

Romans and the Wrath of God

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Time of Wrath and Persecution

Paul wrote to the Romans about AD59 as persecution was increasing.

[The persecution started among Jews against Jews with the stoning of Stephen in Acts. And most often the persecution was of fellow countrymen against the converts among them -- see 1or2Thes for an example. Also see Rev 2 or 3 that showed them enduring.

Some of this was also the government against Believers (who were just another sect of Jews in the perception of people at that time, but maybe worse treated sect). This appears to be the primary persecution in Rome -- the persecution of Rom 5:1-12 and of Rom 8:20 ff. also highlighted by Rom 16:20

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Rom 1 and 2 show the mindset of wrath (Rom 1:18 God's wrath), also described as the judgment of God (Rom 2:8) and the day when God shall judge (Rom 2:16)

[Note that this is different from the judgment that normally happens when a man dies. The verse of that sort says that it is appointment once for a man to die and then comes judgment.

The normal judgment -- a judgment even held equal in parallel with this judgment of the day of wrath yet held in contradiction or tension to the day of wrath judgment -- is apparently accomplished the day each man dies. So why do Christians also expect a future judgment of the same people???

This is an area that needs more exploration in conjunction with the study on concepts of Hell.

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Based on the content of the letter to the Romans, the expectation of wrath and judgment was very high at that moment. It would seem that the expectation was properly drawn from the words of John the Baptist (Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Who told you to flee from the wrath to come?) and from Jesus such as in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24).

Consequence of Wrath

The reason that the expectation was high was that they knew that this was the era of fulfillment. Even more though they felt the pressures of the time. These were the pressures that were driving the church in Rome into madness. This madness was described by Jesus regarding the leaders among Christians (The steward set over the house while the master is away --- the drinking and drunkenness and

beating of the servants -- these are consequences of the troubled times. And Jesus asked "will the Son of Man find those of faith when He comes?")

How bad was the pressure upon believers? Nero would blame the burning of Rome upon the Christians.

The action of the government against believers was described in Dan 7 where the last horn was described as being at war with the saints.

(Dan 7:7-9 shows the beast/animal --representing a ruler probably -- speaking great things against God and then God taking judgment. Historically this boasting would seem to line up well with the claims of deity that first were made upon the dead rulers but then was being attributed to rulers while living.

This ruler worship logically followed from the ancestor worship that became known as the Roman and Greek Mythology. The theory that this culture/literature was ancestor worship is presented in "The Parthenon Code" which also shows that these folk were glorifying the serpent and glorifying the descendants of Cain.)

Dan 7:20-21 shows that the horn made war with the saints. Then God was bringing judgment in favor of the saints (vs 22).

[This war would logically represent the deception by Satan against Christians. This same sort of deception is slated at the end of the 1000s years as shown in Rev 20 when the armies encircle the Christians. The deception appears to be within God plan and the potential logic of this plan is that certain bad trends, evil plots, would be exposed and then destroyed.
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Dan 7 would appear, by my rough understanding of some ideas in Revelation, to correspond with the inquiries of the saints when their blood would be avenged.

Hence, if Dan 7 and Revelation were largely being fulfilled, there was great pressure upon the Christians.

Wrath as fulfillment of Prophecy

[This section was initially to show that the Roman believers were encountering this time of wrath. Then the focus, as this section was written, shifted to show the evidence the wrath was upon that generation.]

The wrath was toward a fulfillment of the conflict of Gen 3:15.

Jesus was now here, the prophesied One. A change, even a conflict, should be expected. The expectation of this conflict is seen in the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4 where it appears

1) that the temptation of the woman is now being undone in Christ Jesus, who refuses and refutes the temptations.

2) Satan is trying to prevent the occurrence of Christ's reign -- by tempting Jesus to take the kingdoms as a gift from Satan.

Even Rom 16:20 showed that the prophecy of Gen 3:15 was being fulfilled. And the consequence of such fulfillment is that the Roman believers would have some relief from the persecution by the government. Again the theme of justice and vengeance, as seen in Revelation, also appeared in Romans.

Effect of Wrath

When Romans is seen as a letter written in response to the time of wrath, then the problems among the Roman believers can be seen to arise from the tensions.

The audience of Paul's letter were under great pressures and fears. There could even be the questioning whether Christ really changed them and had given them eternal life. (This is where the question "will Jesus find faith when He comes?" arises.)

The judgments and separation (separation of wicked from righteous) are either mildly or strongly represented in Matt 13 judgments and likewise in the Dan 12:2. The reservation here is with respect to the falling away of incidental believers. Were these incidental believers under the category of being wicked? And by "incidental believers" the idea is that these were not true believers and hence fell away under pressure.

The apostasy is descriptive of this time of great pressure.

Seed of the Serpent

One important point for those who don't even like this topic are that the seed of the serpent was a concept revealed in Gen 3:15 so that God has ascribed importance to the idea. Then Romans 16:20 showed that the fulfillment was close.

The doctrine applied here is not to speak against Jews in general but only is to be seen as a description of the events of that time period.

The other interpretation is that the wicked were distinctly those who held the doctrine of the Pharisees over and against the message of the gospel. Such conflict again points to the prophecy of Gen 3:15 where the seed of the serpent

The similarity (and proof of connection) between Gen 3:15 and the time of Christ is investigated in some other writings. But Christ Jesus was seen to make new creatures of us and this new creation parallels the original creation. Adam was seen as father of the first creation while Jesus was seen as father of the new creation. Adam was tempted (through the woman) and Jesus was tempted.

Jesus then is the seed of the woman, having not even been a true son of Joseph. Jesus is logically the one who crushed or bruised the serpent's head (Rom 16:20,

John 12:31). But in this viewpoint it must be seen that the "god of this world" was soon being taken out of that position, at least in the sense that Satan no longer would be exercising undo influence over the politics of the world and would be losing his opportunity (for a period of time) to deceive the nations into antagonism against the true believers.

So Jesus was this seed of woman, only of woman and not of man. This was alluding to or declaring of the virgin birth. Yet even without the idea of the virgin birth, Gen 3:15 obviously spoke of Christ Jesus and the time of repairing the problem of the fall of man.

Now if Jesus was the seed of woman then who was the seed of the serpent?

This was described in John 8:44 "you are of your father the devil." And it requires repeated disclaimer that this was not all Jews of all time but was only of a generation, a wicked and perverse generation (Mat 17:17, Luke 9:41, Acts 2:40). [It doesn't even seem that the "perverse generation" applied merely to the Jews. The gospel was to be preached to the whole Roman Empire yet the Gentiles too were becoming more and more perverse. Maybe this was reflected when the woman asked for the head of John the Baptist -- though such action may have been too typical of all rulers --such that this incident over John the Baptist may only be status quo, nothing of great insight or significance as regards rulers and signs of times.]

The wrath was over Jews but was also over the world. Matt 24:30-31 connects with Isaiah 13 which spoke of God punishing the world. And this punishment apparently was for the evils of the world, the Gentile people and their governments. This punishment is what is reflected in Dan 2 destruction of the statue and Dan 7 regarding the judgment against the beast.

Now back to the ideas of Gen 3:15...

It is logical that there was the confrontation between Jesus and Satan. It is reasonable that this conflict came to a peak during the time of Jesus. I would also extend this to the first century since also in Rom 16:20 it can be seen that conflict hadn't been finalized.

Even in John the Baptist's preaching "oh brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3:7), the element of them being seed of the serpent becomes apparent.

Wheat and Tares Parable

What becomes of great interest at this moment is the similarity of Gen 3:15 with Matt 13 parable of the Wheat and Tares.

The description of the conflict of the seed in Gen 3:15 shows a similarity to the

conflict of the sower and the enemy. There was the good seed planted by Jesus and there was the bad seed planted by Satan.

Jesus having preached and prepared disciples then represented the good seed. Jesus was the specific person to sow this seed. Satan then was specifically seen to sow bad seed, even where the word "seed" refers to doctrine but also to the people born of his ideas, of this bad doctrine.

Additional Analysis of the seed...

The seed of the serpent was not originally an obvious allusion to people in the first century, but upon inspection of ideas the seed was multiple people born of the ideas of the devil (John 8:44).

The seed of woman actually points to only to Christ Jesus. Yet the Parable of the Wheat and Tares does point more to the first century disciples as seed of the seed of woman. At first this might seem as a drawback, but in reality the problem is ameliorated by the fact that the children of Christ (His seed) are actually in Christ -- where Christ is the vine and the believers are the branches.

Behavior Under the Wrath

The behavior of the believers in Rome were reflective of the expectation of this wrath.

These believers (including by extension only half believers who then would fall away) were becoming focused on the fleshly self-centered behavior of the mentality "be merry today for tomorrow we die." Of course this thought was contradictory to the teaching of Christ but also was what anyone under this pressure would be drawn to think.

This fleshly behavior was resulting in divisions, boastings, fears and sins (as meaning focusing on fleshly desires). At the same time, the bad reputation of Jews as created by the mere edict of evicting Jews from Rome (since people tend to assume that their own rulers are making truth based actions against "enemies" and hence the people will assume that the Jews must have been bad if they were evicted) permeated the church at Rome too.

The fleshly mindset promoted selfish behavior and judging too. All these actions work hand in hand and all these actions were addressed in the letter to the Roman believers. A correlated pattern of behavior was truly being described in the text of this letter.

So people in the Church were affected by the pressures. But indeed all peoples were. The Gentile believers were persecuted by their fellow countrymen (applying this as implying a continuity of race and culture but also including anyone around them). (1Thes 2:14)

There was also persecution by non-believing Jews against believers, whether

Jewish or Gentile.

[There may have been an inclination or purpose in the last verses of Romans 2 where Paul could be trying to promote peace between believing Jews and the believing Gentiles. The idea here is that Paul was showing that there were **true Jews** who were those who believed and that therefore the Gentiles should accept these true Jews even if the Gentile believers were persecuted by the non-believing Jews.]

This persecution was indicated but not really emphasized by Paul in Romans. The most blatant mention comes after Paul has tried to promote a benevolent attitude of Roman Gentile believers toward Jews (i.e. Paul's main purpose in chapters 9 to 11). Then in Rom 11:28 Paul actually mentioned that Jews (going to a generalized concept now) were enemies of the gospel at that time.

The only moments that Paul mentioned this before were in mild phrases. "Are they better than us?" (Rom 3:9 -- but the proof of this translation requires much discussion of the context.) and in the preceding verses showing that Jews were making accusations that followers of Jesus were doing evil (Rom 3:5).

Despite the Roman believers having some real issues against non-believing Jews, Paul was writing to the Roman believers both for reconciliation with believing Jews and for the respectful attitude toward Jews in general. The solution was in the idea that the behavior of these Romans was improper to someone who has been raised with Christ and who has the hope of the promise (such as seen in Rom 4:13 --with preference given to the translation by Douglas Moo on this verse that shows the promise is to all believers) such that the Romans could focus again on the promise and the faith so that they aren't acting on their own boasting and fleshly behavior.

Solution to the Romans Problem

In a quick overview of this idea, it can be seen that Paul described different effects of the approaching wrath of God on the people. The effects weren't a consequence of the wrath but were the precursors and the behaviors that were building among the people who would reach the point where God properly took out His wrath.

One effect was that of boasting as implied in Rom 3:27 (where the question implied the problem in the Roman church). So Paul went into the argument why Abraham also couldn't boast.

Another element was the fear that the Roman believers felt, seeing themselves maybe as outcasts and secondary to the Jews, the behavior that cause the reactionary behavior of boasting, just as a young brother might do in competition with his older brother. Paul met this fear by showing them as truly having Abraham as their father through faith and then with the believers sharing in the promise.

With each symptom being offered a cure, Paul then was able to address and try to repair the problem of the attitude of the Romans toward the Jews in chapters 9 to 11.

Along with the resolution of the boasting problem, the fears of the Romans should have decreased as a result of the letter. Yet on the otherhand, we can't simply assume that since Paul wrote the letter and sent it that the problem was resolved. But in study of the epistle, it at least can be seen what Paul was seeking to do.

Finally...

This article was first about Romans and then shifted to discussion of the wrath. But as far as the epistles discuss, the letter to the Romans went furthest into discussion of the wrath. The two topics, that of the meaning of Romans and that of the wrath of God, are hard to separate.

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