

FEARING THE ANGRY GOD

Numbers 16:32-35, 2 Kings 1:10-13, Hebrews 10:31

By Raymond White

I get weary of people saying, “Fearing God doesn’t mean be afraid of him, it only means to respect him.” I’m sorry, but that’s baloney. Fearing God means to be terrified of him and what he can do to you.

Isaiah 8:12 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. :13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

This verse is saying, don’t be afraid of the enemy army with their swords and spears which can kill you, but instead be afraid of God. So, whatever “fearing God” means, it means the same thing as “fearing the enemy” and I don’t think that means mere respect, it means what it says: dread.

We prefer to think of God as always loving and kind, a cosmic teddy bear. But that’s only one side of him. There’s another side of him, a dark side, and we should respond to his demands, not just from love and respect, but also from fear. An incorrigible child can push a parent only so far before the parent, otherwise loving and kind, will react violently with a spanking or worse.

I know that most Christians don’t like this *negative* message, but dang it, it’s what the bible says. So let’s take an honest look at the Bible and see the dark side of God, what he’s like when he gets really angry. Read on, if you dare.

[1] NADAB AND ABIHU

Leviticus 10:1 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron ...offered strange fire before the LORD which he commanded them not. :2 And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

Here God kills his own priests because somehow they did a sacrifice wrong.

When you approach God, you’d better be sanctified or you’re in trouble. “Fear God” do not mean “to respect,” they mean to “fear God,” to be afraid, terrified of what God can and might do to you. Fear is warranted. Your atoning sacrifice had better have worked. For Nadab and Abihu, their sacrifice didn’t sanctify them because they did it wrong. With Christ we *come boldly to the throne of God*. But some think they have Christ as their protector and they don’t. And one day they will learn the hard way, as did Nadab and Abihu, who thought they were protected. Don’t claim Christ and offer him *strange fire*, a disobedient life. It doesn’t work. It is very dangerous to mess with God.

[2] THE CAMP

Numbers 11:1 And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

So when you say, “to fear God simply means to respect him,” are you sure? I think “to fear God” means just that, to be afraid of him: you’d better stay on his good side or else. Don’t believe me? Ask the people of Sodom. Ask Noah’s contemporaries.

[3] BLASPHEMY

Leviticus 24:10 And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel: and this son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp; [he got in a fight] :11 And the Israelitish woman’s son blasphemed the name of the LORD, [he cursed the guy out and used God’s name] :13 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, :14 Let all the congregation stone him. :16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death.

Is this too harsh? Three points here: (1) In Israel, blaspheming the name of God was an act of sedition, not merely taking liberties with a religion. God is creating a new nation based on new laws and you can’t just ignore the laws with impunity. (2) God holds his name in high regard and protects it jealously. There are lots of offensive words that men use. But whether you are in the habit of swearing or not, the words that you ought never to use are words that blaspheme God. God will one day hold us to harsh account for how we use his name. (3) Don’t get in God’s gun sights on any account. “Fear” is the operative word, not merely respect. He has the right to destroy, the power to destroy, and the willingness to destroy. Don’t mess with God.

[4] SABBATH

Numbers 15:32 They found a man that gathered sticks on the sabbath day. :35 And the LORD said to Moses, The man shall surely be put to death.

Just for braking the Sabbath.

[5] KORAH

Numbers 16:32 And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. :35 And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

This is a heavy price to pay for a little sedition. Korah was a Levite, and he wanted equal station with Moses. Moses pled with Korah, “You’re a Levite. Be happy with that high station that you already have.” But Korah wanted more. As a result, God killed him and a lot of other people as well.

Numbers 16:49 Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah.

These were not the instigators who were already dead. These were the people who objected to God killing the instigators. They had actually survived then returned to complain which caused their own deaths. They just seemed bent on self-destruction. How stupid can you get?

People argue with God about what's fair. Why should I have to pay such a heavy price for such a trivial sin? Why should God curse me with AIDS for such a trivial thing as being homosexual? Why should God curse me with lung cancer for such a trivial thing as smoking? It's unfair and God is unfair. That's the complaint.

Well, they're wrong. It is not unfair because God telegraphed the laws of cause and effect to us well in advance. "If you do this, that will happen." So if you do this, you cannot cry foul when that happens. If you contract AIDS, you have your own stupid fault to blame, you cannot blame God for having arranged the world in such a way to have singled you out for destruction. Gravity is what it is. You know that. If you jump off a high building you will die. Don't blame God because he created gravity. You know the rules. If you chose to violate them against common sense regardless of the peril, that puts *you* at fault, not God.

Deuteronomy 7:21 a mighty God and terrible.

[6] GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

Joshua 22:20 Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? And that man perished not alone in his iniquity.

"Not alone" means he was guilty and we paid a horrible price. The consequences of his sin spilled over onto us.

That's true. That's what happened. Achan kept the accursed thing and so Israel lost its next battle. Good soldiers, innocent of any wrong doing, died. Innocent people do pay the price of other people's misdeeds. A man drives drunk and he survives the crash that kills a mom and dad and their three children.

Joshua 22:31 ...because ye have not committed this trespass against the LORD: now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD.

They acknowledge that God is dangerous and they are grateful that this time no one else committed sins with repercussions that might have spilled over onto them.

[7] THE ARK

1 Samuel 6:19 And he [God] smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men...

God killed Fifty thousand and seventy men — just for looking into the ark. Of course it's not likely that 50,070 men looked into the ark — that would be a long line. But someone did that God didn't want messing around with it.

Don't tell me God is not dangerous. And, by the way, these are the people who were glad to get the ark back. The Philistines had taken it in battle and had had a similar experience and so returned it at the first opportunity. They were just glad to be rid of it.

***2 Samuel 6:6** ...Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. :7 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. :9 And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and said, How shall the ark of the LORD come to me?*

Good intentions do not excuse violating God's express commandment. Only a priest or Levi could touch the ark. Uzzah violated that restriction and so he died. David's response was proper. It wasn't mere respect that David felt for God, what he felt was terror. Anyone who does not feel terror in the presence of God is stupid. To fear God means to fear.

***1 Chronicles 13:9** ...Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark...:10 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against UZZA, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God. :11 And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzza...:12 And David was afraid of God that day, saying, how shall I bring the ark of God home to me?*

David's fear was well justified. Christians are too anxious to remove the fear from fearing God. That's misunderstanding our relationship with God. He is to be feared, and only Christ can bring us into his presence safely. But don't cross him, or you may pay the same price that Uzza did.

[8] ELIJAH

***2 Kings 1:10** And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. :12 And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. :13 And [the king] sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight.*

Two captains and their two armies were incinerated by God's wrath. Finally the third captain got some wisdom. He gets it. You don't come to God with demands. You go humbly on your knees pleading.

[9] JERUSALEM

1 Chronicles 21:15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

This “evil” on Jerusalem is God’s doing, not Satan’s.

2 Chronicles 34:24 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place...

[10] JOB

Job 23:15 Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him.

Job’s fear of God goes beyond fearing God’s anger. Even when God is not angry, he is to be feared simply because he does whatever he decides to do and he does not owe you an explanation.

Job 31:23 For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure.

Job 42:11 ... they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him.

[11] REVERENCE

Psalms 89:7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.

The expression “fear God” does mean to revere him but it also means to be afraid of him. The idea that it only means to revere him doesn’t hold up under scrutiny. To “fear God” means to be respectfully afraid of him, as we should be respectfully afraid of, say, cars, for example, which are useful but can kill us. In this text, we see both: fear and reverence. If they meant the same thing, then this is repetitive double-talk.

[12] PSALMS

Psalms 103:8 ...slow to anger...

Psalms 103:11 ...so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. :13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

This makes sense. An angry parent is more likely to forgive a misbehaving child who shows proper fear. But an incorrigible child, who shows no fear of discipline, will get written out of the will. Who can love an ungrateful child? Finally, it's good-bye, I want nothing more to do with you. That's what non-believers drive God to.

Psalms 119:120 My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments. :121 I have done judgment and justice ...

And this from a just man, or so he calls himself. To “fear” God is to be “afraid” of God and his judgments.

Psalms 145:8 ...slow to anger...

[13] ISAIAH

Isaiah 6:5 Then said I [Isaiah], Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

The angel then cleans up Isaiah so that he can survive God's presence. Does that make God not fearful because you can be made presentable to survive God? No, it makes God fearful *because* you have to be made presentable to survive God.

[14] JEREMIAH

Jeremiah 7:12 But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.

God makes himself clear to the Jews: Look what I did to Israel. I can do that to you too.

Jeremiah 36:7 ...for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people.

Jeremiah 44:6 Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: and they are wasted and desolate, as at this day.

[15] EZEKIEL

Ezekiel 6:12 ...thus will I accomplish my fury upon them.

Ezekiel 7:8 Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee...

Ezekiel 8:18 Therefore will I also deal in fury...

The “also” does not mean “I do fury like I also do other things.” It means “I do fury like you do fury.” You’re violent, so I’m violent. You want violence? I’ll show you *real* violence. God’s violence is a result of human violence. For example, God caused the flood because the world was filled with violence. God answers violence with violence.

Ezekiel 16:42 So will I make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry.

Ezekiel 20:8 ...then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

This was before Moses, in Egypt.

Ezekiel 38:18 ...my fury shall come up in my face.

God is so angry with Gog that his face turns flush red with rage. That’s God losing control of his temper.

[16] OTHER PROPHETS

Daniel 9:4 ...the great and dreadful God...

Micah 7:16 The nations ...:17 ...shall be afraid of the LORD our God...

Nahum 1:2 God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance of his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. :3 God is slow to anger.... :6 Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

The first two verses give conflicting views of God: furious but slow to anger. It takes a lot to get God mad, but when he does get mad, watch out. Like a boiler exploding

[17] MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

There is the amazing story of Jesus on the Mount of transfiguration where he revealed his glory to his disciples. So bright was his glory, his inner self, his shekinah, that it illuminated through his flesh and through his clothing.

But there was something else that happened there that was nearly as important.

Matthew 17:2 And [Jesus] was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. :3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

That must have been some conversation that occurred between Moses and Elijah and Jesus. The disciples did not overhear it, and what they discussed is nowhere recorded. So, what they talked about we can only guess.

I'll venture a guess. You might like it or you might not, but I think I'm right.

Question: What did Moses and Elijah have in common? What were they famous for? Answer: Their enemies didn't live long. Whether it was fire from heaven or the earth ripping apart, people died in large numbers when they crossed Moses or Elijah.

So, what do you suppose those two might have been advising Jesus to do? How about this: "Jesus, you have angels protecting you, why don't you just kill all the bad guys? That's what you did for us. Then you can just start your kingdom without opposition." And I can well imagine Jesus' answer to them: "I know you mean well and you're looking out for me, but I'm not here to kill and destroy but to seek and to save, even if it means my own life."

I think that was the gist of that private conversation.

[18] THE TALENTS

Our reaction to God's violence is underscored in Jesus' parable of the talents. The one talent servant blamed his own failure on God, accusing God of being too harsh. But God would have none of that and threw that flimsy excuse back into the servant's face.

Matthew 25:24 Then he which received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew they that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed. :25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. :26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed. :27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

Here's my paraphrase.

The one talent servant returned the one talent to his master without any gain and excused himself by accusing his master. "You're a tough master and I was afraid of you so I didn't want to take any chances with your money so here it is."

But the master did not accept that lame excuse and he challenged it. "So, you were afraid of me, were you? Well, if you were afraid of me you would have at least deposited my money into a bank where it was safe and earned me some interest. But you didn't do even that. That proves that you were not afraid of me at all. You're a liar, and a lazy liar at that. You just wanted to do nothing and see if you could get away with it."

People are quick to accuse God for the problems in their life. And God is a tough master as are many parents. But that doesn't mean that our tough God or our tough parents are to be blamed. They are to be praised. The one talent servant couldn't see that.

[19] SO, WHAT DO WE DO?

2 Corinthians 5:11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...

What motivates Paul? He knows firsthand how terrifying God really is, and it is his ambition in life to help as many people escape God's terror as possible.

[20] ESCAPE

Hebrews 2:3 How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

There is one chance for escape. If we neglect that one chance, there is no other escape available. It's like one open window in a burning building. Ignore the elevator, ignore the stairs, that window is all there is. Go through it or burn. When you understand the nature and anger of God, you really ought to take that one escape.

Hebrews 4:1 Let us therefore fear...

That's simple enough.

Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

This is an amazing verse. It is saying that Jesus is kind to us *because* of his human experience. Therefore, what must he have been *before* his human experience? Something different, less compassionate, less understanding, less forgiving. But when he was born, he began to understand our plight, and that new perspective led him to the cross.

But that would mean that God changes, and we can't have that, can we? Actually, we must allow it. Why? Because of his name.

[21] THE CHANGING GOD

Exodus 3:12 And he said, Certainly I will be with thee...:14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

In Hebrew, "I will be" (imperfect) and "I am" (perfect) are the same word, and both occurrences (actually three occurrences) are imperfect. In other words, God's name is not "I am that I am", it is "I will be what I will be" or "I am becoming what I am becoming"; in other words, God is changing. And that notion conforms much better with *Hebrews 4:15* and it allows the harsh, often vicious God of the Old Testament to become the loving Christ of the New Testament.

[22] MARCION

Marcion, was an early church leader (proclaimed a heretic by Tertullian) who had a straight forward way of dealing with the violent Hebrew God — he just dispensed with him. His bible (the first New Testament) did not include any Hebrew scriptures.

Marcion taught that the Hebrew God was a different God than God the Father that Jesus prayed too. And while we do not agree with him, at least it was an imaginative way to deal with the inconsistency of Israel's violent God and Christianity's loving Christ; that is, until we arrive at Revelation which reintroduces the violent God. But Marcion didn't have Revelation in his Bible so he wasn't troubled by that.

I only mention Marcion to show that the problem I'm dealing with here, the angry God, was a troublesome issue for early Christians too and not something I'm fabricating.

[23] BOLDNESS AND FEAR

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in time of need.

There is only way to approach God without fear — with of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And this from the age of grace. Of course the living God is fearful. It's tempting to think that the age of fear is past. Back then God was harsh. But now we have Christ so God is kind. But God has always been kind, and God has always been harsh, just like parents. The difference between then and now is that we have Christ who appeases God.

God is not quick to anger. He is like a parent who loathes to spank, but finds he must. And even then he does it reluctantly. My father once said to me, "This will hurt me more than it does you." I didn't believe it then, but I do now. God struggles to avoid having to punish. Before the flood, God allowed man to live very long lives to extend their opportunity to repent. But that didn't work. Longer lives just meant more evil. So he finally sent the flood to start over, and even then he delayed it as long as possible, timing it to the death of the longest living man in history, Methuselah.

[24] FUTURE TERROR

Revelation 6:1 —

No, I'm not going to include half the book of Revelation with its seven seals and seven trumpets and all that, including the final judgment. You can read it yourself.

But one message pervades Revelation, and that is this: God's patience runs out. And when it does, he gets very angry and lots of people die. And that doesn't even take into account God's dealing with the souls of men in the afterlife which is another terror.

So read Revelation. I expect you'll get an uneasy feeling about this God of the bible we serve, and perhaps a renewed determination to get close and stay close to Jesus Christ who is our protection — from God.

There was a day when Peter got out of his boat and walked on water. Why did he do that? Because he knew that in a storm, the safest place to be was not in a sinking boat but standing next to Jesus.

Don't get on God's bad side. Be glad for this one thing: that you are allowed to meet God while he is in a good mood. For that, you can thank Jesus Christ.