

## Pastor's Note

Hello

God Is Just. This is what the scriptures say about God and Justice. Genesis 6:5 "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Genesis 6:7-9 "The Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry I ever made them.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord... Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time. Noah walked with God."

Genesis 7:1 "Then the Lord said to Noah, 'Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time.'" There was nothing left in the heart of humankind except evil and none was righteous so God destroyed the unrighteous. God is Just. The story of Job also happens sometime after Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden. It could have been before the great flood or after. We're not sure, but biblical scholars agree that it was before the time of Abraham. So the account of Job's troubles takes place some time before 4000 years ago. We read from the book of Job... Job 1:6-22 "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. [Yes, Satan came into the presence of God and was not destroyed even though he was evil. He is another type of creation not made in the image of God as we are and somehow he is able to be in the presence of God's holiness without being destroyed. Perhaps it is because he had eaten from the tree of life prior to his fall from grace and will live forever; perhaps angels are just made that way. We simply do not know.] The Lord said to Satan, 'From where do you come?' Then Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.' The Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.' Then Satan answered the Lord, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.' Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.' So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord."

"Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, 'The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.' While he was still speaking, another also came and said, 'The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.'"

Was this person's interpretation of the events he witnessed reported correctly? Was it the fire of God that fell from heaven? As we have discussed previously humans in ancient times almost always interpreted events in terms of acts of God or the gods. Their viewpoint was constantly reinforced by the

use of violence and domination to assert power over themselves and others around them. Remember, the Bible is written from the perspective of the people who lived in those times. Yes it is divinely influenced but we still have to understand it from the perspective of the people who wrote it or we risk misinterpreting its meaning. Clearly we know from the conversation that God had with Satan that it was not God who burned up the sheep and the servants, it was Satan. Back to Job.

"While he was still speaking another also came and said, 'The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.' While he was still speaking another also came and said, 'Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you.' Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell on the ground and worshiped. He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

God is Just. Even though Job misinterprets these events as acts of God instead of attacks by Satan, Job's response is exceedingly good. He worships God anyway. But as the story of Job moves forward his friends begin to work on him and tell him how horrible it is that God has done these things to him. They say, forget God, curse God, God does not care about you. After many chapters of this we reach the point in the story where Elihu arrives to speak on God's behalf as it states in Job 33:4 he says, "the spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Refute me if you can." We pick up his conversation in Job 34:10-17 "Therefore listen to me you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to do wrong. For He pays a man according to his work, and makes him find it according to his way. Surely, God will not act wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice. Who gave Him authority over the earth? And who has laid on Him the whole world? If He should determine to do so, If He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His Breath, All flesh would perish together and man would return to dust. But if you have understanding hear this, Listen to the sound of my words, 'Shall one who hates justice rule?'"

Job 37:5-13 "God thunders with His voice wondrously, doing great things which we cannot comprehend. For to the snow He says, 'Fall on the earth,' and to the downpour and the rain, 'Be strong.' He seals the hand of every man, that all men may know His work. Then the beast goes into its lair and remains in its den. Out of the south comes the storm and out of the north the cold. From the breath of God ice is made, and the expanse of the waters is frozen. Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. It changes direction, turning around by His guidance, that it may do whatever He commands it on the face of the inhabited earth. Whether for correction, or for His world, or for His loving-kindness, He causes it to happen."

There are three reasons for God's actions and we find them right here. Elihu is telling us that anything God does, He does for one of these three reasons.

1) For Correction - as we correct our children & enforce the rules of society

2) For His World - volcanoes are vents that maintain the pressures required for the earth's core to sustain the earth. Of course we move too close to them and then blame God when they operate as designed and kill a bunch of us. Storms are necessary to bring water to the earth for a multitude of reasons, the movement of tectonic plates is part of the normal settling and shifting of the earth's

surface, and the rest of nature is working as it was designed to work. Yes, God can make things do whatever He wants them to, but mostly these events are simply acts of nature that take place to maintain the world that God has built for us.

3) For His Loving-Kindness - He loves His people and His world. God is Just. Now we read the account of God Himself speaking to Job

Job 38:1-7 "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 'Who is it that darkens counsel by words of knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you and you instruct me! Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding, who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?'"

Job 40:12-13 "Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm and said, 'Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you and you instruct me. Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?'" We do this all the time by the way. Someone does something to someone that is innocent, like a child for example, and we say how could God let this happen? We see the injustice in the act and blame God, but it was never God who chose to do it. It was the person's choices that led to the injustice. Should God have given us freedom of choice? Do we annul God's judgment to give us that freedom? Will we condemn God to justify our feelings of outrage over an injustice? We do it all the time.

Job 42:1-4 "Then Job answered the Lord and said, 'I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear now and I will speak; I will ask You and You instruct me.'" God is Just. Now let's move forward in time to about 4000 years ago during the time of Abraham. God is talking to Abraham in Genesis chapters 18 & 19, Genesis 18:20-21 "And the Lord said, 'The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.'"

Notice that God is explaining to Abraham exactly what He is going to do. Genesis 18:23-32 "Abraham came near and said, 'Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?' So the Lord said, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.' And Abraham replied, 'Now behold I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of the five?' And He said, 'I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.' Abraham spoke to Him yet again and said, 'Suppose forty are found there?' And He said, 'I will not do it on account of the forty.' Then Abraham said, 'Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?' And He said, 'I will not do it if I find thirty there.' And Abraham said, 'Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?' And He said, 'I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.' Then Abraham said, 'Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?' And He said, 'I will not destroy it on account of the ten.'"

God is Just. God is teaching Abraham here. This is not Abraham bargaining for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, this is God being patient with Abraham and showing him that He is just. So God sends two angels disguised as men into Sodom to seek out the righteous and Lot invited them into his house for the night. Genesis 19:4-7 "Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people, from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the two men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.' But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, and said, 'Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly.'"

The scripture says, all the people. There were no righteous people from Sodom or Gomorrah. Many people say, "Well what about the children? Surely they were innocent?" I believe God took them out of mercy to spare them from what was going to happen to them if He allowed Sodom and Gomorrah to continue to exist. More than that, knowing that Sodom and Gomorrah were not geographically far from what would one day become Israel, I believe that God was working to create an area where the cultivation of Godly character would be possible for Abraham's descendants. Lot was not actually from Sodom and must have only recently moved there.

In Genesis 19:9 "But they said to Lot, 'Stand aside.' Furthermore they said, 'This one came in as a foreigner, and already he is acting like a judge...'" Genesis 19:12-13 "Then the two men said to Lot, 'Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the Lord that the Lord has sent us to destroy it.'"

God already knew that there were no righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah before he ever spoke to Abraham. But God waited and took the time to show this to Abraham. Through the account that Abraham undoubtedly received from his nephew Lot, God showed Abraham that He was just in His decisions and His actions and even in saving Lot from the destruction. God is Just. Deuteronomy 32:35-36 "Vengeance is mine, and retribution, in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them. For the Lord will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their strength is gone..."

God Is Just. God dispenses justice on the unrighteous and withholds it from the righteous. So what makes a human righteous in the eyes of God? Is it what we do? Can we do enough good to become righteous in the eyes of God? Romans 3:23 says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So what made Noah righteous? Was he perfect? No, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. What made Abraham righteous? Look in Genesis 15:6 "Then he believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Paul wrote about it in Romans 3:1-3 "What then, shall we say that Abraham our forefather, according to the flesh, has found righteousness? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'"

So when we look at the Old Testament accounts of God dispensing justice we see that not only were humans evil at heart but they did not believe in God. They laughed and made fun of Noah when he built the Ark. They were evil and they didn't believe in God. Job's friends tried to persuade him to give up his devotion to God. But he didn't and his belief in God restored him from the attacks of Satan and God

blessed him all the more. Lot tried to persuade his future son-in-laws to come away with him and escape destruction. They did not believe what he was telling them. The bible says they thought he was making a jest and they were destroyed. God is Just. So how do we become righteous in the eyes of God? We read in

Romans 5:18-19 "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous."

We are made righteous when we believe in Jesus Christ sacrifice on the cross and that He sacrificed himself to save us from judgment and condemnation. He defeated death and rose to life after the third day and because He did, we can become righteous in God's eyes through Jesus Christ when we believe, as Abraham did four thousand years ago. God is Just. God dispenses justice for correction. He dispenses justice for His world. And, He dispenses justice for loving-kindness. God has not changed. He was just in the beginning, He has been just throughout the history of humankind and He will always be just. God's justice can be a scary thing, but he wants the best for us He literally wants to see us as righteous so much that He sent His only son to suffer and die for us to make it possible. The scriptures say that God has plans for you, not to harm you, but plans to prosper you and to give you hope and a future. God is Just.

Blessings,

Scott