the secrets of anguish which, unless God be mocking men with empty threats, are shut up in these terrible words: "there shall

¹⁸⁰Floyd V. Filson, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), pp. 163f.

be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13).¹⁸¹

It is very interesting to observe what many theologians will do with Jesus' interpretation of this parable. C. H. Dodd holds this interpretation attributed to Jesus to be the developed eschatology of the early Church. He states: "We shall do well to forget this interpretation as completely as possible."¹⁸² Others hold this interpretative comment by Jesus to be a later addition since it is full of "the crude and fierce imagery of Jewish Apocalyptic thought and can hardly have emanated from Jesus."¹⁸³ This is a later comment which expands the parable into the terms of a definite apocalyptic scheme.¹⁸⁴ Johannes Weiss holds this to be a later addition because, according to him, the interpretation misses the whole point of the parable.¹⁸⁵ It is to be seriously doubted if one can so readily dispose of the meaning of this passage.

If the parable and its interpretation by Jesus is authentic, as it seems to be, Christ is here definitely

¹⁸¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 539.

¹⁸²Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, p. 148.

¹⁸³Dougall and Emmet, The Lord of Thought, p. 241.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁸⁵Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 202

teaching the active involvement of God in the eschatological punishment of the wicked. Although the Divine judgment has an unfailing certainty about it, yet it does tarry. Judgment belongs to God. It is not for man to "root out" the weeds. While man is short-lived and frequently hasty, He who is from everlasting to everlasting can afford to wait.¹⁸⁶ The parable presents the inflexible fact of God's wrath upon the finally impenitent.

Not only is the precise fact of God's eschatological wrath seen, but also here again is an ultimate distinction between good and evil. There is nothing to hint that the punishment of the wicked will ever cease to be. There is no easy optimism here. Although nothing can be detected to expressly indicate an eternity of punishment, the note of finality is not easily avoided. The ineradicable distinction of good and evil is here.¹⁸⁷ The distinctiveness of the destiny of those who are the sons of the kingdom and those who are the sons of the wicked one is spelled out with stubborn reality. With the consummation of the age "all causes of sin and all evildoers" will be eradicated from the harvest.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 193.

¹⁸⁷Brown, The Master's Way, p. 306.

¹⁸⁸Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, p. 62.

Parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9). This is another of Jesus' parables taken from the world of nature. The context helps us in our interpretation of the parable. In the preceding verses Jesus corrected the erroneous interpretation of the Jews who reported the murder of the Galileans. Furthermore, He pointed to the higher moral of these events, that unless repentance ensued for the Jews who were questioning the meaning of these historic events, they too would perish. In this parable, Jesus once again points to the necessity of the kind of repentance that expresses itself in fruit bearing.

As to the details of the parable this fig tree had been planted by the owner in his vineyard which was the choicest location. Fig trees, as well as palm trees and olive trees, were regarded as so valuable, that to cut them down if they yielded even a small measure of fruit was popularly deemed to deserve death at the hand of God.¹⁸⁹ The fig tree was regarded as the most fruitful of all trees and some species required three years for the tree to become fully productive.¹⁹⁰

The particular message centers in the fact of the longsuffering and severity of God's wrath. His visitation

¹⁸⁹Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. II, p. 246.

¹⁹⁰Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 372.

of wrath, however long delayed in order to give opportunity of repentance, is certain.¹⁹¹ There is nothing hasty about the judgments of the Lord. Even when men say, "There is no point in giving a further chance," God says, "Let there be one more opportunity." When the judgment of God falls upon a man, however, he may be sure that he has exhausted the resources of the Divine patience and that these resources are not meager.¹⁹² In this parable the only thing between the axe and the tree was the intercession of the vinedresser. He would make a last effort and if it failed, the tree would be cut down.¹⁹³ Richard C. Trench makes a cogent comment on the patience of God in relation to this parable:

This great Intercessor pleads for men, yet not that they may always continue unpunished in their sins, but only that their sentence may for a while be suspended; so to prove whether they will turn and repent; even as the vine-dresser here begs for the barren tree, not that it may be suffered always to stand, but asking for one year of grace; "If it bear fruit, well; but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."¹⁹⁴

While we must not see this as an allegory, there are

¹⁹¹Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 339.

¹⁹²Leon Morris, The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), p. 48.

¹⁹³Edersheim, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 248.

¹⁹⁴Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, p. 275.

certain evident allegorical elements in the parable which cry for recognition. Some would carry the parable to an extreme by directly applying all the details to the nation of Israel.¹⁹⁵ Some of the details could plausibly be directed to the destiny of Israel in the light of the context, but Jesus does not make any interpretative comment that would justify such a conclusion. It is certain that God's wrath is to be seen here. It is a wrath of personal involvement. It is a wrath of patient waiting until any opportunity of penitence seems to have been exhausted.

Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-9). Attention is now turned to a rather controversial parable. The difficulty of this parable is well known and the variety of interpretations is very great.¹⁹⁶ Because of the nature of the parable it will not be dealt with in any great detail, but rather an attempt will be made to get an overall picture of what Jesus was attempting to teach.

As the parable goes, a certain steward did what the prodigal son had done with the possession his father had given him--he wasted his master's goods. When the rich owner was informed of this he commanded his steward to give an

¹⁹⁵Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 372.

¹⁹⁶Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 380.

account of his stewardship. The object of this command apparently was to expose the extent of the wastefulness with which the steward had conducted the business.

The unjust steward saw no possibility of accepting a strenuous or humiliating work and devised a crafty plan to look after his own interests in a dishonest fashion. He went to the master's debtors and reduced their debt if they would pay their bill, thus robbing his master but putting himself in a favorable light. It is apparent in verse eight that the master was finally aware of the steward's deceitful handling of his accounts. Since the master did not have the necessary witnesses to bring evidence against the steward, he undoubtedly could not bring legal suit against him. All the master could do was to acknowledge the steward's cleverness.

The real point of difficulty arises when many charge that Jesus commended the behaviour of the unjust steward in verse eight. This certainly cannot be the case, since Jesus unconditionally condemned the steward as a "dishonest" person. The master did not praise the steward's dishonesty, but rather his prudence, his "worldly wisdom" towards the debtors.¹⁹⁷ The parable calls attention to the "wise" and diplomatic manner in which worldlings generally act toward their fellowmen in order to attain their own selfish aims.

¹⁹⁷Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 585.

Worldly people are farsighted and ready in their transactions for worldly gain. The spiritually minded ought to be equally ready in achieving heavenly objectives.¹⁹⁸

There is a sharp contrast between the temporal welcoming of the unjust steward into the houses of the debtors and the eternal welcoming of the faithful in the eternal dwellings where they will be with God.¹⁹⁹ The steward showed great prudence in the use which he made of present opportunities as a means of providing for his future. The believer ought to exhibit similar prudence in using material advantages in this life in such a way as to provide for the life to come.²⁰⁰

It is plain that one faces a reckoning day with Almighty God just as this steward had to have a day of reckoning with his master. This parable urges us with a powerful voice that the coming Day of reckoning must be faced with great realism.²⁰¹

Parable of the Marriage Feast (Luke 14:15-24). This is the last of the parables in the section where the common figure of "householder-judge" is noted. This is Luke's

¹⁹⁸Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 384.

¹⁹⁹Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 416.

²⁰⁰Plummer, op. cit., p. 380.

²⁰¹Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 71.

account of the marriage feast, which is very similar to Matthew's parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt. 22:1-14). Since Luke's version is quite distinct in several details, it is discussed here as a separate unit from Matthew's parable.

Jesus gives this parable immediately on the heels of the exhortation to invite the underprivileged to a feast with the reminder, "You will be paid at the resurrection of the just" (v. 14). This parable is given in response to the statement of one of the listeners, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" (v. 15). This was a common Jewish expression relating to the great feast at the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom.²⁰² This Pharisee had only partially understood Jesus' preceding words. He gave no indication that he knew Jesus as the Messiah, and yet expected to share in these future blessings. Apparently this parable was directed to him.²⁰³

This parable expresses the thought that many really care less for the Kingdom of God than they would outwardly express. Since this is true the Kingdom will be offered to those who do indeed care.²⁰⁴

²⁰²Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. II, p. 249.

²⁰³Ibid., p. 250.

²⁰⁴Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 573.

In this parable, those invited to the wedding feast begin to make excuses. In Matthew the picture is much more turbulent. Those invited actually kill the ones bringing the invitation to the king's marriage feast. Here, the householder's anger is expressed by inviting the poor and the maimed so that the feast will go on. In Matthew, the ruthless guests who murdered those bringing the invitation, are themselves murdered. Luke's account is much less severe. However, the tone of severity is here. There is an element of warning to the Pharisee that only those who accept the invitation will be admitted to the feast and the danger is that many will miss this feast.²⁰⁵

The idea of a distinct separation of men is again clearly seen in this parable. The element of finality is also expressed in the statement, "None of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet" (v. 24). The act of exclusion is a definite act of the householder. The implication is that those who made light of the feast did not realize how serious was their attitude. They trifled to the point of exclusion from something wonderful.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 393.

²⁰⁶Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, p. 332.

Judgment Without a Judge (Matthew 13:47-50). This is the only parable which distinctly teaches punishment in which there is no mention of some kind of judge. The parable under consideration is that of the Drag Net. This parable is distinct in another way in that the others previously considered have been lifted from everyday life or an agricultural setting, while this is taken from the fishing occupation so well known to several of the disciples of Jesus. This is also the shortest of the parables which includes such a specific interpretative comment.

Although some of the details are unique, the parable of the Net is related to the parable of the Tares since it teaches the same lesson and has a similar ending.²⁰⁷ As in the field there are both wheat and weeds, so in the net there are good and bad fish. The same distinction between good and evil is to be seen. Also the angels are the ones who come and separate the evil from the righteous and the same "furnace of fire" and "there men will weep and gnash their teeth," are a part of the interpretation of this parable.

C. H. Dodd interprets this parable to mean that the mission of Jesus and His disciples involved an indiscriminating appeal to men of every class and type. Although the appeal goes to all, the worthy are separated from the

²⁰⁷Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 197.

unworthy by their reaction to the demands which the appeal involved.²⁰⁸ For Dodd, the parable is totally within history and holds nothing of eschatological significance. It is apparent, however, that here is a picture of the Kingdom as an eternal reality embracing both the historic present and the eschatological future. The fish will be mixed together until the net is drawn in to the shore. The net is a vehicle of cohesion. However, it is more than that. It makes it possible for selection and rejection to occur once the net is drawn ashore.²⁰⁹ This brings the eschatological thrust of the parable into full significance.

The fate of the wicked is once again described with unequivocal certainty. Their destiny is the "furnace of fire." With this expression, "furnace of fire," the parable ceases and the explanation begins. The destiny of the wicked is one of fire and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" according to Jesus' teaching.²¹⁰ The grim reality of the consequences of men's wickedness is pungently present in this parable. God's process of punishment will be complete and final at the consummation of the age.

²⁰⁸Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, pp. 151f.

²⁰⁹Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, pp. 137-139.

²¹⁰William C. Richardson, "The New Testament Concept of the Destiny of the Wicked in the Light of Inter-Biblical Thought," (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 179.

Parables of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-43; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-18). These three parables are almost identical in all three of the Synoptics. One finds within each of them the common theme of the husbandmen killing the owner's "beloved son." The parable must have been of extreme importance to each of the Synoptic writers because of their meticulous repetition of the details with unusual agreement.

This parable was widely held as an allegory constructed in the early Church with reference to the death of Jesus.²¹¹ There can be little doubt that some elements of the parable are to be understood as allegorical. The owner is God, the son is Jesus, the husbandmen are the Jewish leaders, or possibly the people as a whole and the slaves are apparently the Old Testament prophets. However, no allegorical significance can be easily seen in the hedge, the pit, the wine press, the tower, the fruit or the exterior of the vineyard.

It is helpful to note the details of this parable. An absentee landlord rents a vineyard to tenants. He sends servants to collect the rent but they are beaten, killed and stoned. The landlord, realizing the seriousness of the situation, sends his "beloved son" with the inner assurance that due respect would be given him. However, the tenants murder

²¹¹Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 472.

the landlord's son, cast his body unburied outside the vineyard and take over the inheritance.

The parable closes with the question, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mark 12:9). The question was really intended, "What do these men deserve?" The answer is quickly given:

He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruit in their seasons' (Matt. 21:41).

The parable then receives its application to the situation. Jesus quotes from Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard (Isa. 5:1-2). Every Jewish listener knew that, from Isaiah's poem, Israel was the Lord's vineyard.²¹² Jesus then specifically prophesies that the Kingdom of God will be taken from Israel and given to a more worthy nation (Matt. 21:43). They had rejected the demands of God for the spiritual fruits which proved their unworthiness to be keepers of the vineyard. They had scorned the insistent love of God. They had spurned the gift of His beloved Son. There remained for them only the wrath of destruction and exclusion from the realm of God's service.²¹³

This story is concluded on the note of sure judgment on Israel. There is the note of forbearance in the parable

²¹²Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, p. 98.

²¹³Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, pp. 69f.

like that in many of the other parables. When God might have inflicted punishment, He sent His Son. But when even this tender gesture of Divine patience is misunderstood and made the basis of a scheme for personal profit issuing in a further outbreak of persistent evil, when the Son is rejected and slain, there is nothing left but judgment.²¹⁴

Anthony T. Hanson finds traces of an impersonal "law-wrath process" in this parable. He capitalizes on the thought that all the Synoptic writers apparently saw the judgment of the Jews as taking place in history rather than at the end of history. Hanson specifically relates Luke's quotation about the stone which will be broken to pieces and falling on one and crushing him (Luke 20:18), to refer to the smashing and destruction of Jerusalem.²¹⁵ Thus, the destruction spoken of here is definitely and exclusively to take place within history for Hanson. Certainly it is to be granted that there is an evident process of punishment in the sense of temporal punishment. However, if we are to restrict this parable only to punishment within history, without any eschatological significance, it would appear to be unfair to the Biblical evidence here. If the figure of the owner of the vineyard be taken to be anyone like God, there is some-

²¹⁴Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 23.

²¹⁵Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb, pp. 119f.

thing here more than an "impersonal wrath." Jesus specifically relates the punishment to God (Matt. 21:43). It is apparent that there is not only the "wrath process" but also there are personal expressions of wrath on the part of God in these parabolic teachings.

Conclusion

This parabolic section is now briefly epitomized. It is vividly clear that even as there is a revelation of Divine wrath in the didactic teachings of Jesus and in the historic events of Jesus' life, there is also a revelation of Divine wrath in these parables. The form critic must pare away a major portion of these parables if he is to be free of the doctrine of Divine punishment upon sin.

There is individual punishment in these parabolic teachings. The Rich Fool was punished because of his lack of the proper use of his possessions. The man at the Marriage Feast without a garment was cast into the outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth. The Unforgiving Debtor in Matthew 18 was thrown into jail because he was not willing to forgive, even after he had been forgiven.

There is also corporate punishment in the parables. Those who made light of the Marriage Feast in Matthew 22 and killed the king's messengers were in turn murdered and their city burned. The parables of the Tares and the Drag Net denote a corporate punishment of all those who are wicked.

Temporal and eschatological punishment is also seen in this section. Almost all of the parables indicate some kind of temporal punishment. For the five foolish virgins, the door was shut. In the parables of the Wicked Husbandmen the tenants are put to death for their punishment. Most of these parables have a heavy eschatological undertone. All these examples of present punishment are used to illustrate how God will deal with sin after death. Especially is this true in the instances when Jesus directly interprets the parables as relating to eschatological punishment. Probably the parables of the Tares and the Drag Net are the most vivid pictures of future punishment upon the wicked.

The author has already indicated that God's wrath is to be seen both as an active expression in punishment and a process of justice. The parables do not present God as expressing His wrath in an unjust manner. It is a measured, patient wrath. Nowhere do we get the impression that God is One who pours His wrath out in a capricious, unjustifiable manner.

In the parables God's wrath is seen against the backdrop of His justice, love and patience. "Wrath is always the consequence of rejected grace. As James Stewart expresses it, wrath is God's love in agony, "smitten with dreadful sorrow."²¹⁶

²¹⁶James S. Stewart, A Man in Christ (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), p. 221.

Jesus expressed this eternal negative in terms of exclusion from the presence of God and His Kingdom. The punishment is represented in terms of conscious suffering which involves "weeping and gnashing of teeth." In a sense, wrath is the Divine self-control that represents God's permission which allows men to divorce themselves from His fellowship. In a deeply mysterious way wrath is equated with the absence of God.²¹⁷

IV. PROPHETIC TEACHINGS

This fourth major division of this chapter on the doctrine of God's wrath as expressed in various kinds of punishment, has for its focal point the prophetic teachings of Jesus. Our study of the prophetic teachings is restricted to those significant prophetic passages which have a definite future and eschatological thrust relating to the doctrine of God's wrath as expressed in punishment. The study is not exhaustive, but hopefully is comprehensive enough to get the significance of the core of these prophetic sayings of Jesus.

This section has been organized around three centers of thought as follows: First, future wrath within history; secondly, future wrath at the Day of Judgment; and thirdly, future wrath beyond the Day of Judgment. It will be recognized that these divisions are not arbitrary in each case,

²¹⁷Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, p. 72.

but rather serve to organize the major thrust of the scriptural passages in their relation to the theme of this paper.

Future Wrath Before the Day of Judgment

The most notable prediction of God's wrath being manifested in history is seen in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. The passages which contain this lament are Matthew 23:37-39, Luke 13:34-35, and Luke 19:41-44.

The lament is most definite in Luke 19:41-44. In glaring contrast with the rejoicing of the excited multitudes in the previous verses Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. The weeping must have been motivated by the sight of the city which had persisted in its rejection of Him. His weeping is motivated by the passionate pity that they will have to pay such a heavy penalty for their rejection. Their insistence on wicked unbelief has blinded them to the opportunities for redemption still remaining. Through their own fault the way of salvation is hidden from their eyes.

The fact of future historical punishment is the direct result of their persistence in unbelief. Because they are going to persist in unbelief and hardness of heart, terrible punishment will come upon them.

For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you and hem you in on every side and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation (Luke 19:43-44).

In the providence of God a mighty enemy will soon come to besiege Jerusalem and destroy the whole city with its inhabitants amid fearful havoc. All this will happen because they did not avail themselves of the time of grace, when God visited them in their Messiah in order to offer them, first among all the nations, redemption and everlasting salvation.²¹⁸ The same thought of impending doom is given in the other passage in Luke and the passage in Matthew. Matthew says, "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matt. 23:38). In Luke 13:35 the same thought occurs, "Behold, your house is forsaken."

Israel had not noted nor used this period of opportunity. Jesus laments because there is still the slim chance of reprieve from the ensuing punishment (Luke 19:42), however the day of grace is past because a judicial blindness has set in, the penalty of a long course of moral perversity.²¹⁹ There seems to be no chance of seeing now. The fate is sealed. Mercy has been extended but now fate has set in because they did not know the time of the visitation. The danger from which Christ would have protected Jerusalem as the hen protects her brood from "the wheeling hawk on high," is the judgment which is about to fall upon it (Matt. 23:37;

²¹⁸Geldenhuis, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 482.

²¹⁹Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 610.

Luke 13:34).²²⁰ The statement, "Your house is left to you forsaken and desolate" (Matt. 23:38), indicates the abandonment to the consequences of their accumulated misdeeds.

"Your house," in this context, can hardly mean anything but Jerusalem.

In Jesus, God has proven once and for all that He is indeed the God of love. He is, however, also the God of holiness and righteousness, the Almighty who is not mocked. Every nation or person who rejects the opportunity offered by Him to be saved through Christ will ultimately be inexorably visited by judgment.²²¹

God's wrath is seen here in the sense of giving them over to the natural consequences of their sinfulness. It is as if God would intervene in behalf of Israel against the coming disaster if repentance would have been the case. The idea of God's wrath being expressed by a withdrawal of His presence from the nation of Israel is suggested here. Since repentance was not eventuated, God would permit disaster to fall through the instrumentation of a foreign power.

Future Wrath at the Day of Judgment

Not only does Jesus give the prophetic word of God's

²²⁰Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 324.

²²¹Goldenhuys, loc. cit.

wrath expressing itself in future punishment within history, but also the Synoptics contain several substantial scriptural passages which reveal the manifestation of God's wrath in punishment at the Day of Judgment.

One of the first significant passages is recorded in Matthew 7:21-23. The passage is given in the sense of the eschatological Day of Judgment. The punishment is here expressed in terms of exclusion on that day:

On that day, many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never know you; depart from me, you evildoers" (Matt. 7:22-23).

There is an apparently surprising feature about the punishment administered on that day. Jesus is quite ready to admit that many of the false prophets will do and say wonderful things. However, Jesus says that if any man uses His name on false pretence, the day of reckoning will come. The real motives will be exposed and he will be banished from the presence of God.²²² Separation from Christ is the real penalty and that sentence of banishment is pronounced by Christ Himself. The condemnation here is on a "piety of sentiment."²²³ The judgment falls on those who perhaps can

²²²Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 294.

²²³Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 118.

inspire others with a love of Christ but have no real part in it themselves.

At the back of this whole passage is the idea of judgment. All through it runs the certainty that the day of reckoning will come. A man may succeed in maintaining the pretences and the disguises for some time, but there comes a day when the pretences are shown for what they are and the disguises are stripped away. We may deceive men with our words and actions, but we cannot deceive God.²²⁴ The reality of God's wrath expressing itself in the punishment of exclusion is evident here.

A second passage which expresses the thought of God's punitive wrath at the Day of Judgment is Matthew 10:14-15 and Luke 10:10-12. In Matthew's account, these words come in connection with Jesus' commissioning of the twelve disciples, while in Luke's account it comes in reference to the appointing of the "seventy others" (Luke 10:1). The passage under consideration is practically identical in both accounts:

And if any one will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town (Matt. 10:14-15).

²²⁴John Wesley, The Standard Sermons of John Wesley, Annotated by Edward H. Sugden, Fifth Annotated Edition, Vol. II (London: The Epworth Press, 1964), pp. 23ff.

The day of judgment mentioned in this passage comes after all earthly judgments and punishments are past, for the men of Sodom and Gomorrah would not rise from the dead to be judged until the end of time.²²⁵ The terrible punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah will be light in comparison to those who reject those commissioned by Christ. A far greater punishment is in store for them.²²⁶ Christ meant the act of shaking the dust from the feet to symbolize the responsibility of the inhabitants for their coming punishment.²²⁷ The act, when performed, would be a last word of warning. The punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, tragic and terrible as it was, or the punishment still in store for Sodom and Gomorrah, will be more endurable than that of a city or village which rejected the message of the Kingdom. Sodom could at least plead some measure of ignorance. But Jewry had been prepared through the centuries for the special revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Privilege always spells responsibility.²²⁸ It is interesting to note that just before their destruction, Sodom and Gomorrah also had been guilty of a grave and vicious breach of the laws of hospitality (Gen. 19:1-11).

²²⁵William Caven, Christ's Teaching Concerning the Last Things (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), p. 59.

²²⁶Spence, The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. XVI, p. 271.

²²⁷Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 162.

²²⁸Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 367.

They had rejected the messengers of God. But even at their worst, Sodom and Gomorrah had never had the opportunity to reject the message of Christ and His Kingdom. That is why it would be easier for them at the last than for the towns and villages of Galilee.²²⁹

The intensity of what Jesus says about Sodom and Gomorrah is greatly amplified when we understand that the Rabbis counted the men of Sodom among those who had "no part in the Life of the Age to Come."²³⁰ Jesus says in effect to His hearers, "Even those whom you consider the most hopeless of sinners are less hopeless than those who refuse to hear the Gospel." The eschatological day of wrath is clearly in view in these verses. Punishment will be meted out according to the degree of personal involvement in sin.

A third group of prophetic sayings referring to the eschatological punishment at the Day of Judgment are Matthew 10:32-33, Mark 8:38 and Luke 12:8-9. These are the sayings which emphasize personal responsibility within history as being determinative of one's acceptance or rejection on the Day of Judgment. Mark records the following comment by Jesus:

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will

²²⁹Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 382.

²³⁰Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, p. 61.

the Son of Man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father (Mark 8:38).

Matthew and Luke record the same thought, however Matthew says the final denial will take place "before my Father who is in heaven," while Luke says the denial will occur "before the angels of God." Undoubtedly the denial will occur before the angels and before God at the same time.

The saying is concerned with the man who is "ashamed" of Jesus and His words, or as Matthew and Luke record, ". . . whoever denies me before men" (Matt. 10:33, Luke 12:9). By this Jesus means that people who rejected His claims would be judged accordingly at the Day of Judgment.²³¹ The contrast is between the judgment seat of human persecutors and the judgment seat of God in the account of Matthew and Luke. Here the Father is the Judge and the Son pleads before Him. Only those whom the Son recognizes are safe in the Day of Judgment.²³² The One who is now so easily set aside by some is to appear as the Son of Man, coming in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. Now they are ashamed of Him, but then, He will be ashamed of them.²³³ To treat Jesus with shame now will result in our being treated with shame

²³¹Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 384.

²³²Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 155.

²³³Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 158.

at His coming again with the holy angels. Men either deny themselves (Mark 8:34), or they deny Him. This is the thought which connects this verse to that which precedes in Mark's account.²³⁴

Some exegetes reject the thought of Mark 8:38 as having any relationship to the preceding verses. For them it is an intrusion, loosely connected with the rest of the paragraph with gar. It is taken to be of the "same metal as verse 35, but not of the same coinage."²³⁵ Henry B. Swete sees the verse in a different light by observing:

This final gar carries us on to the issue of human life, and places the whole struggle between self-seeking and self-sacrifice in the light of the eternal order.²³⁶

C. H. Dodd veers away from the apocalyptic element in these passages saying that this might or might not refer to a Day of Judgment closing history. For him the most natural meaning is that Jesus will acknowledge or deny men in the "supernal world," that is, the acknowledgment or denial is eternal in quality. This would mean that those who acknowledge Christ on earth thereby possess the sign that they are

²³⁴Earle, The Gospel According to Mark, p. 108.

²³⁵Taylor, op. cit., p. 382.

²³⁶Henry B. Swete, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan and Company, 1898), p. 174.

eternally accepted by Him.²³⁷ This keeps Dodd from accepting any kind of historical, literal return of the Son of man in judgment.

The most natural interpretation of these passages requires us to look forward to that prophetic Day of Judgment. This is a most solemn reference to that Day.²³⁸ The followers of Christ must especially be on guard against the hypocrisy of denying Jesus in word or deed. Those who deny Him, by refusing to acknowledge that He is the Messiah and that they are His followers, will also be denied by Christ at the Final Judgment. He will disown any bond of true communion between them and Him.²³⁹ The implication is that such a denial has eternal consequences which will not be easy to accept. a tremendous amount of emphasis is placed on the historic present as being determinative of the eternal future.

Our next passages of scripture relate to the specific judgment which will fall upon the cities which rejected Christ and did not repent. The passages are definitely eschatological in nature because of the phrase, "It shall be more tolerable in the day of judgment. . ." (Matt. 11:22,24;

²³⁷Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, p. 71.

²³⁸Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 167.

²³⁹Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 349.

Luke 10:14). The passages under consideration are Matthew 11:20-24 and Luke 10:13-15.

The introductory statement in Matthew gives us the reason for this pronouncement of coming judgment: "Then he began to upbraid the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent" (Matt. 11:20). Divine wrath will express itself in punishment at the Day of Judgment because these cities were showered with the mighty works of Christ and remained unrepentant. The "woes" pronounced in these passages may refer to more than the eschatological Day of Judgment. It may well be that wrath will express itself in future historic punishment as well as future eschatological punishment. The definite relationship of the passages to the eschatological Day of Wrath is clearly indicated and for that reason that aspect will be emphasized.

The inditement is specifically related to the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. It will be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for Chorazin and Bethsaida. Repentance would have been precipitated long ago if these same "mighty works" of Christ would have been done in Tyre and Sidon. It will be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for Sodom than for Capernaum, for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom that had been done in Capernaum "it would have remained until this day" (Matt 11:23). Because Capernaum anticipates being exalted to

heaven it will instead be brought down to Hades (Luke 10:15). Such is the fate of these unrepentant cities in the face of such high spiritual privilege.

The city of Chorazin is not mentioned in the New Testament except for these two references. This is probably an indication that much of Christ's work is left unrecorded. It is not to assume that Chorazin is a fictitious name.²⁴⁰ The name does not occur in the Old Testament nor in the writings of Josephus, but some think that Chorazin may be identified with the ruins now called Keraze just northwest of Tell Hum.²⁴¹

In Galilee the inhabitants of towns like Chorazin and Bethsaida had already shown that they had rejected Jesus even though they had unparalleled opportunities of believing in Him. A great judgment awaits them because of this rejection. For the people of Capernaum also, who had the advantage of great opportunity (cf. Matt. 4:18-22; 9:1; John 2:12), an irrevocable execution of judgment is awaiting. In the Roman-Jewish War this prophecy was partially fulfilled, but the final fulfillment awaits until the Day of Judgment.²⁴² Of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum the paradox was true that the Kingdom of God had come near to them and yet they were

²⁴⁰Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 386.

²⁴¹Ibid.

²⁴²Goldenhuy, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 301.

far from the Kingdom of God.²⁴³

There is a shocking revelation made to these cities in their self-satisfied complacency. The heathen commercial towns of Tyre and Sidon will not be judged as severely as these towns which have not repented. The towns of Tyre and Sidon were frequently denounced by the Prophets of the Old Testament for their wickedness (Isa. 23; Jer. 25:22; 47:4; Ex. 26:3-7). The sins of these heathen towns are not as serious as the sins of these towns which had rejected the call to repentance. The sin of complacency, whether in the form of Pharisaic self-righteousness, or in that of popular indifference, is condemned by Christ more severely than the grosser sins of Tyre and Sidon. A life that is externally respectable may be just as fatally anti-Christian as one that is definitely scandalous.²⁴⁴ Even Sodom will not receive as severe a judgment for its gross immorality as will Capernaum for rejecting Christ. Capernaum will be judged in proportion to the truth it had rejected.

The reference to Capernaum being brought down to Hades is probably to be taken as metaphorical. The men of Capernaum dwelt in a flourishing city of which they were

²⁴³Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 276.

²⁴⁴Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 165.

proud. But they had failed to appreciate and accept the true significance of Christ's works.²⁴⁵ Capernaum, more than all other places was favoured by Christ's presence and activity. It was the most prosperous and most privileged, spiritually, and yet was the most unsympathetic to Jesus.²⁴⁶ With this in mind, it appears that "heaven" and "Hades" here represent the height of glory and the depth of shame (Isa. 14:13-15).²⁴⁷ If there is any thought that Capernaum will be exalted to the heavens Jesus quickly dismisses the idea by His pronouncement of the coming Day of Judgment when the consequences of such pride and rejection will be punished. The greater privilege spelled greater obligation and therefore a sterner punishment to come.²⁴⁸

In these passages Jesus uses the principle of illustrating future judgment and punishment in contrast to past judgment. The wickedness of Sodom with its consequent historical punishment and the wickedness of these Galilean cities with their consequent eschatological punishment are compared. If the inhabitants of these Galilean cities regard the past punishment of Sodom to be an indication of its

²⁴⁵Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, p. 121.

²⁴⁶Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 177.

²⁴⁷Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 277.

²⁴⁸Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, 387.

future punishment, they too must take a look at their own future punishment, for it will be "more tolerable" for Sodom in the Day of Judgment than it will be for them. The inevitable law of the consequences of present sin will lead to the inexorable future eschatological demonstration of God's wrath in punishment.

A further example of the future wrath is to be seen in Matthew 12:38-42, with its parallel in Luke 11:29-32. In response to the request from the scribes and Pharisees for a sign (Matt. 12:38), Jesus proceeded to give them the sign of Jonah and the queen of the South. This is a most emphatic illustration of the condemnation which will occur on the Day of Judgment.

Jesus here warns that His hearers can expect condemnation in the Day of Judgment when they are contrasted with those of previous generations who had lived better lives with less instruction in the right way of living. The people of Ninevah had Jonah alone to preach to them. The Queen of Sheba had only the wisdom of Solomon for instruction. On the contrary, Jesus' contemporaries had the Son of God as their Teacher and yet failed to repent and live exemplary lives. Surely they would be condemned.²⁴⁹ Jesus' warning is that

²⁴⁹Robert J. Hastings, "The Destiny of Unbelievers as Set Out in the Teachings of Jesus" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950), p. 93.

any who fail to repent and live up to His standards will be condemned. Those who have much knowledge and little righteousness will have the men of Ninevah and the queen of the South for their accusers at the Day of Judgment.

Jesus contrasts the unresponsiveness of the "men of this generation" (Luke 11:31), to the revelation He had brought, with the response of pagans in antiquity to the lesser revelations of Solomon and Jonah.²⁵⁰ At the final judgment the men of Ninevah will indict the men of "this generation" for not having repented at the preaching of Christ, who had been a greater "sign" to them than Jonah had been to the Ninevites or Solomon had been to the Queen of Sheba.²⁵¹ The repentant sinners of the wicked city of Ninevah will join in the sad condemnation of the chosen people. Though a greater than Jonah was now present, the people were deaf to His message.²⁵² The contrast between the Queen of Sheba and "this generation," and the Ninevites and "this generation" again reminds one of the sharp dichotomy between righteousness and wickedness in the teachings of Jesus on punishment.

Both Matthew and Luke give the impression that this

²⁵⁰Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII, p. 211.

²⁵¹Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, p. 140.

²⁵²Spence, The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. XVI, p. 305.

demand for a sign and the enunciation of the satanic origin of Christ's cure of the demoniac just healed were simultaneous.²⁵³ If this be the case, the demand was impudent and insulting to Jesus. To think that men would so speak of Christ's healing ministry and then demand a further sign to establish His identity as the Messiah is almost unbelievable. In this light, the condemnation of these wicked people takes on added significance. The perversity of the inquirers of a sign is further documented.

In these passages just considered, another example is seen of the surety of future punishment on the Day of Judgment. The repentant pagans of past history will agree in the condemnation that will be given upon these reprobate sinners.

A final example of a prophetic teaching relating to the future wrath to be manifested on the Day of Judgment is to be found in Matthew 24:36-44 and Luke 17:22-37. In this case major attention is focused on the passage in Luke, since it is more specific at the point of punishment to come.

Both Matthew and Luke agree in their account of this saying that when the Day of the Son of Man arrives (Matt. 24:37; Luke 17:30), it will precipitate a crisis of separation. "One will be taken and the other left" (Luke 17:34). Thus

²⁵³Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 191.

the Day of the Son of Man is a day of judgment. Just as men ignored the warnings in the days of Noah, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. As soon as Noah entered the ark the flood came and destroyed all the wicked (Luke 17:27). As soon as Lot left Sodom fire and brimstone rained from heaven and destroyed them all. Just as was true in these historic events, so will it be "on the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:29-30).²⁵⁴

In both these accounts the end time is certain, but the time of its arrival is uncertain, therefore men must be watchful. The days preceding the Day of the Son of Man will be analogous to that before the Deluge. Men were wholly given up to material enjoyment. The special point in this analogy is not that the generation swept away by the Flood was exceptionally sinful, but rather that it was so absorbed in earthly pursuits it paid no attention to solemn warnings.²⁵⁵ None of the gross sins are mentioned here. The idea is summarized in the statement, "No one knows when it will come, therefore there is no need to trouble oneself about it yet." This attitude will prevail prior to the Day of the Son of Man. Owing to their foolish attachment to worldly things, the Judgment will overtake them suddenly and

²⁵⁴Tittle, The Gospel According to Luke, p. 188.

²⁵⁵Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 340.

and unexpectedly. The time of grace will be forever past.²⁵⁶

The people of Sodom are also mentioned to emphasize the fact that their worldly-mindedness made them incapable of repentance. They all perished when they were visited by God's judgments after Lot's departure from the city. Just as assuredly are the judgments of God to visit impenitent men at the Second Coming. No preceding or definite indications of the day nor hour are given.

The ones listening to Jesus are urged to "remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). She represents those who are selfishly attached to worldly things. Her fatal end was the consequence of the attachment in her heart to the doomed city. The lesson is plain to all who will listen. Everyone who selfishly tries to seek fullness of life and happiness in earthly things are reminded of their consequent estrangement from God (Luke 17:34).

The lesson from the generation of Noah and Lot is that those who heed God's warnings are saved while those who refuse to do so are left to their fate (Matt. 24:40-41). Since the time of the Second Coming is not known the only thing that can give security in that Day is unceasing watchfulness for Christ's Coming (Matt. 24:42).

²⁵⁶Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke
p. 441.

The equation of destruction with the coming of the Son of Man is certain from Matthew 24:38-39 and Luke 17:26, 29-30. The flood came and destroyed all the antedeluvian sinners. Fire and brimstone rained from heaven and destroyed the wicked inhabitants. After recording this, Luke's account says, "So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:30). The details of this destruction are not spelled out, but it will be as complete as the destruction involved in these two historic events. It appears that a cosmic destruction will occur on that Day.

The wrath of God is also seen in its eschatological setting as compared with the past manifestations of wrath. The wrath expressed in past historic events is used to exemplify the kind of wrath to be demonstrated at the end of the age. Jesus again uses the known to explain the unknown.

Future Wrath Beyond the Day of Judgment

As our attention turns to a new segment of thought, the writer now looks at the manifestation of God's wrath which occurs beyond the Day of Judgment. Some of these passages express the thought of the actual punishment which occurs on the Day of Judgment, but focus is especially on the portions of these passages which indicate the fact of punishment of the wicked beyond the Day of Judgment.

The first passage in this division is Matthew 8:11-12, which is included in the passage of the healing of the

centurion's servant. Matthew reports Jesus to have responded in the following manner:

I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth (Matt. 8:11-12).

These verses are found in a different context in Luke 13:28-29 and will be treated later because of other significant ideas on punishment.

Any eschatological conclusions are not to be seen in these verses according to C. H. Dodd, since this passage falls within the framework of contemporary Jewish usage.²⁵⁷ The Kingdom of God may be "accepted" here and now and its blessings will be enjoyed in the end by those who have fulfilled the necessary conditions.²⁵⁸ To interpret the passage in this fashion drains it of its truest meaning. It seems apparent that Jesus is here stressing the necessity of faith as an essential prerequisite to sitting at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven in its eschatological sense. Faith makes this Gentile the soul-compatriot of the patriarchs. Lack of faith bars even the Jew, in spite of his heritage, from the final joy.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, pp. 27-28.

²⁵⁸Ibid., p. 28.

²⁵⁹Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 342.

The contrast is sharp here. Many will come from east and west to join in the feast. Many others who are "sons of the kingdom," will be shut out. A son is an heir, therefore the son of the Kingdom is the man who is supposed to inherit the Kingdom, but the Jews are to lose their inheritance.²⁶⁰ The fate of the wicked, after having been denied entrance to the banquet, is that of being thrown into "the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 8:12). The feast with the patriarchs, the outer darkness, and the weeping and gnashing of teeth are all familiar Jewish imagery, but the thought is anti-Jewish.²⁶¹ This refrain is characteristic of Matthew. It occurs again in 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51 and 25:30. The thought of the proselyte receiving the reward of heaven and the rightful heir losing the inheritance does not find a parallel in current Jewish apocalyptic thinking.²⁶²

The reversal of human expectations and judgments is vividly portrayed here. These verses foretell the exact opposite of Jewish expectations. The Jew expected the Gentiles would be put to shame by the sight of the Jews in bliss. It is strange irony that the sons of the Kingdom

²⁶⁰Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 309.

²⁶¹Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 140.

²⁶²Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, p. 78.

are excluded from the Kingdom.²⁶³

While nothing is said of the duration of this exclusion into the "outer darkness" where men "will weep and gnash their teeth," there is no suggestion of any possibility of reprieve. There is a sense of finality in this statement of Jesus. As long as this punishment lasts there will be conscious suffering, since men will "weep and gnash their teeth." What a frightful picture this is of the punishment that awaits those who are to be excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our second passage is located in Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:4-5. While examining these particular verses, an attempt is made to note the context. The passage in Matthew is given in the list of instructions to the twelve whom Jesus is preparing to send two by two to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6). The passage in Luke is related to the discussion about the denial of Christ before men. Matthew records Jesus' warning as follows:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna (Matt. 10:28).

This passage is highly debated and thus deserves our close attention. The context reveals that it is given in

²⁶³Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 127.

the context of not being afraid of the persecution that might result from the disciples' going two by two to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:17-23). The assurance is given that the "Spirit of your Father" (10:20) will speak through them when they appear in court and that "he who endures to the end will be saved" (10:22). The disciples are not to fear men but they are exhorted to fear him who can "destroy both soul and body in Gehenna" (10:28).

The controversy begins when one attempts to ascertain the one who is able to destroy one's soul and body in Gehenna. One view is that this cannot refer to God, since the general trend of Jesus' teaching does not lend itself to believe that God destroys and punishes by His own personal action.²⁶⁴ In Anthony T. Hanson's book, The Wrath of the Lamb, no mention is made of this passage. This is very interesting in view of the fact that Hanson asserts that God does not actively enter into the "process" of punishment.

Another view is that the one who is to be the object of fear is God. Only God could pronounce the sentence to Gehenna. However, this is frequently said to be an indication of God's omnipotence and has nothing to do with the severity of the punishment.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴Dougall and Emmet, The Lord of Thought, p. 244.

²⁶⁵Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 371.

It seems most likely that the reference is not to the devil, who nowhere in Jesus' teaching is represented as having this kind of power. The reference is undoubtedly to God Who alone has the power to give life and to withhold life. One would not agree with the view, however, that this saying stresses only God's omnipotence and has nothing to do with the severity of the punishment. It is apparent that Jesus' use of the two strong words "destroy" and "Gehenna," gives special meaning to the severity of the punishment. The fact that God has had mercy on a man and has not cast him into Gehenna does not alter the basic fact that man's eternal destiny is in God's hands and thus, man's attitude toward God must be one of profound awe and reverence.²⁶⁶ To those who lack this awe and reverence, the same question is asked as that posed to the Pharisees, "How are you to escape being sentenced to Gehenna?" (Matt. 23:33).

Many recoil from the idea that Jesus made "fear" one of the motives of obedience to God. Such a reluctance cannot be established from the scriptures we have already studied. The fear that results from the possibility of physical harm would certainly have an element of dread and even terror involved. When the reference to God is placed in such close parallel construction with the reference to

²⁶⁶Metzger, The New Testament, Its Background, Growth, and Content, p. 158.

enemies, the logic of the first statement appears to have significance for the second.²⁶⁷

It is apparent that God is to be feared. He is not to be feared because it is within His power to terminate a man's life on earth, but rather because life on this earth is not the whole story. The fact that there is a Gehenna in which men may be cast gives an awful solemnity to the whole of our personal existence.²⁶⁸ No punishment that men can ever lay on a man can compare with the ultimate fate of a man who has been guilty of disobedience to God. This passage teaches us that there is something worse than death.²⁶⁹ It is difficult to see the validity of the position of conditional immortality or of universalism in the light of these two passages.

A third set of passages relating to wrath beyond the Judgment finds expression in all three of the Synoptics. These are the passages dealing with the subject of the "eternal sin" in Matthew 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-30 and Luke 12:10. Here we shall take Mark's account as representative:

Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin, for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit" (Mark 3:28-30).

²⁶⁷Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, p. 61

²⁶⁸Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 72.

²⁶⁹Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 400.

This is another controversial passage. First, it is important to look at the context. In both Matthew and Mark, Jesus is reported to be responding to the accusation brought by the Pharisees (Matt. 12:24), and scribes (Mark 3:22), that Jesus had cast out demons because He was possessed by Beelzebul, the prince of demons (Matt. 12:24; Mark 3:22). Mark adds the note that Jesus gave this warning about the "eternal sin" because they had said, "He has an unclean spirit" (Mark 3:30).

Many a misguided person has been uncomfortably hounded by the thought that they had committed this sin and were therefore facing the certain doom of hell. On the theological plane many universalists have wrestled with these verses hoping to relate them somehow to a plan of universal redemption. The universalist quickly evades the real issue of these verses by pointing to the phrase in Matthew 12:32 which states that this sin "will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." For the universalist this phrase would not only be meaningless, but also misleading in the highest degree if forgiveness were impossible in the next life.²⁷⁰ Even if we were to accept the possibility of forgiveness on the meager evidence of one phrase in contradiction to a host of other passages, we would still face the fact

²⁷⁰Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life, p. 400.

that there is one sin that will not even be forgiven then. Such an interpretation is highly impossible in the light of the total scriptural evidence.²⁷¹

Although these accounts do not clearly spell out exactly what awaits the person guilty of the "eternal sin," they do clearly indicate the fact of eternal future punishment for this sin. Furthermore, there is no allowance for such a wicked one to ever be restored to God.²⁷² It is specifically stated that a person guilty of this sin can never find forgiveness.²⁷³

Ralph Earle points out that the words "guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:29), suggest that the word "guilty" can mean "held in the grip of."²⁷⁴ There is neither release nor forgiveness for this sin. The eternal consequences cannot be dismissed as being irrelevant to this teaching. The introductory phrase, "Truly, I say to you" (Mark 3:28), is found exclusively in the sayings of Jesus and adds emphasis and solemnity to that which follows.²⁷⁵ Such a sin is not one

²⁷¹Joseph Agar Beet, The Last Things (New York: Methodist Book Concern, Eaton and Mains, 1897), p. 171.

²⁷²Richardson, "The New Testament Concept of the Destiny of the Wicked in the Light of Inter-Biblical Thought," p. 170.

²⁷³Alfred Plummer, "The Witness of the Four Gospels to the Doctrine of a Future State," Expository Times, XXII (November, 1910), p. 58.

²⁷⁴Earle, The Gospel According to Mark, p. 57.

²⁷⁵Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 242.

which is to be eternally repeating itself, but rather that of an unpardonable sin.²⁷⁶ The ground of the unpardonable sin may rest in the fact that it is unpardonable because it is never repented of.²⁷⁷ Simply for the scribes to say, "He hath an unclean spirit" (Mark 3:30), does not seem to amount to an unpardonable sin. It seems rather to be that perversion of spirit which, in defiance of moral values, elects to call light darkness.²⁷⁸ This is precisely what the scribes and pharisees were doing. Although Jesus does not specifically state that the unpardonable sin occurred with their blasphemy, it seems apparent that they stood close to the point of this peril.

The permanence of the sin is clearly evident. Although it is eternal in its consequences, it may be equally true that the presence of the sin is eternal also. Sin reacts on the nature, an act passes into a state, and the state continues.²⁷⁹ Eternal punishment is the result of the effect of any sin, or course of sin in placing the sinful state beyond recovery. To dismiss such a sin as is here described

²⁷⁶Nicoll, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, p. 362.

²⁷⁷Ibid.

²⁷⁸Taylor, op. cit., p. 244.

²⁷⁹Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 66

by Jesus as metaphorical language is to accuse Jesus of saying something He did not really intend to say. Cecil J. Cadoux follows this procedure, saying that this is the use of a strong hyperbole, not intended to be taken literally, but is a means of securing emphasis, a well-understood habit of Jewish speech.²⁸⁰

This impressive declaration has a direct bearing on the subject of final destiny. It expresses intensity of wrath against the loveless and uncompassionate spirit that animated the scribes. This was a spirit that Jesus always resisted. He had always warned that those who did not forgive could not be forgiven (Matt. 6:15). The whole force of this passage is on the ominous and negative side of the ledger for those who persist in wickedness.²⁸¹ God's wrath will be clearly manifested against those who are guilty of an "eternal sin."

If there be such a reality as a sin which can be committed in time with eternal consequences, the responsibility of the present looms before us with a certain terrible reality. This is in agreement with all of Jesus' other teachings on punishment. The present is made the gauge of

²⁸⁰Cecil J. Cadoux, The Historic Mission of Jesus (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 213.

²⁸¹Leckie, The World to Come and Final Destiny, p. 152.

future gain or loss. The seriousness with which men live in this world should take on an added dimension if they live in the light of such an eschatological reality.

A fourth passage in Luke 13:22-30, describes the danger of being ultimately excluded from the Kingdom of God. The warning results from the question by an unidentified person, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" (Luke 13:23). No mention is made of the duration of punishment, nor the place of punishment, but simply the fact of punishment. It is said to be a punishment of exclusion. The figure of the shut door is again seen (v. 25). In response to those who came to the house after the door was shut, the householder says:

I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity! There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last (Luke 13:27-30).

These workers of iniquity are required to depart from the presence of the householder because he does not know them. They will go into intense agony which will be magnified because while they are rejected they see how their righteous ancestors inherit the rich blessings of the

Kingdom of God.²⁸² Their remorse will be even more intense because while they, as members of the chosen people are excluded, even Gentiles from all parts of the world will enter the Kingdom of God.²⁸³ It will be of no avail to plead close association with the Lord (v. 26). If the ends we seek, the policies we adopt, the practices we follow in daily work are a defiance of the righteousness of God revealed in Christ, then our "good works" will not be sufficient to save us from the sure punishment which is to come.²⁸⁴

This admonition concludes on the note that the just and final rating of God involves some very great surprises. In the figurative section, exclusion is apparently determined by the fact of a late arrival. In the interpretative section the exclusion is based on moral character. As it stands here, the statement in verse 30 refers to the Jews as the first ones who will become last and the Gentiles as the last who will become first. The distinction apparently is not one of degree between the first and the last, but is an absolute distinction as within and without the Kingdom.²⁸⁵

²⁸²Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 380.

²⁸³Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 348.

²⁸⁴Tittle, The Gospel According to Luke, p. 152.

²⁸⁵Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 569.

Two great facts stand out in this passage. First, there will be no favoritism in the Kingdom. To plead on the basis of eating and drinking in Christ's presence will not be sufficient. Even the lineal descent from Abraham will not be adequate.²⁸⁶ A second lesson indicates the reality of the reversal of earth's judgments. To have Gentiles seated at a banquet table with the patriarchs and prophets was a drastic reversal of the current Jewish thinking. The idea of a Messianic feast that would inaugurate the new age was a familiar one in late Jewish apocalyptic.²⁸⁷ Jesus reversed the whole picture in this figurative saying.

Another passage in Matthew 7:13-14 is similar to Luke 13:24. Both the passages in Matthew and Luke are set in an eschatological context. In Luke the passage is included with an eschatological passage, while in Matthew the passage precedes the other futuristic teachings in chapter seven. Here in Matthew the meaning is said to be less definitely eschatological.²⁸⁸ However, it is not improbable that we should interpret the words in the light of Matthew 7:22 where the definite futuristic setting is certain.

²⁸⁶Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII, p. 247.

²⁸⁷Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, loc. cit.

²⁸⁸Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, p. 68.

This metaphor of the narrow gate is suggestive of the more common metaphor of the two ways. The major point stressed here is upon the difficulty of entering the Kingdom of God and the ease with which one can take the way that eventuates to destruction. The solemn note here is that we pay a high price for a fictitious joy which proves to be destruction and refuse the discipline that brings true life.²⁸⁹

The reality of punishment is briefly and yet pointedly stated. Many enter the broad way because it requires no self-discipline and therefore seems to promise greater freedom. Furthermore its popularity makes it easy to find. Such thinking is deceptive because certain destruction awaits the traveler at the end of the broad way.

The contrast with the way that leads to life is sharp. It is a way that is infrequently used because of its apparent difficulty and is not easily found. The restrictions of the narrow way are not infringements of liberty, but rather protections against future destruction.²⁹⁰ This is the road that leads to life in contrast with the road that leads to destruction. By "life" we are to understand "eternal life"

²⁸⁹Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 331.

²⁹⁰Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 115.

as the kind of "life" involved.

The difference between this teaching and current Jewish thinking lies in the fact that, for Jesus, eternal life is to be won in no other way than righteousness in this life, while for the Jew, descent from Abraham was the chief guarantee.²⁹¹

There is a final disaster awaiting those who prefer the broad way in contrast to the narrow way. Their destiny is one of destruction. We are not told how this punishment will be given, its simple fact is taught here. Also, the thought of personal responsibility is seen in relation to one's eternal destiny in this passage.

Our next prophetic passage is given in much the same vein of thought as many of the householder parables are given. However, since this is not definitely stated to be a parable we shall treat it here because of its high prophetic content. The passage under consideration is Matthew 24:45-51.

There can be no doubt as to the eschatological nature of this saying. It is placed within the great prophetic section of Matthew's Gospel. The preceding teaching relates to the uncertainty of Christ's Second Coming and emphasizes readiness in the face of this fact. Jesus goes on to emphasize the necessity of faithfulness during this time of

²⁹¹Ibid.

readiness for His Second Coming. The similarity of this passage to that of Luke 12:41-48 is to be recognized, however the idea of punishment is more intense in a definite eschatological sense here.

This illustration gives the blessedness of the watchful servant in contrast to the dreadful fate of the one who dares to treat uncertainty about the time of the Master's return as equivalent to the certainty that He will not return soon. The distinctive feature about this saying in comparison to its twin in Luke 12:41-48 is the fact that in both passages the offender is put to death, but the conclusion here in Matthew passes beyond the end of the Lukan parable to the result which the death symbolizes.²⁹²

The punishment in this case consists of the wicked servant being cut in pieces by his master (Matt. 24:51). Some feel that this barbarous penalty, which was common in ancient times, cannot have been the case because of the following comment which indicates he was put with the "hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 24:51).²⁹³ If this be true, the punishment would be taken to mean that the servant was unmercifully whipped until he was literally cut open and then dismissed from the

²⁹²Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 115.

²⁹³Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 293.

service of the master. It seems more natural, in view of the other teachings of our Lord, to take the punishment of this servant in a literal manner. Jesus probably meant to emphasize that not only did this servant suffer a terrible temporal punishment but also after his death he was cast into the place of punishment with the hypocrites where there is measureless grief and despair.²⁹⁴

There is nothing said about the duration of the punishment, but the finality of the punishment is again certain. The wicked servant is left in a place of suffering punishment and Jesus does not elaborate further on any second chance or end to the suffering. One is not told that the punishment is endless, neither is any indication given that there is any way of escape.²⁹⁵ At any rate the contrast between the servant suffering with the hypocrites in anguish is a distinct contrast with that of the faithful servant who is "set over all his master's possessions" (v. 47).

The last passage of scripture in this prophetic section relating to an eschatological wrath beyond the actual Day of Judgment occurs in Matthew 25:31-46. This is an awesome picture of the Day of Judgment. The details of the actual judging process will be noted but our primary concern

²⁹⁴Spence, The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. XV, p. 445.

²⁹⁵Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 342.

here is to note the fact of punishment beyond the actual judgment pronounced upon the wicked. The interpretations of this passage have great variety, therefore we must note its significance with care.

First, it is essential to note the opening statement. Jesus says, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne" (v. 31). The scene is definitely that of the Day of the Son of Man. The next point is frequently overlooked by many commentators. All the nations of the earth are gathered before the Son of Man on His throne and He separates the nations "as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left" (vs. 32-33). It is clear that the "as" (hosper) indicates Jesus is making a comparison. The comparison is only momentary and ends with verse 34 when the King begins to communicate with those assembled before Him. It is quite obvious that a continuation of the simile would be absurd. On this basis, the writer does not believe it is justified to classify this passage as a parable, a practice almost unanimously done among commentators. C. H. Dodd emphasizes this point by saying that it is a mistake to call this "the Parable of the Sheep and Goats."²⁹⁶ Dodd goes on to say:

²⁹⁶Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, p. 63.

It does not conform to the parabolic type, but belongs to the same class as the judgment scenes in Enoch and other apocalypses. The only parabolic element in it is the simile of the shepherd separating the sheep and the goats, and this is a passing allusion; sheep and goats play no part in the main scene.²⁹⁷

It is essential to realize the mistake of calling this a parable, for it is to seriously limit the impact of Jesus' message. To make this entire passage as strictly figurative and affirm only the main feature of the "parable," would be to change the hermeneutical principle stated to be the policy of this study.

Seeing these verses as an essentially prophetic saying of Jesus, a further note is made of the radical dichotomy of those gathered before the throne of the Son of Man. Those on the right hand receive the inheritance of the Kingdom because of their proper conduct in history. The ones on the left are judged to have neglected matters so important in temporal history that they must depart as cursed beings, into "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (v. 41). A further statement indicates that these "cursed" people "will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous unto eternal life" (v. 46).

Since the fact of eternal life for the righteous and the fact of the eternal punishment of the wicked is given in

²⁹⁷Ibid.

one concise statement, it is little wonder that this verse (v. 46) receives the most attention of this entire passage. Those who would deny an eternity of punishment for the wicked will agree that much of the belief in everlasting punishment is derived from Matthew's Gospel, the Jewish Gospel. The idea of eternal punishment in verses 41 and 46 are therefore taken to be a "commonplace of apocalyptic," as is the entire passage, along with the other passages relevant to eternal punishment. This passage represents the apocalyptic influence at its apex.²⁹⁸

Others try to evade the impact of this passage by asserting that this is not a universal judgment, and therefore the punishment is not universally relevant to all the wicked. Some emphasize this to be a judgment of the living and not of the dead.²⁹⁹ Still others assert that this is to be regarded as the judgment only of the Gentiles since the phrase, "all nations" is used.³⁰⁰ Such assertions seem to be based on conclusions drawn before looking at the Biblical data. There is nothing in the passage to restrict this judgment to the living, neither is there any evidence to suggest this to be a judgment confined to the Gentiles. However, if

²⁹⁸Dougall and Emmet, The Lord of Thought, p. 248.

²⁹⁹Farrar, Mercy and Judgment, p. 457.

³⁰⁰Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 305.

these points were to be conceded, the fact of "eternal punishment" is still with us.

To get around the concept of an eternity of punishment, some will make the picture of "eternal fire" and "eternal punishment" later additions by the evangelist and not originally a part of Jesus' statement.³⁰¹ A still further attempt to "tone down" the apocalyptic element in this passage is done on exegetical grounds. The Greek word used for punishment (kolasin) is said to be suggestive of corrective rather than purely vindictive punishment.³⁰² The use of this method is advanced by those who advocate the "larger hope." Another attempt is made to make the "eternal punishment" qualitative in its meaning in the same sense that "eternal life" has a qualitative aspect to it in the New Testament.³⁰³ Alfred Plummer asserts, "The meaning of 'eternal' may possibly have no reference to time."³⁰⁴

It is interesting that many of the advocates who assert that aiōnios, as used in reference to punishment, does not refer to time, will at the same time conclude that aiōnios as

³⁰¹Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII, p. 566.

³⁰²Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 306.

³⁰³Joe Belcastro, "A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of Eternal Hell" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1942), p. 76.

³⁰⁴Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 352.

used in reference to the future of the righteous does most certainly relate to duration.³⁰⁵ Some believe that aionios does refer to duration, but it is a duration which is only "age-long" and not "endless."

This term aionios is used in reference to the fire which accompanies the punishment prepared for the devil and his angels. One is justified in asking if aionios in its relation of the devil and his angels is also to be taken as "age-long." If this be true, will the devil be so thoroughly purged that even he will eventually be restored to heaven? Certainly the passage does not indicate any such restoration of the devil and his cohorts.

If justice is done to the meaning of the scripture, one must believe that if punishment for the wicked is only "age-long," then one must also believe that the bliss of the righteous is also "age-long" and also come to a point of termination. Since the term aionios is used in this passage in the context of being the last age, it naturally seems to carry the idea of endlessness.³⁰⁶ Just as the fire is endless, so will the punishment of the wicked be endless. To say that aionios does not carry the idea of endlessness

³⁰⁵Ibid, pp. 351-352.

³⁰⁶Richardson, "The New Testament Concept of the Destiny of the Wicked in the Light of Inter-Biblical Thought," p. 174.

seems to do injustice to the context of this eschatological passage.

There is no indication of the nature of the punishment other than "eternal fire." No specific mention is made of the suffering of the wicked.³⁰⁷ There is no mention of the gnashing of teeth, the outer darkness or the weeping. Nothing is said about what happens to the wicked after they go away into the eternal fire. The use of the word "fire" naturally pre-supposes the fact of suffering, although this is not specifically mentioned here. There is not the slightest hint that the wicked are annihilated or that they will ever be released from this punishment. The wicked are left in the place of eternal punishment.

Temporal conduct is made the determinative factor in whether a person's future destiny beyond the Judgment Day is "eternal life" or "eternal punishment." The King is the Judge. He will decide who will be on the left and who will be on the right according to their previous conduct. There is no hint of injustice in the division. The sharp dichotomy between the righteous and the wicked is again graphically seen. This passage brings us to the end of our section on the prophetic sayings of Jesus.

³⁰⁷Beet, The Last Things, pp. 175-176.

Conclusion

The reality of the Divine wrath as it is to be manifested in history before the Day of Judgment is before us. The process of God's wrath as it was prophesied to occur at the eschatological Day of Wrath has also been noted. "Woes" were related to both individual and corporate judgment in the Day of Judgment. Especially dominant is the theme of present personal responsibility as the determinative factor in future destiny. In the prophetic sayings relating to punishment beyond the Day of Judgment we noted the fact of an "eternal sin" declared by Jesus with great solemnity as having eternal consequences. The fact of "eternal fire" and "eternal punishment" indicate something of both the nature and duration of future punishment.

It was also obvious in this section that Jesus frequently made use of past historic judgments as well as present examples of punishment to depict with unequivocal certainty the fact of the future punishment and judgment of the wicked. Jesus used historic events as well as apocalyptic figures familiar to His listeners to illustrate the fact of God's wrath. As George E. Ladd says:

The New Testament writings indicate that Jesus Christ took his stand in the stream of the apocalyptic, enforcing and purifying many of its emphases.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸George E. Ladd, "The Place of the Apocalyptic in Biblical Religion," The Evangelical Quarterly, XXX (April-June, 1958), p. 75.

V. KEY WORDS IN JESUS' TEACHING

Now that a rather comprehensive look has been made of the actual Biblical teachings of Jesus in their didactic, historic, parabolic and prophetic settings, attention is now turned to a concluding division of this chapter by studying some of the important words Jesus used in describing God's wrath as expressed in punishment. Many Biblical scholars permit their theology of God's wrath to rise or fall on the use of one key Biblical word. Since this is true, the significance of some of the key words in their natural setting in the Scriptures will be examined.

Gehenna and Hades

Under this discussion we shall first examine the significance of the word, "Hades." Almost without exception, the Septuagint uses the word Hades to translate "sheol," the Old Testament word for the abode of the dead.³⁰⁹ In the synoptics this word is used in Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15 and Luke 16:23. In three of these passages Hades is contrasted with heaven (Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15; Luke 16:23),³¹⁰

³⁰⁹John A. Motyer, "Hades," Baker's Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 260.

³¹⁰William F. Arndt and Wilbur F. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 16.

In Matthew 16:18, Hades is said to have "gates" which cannot prevail against the rock upon which the Church is built. The idea is that the Church is built upon so strong a foundation that all the powers of Hades cannot prevail against it.³¹¹ Apparently, Hades signifies the focal point of opposition to the Church. Hades is seen to be a place of torment and punishment of the wicked in Luke 16:23. Some believe this passage in Luke suggests Hades to be a place of purgatorial cleansing.³¹² Others indicate that Hades is the intermediate state of the righteous dead as well as the wicked dead, citing Luke 16:23 as evidence.³¹³ Both these statements seem to impose something on the passage which is not there. In this passage the distinction is not between "the bosom of Abraham" and another place, as if both were in Hades, but rather between the "bosom of Abraham" and Hades as antithetical and exclusive of each other.³¹⁴ The very form of Dive's expression of torment leads us to associate punishment and pain with Hades in contrast to the bliss of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom.

³¹¹Merrill, The New Testament Idea of Hell, p. 67.

³¹²J. M. Furness, Vital Words of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1936), p. 58.

³¹³Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life, p. 474.

³¹⁴Geerhardus Vos, "Hades," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1952), p. 1315.

In the three other occurrences (Matt. 11:23; Matt. 16:18; Luke 10:15), Jesus makes a metaphorical use of the word which seems to be based on the common understanding of Hades. The reference to Capernaum seems to represent the figure of the humiliation to which that city was to be reduced within history. In the Matthew 16:18 passage Jesus declares that the gates of Hades will not overpower the Church He intends to build. This suggests the association of evil with Hades.

Since these passages equate Hades as the stronghold of the power of evil and since there is no specific mention made that the righteous go to Hades, it would appear that Hades is to be seen as a place of punishment for the wicked which they enter immediately upon death. Even in Jesus' metaphorical use of the word, it refers to a state of misery and despair which is certainly not the state of those who are the righteous dead.³¹⁵

Upon coming to our discussion of "Gehenna", it is important to note that Gehenna is never equated with Hades in the New Testament. Originally this was the name derived from the deep valley south of Jerusalem, the Valley of

³¹⁵William H. Moore, "An Investigation of the Teaching of Jesus Concerning Man's Salvation from Sin" (unpublished M. Th. Dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1954), p. 257.

Hinnom.³¹⁶ Jeremiah had announced that this valley was to be called the "valley of slaughter" (Jer. 7:32; 19:6) because the enemy from the north was going to kill the fleeing inhabitants of Jerusalem and leave their bodies unburied in this valley. In the first century B. C. this name came to be used in the sense of denoting the place of fiery torment believed to be reserved for the wicked either immediately after death or ultimately after the Last Judgment.³¹⁷

In the New Testament this word "Gehenna" is to be found only in the Synoptic Gospels and once in James 3:6. The use of the word is most frequently used by Matthew (Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33). Matthew's total use of the word occurs seven times in these passages. Mark uses the word three times (Mark 9:43,45,47). Luke uses the word one time (Luke 12:5). This makes a total occurrence of the word eleven times in the Synoptics.

Although Jesus made use of the language of His time, as is indicated by His use of Gehenna, it cannot be said that He endorsed all the rabbinic notions of future punishment.³¹⁸ It

³¹⁶Gustaf H. Dalman, "Gehenna," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. IV (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 442.

³¹⁷T. H. Gaster, "Gehenna," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. II (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 361.

³¹⁸E. G. Hardwick, "Hell," New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VI (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 1005.

has already been seen how Jesus purified and revised the apocalyptic thought of His time and in some instances thoroughly reversing the Jewish expectations. In one phase of Jewish belief, Gehenna was not believed to be a place of punishment for Israelites. It was rather a place of punishment for the heathen and a place of detention for the imperfectly righteous.³¹⁹ Certainly Jesus did not restrict Gehenna as a place of punishment strictly for Gentiles.

Jesus used several different phrases in connection with Gehenna. In the Synoptics we note the following usages: "in danger of Gehenna fire," "to cast into Gehenna," "to go," or "be cast into Gehenna," "in Gehenna," "the damnation of Gehenna," and "the child of Gehenna." The critic cannot easily dispose of the claim that these phrases are an actual part of Christ's original words.³²⁰

It is important to especially note whether or not this word Gehenna either in itself or in its associations expresses the permanence of the penal condition beyond the Last Judgment. It is to be certain that as Jesus used the word, it carried the thought of the place of punishment for the wicked after

³¹⁹Stewart D. F. Salmond, The Christian Doctrine of Immortality, Fifth Edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903), p. 286.

³²⁰Sharman, The Teaching of Jesus About the Future, pp. 256ff.

the Day of Judgment.³²¹ However there is some argument as to whether any element of permanence is to be concluded from the use of this word.

Three of the references by Jesus to Gehenna occur in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:22 Jesus states that the person who calls another a "fool" is liable to the "Gehenna of fire." The law had said that the murderer should be punished by the proper authority but Jesus indicates that the feeling which prompts such crimes will also meet with Divine condemnation. There is nothing in this context which suggests the duration of this "Gehenna of fire." The sense of a severe punishment is, however, indicated by the context. S. M. Merrill asserts, "Gehenna has duration, though it is not expressed by the word. The duration is implied."³²² One must be cautious in coming to such a conclusion until all the evidence is in.

In Matthew 5:29-30, Jesus makes two references to Gehenna. The warning is similar to the previous passage. Here again, the tone is one of severity, but no idea of the duration of the severity is implied.

In Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:5 there is a further elaboration of the idea of Gehenna. The passage according to

³²¹Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 152.

³²²Merrill, The New Testament Idea of Hell, p. 29.

Matthew is: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna." The account in Luke is almost identical to Matthew's record: "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into Gehenna, yes, I tell you, fear him!" Here is mention of the destruction of the soul and body in Gehenna. Although there is no specific reference to duration, the element of finality is obviously present.

Two final passages bring into special focus the element of duration in relation of Gehenna. It is really in Mark 9:43-48 and Matthew 18:8-9 that we find the clearest indication of what Jesus means by this word. In these two passages Jesus is teaching about offences and the accounts are parallel materials.³²³ Mark's account is given as follows:

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to Gehenna, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

³²³Ernest DeWitt Burton and Edgar J. Goodspeed, A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek, Thirteenth Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 155-157.

Of special significance to this discussion on the element of permanence in Jesus' use of Gehenna, is Mark's appositional use of the "unquenchable fire" with Gehenna. Gehenna is made the equivalent of the "unquenchable fire."³²⁴ In the parallel setting in Matthew 18:8-9, "eternal fire" is also made the equivalent of Gehenna. The permanence of punishment is made unequivocally clear in these passages. Again, in Mark 9:48, Gehenna is further described as the place where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." The action of the verses is present time, indicating continuous action. There is no end in sight for this "unquenchable fire." Any evasion of this fact is not to square with the real issues at hand.³²⁵ As S. D. F. Salmond states at the close of a very detailed study of the scriptural evidence:

It cannot be said, therefore, that our Lord's own teaching favours the doctrine of a terminable penalty for the worst of sins, or a final recovery of all sinners. On the contrary, it is in His teaching that we find the most absolute and unambiguous statements of the retributions of the future life which the New Testament offers.³²⁶

³²⁴Richardson, "The New Testament Concept of the Destiny of the Wicked in the Light of Inter-Biblical Thought," p. 190

³²⁵Cadoux, The Historic Mission of Jesus, p. 222.

³²⁶Salmond, The Christian Doctrine of Immortality, pp. 308-309.

Gehenna was the perpetually burning rubbish disposal area outside Jerusalem and is naturally enough associated with "eternal fire." The wretchedness of this place is indicated by the phrases "unquenchable fire" and where the "worm does not die." There can be no doubt from this study of the Gehenna passages, that there is a dreadful eternal punishment for the wicked.³²⁷

Eternal and Everlasting

The writer has already pointed out in the prophetic sayings of Jesus, how many scholars wish to qualify the meaning of aiolos in relation to punishment. Since this is evident, some make a vigorous attempt to deny the most natural meaning of this word. The effort is made to drain the durative element from the word. Especially is this true among those who believe in conditional immortality, as well as those who find a doctrine of universal restoration of all men in the New Testament. For them, the historic literary use of the phrases "eternal fire," "unquenchable fire," "everlasting punishment," "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched," and an "eternal sin" do not mean endless punishment.³²⁸

³²⁷C. L. Mitton, "The After Life in the New Testament," Expository Times, LXXVI (August, 1965), p. 332.

³²⁸Belcastro, "A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of Eternal Hell", p. 72.

This disputed word, aionios, is used in the New Testament in three distinctive ways.³²⁹ First, it is used in the sense of "without beginning." A second usage relates to "without beginning or end," especially in relation to God. The third sense in which the adjective is used has the idea of "without end." This is the disputed usage. While aionios especially serves for the actual statements of eternity, it is said that there is no clear distinction made between limited and unlimited duration of time. However, the idea of duration of time is fundamentally inherent in aion.³³⁰ It seems quite unfounded to emphasize only a qualitative aspect to aionios, when it is primarily durative in nature. As to whether it is limited or unlimited duration of time, the debate intensifies.

If aionios is limited in its meaning, then it refers to a terminable age. If this be true, there could be no real evidence for "eternal" punishment in the sense of punishment without end. If the problem is investigated, one discovers that the usual New Testament way of speaking of eternal punishment is by the use of aion or one of its derivatives.³³¹

³²⁹Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, pp. 27-28.

³³⁰Ernst Jenni, "Time," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. IV (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 645.

³³¹Leon Morris, "Eternal Punishment," Baker's Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 196.

The New Testament aiōnios and its cognate forms are ordinarily employed to convey the idea of the permanent and changeless.³³² Outside the Synoptics they are placed in direct antithesis to terms which denote temporal process (II Cor. 4:18). They occur so frequently in instances when the idea definitely suggests lasting permanence or make that sense certain by a contrast with the transitory, that we should require an unusual explanation for demanding them to mean something other than permanent and lasting in relation to future punishment.³³³ The passages where the phrases "eternal fire," "eternal punishment," and "eternal sin" occur do not give the slightest indication that the use of aiōnios is to be interpreted in an uncustomary sense (Matt. 18:8; 25:41; Mark 3:29). As A. A. Hodge indicates, "The Greek language possesses no more emphatic terms with which to express the idea of endless duration than these."³³⁴

It must also be remembered that these same terms are used for the eternity of God. In this case they cannot be held to imply a limited duration of time. Neither should the terms be held to imply a limited duration of punishment,

³³²Salmond, The Christian Doctrine of Immortality, p. 516.

³³³Ibid.

³³⁴A. A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1873), p. 469.

especially when there is no warrant to assume this to be the case.³³⁵ There is no conclusive evidence which would show these terms to be meant in any sense of a terminable punishment for the wicked.

It is again important to point out that the same terminology is used of "eternal" life as is used of "eternal" punishment. In fact, Matthew 25:46 has both usages in the same verse. The implication of this is that the punishment is just as "eternal" as is the life.³³⁶ The one is no more limited than the other. Why should the meaning of the word be limited in one clause and not in the other? Why did Jesus select this one particular word, aiōnios, the strongest term for eternity in the Greek language, if He did not intend to say that the punishment of the wicked will be as lasting as the blessedness of the righteous?³³⁷

It becomes readily apparent that those who wish to deny the thought of eternal punishment for the wicked will have to do so on some other basis than the recorded teachings of Jesus. The universalists do not spend very much time in

³³⁵Cephar Kent, "Christ's Words on the Duration of Future Punishment," Bibliotheca Sacra, XXXV (April, 1878), p. 296.

³³⁶Morris, "Eternal Punishment," p. 196.

³³⁷Joseph P. Thompson, Love and Penalty (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1870), p. 293.

the teachings of Jesus gathering support for their doctrine.³³⁸ It is notable that Alfred Edersheim, the Jewish scholar of the nineteenth century, concluded his memorable work, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, with his comment about future punishment:

Thus far it has been the sole aim of the present writer to set before the reader, so far as he can, all the elements to be taken into consideration. He has pronounced no definite conclusion, and he neither wishes or purposes to do so. This only will be repeat, that to his mind the Words of our Lord, as recorded in the Gospels, convey this impression, that there is an eternity of punishment; and further, that this was the accepted belief of the Jewish schools in the time of Christ.³³⁹

Destruction and Loss

For those who teach the doctrine of conditional immortality, much is made of the words "destruction" and "loss." These words are taken to be expressive of the totality of punishment to the extent of the total extinction of the body and soul. They are understood to convey the meaning of the utter end of the wicked.³⁴⁰

All these English words come from apollumi and the

³³⁸Robert A. Byerly, "A Biblical Critique of Universalism in Contemporary Theology" (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Temple University, 1959), p. 147.

³³⁹Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. II, p. 796.

³⁴⁰George L. Young, "Final State of the Wicked," Bibliotheca Sacra, LXXXII (October, 1926), p. 425.

abstract noun derived from it, apoleia.³⁴¹ Some have asserted that the common theme running throughout all the occurrences of words derived from this root is that of frustration, either accidental or intentional, the non-fulfillment of the purpose for which man was created.³⁴² This is seen in the failure to win a reward (Matt. 10:42; Mark 9:41). It has a more pungent, active meaning, however, with the thought of "utter destruction." This does not imply extinction, but rather the idea of the ruin, or loss of well being.³⁴³

Destruction meets those who have chosen the broad road (Matt. 7:13). Here "destruction" is the direct opposite of "life." In Luke 15, apollumi is used as a passive participle, signifying a grave condition, and yet with the glad prospect of recovery. In Luke 19:10, the Son of Man "came to seek and to save the lost." Whatever this condition may be, it must have been regarded as serious enough to motivate the mission of Christ to the earth. He who is lost may be found, and he who is perishing may be saved because Christ has come to

³⁴¹Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, pp. 94-95.

³⁴²Cadoux, The Historic Mission of Jesus, p. 216.

³⁴³W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Sixteenth Impression (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), p. 302.

recover men from such a condition.³⁴⁴ In the context of eternal punishment, there is the sense of "destruction" and "loss" which is irrevocable. Whatever this involves is not the Father's will, for He does not desire that "one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14).

The finality and the eternality of the punishment which is involved must be conceded, but must one grant that it is to be annihilation? Those who support the doctrine of conditional immortality say there is no mention of eternal "suffering," and thus the Bible must teach the complete extinction of the wicked after the Day of Judgment.³⁴⁵ To this it should be said that the rich man in Luke 16 was in conscious torment in Hades. It is difficult to understand why he would be kept in such punishment only to be exterminated after the Day of Judgment. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand the significance of the phrases, "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48), and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12), if there is no reality to some kind of conscious suffering for the wicked. It is also important to point out the fact that the

³⁴⁴F. Carlton Booth, "Lost," Baker's Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 332.

³⁴⁵Alfred Plummer, "The Witness of the Four Gospels to the Doctrine of a Future State," Expository Times, XXII (November, 1910), p. 57.

medium of the torment, "fire," and the place of torment, "Gehenna," are both described as being eternal, in the sense of unending (Mark 9:43,48; Matt. 25:41). Why would there need to be an "eternal fire" if the wicked are annihilated immediately, or soon after the Day of Judgment? It seems that the most natural interpretation of the evidence leads to the view of the eternal suffering of the wicked.

Judgment

One more word is necessary to consider before concluding this division, the word "judgment." This is a word expressing both the punishment and reward of God. The idea of equity is uppermost, especially in view of the Last Judgment. There is to be reward for the righteous and punishment upon those who are wicked (Matt. 12:36-37; Luke 11:31-32; Mark 12:38-40).

The Synoptics have a substantial amount to say about the negative aspect of God's wrath. The verb krinein and the noun krima become synonymous with condemnation. Christ's ministry becomes a judgment on human sinfulness.³⁴⁶ It becomes inevitable that judgment will meet us if sin is to be punished. There is individual and corporate judgment at the Last Judgment. The division will ultimately occur on the

³⁴⁶Furness, Vital Words of the Bible, p. 80.

basis of individual responsibility for sin, as has already been noticed (Matt. 25:34-40).³⁴⁷

Arthur J. Baird has done a service for us by making a detailed study of the frequency of the theme of judgment in the Synoptics. The following chart illustrates the overall use of shaphat and mishpat in the Old Testament as compared with their equivalent words, krinein, krisis and krima in the New Testament and in the Synoptics:³⁴⁸

	O.T.	N.T.	SYNOPTICS
(1) Judgment that expresses God's equity:	112	42	9
(2) Judgment that expresses God's love, salvation:	33	6	2
(3) Judgment that expresses God's wrath, His condemnation and punishment:	55	47	16

If this chart is anywhere near accurate, it is to be noted that the ratios in the first two categories remain rather constant, while the ratios in the third category show the Synoptic ratio to rise sharply. The reality of the condemning judgment of God is radically evident in the Synoptics.

³⁴⁷A. T. Robertson, Key Words in the Teaching of Jesus (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1906), pp. 116f.

³⁴⁸Baird, The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus, p. 60.

Conclusion

In our conclusion to this division, it is noted that the reality of God's wrath cannot be reduced even by a deeper study of significant words. The reality of punishment for the wicked is just as intense. The natural message of the key words in the Synoptics adds further evidence of eternal punishment for those who refuse to turn to the Lamb of God. It is to be seriously doubted if one can find substantial exegetical evidence to overturn the most natural interpretation of the Synoptic message at this point.

VI. CONCLUSION

Many different aspects of God's wrath as expressed in punishment have been examined in this chapter. The reality of God's wrath has been seen in the didactic, historic, parabolic and prophetic teachings of Jesus. Several of the key words used in the teachings of Jesus also added further evidence of God's wrath.

Several important facts have come to light which need to be summarized before moving into the next chapter of this study. First, note was made how Jesus used the familiar to point to the unfamiliar truths. Jesus used the language of His day, and every-day occurrences to express eternal truth. The common ordinary facts of agriculture and the fishing industry took on a new dimension when Jesus related them to God's wrath and the future punishment to come upon the

wicked after death.

A second fact to be observed is that Jesus spoke of the present wrath of God as well as the eschatological wrath of God. Jesus did not confine the essence of wrath to some far distant event beyond history. He made it clear that sin would be punished within history as men brought upon themselves the wrath of God, as well as beyond the Day of Judgment. One is definitely impressed with the fact that God is over all. He is sovereign in His wrath. Sin will never get the last word.

It is also equally apparent that Jesus made much of individual responsibility. Life is to be lived, not in fear of those who kill the body, but rather in fear of the One who is able to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna. The eschatological aspects of God's wrath are to be an essential motivation to the one who expects to enter into eternal life. Present privilege spells out future responsibility for destiny.

There is much difficulty in maintaining that Jesus had discarded the conception of the wrath of God. For Him the divine reaction to evil was a solemn and terrible reality.³⁴⁹ The statement in Gerhard Kittel's Bible Key Words had a high degree of veracity:

³⁴⁹Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), pp. 164-165.

Wrath is an integrating feature in the gospel's picture of Jesus. It is true that it is only seldom mentioned expressis verbis, but the fact itself appears more often.³⁵⁰

In confronting the evidence in the Synoptics, it is very difficult to agree with Nicolas Berdyaev that "anger in every shape and form is foreign to God."³⁵¹ Neither can we say that the idea of God's wrath is exclusively contained in the "Jewish Gospel" of Matthew, because of the deep influence of the apocalyptic thinking of his day. It is true that there is a greater emphasis on wrath and punishment in Matthew, but a significant amount of "pruning" will be essential to rid Mark and Luke of their pungent statements relating to God's wrath. It is difficult to agree with Lily Dougall and Cyril Emmet who assert:

Jesus markedly avoids the language of contemporary Judaism which represents God as taking a fierce vengeance on evil-doers, whether here or hereafter. A very few phrases are attributed to him which suggest that he occasionally shared this attitude, but they can be explained as later glosses, added in oral tradition or by the Evangelists. Here, as elsewhere, his conception of God is harmonious and self-consistent.³⁵²

The point of disagreement comes when one asserts that there

³⁵⁰Gerhard Kittel, Bible Key Words, Vol. IV, Tr. and ed. by Dorothea M. Barton and P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 92.

³⁵¹MacGregor, "The Concept of the Wrath of God in the New Testament," p. 102.

³⁵²Dougall and Emmet, The Lord of Thought, p. 249.

is no anger on the part of God in Jesus' view. It is understandable that God's wrath is not to be equated with the wrath of man in any erratic fashion. But the Synoptics make it crystal clear that God is dynamically opposed to evil in all forms.

It is impossible to minimize the force and weight of our Saviour's message on its ominous and negative side. There is an aspect of the Galilean Gospel which is far from hopeful. The apocalyptic parables communicate more than mere imagery for there is a deep-seated conviction which motivated Jesus to illustrate these truths on punishment.³⁵³ There is the distinct prophecy of a decisive separation of the heirs of the Kingdom from the rest of humanity. This note of exclusion is so dominant that it is emphasized as a most solemn thought in the mind of Jesus. There can be no doubt that Jesus taught the dread reality of wrath as both present and primarily future regardless how we may explain the meaning of His parabolic and pictorial language. He clearly regarded Himself as related to orge tou theou as He was related to basileia, zoe or doxa.³⁵⁴

³⁵³Leckie, The World to Come and Final Destiny, p. 152.

³⁵⁴Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 77.

Although a study of the theological significance of the cross of Christ is not included here, it is clearly the visible, historical manifestation of the orge tou theou. It is the supreme revelation of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Conclusion is made on the note that Jesus' understanding of wrath does not have any hint of avarice or injustice. There is no suggestion that some will have special favors from God.³⁵⁵ Men stand under the condemnation of the Divine negative so long as they continue to reject God. As men respond, so do they judge themselves. There is no basis in the recorded sayings of Jesus for universalism in the sense that all men will ultimately be rescued from wrath. So far as the evidence indicates, Jesus thought of the punishment of the wicked beyond the Day of Judgment as being eternal in duration and something to be avoided, even if it involved some physical injury or even death.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵Metzger, The New Testament, Its Background, Growth and Content, p. 165.

³⁵⁶Miller Burrows, An Outline of Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 211.

CHAPTER IV

GOD'S WRATH AS EXPRESSED IN THE PETRINE TEACHINGS

Attention is now turned in the direction of the followers of Jesus. It is important to examine the teachings of the followers of Jesus to discover their understanding of God's wrath as expressed in punishment. In this chapter the writings of the Apostle Peter are examined. Since the first twelve chapters of the Acts of the Apostles are usually called the "Petrine Section," note is made of them in connection with I and II Peter. The teachings on God's wrath are in two major divisions. First, wrath is examined as a present reality and secondly, as a future, eschatological event.

I. GOD'S WRATH AS A PRESENT REALITY

There are three definite historic events which point to the reality of God's wrath in its temporal expressions. The death of Judas is linked with God's punitive wrath. Also, the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira are significant as expressions of God's retributive punishment. A third event which points to the reality of God's wrath in the present is the death of King Herod. These three events are noted in this "Petrine Section" of the Acts of the Apostles.

The Death of Judas (Acts 1:15-20)

Although it is not directly stated, it seems apparent that Peter saw in the death of Judas, a direct Divine punishment. The quotation from Psalm 69:25 is used to emphasize the fact that this fate was God's punishment.¹ The previous verse in this Psalm is: "Pour out thy indignation upon them, and let thy burning anger overtake them" (Psalm 69:24). This verse adds significance to Peter's speech. It emphasizes the connection of God's wrath with the death of Judas.

Peter does not heap scorn or abuse upon Judas, but simply states the facts of the matter. This self restraint is remarkable on the part of men who must have regarded their Master's death as the most atrocious kind of death.² That night in Gethsemane had never passed from Peter's soul. The consequences of Judas' sin are now revealed in a measure. The refusal of the priests to take the thirty pieces of silver sent Judas reeling back into his terrible darkness. Louder than the ring of the thirty silver pieces as they fell on the marble pavement of the Temple, rang the words in his soul, "I have betrayed innocent blood!" Judas took his life

¹Anthony T. Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), p. 131.

²W. Robertson Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), p. 63.

into his own hands. The dark waters have closed around him in eternal silence. In the lurid morning that broke on the other shore, it is not told whether he met the searching, loving eyes of Jesus.³ There is only this short epitaph by Peter. It is an indication of the temporal punishment of God. Because Judas sinned, his "habitation" was become "desolate."

The Death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

This is a second example of God's direct punishment of sin in connection with Peter. The seriousness of sin is brought into sharp focus in the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. It is difficult to dismiss these examples on the basis that they are found in the part of Luke's work where he had to depend on second-hand sources.⁴ This story presents a difficulty to many theologians, because one prefers to dwell on the tenderness and love of God. However, this incident reveals the conviction that sin is an evil thing deserving severe punishment.

There are mysteries in the story, but it is clear enough that the deaths of these two sinners made a profound impression of the infant Church. This was a punishment,

³Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. II, New American Edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 478.

⁴Hanson, op. cit., p. 130.

not of pagans, but of believers. They had no special immunity from punishment. Sin is here made to be seen as a horrible thing. Ananias was directly responsible for his sin. He was punished immediately. Sapphira was held directly responsible for her sin and was likewise punished immediately. They had attempted to deceive, not men, but rather God. This is a striking example of how men cannot sin and expect to escape the consequences. The punishment of sin is certain and severe.⁵

The sharp contrast between the unreserved self-sacrifice of Barnabas in chapter four and the selfishness and hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira in chapter five, heightens the theme of the punishment of sin. No apology is made for the fact of this punishment. The narrative implies the closest connection between the guilt of this couple and their resultant death. Many have tried to dismiss this as an example of God's direct punitive judgment. Some have tried to see this as a chance occurrence, or the effect of the sudden shock caused by the discovery of guilt.⁶ Such explanations are not to be maintained in the face of the evidence, simply and explicitly presented here.

⁵Leon Morris, The Cross in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 112.

⁶Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 142.

This stern condemnation of any attempt to lie to God underscores the observation that Jesus had condemned no sin so severely as that of hypocrisy. The action of Ananias and Sapphira was hypocrisy of the worst kind. They sought to gain a reputation by false pretenses like the Pharisees. The judgment was pronounced, not only as punishment, but also as a warning to others. Great fear came upon the whole church (5:11) because of this event. The deed of Ananias and Sapphira was destructive. The brotherhood of this early community would be more seriously endangered by hypocrisy or treachery within, than the severe pressures of Judaism from without.⁷ God chose to manifest His wrath in this manner. It serves as a sure reminder of the fact of the certain punishment of sin.

The Death of King Herod

Another of the manifestations of God's wrath in temporal punishment is definitely stated in the case of the death of King Herod. It is said that "Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died" (12:23). It would be difficult to evade the fact of God's direct punitive action here. The cause of the punishment is clear. When the people

⁷Edwin Lewis, Frederick C. Eiselen and David G. Downey (eds.), The Abingdon Bible Commentary (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1929), p. 1100.

shouted, "The voice of a god, and not of man!", Herod did not give God the glory. The king accepted the worshipful, but hypocritical plaudits of the people.⁸ Josephus expressly says that the king did not rebuke the flatterers or reject their flattery.⁹

The author of Acts uses this event as a commentary upon the power of God to resist His persecutors. The contrast is notable. King Herod was eaten by worms and died. The word of God grew and multiplied. One who dares to oppose the work of God, as Herod did in persecuting the early Church, will meet a place of retribution. This is a clear ascription of destructive punishment to God.

These three examples point out the fact, that for Peter, there is a present reality to God's wrath. Further evidence of God's present temporal judgments is found in the Petrine Epistles. In I Peter 1:17, the apostle speaks of God as having the right to rule His household and to judge each one impartially according to his deeds. The emphasis here could be taken in the present, as well as future eschatological sense. Since one is God's child, and because He judges each one, it is essential to walk the earthly way in godly fear, a fear that the enemy of one's soul may find one

⁸Ibid., p. 1109.

⁹Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 280.

asleep when he should be in prayer.¹⁰

A second verse in the Petrine Epistles which sounds out the fact of temporal, as well as future judgment, is I Peter 3:12, "But the face of the Lord is against those that do evil." The two prepositions used in the phrases, "upon the righteous," and "against those that do evil," are both the same in the Greek. The eyes of God are upon both the good and evil ones. It lies within the nature of the case whether God will be "against" or "for" the individual. The result will either be protective or punitive according to the character of the individual.¹¹

In I Peter 4:17-19, the thought of judgment upon the righteous is explicitly stated. Bengel believes this to mean that the sufferings of the Christians are the actual beginning of the final judgment.¹² Other commentators believe this verse to indicate the judgment which was to come upon Israel.¹³ Another view is that this is a deduction

¹⁰E. Schuyler English, The Life and Letters of Saint Peter (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope", 1941), p. 169.

¹¹E. H. Plumptre, The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude (Cambridge: University Press, 1879), p. 128.

¹²Charles Bigg, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 181.

¹³Nicoll, op. cit., p. 75.

from the vision of Exekiel in chapter 9, of the slaughter of the Israelites who did not have the mark on their foreheads, which began with the elders.¹⁴ Some believe this to be a judgment, not of condemnation, but rather of separation. It was to try the reality of the faith of those who professed to believe in Christ, and to divide the true disciples from the hypocrites and half-hearted.¹⁵ In verse 18, which is a quote from Proverbs 11:31, the original, according to the Masoretic text, is "Behold (or) if the righteous will be punished on the earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner."¹⁶

These verses add even more weight to the fact that God's wrath is expressed in punitive retribution in the present. The reality of Divine wrath is more than eschatological in nature. There is an awesome reality of punitive wrath in the temporal setting for Peter.

II. GOD'S WRATH AS A FUTURE, ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENT

Not only is Peter convinced of the present manifestations of God's wrath, but he is further convinced of a future, cosmic manifestation of Divine wrath. This is

¹⁴Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁵Plumptre, op. cit., p. 150.

¹⁶Bigg, op. cit., p. 181.

evident in his sermons in the book of Acts, but grows more intense in the epistles. We shall note God's wrath as it is manifested, both to angels and men, and even to the earth.

God's Wrath Upon Angels

This verse is only present as an illustration of God's future wrath which is to come upon men. The apostle says:

For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into Tartarus, and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment . . . (II Peter 2:4).

The whole setting is that of a discussion of the future lot of the wicked.

It appears that the word "Tartarus" was deliberately coined to denote the dispatch of the rebel angels to the infernal realm of punishment.¹⁷ It is said that this name was previously used to denote the place of punishment of the Titans.¹⁸ In Greek thought, it was regarded as a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was

¹⁷George A. Buttrick (ed.), The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. I (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1962), p. 788.

¹⁸Robert H. Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of A Future Life, Second Edition (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), p. 415.

meted out.¹⁹ Jewish apocalyptic also seems to have regarded Tartarus as a place in the depths of the earth where punishment was meted out on the wicked after their death.²⁰ This is not the place of eternal punishment but only a place of intermediate detention. It will endure until the Day of Judgment. It denotes that the idea of punishment was positively attached to the intermediate state in the mind of the Apostle.²¹ Disobedient angels will undergo temporary punishment until the day of their final doom.

God's Wrath upon Men

Peter uses the past judgments of God to point out the reality of a future, eschatological Day of Judgment. His methodology is much like that we have observed in the teachings of Jesus. The past and present punishments are used to emphasize the reality of future punishment.

The emphasis on eschatological judgment is heightened in Peter's writings. Such words and phrases as "swift destruction," "will be destroyed," "cast into hell," "reserved under punishment," "last state worse," "perish," "fire," and

¹⁹William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 813.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. V., p. 134.

"their own destruction," point out the fact of future judgment. Many have tried to find a doctrine of the intermediate state in Peter's thought which would overlook the meaning of these words. The very difficult passage found in I Peter 3:18-20, is one of the most frequently debated and discussed sections of these epistles. Even the best of exegetes will admit the difficulty of objectively interpreting the passage under question.²²

This passage is the basis for many misleading ideas about the future state of the wicked. Some find the basis for a purgatorial hell here. Others find this as a direct foundation for the doctrine of a second change after death. Still others will find a doctrine that suggests a first chance for the heathen who have never heard of God's plan of salvation.²³

It will be especially good to get the passage in question before us so the discussion will be centered in the central reference point:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not

²²Stewart D. F. Salmond, The Christian Doctrine of Immortality. Fifth Edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903), p. 365.

²³English, The Life and Letters of Saint Peter, p. 202.

obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water (I Pet. 3:18-20).

This passage is frequently related to I Peter 4:6, where it speaks about the Gospel being preached to the dead.

The differences of the interpretation hinge upon several factors. First, we need to know the time when this preaching may have occurred. Was it during the time of Noah? Some assert this to be the case. It is held that Christ, in His pre-incarnate state, preached to the spirits in prison. This done by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of Noah. This preaching was done before the Deluge. Only Noah and his family believed and were saved.²⁴ Adam Clarke takes a similar view. He believes this passage is to be related only to the antediluvian world. The "spirits in prison" refers to the antediluvians during the 120 years of mercy, during which God deferred from punishing them. During this time, they were as criminals, tried and convicted, awaiting the Divine justice, which was postponed, either for their repentance, or the expiration of God's mercy, in order that the punishment pronounced might be inflicted. Christ went and preached to these "spirits in prison" by the

²⁴George B. Stevens, The Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 305.

ministry of Noah for 120 years.²⁵

A second interpretation of the time element, would suggest that Christ went in His spirit, in the non-corporeal mode of His existence, between His crucifixion and resurrection, and proclaimed the gospel message. His mission was to set the disobedient free who once were disobedient, but believed on Him, after their death, at His preaching.²⁶

Furthermore, our interpretation of this passage is not only dependent upon our understanding of the time this preaching occurred, but also the subject matter of this preaching. Was this a Gospel of redemption, or rather a Gospel of condemnation? R. H. Charles believed that Christ went to the spirits in prison and preached a Gospel of redemption, for this is the only proper interpretation of the word "preach" in Greek.²⁷ Since this is true, for him this is taken as a clear statement by the Apostle Peter that the scope of redemption is not limited to this life for certain angelic or human beings.

Such an interpretation frequently leads to a position

²⁵Adam Clarke, Clarke's Commentary Vol. VI (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), p. 861.

²⁶Roy S. Nicholson, "I Peter", Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol. X (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1967), pp. 290-292.

²⁷Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of A Future Life, p. 434.

of universal restoration. William Barclay takes these verses to mean that the work of Christ is infinite in its range. It includes time and eternity, this world and any other world. There is nothing in earth and heaven outside the empire and power of Christ. For Barclay, "It means that no man who ever lived is outside the grace and the gospel of God."²⁸ Such a position leads one to assert that these controversial verses teach that even the most rebellious of sinners will eventually be unable to hold out against the Divine love of God. Such assertions as these lead us to believe that the persons preached to include all the disobedient dead and the outcome of such preaching was belief in and acceptance of Christ.

With the many differing interpretations as to the time when this preaching occurred, the subject matter and results of this preaching, as well as the audience preached to, it is well to note some background for this passage.

It is felt that Peter was dependent upon current Jewish tradition when writing these verses. He simply modified and amplified the original myth to fit the context of his preaching. Peter limits this Jewish doctrine to the special case of those who have not heard the Gospel here on earth.²⁹ The tradition for which the Apostle is said to

²⁸William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter, Second Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 279.

²⁹Bigg, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, p. 162.

have received his thought is given in the Book of Enoch. The spirits who disobeyed in the days of Noah are the sons of God described in Genesis 6:1-4. These fallen angels lusted after the daughters of men in the days of Jared. The children of this unlawful union taught all men evil, with the result that they perished. Enoch was sent to pronounce the sentence of condemnation upon these evil spirits. God refused to grant them peace since they had transgressed the line of demarcation between men and angels, and had disobeyed the law that spiritual beings do not marry and bear children like men. Peter took this tradition and supplemented and revised it to teach the complete victory of Christ.³⁰

We would not argue with such an explanation. It could well be that Peter had some current apocalyptic thought in mind when he wrote these words. However, if we refrain from speculation, our outcome will not lead us to believe in a purgatorial hell, or a "second chance" kind of theology, based on this precarious passage. It seems most natural to believe that Christ did this preaching sometime between His death and resurrection. The context lends itself to this interpretation. We are not told the subject matter of this preaching, nor are we told the purpose nor the consequences. We do not know who listened. The scriptures simply tell us

³⁰Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. V, p. 68.

that Jesus performed some kind of ministry between His death and resurrection.³¹ To say that Jesus went to Hades is not to stick with the scriptural evidence.³² To say that the preaching was done in the person of Noah is plausible, but even this interpretation, though it is free of many difficulties, does not seem to be a natural interpretation.

The closely-related passage, I Peter 4:6, is treated in almost as varied a manner as is I Peter 3:18-20. Some commentators who do not become explicit on the point of a chance after death in the first difficult passage, become very optimistic when they come to I Peter 4:6. William Barclay best exemplifies this optimism by saying, "In some ways this is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible, for, if our explanation of it is anywhere near the truth, it gives us a breath-taking glimpse of nothing less than a gospel of a second chance."³³

Some scholars relate this verse directly to Christ's ministry in Hades, between the crucifixion and resurrection. Some explain it that all the dead have been judged in the sense that the "wages of sin is death." Yet, here the

³¹Lewis, The Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 1342.

³²Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), p. 657.

³³Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter, p. 295.

promise indicates they shall live in the spirit, as God lives.³⁴ A second interpretation is that death is the sentence passed upon all men, but believers, who are spiritually quickened, cannot be condemned to the second death at the Last Judgment.³⁵

As to the doctrine of the intermediate state, it appears that Peter understands there is to be such a place for unbelievers. It will be a place of punishment. In II Peter 2:9, the unrighteous are kept "under punishment until the day of judgment." This would agree with the teaching of Jesus in the account of the rich man and Lazarus.

Stewart D. F. Salmond concludes his study of Peter's understanding of the doctrine of the intermediate state by saying that there is no sufficient ground for ascribing the doctrine of an extension of opportunity into the realm of the wicked dead.³⁶ If these isolated verses are taken to mean probation after death, it would be difficult to understand their uniqueness in the New Testament, and still more difficult to understand why this second offer is apparently

³⁴Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. V, p. 72.

³⁵Bigg, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, p. 171.

³⁶Salmond, The Christian Doctrine of Immortality, p. 387.

limited to those antediluvian sinners.³⁷ We would agree with A. T. Robertson who says: "One can only say that it is a slim hope for those who neglect Christ in this life to gamble on very precarious exegesis of a most difficult passage in Peter's Epistle."³⁸

In chapters two and three in II Peter, the certainty and nature of God's judgment upon the wicked is intensified. In chapter two Peter gives three examples of past judgment to emphasize the fact of future judgment. God spared not the angels, He did not spare the antedeluvian world, nor did He spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.³⁹ The reference to the doom of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is especially strong, since the doom of these two cities occurs at least twenty-two times in the Bible.⁴⁰ The purpose of using these examples is not to reveal the particular sins which were punished, but rather to reveal the absolute nature of God's judgment and the utter destruction that follows it.

³⁷W. H. Griffith Thomas, The Apostle Peter (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), p. 217.

³⁸Archibald T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. VI (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933), p. 117.

³⁹John Calvin, Commentary on the Catholic Epistles, Tr. and Ed. by John Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 396.

⁴⁰Elvis E. Cochrane, The Epistles of Peter, A Study Manual (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), p. 90.

Peter also reminds his readers that a day of judgment has been appointed by the Lord and that the wicked will not escape punishment, even though it is not immediately inflicted (II Pet. 2:9). The graphic imagery of a fiery judgment at the Day of the Lord amplifies the certainty of awful doom for the wicked (II Pet. 3:7f). No one can debate the certainty of punishment and the sure retribution of sin as a doctrine firmly entrenched in Peter's theology. No one can expect to continue in sin and "get away with it."

Not only is the fact of judgment noted here, but also its nature is vividly expressed. In II Peter 2:12-13, the idea of apostasy as a self-destructive force is introduced. Peter says, "They will be destroyed in the same destruction with them" (II Pet. 2:12). The wicked will receive the "reward of unrighteousness" (II Pet. 2:13). The sure consequences of sin will be felt by the sinner. The wicked will be destroyed because they ran after unrighteous gain.⁴¹

In II Peter 2:20, the thought is that a person would find it easier to remain a heathen than to "know the way of righteousness" and then fall into apostasy. The idea of a "worse state" is suggestive of the kind of judgment to come upon the apostate person. Peter cannot find words too strong to describe the severe penalty of sin. He is unsparing in

⁴¹Bigg, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, p. 231.

his condemnation of both teachers and followers who pervert the faith and turn men away from the right path.⁴²

The judgment which is to come upon the wicked at the "day of the Lord" is a judgment of destructive fire (II Peter 3:7-12). "The heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." According to the rainbow promise, water will not be the destructive agency. A great cosmic change will occur with the coming of the Lord in judgment upon the wicked.⁴³ The fact that the universe is stamped with impermanence, and must one day cease to be, is affirmed just as strongly by men of science today, as was Peter's deep-seated conviction.⁴⁴ Even this solid and lasting universe is neither solid nor lasting. One day it will be destroyed. With the bursting of the atomic age it is becoming frightfully evident that Peter's picture of the destruction of this present world system by means of a world conflagration is not just an impossible fantasy, but offers evidence that gives a sober picture of prophetic revelation.⁴⁵

⁴²Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 333.

⁴³Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. V, p. 144.

⁴⁴Morris, op. cit., p. 333, footnote 55.

⁴⁵D. Edmond Heibert, An Introduction to the Non-Pauline Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1952), p. 162.

There are many "words of God" that indicate fire as attending judgment (cf. Ps. 97:3; Isa. 66:15,16; Dan. 7:9,10; Isa. 34:4; Mic. 1:4). The belief that, as the world once perished by water, so it would again perish by fire, was possibly held by many of the Jews in Peter's time.⁴⁶

Peter has a frightening concept of the destruction that will attend the coming of the "day of the Lord." Punishment of sin is very real. It will be a destructive, fiery judgment upon the unprepared and the apostate in heart. This terrifying thought that the earth may await a fiery destruction, is now suggested not only by preachers, but also by politicians and leaders of nations. Man may well be destroyed by fire.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

From the Acts of the Apostles, one especially discovers the thought of punishment as expressions of God's wrath in history. The examples of Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and King Herod, serve to illustrate this fact. The note of God's wrath finding expression in history is also noted in the Petrine Epistles. The Judgment upon sin is primarily seen in

⁴⁶Bigg, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, p. 294.

⁴⁷G. R. Beasley-Murray, Bible Guides, The General Epistles (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 92.

its eschatological aspects in the epistles.

Note has been made of the use of the historic past and present expressions of God's wrath to illustrate future eschatological wrath. Peter makes it clear that God's wrath is both specific and individual, as well as general and corporate. Men stand before God as individuals. Whole groups of men stand before God and will receive their punishment for sin because of their wickedness. Peter indicates the fact of immediate punishment for the wicked at their death, where they await the destructive Day of the Lord.

Peter very strongly affirms the fact of future retribution for the wicked, both of men and of angels. He is reserved in giving any details about the duration of this punishment. It is a destructive punishment in its final expression, which is a suggestion of its finality. His view of an intermediate state of punishment contradicts the idea that he held to a probationary state after death. He also indicates that he considered the final lot of the wicked to be more severe than that of the intermediate state of the wicked.⁴⁸

Peter implies that some will "perish" in that Day of the Lord, in spite of God's express desire that all should come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9). Since it is not God's

⁴⁸William C. Richardson, "The New Testament Concept of the Destiny of the Wicked in Light of Inter-Biblical Thought" (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 246.

desire for men to perish, whatever "perishing" involves must be terrible. There is no more elaboration on the destiny of the wicked after the Last Judgment. One is left with the words "destruction" and "perish" to describe their final state. In view of the teachings of Jesus, with which Peter was well acquainted, it is easy to imply that this is the eternal state of the wicked.

All of the Apostle's views on eschatology are given with more than a desire to enlighten the reader as to the doctrine of last things. Peter is intensely concerned that the reality of things to come will issue forth in holy living. In I Peter 4:7, for example, he warns, "The end of all things is at hand, therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers." A similar exhortation is given in II Peter 3:14. After describing the fiery destruction of the earth as an expression of God's wrath, and also the anticipation of the saints for the new heaven and the new earth, he says, "Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace." A lively anticipation of the Day of the Lord provides a powerful incentive to holiness.⁴⁹ If the world is hastening to judgment, that obviously, a man will be motivated to live a life of piety and holiness.

⁴⁹Beasley-Murray, Bible Guides, The General Epistles,

There is a sense of lostness in the human heart without a doctrine of last things. Peter sets before us a proper perspective of this life, by placing it in the context of eternity. Without the sense of the eternal as an ever-present reality, life becomes listless. Peter brings his readers back to a correct understanding of the punishment of sin in the present by placing it in the context of the punishment of sin in the future. There is nothing in his teachings which contradict the teachings of Jesus in any way.

CHAPTER V

GOD'S WRATH AS EXPRESSED IN THE PAULINE WRITINGS

It is in St. Paul's epistles, more than in any other part of the New Testament, that one finds a theological conception of the wrath of God explicitly stated.¹ The punitive aspects of God's wrath are succinctly expressed in the teachings of John the Baptist, Jesus and Peter, but upon coming to Paul, a very careful and considered theological discussion is found on the subject of Divine wrath.

In this chapter, the discussion will be centered first on Paul's conception of God's wrath as a present reality, and second on God's wrath as an eschatological certainty. Some theologians attempt to make the expression of God's wrath in Pauline thought an impersonal, process with little relationship to God, and void of any eschatological aspects.² Especially is it true, that many theologians will deny Paul any concept of the final destiny of the wicked.³ Since this is evident, the writer will investigate the Pauline view of historical manifestations of God's wrath, as well as the

¹Anthony T. Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb (London: S. P. C. K., 1957), p. 68.

²Ibid., p. 69.

³H. E. Fosdick, A Guide To Understanding the Bible (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), p. 297.

eschatological aspects of God's wrath.

I. GOD'S WRATH AS A PRESENT REALITY

First, it is desirable to examine the Biblical evidence for Paul's view of God's wrath as a present active force in history. In order to facilitate the organization of this section, a first look is made of the historic examples of God's wrath which are noted in the Pauline section of the book of Acts, as well as the Pauline epistles. After noting these examples, the writer will move to the more theological interpretation of the present manifestations of God's wrath as Paul understood them.

Historic Examples of God's Wrath. The historic examples of God's wrath are arranged in their chronological order in history, and not in the order in which they appear in the Pauline writings.

Israel in the Wilderness (I Cor. 10:1-10). In the previous chapter, Paul was dealing with the question of eating meat which has been offered to idols. At the back of this passage lay the over-confidence of some of the Corinthian Christians. Their point of view apparently was one of assurance, since they had been baptized, and had partaken of the sacrament and were in Christ, there was

nothing to fear. In this passage Paul warns the people who speak with a confidence, that rules out all possibility of failure.⁴

In order to illustrate the danger of over confidence, Paul pointed to the past failures of Israel. All the Israelite fathers were rescued from Egypt, and sealed with the ancient sacraments, and sacramentally partook of Christ in the wilderness. They were blessed with high spiritual and material privileges. The point of warning lies in the five-fold repetition of pantes.⁵ They were "all under the cloud," "all passed through the sea," "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," "all ate the same supernatural food," and "all drank the same supernatural drink." In the face of such high privilege, Paul pointed out: "Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness (I Cor. 10:5).

Paul goes on to cite specific examples of God's punishment because of the sins of Israel in the wilderness. When Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law, the people seduces Aaron into making a golden calf and worshipping it

⁴William Barclay, The Letters to The Corinthians, Second Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 97.

⁵W. Robertson Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), p. 857.

(Exodus 32:6). They were guilty of fornication, even in the desert, with the Midianites and the Moabites and thousands perished as a result of God's direct judgment (Numbers 25:1-9). They were destroyed by serpents because they grumbled on the way (Numbers 21:4-6). When Korah, Dathan and Abiram led a grumbling revolt, judgment fell on many and they died (Numbers 16). Paul states that these "things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did" (I Cor. 10:6). The moral contagion of Israel, with the consequent severe penalty, serves as an example of Divine punishment of sin. Explicit mention is made of the wrath of God with Israel.⁶

After having mentioned these instances of the wrath of God in the Old Testament, Paul then goes on to envisage the possibility of Christians provoking God to similar wrath, with the consequent results.⁷ When Paul reminds his readers so emphatically of the danger in which they stood, he is apparently not merely proclaiming a truth which is self-evident in the Old Testament, but also speaking from his own experience as a Christian.⁸ The reality of encountering

⁶R. V. G. Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God (London: The Tyndale Press, 1951), p. 40.

⁷Hanson, op. cit., p. 76-7.

⁸Tasker, op. cit., p. 41.

wrath is highly probable to those who are so confident they believe there is no possibility of disobedience (I Cor. 10:12). Paul insists on vigilance, because again and again a fortress has been stormed simply because its defenders thought such to be impossible.⁹

Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:4-12). Another historic example is that of the punishment of Bar-Jesus, a magician, and a "Jewish false prophet" at Paphos, on the island of Cyprus. Elymas, as Bar-Jesus is also called, attempted to oppose Paul's witness to Sergius Paulus, an official on the island. The following is Luke's record of the event:

But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) withstood them, seeking to turn away the procounsul from the faith. But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, 'You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.' Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand (Acts 13: 8-11).

There can be no doubt that this punishment was directly inflicted because of Bar-Jesus' direct interference with the work of God. Paul states that the Lord is the One who caused the blindness to come upon Bar-Jesus. This

⁹Barclay, op. cit., p. 99.

narrative is an excellent example of a historic "punitive miracle."¹⁰ In this case, God visited punishment upon a man, through a man. In this case the punishment was to be temporary (Acts 13:11). At any rate, this punishment, the blindness of Bar-Jesus, opened the eyes of Sergius Paulus.¹¹ This expression of God's wrath ended in the conversion of the proconsul, for he believed when he saw what had occurred (Acts 13:12).

This example of the direct infliction of punishment by God, does not serve to support the idea that A. T. Hanson attempts to show in his book, The Wrath of the Lamb. In attempting to show that the New Testament conception of God's wrath is purely "an impersonal process", Hanson states that this example of punishment is included in the portion of Luke's work where, on the whole, his sources seem to be not first-hand.¹² For this reason, only a passing reference is made to this event. In view of the other examples of the direct punishment of God in the book of Acts, it seems that an injustice is done to the Biblical record by dismissing

¹⁰Edwin Lewis, Frederick C. Eiselen and David G. Downey. (eds.), The Abingdon Bible Commentary (New York and Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1929), p. 1110.

¹¹Nicoll, op. cit., p. 288.

¹²Hanson, op. cit., p. 130-1.

such evidence so easily. By maintaining the hermeneutical principle stated in the introduction, this event will be taken to emphasize the fact of God's direct intervention in history by expressing His wrath in punishment.

Ananias, The High Priest (Acts 23:1-5). Another incident which occurred in the life of Paul which illustrates the fact of God's punishment in history, is that relating to Paul's trial before the High Priest, Ananias, at Jerusalem. After Ananias had commanded some men standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth, Paul responded by stating the reality of punishment for Ananias:

Then Paul said to him "God shall strike you, you white-washed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" (Acts 23:3).

Paul's words are not regarded as an imprecation of evil on the high priest, but only as an expression of the firm belief that such conduct would meet with punishment. The terrible death of Ananias was a fulfillment of these words.¹³ According to Josephus, Ananias died by the daggers of the Sicarri at the beginning of the Jewish war under the procuratorship of Florus, in the year A. D. 66. He had been previously deposed from the high priesthood by King Agrippa

¹³Nicoll, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 466.

toward the close of the government of Felix.¹⁴

Paul's strong words are highly questioned by some. However, even the Lord spoke with righteous indignation. Jesus never spoke more severely than when He was condemning the same sin which Paul had censured, that of hypocrisy.¹⁵ Ananias was supposed to be God's representative, but he had acted contrary to the very law that God had given. Paul strongly asserted that God would in turn punish Ananias for such hypocrisy.

Civil Punishment (Romans 13:1-7). Paul's theory of civil government is presented in this passage in Romans. The governing authorities are instituted by God. A civil authority is "the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience" (Romans 13:4-5). The Christian has no active part in the system of retribution, though he submits to the civil regulations which serve moral ends.¹⁶ Paul sets forth the civil government as

¹⁴H. D. M. Spence (ed.), The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. XVIII, Large-Type Edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 211.

¹⁵Nicoll, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 466.

¹⁶T. C. Smith, "The Meaning of Ὀφείλω in The Pauline Epistles." (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1944), p. 94.

a servant of God, because it is the agent of the personified Wrath. He who administers the wrath is an administrator of God.

The Divine wrath is here presented in a new aspect. It is exhibited in "the powers that be." Apparently, non-Christian rulers, punishing on principle, are the instruments of the wrath of God.¹⁷ Many times Paul had received justice and protection at the hands of impartial Roman justice. Here, Paul sees the state of the divinely ordained instrument to save the world from chaos.¹⁸ The state exists positively for the well-being of the community, and negatively to check evil by the infliction of punishment, and both these functions are derived from God.¹⁹ The civil power has Divine sanction. Its function is to punish the wicked. Obedience to it is a Christian duty and deprives it of all its terrors. We are to be obedient, not only to avoid punishment, but also to have an inward assurance that we are doing right.²⁰ The Roman ruler was acting consciously

¹⁷Hanson, op. cit., p. 94.

¹⁸William Barclay, The Letter to The Romans, Second Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 189.

¹⁹William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Second Edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896).

²⁰Joseph Agar Beet, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Tenth Edition (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), p. 325.

in the name of justice, though, like the Assyrian in the Old Testament, he was unaware that he was the instrument of God's wrath.²¹

This is an expression of God's wrath that is very contemporary. It is a current expression of Divine punishment upon injustice. Paul's teaching here is wrongly applied when it is taken to mean that all existing civil authorities of any kind and character are divinely appointed. Paul himself suggests the test. When they are a terror, not to the worker of good, but to the evildoer, when they administer justice, they are ministers of God's wrath and demand the respect of Christians.²²

God's Rejection of the Jews (Romans 11:17-24).

Another historical manifestation of the wrath of God, occurred with the rejection of the Jews as Paul expressed it. It is to be recognized that Romans 9, 10, and 11 deal with God's rejection of Israel, but this short passage is chosen which seems to get at the core of this rejection.

The reality of God's wrath is expressed in the imagery of an olive tree whose branches were broken off. In this particular passage, Paul gives the Gentiles a warning. The Gentiles are to have a profound regard for Israel, because

²¹Hanson, op. cit., p. 94.

²²Lewis, op. cit., p. 1161.

it was the channel of blessing for the Gentiles. If rejection had come upon such privileged people as the Jews, it would be far easier to bring upon the Gentiles a similar demonstration of Divine wrath.²³ If some of the Jewish branches were broken off, and the Gentiles were grafted in, the Gentiles must be warned against pride which might lead to their being cut off (Romans 11:22). The words of the apostle are pungent:

For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off (Romans 11: 21-22).

The rejection of Israel by God is to serve as a warning of the kind of punishment awaiting the Gentiles if they do not continue in obedience to God. The branches that are pruned away illustrate the rejection of Israel. In their place other branches, brought from a wild olive tree, have been grafted.²⁴ The apostle sums up his argument by deducing from this example of the rejection of Israel two sides of the Divine character. First, God is full of goodness. This has been shown in His conduct toward the Gentiles who have been

²³W. H. Griffith Thomas, St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), p. 298.

²⁴Anders Nygren, Commentary on Romans, Tr. by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 402.

received into the Christian faith. That goodness is contingent upon continued obedience. On the other hand, the treatment of the Jews shows the severity which also is an integral part of the character of God. God can show the same severity against the Gentiles, and cut them off as well as the Jew.²⁵

So long as the Gentiles believe, they will enjoy the full benefits of God, But if disobedience ensues, God will not spare them, but will cut them off with as great a severity as was the cutting off of Israel.²⁶ In fact, the whole setting of the passage indicates that God was actively engaged in the rejection of Israel, even as He will be with the rejection of the Gentiles if they too fall into disobedience.

The Pagan World (Romans 1:18-32). The passage before us now, is a classic in the exposition of Paul's conception of the wrath of God. Some have called this a "handbook to the working of wrath."²⁷ In Romans 1:17, Paul proclaims a revelation of the righteousness of God. In the following verses, he describes the revelation of Divine wrath. The

²⁵Sanday and Headlam, op. cit., pp. 329-30.

²⁶Beet, op. cit., p. 302.

²⁷Hanson, op. cit., p. 83.

first mention of justification by faith, is followed immediately in logical sequence by the thought of God's wrath.²⁸ J. Agar Beet is not over-emphasizing the importance of this point when he says, "The entire weight of verses 16 and 17, which contain a summary of the epistle, rests upon the assumption that all men are, apart from the Gospel, under the anger of God."²⁹ In the remainder of this chapter, Paul shows how the wrath of God rests upon the pagan world.

The key verse for our discussion is Romans 1:18. It brings the wrath of God into special focus: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18). This wrath is "of God." Rabbinic thought felt the danger of a totally anthropomorphized God, and attempted to lessen this threat by placing the wrath of God in an angel of destruction.³⁰ Although we have noted the activity of an angel in the destruction of King Herod (Acts 12:23), Paul does not wish to separate wrath from its Divine Source. God's wrath is revealed in connection with revelation of His righteousness. The wrath is as vital and as integral a part of the revelation as the righteousness. It

²⁸Thomas, op. cit., p. 67.

²⁹Beet, op. cit., p. 54.

³⁰Calvin R. Schoonhoven, The Wrath of Heaven (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 17,18.

is because the wrath of God against sin has already been revealed that Paul is so proud of the Gospel which is the revelation of God's way of salvation.³¹

The phrase, "from heaven," is used by Paul as an "emblematical expression for the invisible residence of God, the seat of perfect order."³² Heaven, the place of God's throne and His living quarters, is the place from which His wrath descends. The basic emphasis is on the universal, cosmic nature of God's wrath.³³ This phrase further emphasizes the direct relationship of wrath to God.

Now, we inquire as to the nature of this wrath. C. H. Dodd asserts that these passages reveal "wrath" to be tantamount to an inevitable process of cause and effect in the universe.³⁴ A. T. Hanson further amplified this kind of thinking by steering clear of any eschatological implications, and especially emphasizes that these verses unequivocally assert that wrath is not something directly inflicted by God, but rather is something which men bring on themselves.³⁵

³¹D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, The Plight of Man and the Power of God (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), p. 84.

³²Smith, op. cit., p. 83.

³³Schoonhoven, op. cit., p. 18.

³⁴C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), pp. 20ff.

³⁵Hanson, op. cit., pp. 83-85.

William Sanday and Arthur Headlam go the other extreme and attempt to place all the emphasis on an eschatological interpretation of God's wrath in this passage.³⁶ Certainly there are eschatological implications in this passage, but its interpretation cannot be restricted to the end time. This wrath is clearly a present progressive reality in the process of history because of Paul's use of the present tense in verse 18.³⁷ However, to deny "wrath" any direct relation to God is to overlook the plain statement that this is the wrath of God (orge theou), and it is "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness."

The further direct relationship of God in this process of wrath is to be seen in the three-fold phrase, "God gave them up" (vs. 24, 26, 28). Wrath seems to be more of God's own displeasure, that is, His fixed attitude toward wickedness.³⁸ The grammatical construction of these verses do not rule out an eschatological day of God's wrath, but rather emphasize the present reality of Divine displeasure against wickedness.³⁹ God is set against sin and constantly manifests

³⁶Sanday and Headlam, op. cit., p. 41.

³⁷Smith, op. cit., p. 83.

³⁸J. B. Bedenbaugh, "Paul's Use of 'Wrath of God,'" Lutheran Quarterly, VI (May, 1954), 154-157.

³⁹William C. Richardson, "The New Testament Concept of the Destiny of the Wicked in Light of Inter-Biblical Thought," (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 214.

His wrath against it. The personal activity of God is brought out in these manifestations of wrath. Paul seems to go out of his way to emphasize the Divine participation in the consequences of sin as it is described here. Although sin has its inevitable consequences, Paul would have us note the activity of God those consequences. To a man like Paul, with his vivid consciousness of the Divine government of all the affairs of men, there was no such thing as a purely natural consequence to sin. For him nothing operated apart from God.⁴⁰

It is impossible, therefore, to see this manifestation of God's wrath as a purely automatic process, without any direct reference to God. Paul seems to be saying that if men sin, and evil consequences follow, then that is because God has willed it so. This idea about the wrath of God is not an unimportant appendage to Paul's view, which could be dropped without serious loss. Paul gives no occasion to set up such an alternative between God's wrath as either present reality or eschatological event. It is not a case of either-or. It is both--and.⁴¹

In this passage, the inference is clear. There is only one power in the universe. Sin is permitted by God and

⁴⁰Leon Morris, The Cross in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 204.

⁴¹Nygren, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

is a fact and condition of His created universe.⁴² God's wrath is continually being revealed against this perversion of creation. As long as evil exists, this will be the situation.⁴³ There is a certain permanence to God's wrath as it is expressed here. This is one of the distinguishing features from sinful human wrath. God's wrath is stable, unswerving, and of set purpose.⁴⁴ Complacency in evil is an indication of sharing in the evil, or of the inability to do anything about it. If God loves the sinner, He must hate the sin and act with vigor to drive it from the object of love. Failing in that, there must still be severity, lest the infection spread. Since all unrighteousness hinders God's loving plan, the wrath of God is against all that is not righteous and not godly.⁴⁵

This process of punishment is described in glaring colors. Here God punishes the world by giving man up to sin. Even now in history, God makes His wrath operative.⁴⁶ The

⁴²W. M. Ramsay, The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day, Second Edition (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 141.

⁴³Henry M. Shires, The Eschatology of Paul (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 107.

⁴⁴Tasker, op. cit., p. 9.

⁴⁵Wilbur T. Dayton, Aldersgate Biblical Series, Romans A, Study Guide (Winona Lake: Light and Life Press, 1960), p. 22

⁴⁶Nygren, op. cit., p. 109.

three fateful phrases, "God gave them up," indicate this as a present historic fact. As H. Wheeler Robinson says:

This wrath of God is not the blind and automatic working of abstract law--always a fiction, since "law" is a conception, not an entity, till it finds expression through its instruments. The wrath of God is the wrath of divine Personality.⁴⁷

The Church At Corinth (I Corinthians 11:27-32).

Another of the examples of God's present wrath in history is to be seen in Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian Christians regarding their misuse of the Lord's Supper.

In this passage, Paul speaks of a person being able to drink the "cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner and will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27) The unworthiness consisted in the fact that the man who did so, did "not discern the Lord's body" (v. 29). This may mean that the person had no sense of the sanctity of the thing he did, or ate and drank with no reverence.⁴⁸ At any rate, such a person "drinks judgment upon himself" (v. 29).

Paul uses this example to illustrate the present fact of God's judgment. This thought is especially seen in these verses: "But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be

⁴⁷Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), p. 166.

⁴⁸William Barclay, The Letters to The Corinthians, Second Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 116.

judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world (vs. 31-32). The verb used here, means "to distinguish," and "to discriminate."⁴⁹ In other words, Paul sees these judgments, not as something simply to be feared and hated, but as incentives to self-examination and right living. An understanding of the activity of God in judging His people here and now can be powerful incentive to Christian people. Verse 32 goes on to suggest that sufferings of various kinds for the Christian are to be regarded as tokens of God's love. Through God's "chastenings" the Christian is given incentive to grow in maturity. Such manifestations of God's wrath are to be regarded as "corrective" punishment.

In this passage, therefore, we note the reality of God's wrath, even upon His children. It is a wrath issuing in the type of punishment which serves to stimulate growth, and keep the Christian from continuance in a sinful direction.⁵⁰

These passages reveal the fact that Paul is keenly aware of God's present involvement in the punishment of sin within history. We have especially noted the actual accounts of historical accounts of these manifestations of God's

⁴⁹Leon Morris, The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), p. 45.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 46.

wrath. God's wrath is seen to be very severe in the case of King Herod, and always directly related to God. To maintain that God is only remotely connected with the punishment of sin can be true only if a significant portion of scripture is overlooked. To assert that God's wrath is exclusively eschatological is also to do injustice to the examples of these expressions of God's temporal punishments.

Theological Presentation of Present Wrath. In this division note is taken of just a few passages which are exclusively didactic. There is much theological interpretation in relation to the historic events just previously discussed, but note is made of three of Paul's exclusively didactic teachings which relate to the present expression of God's wrath.

Present Body of Death (Romans 7:24). Paul has a conception of "death" which is both positive and negative. In Romans 6, he speaks of the state of being "dead" unto sin, a state which is positive, since it unites one with Christ (vs. 1-11). However, in Romans 7:24, "death" is mentioned in a very negative sense: "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" In this sense, Paul uses the term "death" to indicate a very undesirable state of being which exists in this life. It is the kind of death which is in process in this life and negates the kind

of dying which leads to life in Christ. If one continues to remain in this state of "death," he will "die" ultimately.⁵¹ A fatal grip had its hold on Paul and he longs for deliverance.

The same note of death appears in Romans 8, where Paul sets "death" in direct contrast to eternal life (8:2; 8:6; 8:10; 8:13). In these passages the note of death is eschatological, as well as present. However, Paul is here referring to something distinct from a strict "physical death." Paul saw in man a process of death going on in this life which would result in the kind of death which is set in contrast to "eternal life." It is a dying of the essential person at a level of life more basic than that which is involved in a natural death. This was the death which really mattered to Paul. Natural death was only secondarily related to it.⁵²

Apparently, Paul saw the eternal consequences of a death far worse than physical death already operative in life. This awesome death already had its fangs almost irretrievably embedded in his soul. The present process of death would eventuate in a death of far greater seriousness.⁵³ This

⁵¹Mark Arnold Rouch, "Concepts of Death and the Future Life in the New Testament" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1962), p. 244.

⁵²Ibid., p. 246.

⁵³Sanday and Headlam, op. cit., p. 184.

present "body of death" seems almost to be an intrusion of death into the human scene, which is a personification of the last enemy of God to be destroyed (Rom. 5:14, 17; 6:6).

The sinner is a slave. His master is his greatest enemy, and his enemy dwells within. The sinner finds himself a prisoner, held in the clutches of sin. This cry of helpless anguish, even more than the picture of his captivity in the preceding verses of Romans 7, reveals his terrible position and the consequences of sin.⁵⁴ In this case, the absence of God's presence, is a revelation of God's wrath. The phrases we have already considered, "God gave them up," would seem to be a fair indication of the condition Paul mentions here. The natural consequences of sin, without the loving presence of God, are to be seen in this verse.

Law of Sowing and Reaping (Galations 6:7-9). This is another of the didactic teachings of Paul which seems to point to the process of God's justice in this life as well as in the future life. "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (v. 7). There can be no double dealing with God.⁵⁵ Every action produces an effect on the character of the actor corresponding as exactly to its motive as the fruit to the

⁵⁴Beet, op. cit., p. 204.

⁵⁵Nicoll, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 189-190.

seed. One's present, immediate behaviour is important.

Although Paul does speak of "eternal life" in these verses, there is no reason to believe that the sowing and reaping process is meant to be thought of in a strict eschatological sense. The point is that God's wrath works according to an exact law. There is no escape from this law of wrath, except by faith.⁵⁶ The quality of the harvest depends on the quality of the seed sown. In reality, the deed which is done is said to be received back in corresponding award or punishment.⁵⁷

The law of sowing and reaping may well refer to a present process of God's retribution upon sin in this present life. Although Paul does not regard God's judgment as a purely automatic process at work, there is a certain regularity and dependability to the law of retribution. Men cannot expect to sin and escape the consequences. God's judgments are being worked out in men's lives.⁵⁸

Children of Wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Here again the presence of God's wrath is seen in a present sense. This verse states that "we were by nature children of wrath, like

⁵⁶Hanson, op. cit., p. 75.

⁵⁷Spence, op. cit., Vol. XX, p. 299.

⁵⁸Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 204.

the rest of mankind." Some take the phrase, "by nature children of wrath," to support the view that wrath is not an attitude to God, but rather a condition of unregenerate man.⁵⁹ For them, wrath is the process into which men were born, and from which they need to be born out again. Men are not "objects of wrath," but "involved in wrath."⁶⁰

If the context of this statement is noted it is simple to conclude that the Divine wrath is in view here. In thirteen of the twenty occurrences in the Pauline writings, with or without the definite article, or the defining Theou, it is the Divine wrath that is meant.⁶¹ The passage 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 which they are persistently maintained. Because of men's fallen nature they are inevitable involved in behaviour which renders them the objects of Divine wrath.⁶² Their universal sin has already been affirmed. Now Paul describes it as a sin by nature. Universal sin implies a law of sinning, and this is the explanation of the fact that all are under the Divine wrath.

This verse reveals the reality of the wrath of God in

⁵⁹Hanson, op. cit., p. 105.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Nicoll, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 286.

⁶²Tasker, op. cit., p. 16.

time. No suggestion is given as to the nature, duration, or extent of this wrath, but simply that apart from the Gospel all men are under the wrath of God.

Before moving on to the second major division of this chapter, it is well to note the fact that Paul recognizes the present reality of God's wrath, as did John the Baptist, Jesus and Peter. There is nothing to suggest any diversity of thought on the reality of God's wrath as expressed in punishment within the scripture we have considered thus far. Paul does seem to be distinctive in noting the wrath of God as a consistent law, God's wrath is not sporadic. It is not irrational. God acts in accordance with Divine law. Those who refuse to surrender to the love of God, have thereby pronounced their own judgment. The present reality of wrath points to the ultimate effect of what is now seen.⁶³

II. GOD'S WRATH AS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL CERTAINTY

Having considered the present, historic features of Paul's understanding of God's wrath, attention is now turned to eschatological aspects of God's wrath. First, Paul's understanding of the eschatological Day of Judgment will be studied, and second, some time will be spent considering Paul's understanding of the fate of the wicked.

⁶³Shires, op. cit., p. 109.

The Day of Judgment

Two major features of the Pauline concept of the Day of Judgment demand attention. First, the passages which emphasize the certainty of the day are considered and second, the passages which denote the nature of the Day of Judgment.

Certainty of the Day of Judgment. One of the most notable of the passages which draws specific attention to the fact of the Last Judgment is found in Paul's sermon to the men of Athens in the Areopagus. At the close of the sermon Paul said:

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

The motive for repentance is grounded in the certainty of a day of judgment when God will judge the world righteously.

In addition to this specific passage, many of Paul's epistles denote the fact of a coming Day of Judgment. There are several references in the book of Romans. In Romans 2:5 Paul mentions the "day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." Romans 3:6 also indicates the fact that God will judge the world. Men are not to avenge themselves, because vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12:19). Neither are men to pronounce judgment before God's Day of Judgment

(I Cor. 4:5).

The idea for a definite time of wrath beyond the usual manifestation is indicated by Paul in Romans 2:5, with the expression "day of wrath." The idea is that right now the impenitent are accumulating wrath to themselves for a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. The future sense of the day of wrath is indicated in verse six where the verb is translated "will render." This idea of time of eschatological wrath occurs frequently in Paul's thinking (Rom. 2:5; Col. 3:6; I Thess. 1:10; 5:9). Several other passages affirm the certainty of a day of judgment when all the accounts will be settled by God. Many of these will be presented in the following discussion on the nature of the Day of Judgment according to Paul.

Nature of the Day of Judgment. It has already been suggested that Paul viewed the Day of Judgment as a day of wrath. Comments on that aspect of Paul's eschatological thinking are postponed until coming to Paul's idea of the fate of the wicked. Here only the general characteristics of that Day are noted.

First, there are several passages indicating the fact of a universal judgment. One of the most explicit passages is II Corinthians 5:10-11: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body. Therefore,

knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." The word pantes indicates the universality of this coming judgment. "All must appear." The judgment of God is destined for Jews and heathen alike. St. Paul passed far beyond a purified theocracy.⁶⁴ Paul expected a universal judgment for all men, believers and nonbelievers alike. The principle of recompense appears to apply everywhere.⁶⁵

A second aspect indicates that the coming judgment will be comprehensive. Paul wrote in Romans 2:16, about "that day, when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." Every area of a person's life will be exposed in that day. God will pass judgment on the secrets of a man, which he has already condemned in the solitude of his own conscience.⁶⁶ This same thought of a thorough judgment is further seen in I Corinthians 4:5, where Paul says:

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.

⁶⁴H. A. A. Kennedy, St. Paul's Conception of the Last Things, Second Edition (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), p. 195.

⁶⁵Shires, op. cit., p. 117.

⁶⁶Beet, op. cit., p. 81.

Every man must face the judgment of God. In the last analysis this is the only real judgment. For Paul, the judgment which he awaited was not the judgment of any human day, but the judgment of the Day of the Lord. God's judgment is final because only God knows all the circumstances. He can bring the hidden things to light. He knows what a man might have been for better or for worse. God is the only person who knows all the facts.⁶⁷ He who made the human heart alone knows the human heart and alone can judge it. The records will be made straight in that day. Even if one escapes all other judgments, he cannot escape the judgment of God, for it will be both universal and comprehensive.

A further general insight of Paul as to the Day of Judgment, reveals that he regarded it to be a just judgment. The law of sowing and reaping has previously been considered. Paul firmly believes that the Last Judgment will operate on this law. There will be no partiality by God on that awesome day (Rom. 2:11). Eternal life will be justly given to those who have been faithful to God (Rom. 2:7). There will be "wrath and fury" (Rom. 2:8), upon those who did not obey the truth. God will render to every person according to his works on earth (Rom. 2:6). Paul does not regard God as being unjust in inflicting wrath upon those who have been disobedient,

⁶⁷Barclay, The Letters to the Corinthians, p. 42.

their condemnation is just (Rom. 3:1-8).

This constant and unvarying working of the principle of recompense that applies to each man is represented by the present tense of the verbs describing the act of judging. But even the continuative present is not adequate to depict the end result of all history and of all human lives. Only a future tense, or some other construction requiring a future interpretation, will suffice (cf. Rom. 3:6; I Cor. 5:13; II Thess. 2:12). Its futurity points to its inevitability as well as to the fact that it transcends all experiences of this or any other single period of time.⁶⁸ The wrath of God means an unyielding and ultimately thoroughly effective resistance to evil which guarantees full salvation for the believers. As it is thus conceived, "wrath" is an eschatological term and is joined to a "last day," symbol of the full establishment of God's justice in the universe. Paul regards the Day of Judgment as far more than the termination of an automatic evolution of history. It is the final and authoritative evaluation of history by the Lord of history, who is working within it, but who also stands above it.

What man does in history is in Paul's view the basis for the judgment he must receive from God. No favors are granted, and no one is exempt. There is one standard for all

⁶⁸Shires, op. cit., p. 111.

because God shows no partiality (II Cor. 5:10). Nothing is beyond God's searching examination. The internal conditions of the heart, thoughts and motives will be assessed in addition to a man's works. For Paul, the Day of Judgment will be a certain eschatological event. It will be universal and comprehensive in its scope, and characterized by Divine justice.

Paul expresses the concern that since one knows "the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Cor. 5:11). Where there is no fear there is no rescue. Where there is no condemnation there can be no acquittal. Love must be based on justice, or else it degenerates into mere affection.⁶⁹ To avoid any conception of God's wrath is to overlook the great mission of Christ, who came into the world to save men from the wrath to come. The reality of the coming final Day of Judgment was for Paul a motivating force which caused him to persuade men to accept Christ. The fear of the Lord is a very present factor for Paul, and one to be used in sizing up many situations. It is especially relevant to the truth that no man shall escape judgment.⁷⁰

It does not appear that Paul had worked out in any great detail the actual events and processes of the final

⁶⁹Tasker, op. cit., p. 36.

⁷⁰Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 205.

Judgment. He is not as picturesque as the apocalyptic writers in picturing the Judgment.⁷¹ If one views this solemn crisis in close connection with the rest of his teaching, however, it is plain that the judgment of the Christians will be their admission into the heritage of glory. The disobedient will experience the wrath of God. Its effect is exclusion from the Kingdom of God. The Judgment establishes eternal destiny.⁷² It is a future, final judgment, which comes with the day of wrath (Rom. 2:5; I Cor. 3:13). It is the judgment of God (Rom. 2:3; 14:11), the judgment of Christ (II Cor. 5:10), and the judgment of God through Christ (Rom. 2:15). It is a universal judgment, embracing all, both the quick and the dead (Acts 17:31; II Tim. 4:1). It is a righteous judgment, which shall lay bare the secrets of all hearts, and give to every man according to his works (Rom. 2:5; II Thess. 1:5).

The Divine Judgment is a prominent theme in Paul's earlier letters and in the primary group, but is equally prominent in the latest of all the Pauline writings.⁷³ There is no reason for believing that Paul abandoned his belief in the final Judgment. It may be concluded that Paul continued

⁷¹Harold Guy, The New Testament Doctrine of Last Things (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 113.

⁷²Kennedy, op. cit., p. 201.

⁷³Salmond, op. cit., p. 410.

to believe in the Day of Judgment throughout his life. There is irrefutable evidence that such was his belief as late as the composition of Romans, and there is no concrete evidence of a subsequent change.⁷⁴ A basic element of Pauline thought was the conviction that God is just and will render to every man according to his deeds.

The Fate of the Wicked

Many Biblical scholars assert that Paul has very little of a definite nature to say about the final condition of the lost.⁷⁵ The suggestion is that it is difficult to understand whether Paul is referring to the present condition of men or their ultimate destiny with his use of "hints and metaphors."⁷⁶ In this discussion, the three major terms are noted which Paul applies to the wicked as to their eschatological fate.

Wrath. One of the major expressions to denote the future condition of the wicked in Pauline thought, is the word "wrath." In Romans 2:5, 8, "wrath" is set in direct contrast with "eternal life" (Rom. 2:7). To those who seek after glory, honor, and immortality, the reward is eternal

⁷⁴Harvey K. McArthur, "The Apostle Paul and the Resurrection of the Wicked" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Hartford Seminary, 1941), p. 180.

⁷⁵Guy, op. cit., p. 118.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 118-119.

life, but for those who obey wickedness, there is the reward of wrath and fury (orge and thumos). Orge is used in the sense of God's settled opposition to evil, while thumos indicates the outward manifestations, the "outburst" of wrath.⁷⁷ God's wrath is set in the context of its future manifestation against wickedness. Its effect is the antithesis of the bestowal of salvation and excludes men from redemption because of their persistence in wickedness.⁷⁸

These verses are definitely given in an eschatological context. Wrath is used in contrast to eternal life and is understood to involve eternal consequences.⁷⁹ There is no explicit reference to the duration of this "wrath", but the sense of finality is certainly here.

The "wrath" which is mentioned here seems to be more than the natural process of history. The fact that this is a "day of wrath" (Rom. 2:5) is suggestive of a definite period of time in the future.⁸⁰ It is difficult to see in this day, the mere consequences of a process of history.

⁷⁷Sanday and Headlam, op. cit., p. 57.

⁷⁸Hermann, Cremer, Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek, Tr. by William Urevick, Fourth English Edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1954), p. 460.

⁷⁹Richardson, op. cit., p. 218.

⁸⁰Hanson, op. cit., p. 86.

There is nothing to suggest that God merely sits back and permits the "natural" laws bring about the defeat of evil. These verses suggest the active opposition of God to evil in every shape and form.⁸¹ If God is a moral God, He is seen to take vigorous action in opposition to evil. Human passion is here attributed to God with the use of thumos, but this seems to indicate that Paul wished to indicate the intensity of God's indignation against sin and the tremendous punishment awaiting sinners.⁸²

Another set of passages which point to the reality of God's wrath upon the sinner in an eschatological sense is found in Romans 5:9 and I Thessalonians 1:10. Here again, "wrath" is set in opposition to salvation. Special emphasis is on the fact that Jesus saves us "from the wrath of God."

Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God (Rom. 5:9).

...and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (I Thess. 1:10).

Although this "wrath" is not spelled out here, its antithesis with "salvation" emphasizes it to be the fate of the wicked. Paul makes a distinction between the justification of sinners in the past, and their final salvation from the wrath to come (Rom. 5:9). Evidently, the final

⁸¹Morris, The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment, p. 70.

⁸²Beet, op. cit., p. 73.

deliverance will be even more significant than the deliverance in the present.⁸³ This heightens the reality of the coming wrath. The wrath of God is a reality which applies not to this life only. To live in Christ is to be free from the wrath of God. That is to be delivered both from the present wrath which God reveals from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, and from "the wrath to come," which will be revealed on "the day of wrath."⁸⁴

This eschatological wrath is not only something seen here and now, it will also endure to the end of all things. It will especially be manifested in the end of all things. It is inevitable, a thought conveyed by the present participle, it is even now coming.⁸⁵ We cannot specifically define this "wrath" in these verses, only that it is eschatological and is sent in opposition to salvation. Paul sees the demand for punishment as arising from the very nature of God. To denote that about God which requires punishment of wrongdoing, he uses the word orge. There is no suggestion of fickle anger, but the natural reaction of a righteous God

⁸³Sanday and Headlam, op. cit., pp. 128-129.

⁸⁴Nygren, op. cit., pp. 205-206.

⁸⁵Leon Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), p. 65.

toward wrong.⁸⁶ Wrath is seen in an eschatological context because sin appears to be an eschatological reality.

Two other related passages refer to the wrath of God as coming upon the wicked in a final sense. These two verses are significant: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:6). "On account of these the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience" (Col. 3:6). In these prison epistles, Paul indicates what he understands to be the recompense for ungodly and unrighteous living. Both verses assert the certainty of Divine punishment for wickedness.⁸⁷ Paul warns his readers not to be deceived into thinking that just punishment would not come upon ungodly living. On the contrary it is because of those very things that the wrath of God is coming, in the sense that it is on its way. These verses may refer to the general principle of punishment in time, but the reference seems to be eschatological, in accordance to Paul's customary usage of the word "wrath."⁸⁸ This is to be a definite wrath, indicated by the use of the article, the

⁸⁶Rouch, op. cit., p. 424.

⁸⁷F. F. Bruce and E. K. Simpson, Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), p. 270.

⁸⁸Nicoll, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 538.

consequence of sin to be administered at the set time. Here again, the future end of the wicked is "wrath," but that wrath is not defined as to nature or duration.

In Paul's Thessalonian writings, there is further evidence of the future fate of the wicked, as being that of "wrath." One of the most significant passages is I Thessalonians 2:14-16:

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea; for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved--so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last.

These three verses contain a very strong denunciation of the Jews by Paul. Paul begins with the accusation that they had killed the Lord Jesus. His unusual word order emphasizes both words. They had killed the heavenly Man, the Lord, and they had killed One who was of their flesh, the human Jesus. Paul emphasizes the heinousness of this crime, and proceeds to bring out the point that it was no isolated act. The slaying of the Lord was the outworking of the same essential attitude as that displayed so often to the prophets.

The denunciation continues, "and drove us out." Paul's verb is a compound rare in the New Testament and denotes the extreme in persecution. Their manner of life is such that they "displease God." The present tense indicates this to be

a habitual attitude.⁸⁹ Paul's indignation mounts as he thinks of their trying to prevent the Gospel being preached to the Gentiles, quite in the spirit of the Pharisees of Matthew 23:13. Jesus had soundly denounced the Pharisees for such a spirit. God's wrath was to come upon those who sought to thwart the purposes of God and to frustrate the salvation of the lost.⁹⁰ This curt and sharp verdict sprang from Paul's understanding of God's wrath.

Such conduct cannot go unnoticed on the part of God. The Jews are seeing to it that nothing is left out in the catalogue of their sins. They are filling up the measure of their sins to the last drop.⁹¹ The consequences are sure. God's wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. Paul's use of the aorist tense in reference to God's wrath has puzzled many who wish to retain a strict eschatological interpretation of God's wrath. Leon Morris indicates that this reveals the surety of coming punishment.⁹² Others have completely eradicated any reference to future punishment and see this as a process of punishment in history, probably a reference to

⁸⁹Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 91.

⁹⁰Tasker, op. cit., p. 43.

⁹¹Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 91.

⁹²Ibid., p. 92.

the fall of Jerusalem.⁹³ Such an interpretation would confine the meaning to a process of wrath in history, which was openly declared and consummated in the past, rather than something to be executed or inflicted in the last days.⁹⁴

If one regards these verses in the strict historic sense, as referring to the fall of Jerusalem, they must be taken to be a marginal gloss, written after the tragic days of the siege in 70 A. D.⁹⁵ This would be necessary in view of the early date commonly given to the Thessalonian letters. It may be best to interpret these verses as having both historic and prophetic significance. The phrase, "to the uttermost" (v. 16), seems to indicate something more than a temporal punishment. The setting of the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in Luke 21 within a wider eschatological framework makes it clear that Jesus regarded that historic event as a forerunner of the final day of wrath, when He would return again to execute final judgment.⁹⁶ A similar interpretation can likewise be easily applied to this passage. The certainty of punishment for the Jews has both a historic and eschatological thrust. The finality of the

⁹³Hanson, op. cit., p. 70.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 71.

⁹⁵Nicoll, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 29.

⁹⁶Tasker, op. cit., p. 44.

punishment of God's wrath is emphasized by the phrase "orge eis telos."

A final passage indicating the final destiny of the wicked to be "wrath," is to be noted. Paul writes in I Thessalonians 5:9-10, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him." Two destinies are clearly set out in this passage. Here orge is set in contrast to soteria. This is highly suggestive that "wrath" is the antithesis of "salvation."⁹⁷ Paul speaks of salvation in both its negative and positive aspects. God's purpose for man is not wrath. On the contrary, He purposed that His children should obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation includes the fact that God did not destine His own to experience His wrath.⁹⁸

R. C. H. Lenski understands "wrath" in this passage to refer back to I Thessalonians 1:10 and "the wrath to come," thus taking it in a definite eschatological sense.⁹⁹ This eschatological aspect is emphasized by the phrase, "destined

⁹⁷Richardson, op. cit., p. 212.

⁹⁸Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 160.

⁹⁹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1937), p. 348.

for wrath." However, the idea may certainly be that God has not destined men for wrath in this life or in the end, but has destined them to salvation in this life and in the end. Paul places wrath over against salvation as one of the two possible human destinies. Wrath is not defined, only as it is contrasted with salvation. God's wrath was a terrible certainty for the wicked in Paul's thought.

Destruction. Another word frequently used by Paul to denote the destiny of the wicked is "destruction." Paul uses two different terms in the Greek to express the idea of destruction. These are apoleia and olethros. The former term is used five times and the latter four times.

First, the passages are considered where Paul uses the word apoleia to express the thought of destruction, in the sense of it being the destiny of the wicked. First consideration is due Romans 9:22, where Paul speaks about God enduring with patience the "vessels of wrath made for destruction." This verse makes use of the term "wrath" twice in connection with the term "destruction." Paul indicates that God desires to make known His wrath, but has delayed doing so in order to make known the riches of His glory for the vessels of mercy. The expression, "vessels of wrath," refers to those made for destruction, whose ultimate end will be wrath unless they experience the saving power of Christ

during the period of God's delay of eschatological judgment.¹⁰⁰ Paul understand that those who remain rebellious to God remain "vessels of wrath made for destruction," and whose final lot is the eschatological wrath of God. The wrath of God is seen to be an attribute of God held in reserve in this passage.¹⁰¹ A. T. Hanson believes Paul is thinking of unbelievers in some sense as "instruments" of wrath, bringing destruction to those who are with them caught up in the wrath of God.¹⁰² He would suggest that Paul meant that these vessels were "instruments of wrath forged for destruction," and not necessarily "recipients of wrath prepared for destruction."¹⁰³ It seems difficult to understand this, however, in any sense other than that which seems most natural to the text. These are vessels which deserve God's wrath and, as such, are prepared for destruction.¹⁰⁴ Here again, as with wrath, "destruction" is seen as the opposite of salvation. Paul says that these vessels will be subject

¹⁰⁰Richardson, op. cit., p. 220.

¹⁰¹G. H. C. MacGregor, "The Concept of the Wrath of God in the New Testament," New Testament Studies, VII (January, 1961), p. 104.

¹⁰²Hanson, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁰⁴Beet, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Tenth Edition, p. 271.

to the terrible finality of destruction under God's wrath.¹⁰⁵ Again, the nature of this destruction is not elucidated, but its simple fact is asserted.

A second occurrence of the term apoleia is in Philippians 1:28. Paul says that the destiny of those who oppose the Gospel is that of "destruction," in contrast to "salvation." It is especially important to note that this destruction is distinctly "from God." Paul does not define "destruction," he only asserts it to be a future penalty for the opponents of the Gospel. According to Marvin Vincent this term means waste in general, but here it is "the destruction which consists in the loss of eternal life."¹⁰⁶

Paul's third use of the term apoleia is discovered in Philippians 3:19: "Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." In the previous verse, Paul says that there are many who live as the enemies of the cross of Christ and then describes their end (telos) as destruction. In the following verses, Paul describes the destiny of the saved in these terms:

¹⁰⁵Sanday and Headlam, op. cit., p. 262.

¹⁰⁶Marvin R. Vincent, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), p. 35.

But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself (Phil. 3:20-21).

The immediate contrast between the destiny of those whose end is destruction because of their wickedness, and the destiny of the Christian is salvation because of obedience to Christ. Whatever Paul means by "destruction," it is certain that it will involve a denial of entrance into heaven.

In II Thessalonians 2:8-9 a passage is discovered with Paul's understanding of the destiny of the "Man of Sin." The "lawless one" will be slain by the Lord Jesus and "destroy him" by His appearing and His coming. Consideration is limited to the term "destroy" at this point, the term "perish" is considered a bit later in this study.

No sooner has Christ come to the appearance of the Lawless One than He shall proceed to his destruction. The picture is strengthened by the ease with which the Lord will destroy this terrible being. The Lord will slay the "lawless one" with the breath of His mouth. There can be no doubt as to the Divine participation in the destruction of evil in this instance. There is more than a process of history at work here. The Lord is seen to directly "slay him with the breath of his mouth" (II Thess. 2:8). Paul is vitally interested in conveying the thought that God will have the final

word in the conflict between good and evil.¹⁰⁷ The point here is that the manifest presence of Christ is sufficient to destroy the "lawless one." The Thessalonians need not fear, however awesome evil might seem to be. Even the most outstanding of those who oppose God will be destroyed by the coming again of the Lord.¹⁰⁸ This passage has a fierce anticipation of the adversary's doom at the appearance of the Messiah.

A final passage in which Paul uses the term apoleia is I Timothy 6:9. In warning about the dangers of money, Paul states: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction." Here the term "destruction" is used by Paul in two ways. Both terms for "destruction" are used. Olethros is used to refer to the consequences of the indulgence of the flesh, referring to physical ruin and possibly that of the whole being, and is followed by apoleia which stresses the final, eternal and irrevocable character of the ruin.¹⁰⁹ The words stress both

¹⁰⁷James Everett Frame, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p. 265.

¹⁰⁸Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 231.

¹⁰⁹W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Sixteenth Impression (Westwood, N. D.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), p. 304.

the idea of temporal loss as well as future ruin.

It is clear that Paul understood apoleia to be the opposite of salvation, just as he understood wrath to be the antithesis of salvation and eternal life. The relevant passages are now noted where Paul uses the word olethros to denote future destruction for the wicked. The usage in I Timothy 6:9 has already been considered where the desire to be rich is said to lead one into "ruin and destruction." It is apparent that the desire for riches can lead to irretrievable loss with eternal consequences.

The usages in I Thessalonians 5:3 and II Thessalonians 1:9 are similar, since both relate to the Second Coming. In I Thessalonians 5:3, the Day of the Lord is said to come unexpectedly and with it will come "sudden destruction" and there will be "no escape." The whole mood of this passage is that of disaster. The startling nature of this disaster is heightened by the fact that it will be "sudden." This word is placed in an emphatic position, right in the forefront of the clause. The disaster itself is described as "destruction." The term is to be understood as denoting loss of fellowship with God, the loss of that life which is really life.¹¹⁰ There is nothing to suggest that this "destruction" is the equivalent of annihilation. It is probable that olethros,

¹¹⁰Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 153.

like thanatos and apoleia, is the opposite of soteria. The point is not annihilation of existence, but separation from the presence of Christ.¹¹¹

Upon coming to the discussion of II Thessalonians 1:9, a phrase is encountered that causes no little concern for many who do not wish to see the idea of eternal punishment in Paul's thinking. Since this is an important passage close examination is essential:

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering--since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed (II Thess. 1:5-10).

There are several important facts to observe in these verses. First, it is evident that God's righteous purpose is being worked out. Just as it is a righteous thing with God to bring believers to salvation and blessing in His Kingdom, as it is a righteous thing with Him to bring punishment to those who persist in the courses of evil. If it is true that Paul speaks much of the love and mercy of God, it is also true that he does not gloss over the serious nature of moral issues

¹¹¹Frame, op. cit., p. 182.

Just as our Lord spoke plainly of the fate of those who persist in ways of sin and impenitence, so also Paul affirms this truth. The evildoer can look for nothing but the continuing wrath of God.¹¹² These verses also point out the reality of punishment as more than the mere penalty of natural law. In that Day, when the Lord Jesus is revealed, He will directly inflict punishment in His capacity as Sovereign Judge.¹¹³ It is very difficult to get around the fact of direct Divine involvement in the process of punishment. It is little wonder that those who attempt to view God's wrath as primarily a "process" do not spend very much time in discussing this very relevant passage.¹¹⁴ Even as Paul reminded the Romans that vengeance belonged to God (Romans 12:19), he again asserts that the Lord will inflict vengeance upon those who know not God and who obey not the Gospel in the eschatological Day of the Lord.

The last major thought to be carefully considered is noted in verse nine. Paul says, "They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." Paul

¹¹²Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 200.

¹¹³Joseph P. Thompson, Love and Penalty (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), p. 271.

¹¹⁴Hanson, op. cit., p. 71.

becomes very specific in defining the nature of the vengeance which is to be inflicted upon the ungodly. He defines the nature of destruction. It is to be "eternal," and it will involve "exclusion from the presence of the Lord." The penalty is announced as an eternal banishment from Christ.¹¹⁵

The two words, "eternal destruction" (olethron aionion), are of special significance at this point. In the analysis of the teachings of Jesus regarding God's wrath as expressed in punishment, note was made of the attempts of scholars to take the word aionios as meaning punishment of a limited duration. The adjective "eternal" means "age-long" and everything depends on the length of the age. In the New Testament there is never a hint that the coming age has an end. When the life of believers beyond the grave is spoken of, it is with the use of the same adjective. When Paul uses this adjective to describe the fate of the lost, the additional use of the word "destruction" suggests that the ruin which Paul spoke of was final and without end.¹¹⁶ It appears that Paul understood the destruction of the wicked to be that of eternal separation from God. "Eternal destruction" is the opposite of "eternal life." The penalty for the wicked is to be the direct opposite of the reward of the

¹¹⁵Frame, op. cit., p. 234.

¹¹⁶Joseph Agar Beet, The Last Things (New York: Methodist Book Concern, Eaton & Mains, 1897), p. 123.

believer (v. 10). It is the end of all that is worthwhile in life. As eternal life can be defined in terms of the knowledge of God, so the eternal destruction which is here in mind is "from the presence of the Lord." "From" appears to have the meaning "away from." It indicates the separation from the Lord which is the final disaster.¹¹⁷

Those who accept the annihilation of the wicked look to this passage for much support. Since the word "eternal" is connected with "destruction," some scholars feel convinced that this means annihilation.¹¹⁸ Still others, who believe in universal restoration hold that in this passage the Apostle has "hardly outgrown the narrow intolerance of Jewish eschatology."¹¹⁹

As concerns this statement by Paul, no one can deny that it posits a strong contrast between the destiny of the believers and the end of their persecutors. The question must arise, however, whether the thought of annihilation is fitting to serve as the evil opposite pole in a contrast so sharply stressed by Paul. It will have to be remembered that

¹¹⁷Morris. The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 206.

¹¹⁸H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology, Vol. III, Tenth Printing (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1965), p. 361.

¹¹⁹Robert H. Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life, Second Edition (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), p. 443.

annihilation is an extremely abstract idea, probably too philosophical, in fact, to find a natural place within the limits of the realism of Biblical eschatology.¹²⁰ It is not a stronger, but rather a weaker concept than that of eternal punishment in the traditional sense. Furthermore, there appears to be no evidence for placing such an absolute meaning upon olethros or apoleia.¹²¹ The problem of the relation of olethros and apoleia to existence or nonexistence could be solved without much difficulty if the Pauline statements are viewed in the light of Jesus' previous words, with which Paul must have been sufficiently aware. Jesus used apoleia of the state of eternal destruction and Gehenna of the place of eternal destruction. He combined with these the strongest predicates of unceasing retribution. Paul regards the ungodly to be destroyed, that is, they lose all true life, but there is no reason to believe that they lose conscious existence.¹²²

Perish. A third term used by Paul to denote the future state of the wicked is "perish." The Greek term is apollumi. This term is employed by Paul to indicate the fate of the

¹²⁰Geerhardus Vos, The Pauline Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Wm. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 294.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Kennedy, op. cit., p. 123.

general lot of mankind who have not had access to the special revelation of God in Christ. This thought is stated in Romans 2:12: "All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law."

The Jew's advantage is that he has the law, while the heathen does not have it. Paul does not deny that difference. However, though the heathen does not have the law, he is not without knowledge of God's will. Of that he knows enough that he is without excuse for his evil-doing. The Gentile has a law to himself and for that reason, he too is without excuse before God. He is a sinner and will "perish" apart from God's grace.¹²³ No explanation is given here as to what perishing might include, but the root idea of the term means loss or ruin.¹²⁴

Paul further makes use of apollumi to refer to all those not saved, as in I Corinthians 1:18 and II Corinthians 2:15, where perishing is contrasted with those who are being saved. In I Corinthians 1:18, Paul says: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The present

¹²³Nygren, op. cit., p. 130.

¹²⁴William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 94-95.

participles here indicate continuous action, suggestive of an abiding condition. Those perishing now in this life will go on perishing in the future life, unless the course of action is reversed. Paul uses this same term in I Corinthians 15:18. He is speaking of the consequences had Christ not been resurrected, and says, "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." Since Christ did arise from the dead, those who died in the Lord have not perished, but rather have the hope of the resurrection of the dead.

Other usages of the term occurs in I Corinthians 8:11 where Paul describes what happens to a weak brother who is offended, and again in II Thessalonians 2:10 where he describes those who will be deceived by the coming of the lawless one before the return of Christ. Those who are duped by the lawless one will find in the end that they have followed him to their own irreparable loss.¹²⁵

Like the words "wrath" and "destruction," so too, the word "death" (thanatos). The great majority of the usages refer to the natural event of death. However, there are some references to spiritual death in a definite eschatological sense. Some of the aspects of "death" in a present sense have been previously discussed. Now the aspect of death is considered in its final sense as understood by Paul to indicate the

¹²⁵Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 232.

fate of the wicked.

The term which Paul frequently uses to sum up the condition of the Christian is "life" (zoe). Its antithesis is "death" (thanatos), which is apparently the same as apoleia.¹²⁶ Evidently for St. Paul, death signified something far deeper than the natural close of life. For Paul death was regarded as the correlative of sin. It is to miss the permanent ethical element in the apostle's thinking, when the assertion is made that the physical experience of death in itself was the supreme evil to the mind of Paul.¹²⁷

In Romans 1:32, after listing the catalog of gruesome sins, Paul says that those who do such things under the judgment of God are worthy of death. Here death is obviously to mean more than the mere physical even of dying. It is the death that cannon die that Paul seems to be referring to here. It is the extreme penalty of sin by the Divine judgment of God.¹²⁸

Again, this word is used in a similar manner in Romans 6:23, where Paul says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Here death is contrasted with eternal life in Christ Jesus.

¹²⁶Guy, op. cit., p. 119.

¹²⁷Kennedy, op. cit., p. 113.

¹²⁸Richardson, op. cit., p. 229.

our Lord. Here death is contrasted with eternal life as the expression of all that is completely opposite to the Divine will of God.¹²⁹ Death is the shadow of the wrath of God. It is separation from God. Death had a sharp sting to it for the sinner because it involved the fixation of eternal consequence. Death is more than a mere physical event. Although Paul does not spell out its meaning in any great detail, only the simple-minded would be unable to see the shadow of eternal consequence embodied in the term.¹³⁰ The essence of thanatos for Paul was separation from God.¹³¹

CONCLUSION

This chapter on the investigation of the various aspects of Paul's understanding of God's wrath is concluded by asserting that Paul understood God's wrath as an inevitable consequence of His righteousness. The coming of Christ did not mean that God was no longer a God of wrath. On the contrary, it clearly revealed God's wrath against all human ungodliness and unrighteousness. Because of the universality of sin, the whole race of mankind is the object of God's wrath.

¹²⁹Shires, op. cit., p. 130.

¹³⁰Kennedy, op. cit., p. 117.

¹³¹Guy, op. cit., p. 119.

Unredeemed mankind are by nature the "children of wrath." Both the Gentiles and the Jews are without excuse, because they both known and disobeyed the Law.

In Paul, though the expression "the wrath" is used absolutely, it always means "the wrath of God." It is not a kind of impersonal, inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe which is totally unrelated to God. One can rationalize the idea in that way, but it would be a mistake to suppose that Paul did so.¹³² Directly, or indirectly, Paul connects God with the idea of anger or wrath some ten or eleven times. In six of these cases (Rom. 2:5; 3:5; 5:9; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; I Thess. 1:10), the reference is clearly to the wrath in the escahtological sense of the Day of Judgment. Romans 9:22 refers to the postponement of wrath. In three cases the same reference is less clearly expressed, with the possibility of present as well as eschatological wrath implied (Rom. 4:15; Eph. 2:3; I Thess. 5:9). The two remaining references in Romans 1:18 and I Thessalonians 2:16 may well fall under the principle of men experiencing the present wrath of God.¹³³

Beyond these direct references to the stated "wrath"

¹³²Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 76.

¹³³Charles Anderson Scott, Christianity According to St. Paul (Cambridge: University Press, 1927), pp. 78-79.

of God, there are many other expressions of God's wrath as expressed in punishment. There is the active infliction of punishment in historic occurrences. Further attention has been given to Paul's understanding of the destiny of the unrighteous. This topic was of more than of occasional interest to Paul. Note was made of the use of the terms "wrath," "destruction," "perish," and "death" to indicate Paul's understanding of those who do not obey the Gospel. In all these instances, these words were used in a context which made them antithetical to "eternal life." There is nothing to suggest that Paul viewed the destiny of the wicked as anything other than a permanent state of fixation.¹³⁴ Not only are men sinners and slaves to sin, but they are in jeopardy as a result. God is opposed to evil and evil men.¹³⁵ Paul makes it vividly clear that God is totally opposed to every form of evil. He leaves no room for complacency.

Beyond the assertion of their utter ruin, there is little information from the pen of the Apostle regarding the eternal state of the wicked. There is nothing asserting or suggesting that they will be ultimately annihilated, or that

¹³⁴Salmond, op. cit., p. 411.

¹³⁵Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 191.

their consciousness will cease.¹³⁶ In Paul's dark vision of the ruin of the lost he cannot find a ray of light. He does not further analyze it, but turns away to greet the life eternal, the gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul found no basis for expecting universal salvation, either in the teaching of Jesus, the preaching of the other apostles, or in the facts of life as he observed them. Paul was sure that all men would face God's test, and he expected that those who rejected God's will and goodness would fail to receive life eternal.¹³⁷

¹³⁶J. Agar Beet, "New Testament Teaching on Future Punishment of Sin," Expository Times, 4th Series, I (1890), p. 211.

¹³⁷Floyd V. Filson, Jesus Christ the Risen Lord (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 276.

CHAPTER VI

GOD'S WRATH AS EXPRESSED IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

The study of the Johannine writings has been left for the last chapter because of the generally accepted fact of their late date.¹ It will be of special interest to note any significant change in John's understanding of God's wrath as the last of the writers of the New Testament, in contrast to the earliest teachings in the New Testament.

As to methodology, an examination will be made of the evidence for God's wrath as a present reality and secondly look at God's wrath in its eschatological aspects. It is in the Johannine writings that A. T. Hanson sees wrath as something which is imposed on ourselves, not something imposed from outside by God.² This assertion will be of special interest as note is made of John's Gospel, his three epistles and the Apocalypse.

I. GOD'S WRATH AS A PRESENT REALITY

John has his own way of bringing out the seriousness of sin. At the outset, notice that he spends much more time

¹Henry C. Thiessen, Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1943), pp. 173, 310, 323.

²Anthony T. Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), p. 141.

with the problem of sin than any other of the Gospel writers. It is not without significance that he uses the word "sin" more often than Matthew and Mark combined. Matthew uses the noun seven times and the verb three times, Mark uses the noun six times, while John uses the noun seventeen times and the verb three times.³

In view of John's concern with sin, he emphasizes the present judgment of God on sin. The first significant statement for study is John 3:18:

He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Here it is obvious that a part of God's judgment is already invoked on the sinner by his very rejection of Christ. Judgment is already passed in some sense, by one's reaction to Christ.⁴ The word "already" and the substitution of the perfect tense for the present tense, show clearly that Jesus is thinking here of a judgment of a spiritual nature which is in process in time on him who rejects the salvation offered in Christ. Such a man has pronounced on himself, by his unbelief, and without any

³Leon Morris, The Cross in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965)

⁴Hanson, op. cit., p. 141.

intervention of God in a judicial manner, his own condemnation.⁵ Christ came into a world under condemnation, and His coming finally pronounced that condemnation. Here the condemnation is directly resultant from one's turning from the light.

A second passage in the Johannine writings which may have implications for the present, as well as for the future, is John 3:36: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him." This is the only explicit reference to God's wrath outside the Apocalypse in John's writings. Certainly there is a definite eschatological thrust to God's wrath in this passage. The consequences of the one who disobeys God will be a denial of life and the experience of God's wrath. The unrepentant sinner excludes himself from life, "eternal life" as John has it here. He shuts himself up to the wrath of God, and the present tense, "meni" denotes continuous action, indicating that this wrath is no passing phenomenon.⁶ All other wrath is revocable, but that which falls upon unbelief abides forever. The

⁵F. Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of John, Vol. I, Tr. from Third French Edition by Timothy Dwight (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1890), p. 397.

⁶Morris, op. cit., p. 147.

word "eternal" of the first clause has its counterpart in the second.⁷ Wrath is the present lot of the unbeliever, for he is already under condemnation.⁸ It appears to be a wrath already in operation with eternal consequences.

A third passage indicative of the present activity of judgment is noted in I John 3:15: "Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Here it is readily apparent that one who hates his brother is under the self-imposed judgment of being deprived of the present quality of eternal life. This is apparently the equivalent of John 3:18 which we have already considered.

The involvement of Christ in the present activities of men as Judge is also seen in John's writings. The purpose for Christ's coming into the world was to bring judgment (John 9:39). The very coming of Christ into the world bringing salvation involved the fact of judgment. The sifting process must begin with the acceptance or rejection of Christ.

In John 3:19, it is noted how this judgment works.

⁷Godet, op. cit., p. 414.

⁸Merrill C. Tenney, The Gospel of Belief (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 91.

"This is the judgment," says John, "that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." "Judgment" here is krisis, which denotes the process, not krima, which means the sentence.⁹ John is not saying, "This is the sentence which God has decreed." He is saying, "This is the process of judgment." The ground of the condemnation mentioned in John 3:18 is given in this verse. Since the coming of Christ and His exhibition of human life in the light of the holiness and love of the Father, human sin is no longer the result of ignorance, but a deliberate choice and preference.¹⁰

John saw that judgment comes as a consequence of God's righteousness. It is the consequence of men's choosing to sin rather than not to sin, and that judgment has come because God has come in Christ and brought the light that shows up the shabbiness of the dark corners of the human heart.¹¹ When one is found in the spotlight of that great white Light which has come from God, he is

⁹Leon Morris, The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), p. 51.

¹⁰W. Robertson Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), p. 718.

¹¹Hoover Rupert, "What Jesus Thought About Judgment," Pulpit Digest, XLVII (February, 1967), p. 26.

aware of God's hostility toward all forms of evil and His antagonism for all sin. Because this Light has come, men are forced into a decision. The present is itself already an eschatological, final time of decision because in this present time men are compelled to a refusal or recognition of Christ. This decision determines beforehand a man's judgment for himself at the Last Judgment. The present judgment is a spiritual state rather than a temporal calamity, but it is very real.¹² This present judgment of the man who rejects the revelation that God has made in His Son does not exclude the thought of a final punishment in the world to come as will be noted in the next section.

Final judgment is already in operation for John. It is true that the impenitent man will one day meet God's judgment, but it is also true that he is "judged already." His preference for darkness over light has shut him up to darkness. He cannot have light because he has chosen darkness. His own action means that here and now he is under judgment which is terribly real, even though it is self-imposed.

The truth of the present process of judgment is expressed in other ways by John. For instance, the man who

¹²Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 147.

persists in sin can be spoken of as a slave (John 8:34). They sin under the illusion of having freedom. However, it is not mankind which is the master of sin, but rather it is sin which is the master of mankind. The picture is not pleasant. The lot of the slave to sin is not wholesome. A slave is one who cannot break free. The imagery is pungent in giving the portrayal of the present judgment of sin on the wicked.

Another implication of present punishment is to be seen in Jesus' admonition to the man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. After his healing, Jesus told him to "Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you" (John 5:14). Jesus may have been referring to a worse punishment beyond death, but it is also feasible to believe that Jesus was speaking of something worse than lameness, something of a worse present disaster.

A further example of Christ's direct relationship to judgment is evident in His words in John 9:39: "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." Here Jesus refers to the personal, existential crisis in which everyone who encounters Christ finds himself. It is characteristic of John's Gospel to emphasize that every person who is exposed to the light and rejects it places himself under judgment. The impenitent, unbelieving person,

therefore, lives out his days under condemnation. This passage has a note similar to Paul's emphasis in Romans 1:18-32. There the Gentiles rejected the revelation of God through nature and conscience until their whole nature became perverted. This perversion ended in a reprobate mind which could not distinguish good from evil or right from wrong. Likewise in the Synoptics, Jesus warned that a chronic rejection of light could lead to the "eternal sin" of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Here Jesus also emphasizes that those who prefer darkness to light will have darkness as their punishment.¹³

In John, then, a new concept is seen, or at least one which is emphasized more than in the other scriptures studied. While it is true in one sense that God passes the sentence of condemnation on sinners, it is just as true in another sense that men condemn themselves by their present rejection of Christ. Even as eternal life has begun in this world, even so, John regards the fact of judgment and condemnation a process which is already under way in this life.

¹³George Allen Turner and Julius R. Mantey, The Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 209.

II. GOD'S WRATH AS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL CERTAINTY

Because the major emphasis of John falls on the present age in his Gospel as well as in the Epistles, this does not mean that he excludes the eschatological wrath of God. Outside the Apocalypse, John focuses a large share of his writing on the meaning of "eternal life." However there are several passages that are very succinct in communicating the thought that John expected the wrath of God in its final sense. Present judgment is merely a prophecy of that which is to come. The wicked will experience the wrath of God (John 3:36). The ones who persist in evil will arise to a resurrection of judgment (John 5:29). In several passages the thought of "perish" or "death" is contrasted with the fact that believers will receive "eternal life" (John 3:16; 5:24; 8:51; 10:28).

In John 15:6, the apostle uses words which are reminiscent of those employed by Jesus when He spoke of eschatological punishment in the Synoptics. Here John records Jesus to say: "If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned." The familiar metaphor of something being thrown into the fire reminds one not only of the words of Jesus in the Synoptics, but also of John the Baptist in his announcement of the Messiah's coming (Matthew 3:10). Also, here too is "fire"

as the representative of judgment. The present of duration here takes its full force. Once the branches are cut, they are of no more value except to be burned.¹⁴

Here, the fearful consequences of not abiding in Christ are frankly set forth. It is a picture of final judgment consistent with the Synoptic view, although presented in a different context, and with a difference of language and imagery. Note has been made of the several references to the consequences of non-productivity in the natural realm, and its application to the spiritual (Matthew 13:30; Matthew 13:47-50). No New Testament writer denies that there will be eternal punishment for unbelievers, and all evidence points to the fact of an eternity of punishment for the wicked.¹⁵ The same sense of the finality of the punishment of the "unfruitful" is seen in this passage. They are "burned." Nothing more is said of their destiny, and it seems obvious, in the light of all the New Testament teaching, that nothing more is essential to be said.

In two places, John contrasts eternal life with "perishing" (apoleia). In John 3:6, it is not God's will that any should "perish" but that all should have "life

¹⁴Godet, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 296.

¹⁵Turner and Mantey, op. cit., p. 299.

everlasting." Again, in John 10:28, Christ will give eternal life to His sheep and they shall "never perish." The idea contained in the word "perish" is probably that of an ethical destruction, the loss of man's true destiny as a child of God. The stress of thought does not particularly lie upon its perpetuity, but upon its nature or content.¹⁶ The sense of finality involved in "perishing" has the implication of eternal consequence, however.

In John 5:24, eternal life is contrasted with "death." John is speaking of more than a physical death here, undoubtedly he is referring to the death which results from sin, the state from which it is the mission of the Son to raise men (5:21). There is a sharp contrast between the one who has entered into "eternal life," and the fate of one who will have to pass through the judgment.¹⁷

The theologians who wish to support the doctrine of conditional immortality make much of the fact that John portrays Jesus as making "eternal life" a gift to man. They would hold that only those who believe in Christ will be immortal. Several passages are pointed out as proof for this contention (John 8:52; 11:25; cf. 6:50, 51, 58). It is necessary to point out, however, that the passages

¹⁶George B. Stevens, The Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 323.

¹⁷Godet, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 474.

which assert the continuance of life for the believer do not necessarily infer that for unbelievers there is no continuance of being. There is no indication that John associated this inference with his doctrine of life, and the actual statements he makes, or reports, seem to show that for his mind, the perpetuity of the true life is incidental to its nature. The direct contrast to eternal life would not be extinction, but rather depravation, loss and moral destruction.¹⁸

After a brief summary of John's understanding of the judgment of God in his Gospel and Epistles, the study will move into the Apocalypse. Just as the life-giving work of the Son is presented chiefly in its present aspect, so John emphasizes the process of judgment which is continually taking place, more than he does the final judgment at the end of the present world. The future judgment appears to be regarded as the culmination of a process of judgment which is inseparable connected with the presence and effect of Divine light and truth in the world. The apparently contradictory statements of Jesus regarding His role in judgment may be solved if one realizes that the direct and primary purpose of Jesus' mission was to save and not to condemn the world. However, His revela-

¹⁸Stevens, op. cit., p. 326.

tion of the truth to men inevitably tests them and separates them according to their acceptance or rejection of it.¹⁹

Judgment is conceived as both present and subjective, and also as future and objective. In the former sense, judgment is not an arbitrary process, but is working out of an absolute law by which the unbelieving world is condemned. A man is justified or condemned according to his response to the light (John 3:19-21). This present self-executing judgment is coextensive with the entire human life. A man's character is the result of all this process in the past, and is, in fact, the verdict of God on man's conduct from first to last. His ultimate destiny has thus already been determined by his present condition.²⁰ From this standpoint, the Last Judgment will involve the recognition and manifestation of judgment already initiated in the present.

Some will assert that outside of the Apocalypse, John's writings are distinctly different from the other teachings of the New Testament. The assertion is that, while there are prominent elements of future judgment in the other writers, there are no significant passages in

¹⁹Ibid., p. 348.

²⁰Robert H. Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life, Second Edition (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), p. 424.

John's Gospel or Epistles.²¹ It may be agreed that there are only a few passages in the Gospel and the Epistles which directly speak of the future judgment. There are as many more, however, which clearly imply the idea of such a judgment. It is impossible to maintain by legitimate exegesis that the common eschatological conception of judgment is not present in John.²² It is equally true, however, that the emphasis of his thought rested upon the aspect of a continuous process of judgment coincident with the work of salvation. This is not incompatible to the rest of the New Testament, for we have noted in the discussion of all the other writers, that they too, have noted the reality of God's wrath as a present fact.

The fact of God's punishment of sin is self evident in these writings. It is a punishment which begins in this present life and continues into the future age. Wickedness is primarily stressed as unbelief, and unbelievers are to remain under the wrath of God, to stand judged, to be cast into fire, to perish, to remain in death and in darkness, and to die in their sins. John does not clearly state how long God's wrath will remain,

²¹ Stewart D. F. Salmond, The Christian Doctrine of a Future Life, Second Edition (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), p. 424.

²² Stevens, op. cit., p. 354.

nor what the nature of that wrath will be, but he does clearly affirm the fact of punishment for sin, both present and future.²³

Attention is now turned to eschatological thought of John as expressed in the Apocalypse. More than any other book of the New Testament, the Apocalypse looks toward the future, confident of the complete triumph of Christ, both in the contemporary situation and in the final events of the future.

The concept of the wrath of God is more prominent in the Book of Revelation than in any other part of the New Testament. Modern commentators have apologized for the un-Christian emphasis on Divine wrath they believe they find in Revelation, and believe John's conception of the wrath of God is essentially that of the Apocalyptists and must be somehow reconciled with the Christian revelation.²⁴

First, it is important to note that John uses orge six times of the Divine wrath in the Apocalypse, twice it is in connection with thumos (16:19; 19:15). He uses

²³William C. Richardson, "The New Testament Concept of the Destiny of the Wicked in Light of Inter-Biblical Thought" (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 209.

²⁴Hanson, op. cit., p. 159.

thumos of the Divine wrath eight times. His equation of thumos with Divinity is unique in the New Testament, except for one occurrence in Paul's writings. Orge, when related to God, is thought of, not so much as an emotion in terms of the outcome of an angry frame of mind, as it is the settled opposition of God to evil.²⁵ Most frequently orge is related to God's final reckoning with evil, although we have noted its expressions in the present.²⁶ Some exegetes make a distinction between orge and thumos by noting thumos to convey the meaning of a passionate outburst against evil. In the Apocalypse, however, it is possible to interpret thumos in much the same sense as orge, with a possible intensification of the idea of God's wrath.²⁷

As one studies John's presentation of God's wrath, it is noted that he does not exclusively limit himself to a purely eschatological wrath. He sees God's wrath as active in history as well as in the eschatological "Day of wrath." The reality of Divine punishment for sin in the present is to be seen in the letters to the seven churches.

²⁵ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 582.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 366.

The church at Ephesus would have its "lamp-stand" removed if they did not repent (2:5). The church at Pergamum was urged to repent. If they did not repent, Christ would come and "war against them with the sword of my mouth" (2:16). The wicked Jezebel was to be thrown into a sickbed, her followers thrown into a great tribulation, and her children struck dead unless she repented of her immorality (2:21-23). Because the church of Laodicea was neither "cold nor hot," they were to be spewn out of God's mouth (3:16). The reality of God's wrath is to be seen in the present.

The greater portion of the Apocalypse, however, is definitely given to the subject of eschatological wrath. It is difficult to agree with A. T. Hanson that most of John's references to Divine wrath refer to a process of wrath which men bring upon themselves in history.²⁸ There is a significant portion given to the present aspects of wrath. Specific sins are denounced and there is an emphasis on the consequences of failure to repent. (9:20ff). John looks forward with certainty to the judgment of God, when all will be suitably recompensed for their ill deeds. This is vividly clear in several passages. In Revelation 6:12-17, for instance, the picture of a great disaster is portrayed in an eschatological setting.

²⁸Hanson, op. cit., p. 160.

Men will call to the mountains and rocks saying:

Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it? (Rev. 6:16-17).

There is a feeling of terror in this passage. The Lamb's wrath is seen here with great intensity.²⁹ This is very similar to Nahum 1:6:

Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken asunder by him.

As John saw it, the end time was to be a time of universal terror. No one will be exempt from the judgment of God. This passage lays it down that the whole fabric of human society from top to bottom is under the judgment and fear of God.³⁰ One does not readily associate wrath with the Lamb, for the Lamb normally stands for gentleness and kindness. But here, wrath is associated with the figure that generally represents love. For John, there can be no escape from the consequences of one's sin.³¹

The holy Lamb of God is pictured as gathering the vintage of the earth, through His ministering angels, and

²⁹Isbon T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), p. 530.

³⁰William Barclay, The Revelation of John, Second Edition, Vol. II (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 20.

³¹Morris, The Cross in the New Testament, p. 362.

casting it into the winepress, the great winepress of the wrath of God (Rev. 14:9). It is he, the Word of God, who treads this winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God (Rev. 19:13; 15-16). And it is He 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 be punished for their sins, for they shall,

Drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is poured unmixed into the cup of his anger and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb (Rev. 14:10).

It is thus with an unmistakable manner that the final and complete effusion of God's wrath is symbolized.³²

Having looked at the concept of God's wrath in the Apocalypse, study is now made of some of the key words John uses to describe the terrible reality of God's eschatological wrath.

Death and Hades

Several times these two words are linked together in the Apocalypse. The words are noted in the following passages: Revelation 1:18; 6:8; and 20:13, 14. In

³²R. V. G. Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God (London: The Tyndale Press, 1951), p. 48.

Revelation 1:18, the reference has to do with Christ's power over the realm of death and Hades. Hades taken by some to be the equivalent of "death," or the realm of the dead.³³ However, it is reading something in to the meaning of this passage if one takes it to mean anything more than the fact that Jesus has authority over death and Hades, whatever that may involve.³⁴

The passage in Revelation 20:13-15, gives greater insight into the fuller meaning of "death and Hades." Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, after all are judged according to their deeds. Death and Hades are here personified and doomed to punishment. This is probably a conception due to the connection thought to exist between death and sin.³⁵ However, John sees "death" in this setting as something more than physical death, since the preceding verse indicates that Death, gave up the dead. Those who have already undergone the first death are held captive in the sense of an even greater Death.³⁶

³³George A. Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. XII (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), pp. 377-78.

³⁴Barclay, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 65.

³⁵Beckwith, op. cit., p. 749.

³⁶R. H. Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, Vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 199.

The intermediate place of detention is done away with by its being cast into the lake of fire.

John does not suggest the condition of those who are held in the grips of Death and Hades. However, since Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, the implication is that they serve no useful purpose after the Last Judgment.

Destroy

In Revelation 11:18, John states:

The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and the saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.

At the time of the Last Judgment, the hostile powers would be finally and ultimately defeated.³⁷ God will fulfill His covenant in giving His servants their reward and bring His wrath in destruction of the destroyers.³⁸ This is a general description of the fate of the wicked on the great Day of Judgment.

Lake of Fire

One of the specific expressions to describe the final fate of the wicked is the phrase, "lake of fire." Here is

³⁷Barclay, op. cit., p. 89.

³⁸Beckwith, op. cit., p. 611.

where the beast and the false prophet are to be thrown at last (19:20). Also, the devil is said to be thrown into the lake of fire (20:10). John intends to teach that the forces which have inspired mankind with false views of life and taught antagonism to God will be prevented from causing further trouble by being completely subjugated.³⁹

In addition to the forces of wickedness being thrown into the lake of fire, "if anyone's name was not found in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (20:15). Some of those whose names will not be found in the Lamb's book of life are cited in 21:8:

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Here is the list of those who have disfranchised themselves from the Kingdom of God and gone over into the Kingdom of outer darkness. The sins have a wide range. This is a list of sins of the character, which steadily widens from the faithless to the whole body of the impure.⁴⁰

Twice the lake of fire is also called the "second death," once in 20:14 and once in 21:8. The fate of the

³⁹Henry B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, Third Edition (London: Macmillan and Company, 1911), p. 270.

⁴⁰Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, Vol. II, p. 217.

wicked is such that it can only be described as the "second death." The second death is the death of the soul, as the first is the death of the body. It is not the annihilation, but the endless torment of the wicked that is meant here.⁴¹

Aspects of the Second Death

Exclusion. John gives us graphic imagery to express the fate of the wicked. One of the most vivid is his portrayal of the exclusion of the wicked from the new heaven and new earth. The undesirable wicked of humanity will be left outside the blessedness and joys of the redeemed (21:27; 22:15). This agrees with the teaching of Jesus who told the scribes and Pharisees that they would find themselves outside the Kingdom.

Torment. The fate of the devil, the beast and the false prophet is described as being "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (20:10). Although this same expression is not directly applied to the wicked who are cast into the lake of fire along with the devil, it seems logical to believe that the wicked will share in the same torment as the devil, because they will be in the same place. This idea is implied in Revelation 14:10-11, where mention is made of the

⁴¹Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life, p. 411.

fate of those who worship the beast. If anyone worships the beast he is to be the recipient of God's wrath. John describes his fate as follows:

He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name (Rev. 14:10-11).

Warning is given to those who fail in the time of trial. The doom of the apostate is given in pictures of the most terrible judgment that ever fell on this earth--the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Apocalypse states the doom of the apostate in the most terrible terms which the story and the prophecy of Scripture can provide.⁴² It is obvious that fire of some nature is understood to be involved in the infliction of this torment, and that the fiery torment is understood to last eternally. It is difficult to steer away from the idea of conscious suffering in these passages. There is nothing to indicate that there is cessation of existence for the wicked in John's understanding of the Second Death.

Forever and Ever. The phrase, "forever and ever," appears two times in the Apocalypse. In both instances,

⁴²Barclay, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 148.

Revelation 14:11 and 20:10, it relates directly to the punishment of wickedness. In the 14:11 passage the phrase is in reference to the worshippers of the beast. "The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever." In the second passage, Revelation 20:10, the devil, the beast and the false prophet will be "tormented day and night forever and ever." There can be no doubt that both these passages refer to the involuntary endurance of ceaseless torment.⁴³ In both instances the fact of an eternity of punishment is clear. Those who worship the beast will be tormented with fire and brimstone eternally. The final lot of the wicked must involve the same fate. It is the death that is beyond all other death. It means existence without the resurrection of life and the crown of life, the existence that is eternal loss and dying.⁴⁴

It has been seen that God's wrath is an integral part of the Johannine writings. It is treated in both its present and eschatological aspects by the Apostle. In the Gospel and Epistles of John the description of judgment is primarily given in a present sense. John has his own kind of "realized

⁴³Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Revelation of St. John, Vol. II, p. 18.

⁴⁴Salmond, op. cit., pp. 343-344.

eschatology" in these writings.⁴⁵ However, it is also noted that the judging process is not limited to this world, but has its culmination in a final, irreversible judgment. The present process of judgment is merely a foretaste of that which is to come. The Fourth Gospel depicts a tragedy. In Shakespeare's tragedies Macbeth and Lear, the two kings are judged already in the first part by what they are, but this does not preclude a final act. The last act is only sequel, yet it is climax. John's message, through Jesus, is "You are being judged now by what you do with Christ." All else is sequel, yet the sequel is the climax. Although John emphasizes this concept in a different way than the other New Testament writers, the principle is still the same. God's wrath is present in both its present and future aspects in each of the writers studied. Present judgment and wrath is used to illustrate and exemplify the final "day of wrath."

In the Apocalypse of John the idea of judgment is everywhere. There is also in this book the idea of both present and future wrath. In the first part of the book (Rev. 1-3), Christ judges several churches in a present, historical situation. In the second and longer part (Rev. 4-22), it is generally assumed that already men are divided

⁴⁵c. Ryder Smith, The Bible Doctrine of the Hereafter (London: The Epworth Press, 1958), p. 209.

into saints and sinners, and the chief idea under "judge" is to inflict punishment. As the book proceeds, the idea of God's wrath being expressed in punishment looms larger and larger. The reality of future unending punishment, the overthrow of all that is sinful, and the establishment of the undisputed reign of the Lamb in the universe is not a debatable point. The day of judgment will be a day of punishment for some and a day of vindication for others.⁴⁶

Although John points to the fact of the "process" of God's wrath in history, he does not limit it to an impersonal process void of any eschatological certainty. A. T. Hanson concludes that the view of the Apocalypse is that God's wrath is never purely eschatological, though it often looks towards the end of the process.⁴⁷ This is difficult to maintain in the face of the Scriptural evidence. He finds it necessary to view Revelation 22:18-19 as completely incongruous with the conception of wrath to be noted in the rest of the book.⁴⁸

It is necessary to believe that John sees God's wrath as something more than a process of nature. God is definitely involved. The very fact of the frequency of the phrase "wrath of God" should indicate that God is personally involved

⁴⁶W. Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXVIII (July, 1966), p. 310.

⁴⁷Hanson, op. cit., p. 178.

⁴⁸Ibid.

in the punishment of the wicked.

John sees the wicked to face future punishment involves confinement in the lake of fire, exclusion from the presence of God and torment forever and ever. The fact, the nature and the duration of future retribution are all vividly indicated in his teachings. Sin is viewed with great seriousness and is to be dealt with in time, but most severely and irrevocably in eternity.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this study an attempt has been made to inductively study the New Testament in order to discover the certainty of God's wrath, along with its related significance for theology. After studying the evidence about wrath in these major writings of the New Testament, an attempt needs to be made to get a perspective of the whole.

It is clearly obvious that any contention that God's wrath is not an integral part of the New Testament is based on something other than the facts of scripture. Unless one wishes to delete great portions of the New Testament, he must face the reality of God's wrath.

God's wrath is seen in the first proclamation of the Messiah's coming by John the Baptist, and fiercely portrayed by John the Apostle in the closing book of the New Testament, the Apocalypse. There is a certain continuity from John the Baptist, through all the writers to the New Testament right through to the closing chapter of the Bible. Jesus is very explicit in His teachings of God's present wrath as well as His future wrath, executed in punishment upon all who persist in sin. Peter picks up the same theme, as do Paul and John and express their understanding of God's wrath in the same basic pattern of expression. Peter and John are especially

vivid in their portrayal, while Paul is more didactic in expressing his understanding. There can be no denial that God's wrath is plainly evident in these major personalities of the New Testament.

There is an agreement among the major personalities of the New Testament as to emphasis on both the present as well as the eschatological aspects of God's wrath. It is also noted that each of the writers uses the principle of depicting eschatological judgment in the face of the present aspects of God's wrath. Present punishment is used to illustrate the fact of future punishment. Present manifestation of wrath are tokens of the final eschatological "day of wrath." Historic examples of past punishment in the Old Testament are frequently used to depict future punishment. The drastic punishment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as the judgments of God upon the Children of Israel serve as popular pictures of past judgment used to exemplify the certainty of future eschatological punishment.

In the New Testament wrath is most frequently the "wrath of God." Jesus and John the Baptist both included this in their proclamation. The Gospels, Paul and Revelation give prominence to it. It is quite wrong to think of it as an Old Testament concept. Wrath is directed against man's insolent defiance of God or indifference to His will. God's wrath is just, it is never seen to be capricious. Rather,

it is calculating and deliberate. It is never an automatic process acting independently of God. It is God's "personal" involvement in confronting sin with His righteousness.¹

This wrath is not understood to be a rage, but rather a holy wrath that is the inevitable result of the confrontation between righteousness and sin.²

The New Testament has no hesitation in attributing emotions to God. Peace, love, gladness and pleasure are to be found in Him. It is frequently urged that, while it is true that the New Testament attributes emotions to God, it differs in not attributing to Him the emotion of anger. Albrecht Ritschl maintained that the only New Testament use of Divine anger is eschatological.³ It is certain that eschatology occupied a large place in the teaching of Jesus, and that He used Old Testament figures for describing the terrors of the Judgment. The preaching of the Apostles is full of the terror of the Lord. In the Apocalypse of St. John the final outpouring of God's wrath weighs upon the soul with an awful sense of doom. The usage of wrath in an

¹Editorial, "Notes of Recent Exposition," Expository Times, LXXXVI (March 1965), pp. 170-171.

²William Newton Clarke, The Christian Doctrine of God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 186.

³T. B. Kilpatrick, "Anger (Wrath) of God," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925), p. 478.

eschatological sense is not exclusive, however. It is to be observed that, while feelings of terror are aroused by references to the ultimate Judgment and its accompanying punishment, a deep awe is also aroused by the contemplation of Judgment as a present and continuous fact. It is possible to deny this doctrine, but it is impossible to deny that the New Testament writers held this doctrine of God's wrath.⁴ The wrath of God is inseparable from the Gospel to be found in its pages.

The Scriptures represent all punishment of individual transgressors and all manifestations of God's vindicatory justice in the history of nations as acts or processes of judgment. However, they also intimate that these temporal judgments are only partial and imperfect and that they are therefore to be concluded with a final and complete vindication of God's righteousness.⁵ God will requite everybody in accordance with his deeds. By their fruits they shall be known and by their fruits they shall be judged. There will be degrees of punishment according to the degree of obedience. Material punishments are temporary, while spiritual punishments

⁴Ibid., p. 479.

⁵Augustus H. Strong, Systematic Theology (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1907), p. 1023.

are permanent.⁶

As to future punishment as a manifestation of God's wrath, several conclusions may be noted. First, it must be said that the New Testament is very explicit on this subject. Also, it is important to recognize that the New Testament supports one main view on the destiny of the wicked, the view of eternal retribution. Contrary to the opinion of some, the New Testament gives no uncertain sound about this all important matter.⁷ The moral principles of just retribution for sin finds its clearest and most logical expression in the New Testament. Sin is dealt with both in this life and in the life to come. Those who persist in their stubborn rebellion will meet with certain punishment in the future. Every sin and disobedience will receive a just recompense.

In addition to the assertion of the fact of future punishment, the New Testament also indicates something of its nature. It is to involve separation from God. It will be exclusion from the presence of the One by whom we were created, for whose service we were made, and outside of whom there is

⁶Vahan H. Vartanian, "The Concepts of Reward and Punishment in the Koran in their Relation to Old Testament and New Testament Concepts" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Hartford Seminary, 1938), p. 63.

⁷Joe Belcastro, "A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of Eternal Hell" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Seminary, 1942), p. 15.

nothing for us but utter futility and hopeless frustration.⁸ The wicked will be cast into "outer darkness." It will be a state of deep distress and anguish. The suffering will be conscious as the teaching of Jesus indicates. It will be a place of weeping, wailing, or gnashing of teeth.⁹ It is a place of death and destruction. The descriptive terminology of "fire," "bottomless pit," "worm that does not die," and "wrath," all indicate something of the nature of the fate of the wicked after the Last Judgment. Of all the ideas expressed by the New Testament as to the precise nature of the punishment of the wicked, the most familiar is that of "fire." The punishment will be a fiery punishment. The wrath will be a fiery wrath.¹⁰

As to the duration of future punishment for the wicked, where they speak, the New Testament writers state that it is eternal. There is nothing substantial to suggest that the wicked are either annihilated after the judgment, nor that they will be restored into the Kingdom of God. On the contrary, there is strong terminology to indicate the eternal

⁸Roger Nicole, "Punishment of the Wicked," Christianity Today, II (June 9, 1958), p. 13.

⁹Thomas N. Ralston, Elements of Divinity, Edited by T. O. Summers (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1924), p. 521.

¹⁰William C. Richardson, "The New Testament Concept of the Destiny of the Wicked in Light of Inter-Biblical Thought" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 266.

punishment of sinners.

The place of the future punishment of the wicked is called Gehenna, the lake of fire, and the furnace of fire. It is in Gehenna, the lake of fire, that the Divine revelation draws the curtain on the fate of the wicked. As far as the New Testament record is concerned, there is no ray of hope gleaming from beyond the eternal fire.

It is no accident that the current discussion about universalism is concentrated in the area of the preaching of the Gospel. Here is the point the Church must know if it has understood her command. Its command is not to soften the Gospel into a communique informing the world that everything is going to come out alright in the end. As G. C. Berkouwer says, "Its command is to let the voice of the Cross resound through the world with its summons to faith and repentance."¹¹ It is to be feared that the Church centers its message in such a fashion that it ends up with a "love monism."¹² The love of God is distorted and made superficial when it is divorced from the wrath of God. There is no Scriptural basis for believing that God's wrath is subservient to His love with the result that hell is made

¹¹G. C. Berkouwer, "Universalism," Christianity Today, I (May 13, 1957), p. 6.

¹²K. Koyama, "Wrath of God versus Thai Theologica Gloriam," South East Asia Journal of Theology, V (July, 1963), p. 19.

redemptive. The doctrine that God's moral excellence demands punishment cannot be easily overlooked in the face of the Biblical evidence.

One might easily conclude that the wrath of God is a fiction in many American pulpits today. There is no lively sense of God's anger against sin and sinners in many places.¹³ If, however, one is to believe in the Biblical God at all, then one must take seriously His active work against sin as expressed in His wrath. If this cannot be accepted there is no hope, for how can there be ~~no~~ hope if there is no justice? The Bible makes it adequately clear that the force working for justice, while based in love, has a severe and active force against that which is the negation of love.¹⁴ In "sentimentalizing" the Biblical God, theologians have too frequently dealt with the positive aspects of the Good News exclusively. Certainly it is to be admitted, that some preachers and theologians of the past seemed to take sadistic pleasure in speaking of the reality of God's wrath. On the other hand, the past misuse of a Biblical doctrine must not be permitted to negate its significance for the modern day. The Bible presents a two-pronged message which culminates

¹³Frank E. Gaebelin, (ed.), A Christianity Today Reader (New York: Meridith Press, 1966), p. 117.

¹⁴R. H. Swartzback, "A Biblical Study of the Word 'Vengeance,'" Interpretation VI (October, 1952), p. 456.

either in joy or sorrow, terror or comfort, life or death, light or darkness. This emphasis must not be overlooked.

It is evident that if one is to believe God's Word is true, he must also hold to the Biblical doctrine of the wrath of God. C. H. Dodd may shrug off the wrath of God as an "archaic phrase," but until sin becomes "archaic" the Bible indicates that the doctrine of God's wrath will continue to be intensely relevant to man.¹⁵

¹⁵W. E. McCumber, "God's Wrath in the New Testament," Christianity Today, III (January 19, 1959), p. 18.

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