

God's Heart is Still Slow to Anger (Exodus 34.6-7)

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Dominant Thought: The LORD is slow to anger to give us time to repent.

Objectives:

I want my listeners to understand that God expresses anger differently than we do.

I want my listeners to appreciate God's slowness in anger.

I want my listeners to reflect God's patient heart in our relationships.

Today, I want to talk about God's nose. Have you ever thought about God's nose? We are created in God's image and Scripture actually talks about His nose or His nostrils. The Bible actually says God has a long nose or long nostrils. Hang with me. God is Spirit. Scripture is using human imagery to help us understand something about God's character.

Today, we'll look at the central characteristic in our list from Exodus 34.6, slow to anger. As we move through these five descriptions of God's heart, we identify "the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

The words, "Slow to anger," actually mean long nose or long nostrils. It was a figure of speech the Hebrews would use to describe anger. Many times, when they wanted to describe anger, they would use the phrase "their nose burned hot."

The Proverbs have some descriptions and counsel about anger. Listen to the wisdom counsel about dealing with our anger.

Proverbs 14:29 ESV

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

Proverbs 15:18 ESV

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

Proverbs 16:32 ESV

Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

James 1:19–20 NIV

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

God's anger is much different than the gods of the ancient near east. For example, many ancient cultures have a flood story. In Genesis 6.5, "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the human heart was only evil all the time." God's heart is deeply troubled, and He regretted He made mankind. That is the grounds of the flood story in the Hebrew Bible.

Compare that reason to "the Myth of Atrahasis (ANET, 104–106). The distemperate gods, led by Enlil (the storm-god), decide to obliterate humanity by means of a flood because the human race had multiplied to the point that its noise kept the gods (and particularly Enlil) awake at night" (Herion, G. A. (1992). Wrath of God: Old Testament. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary (Vol. 6, p. 991). Doubleday.).

In our time together, I want to look at the theme of God's anger from Exodus and Romans. In Exodus, we see God's anger three different times: Exodus 4.14; 15.7; 32.9.

In Exodus 4, God is angry when people make excuses instead of trusting Him. In Exodus 3-4, God appears to Moses in the burning bush to send him to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3.10). Five different times Moses gives excuses to God. 1-Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3.11). 2-What is your name? (Ex. 3.13). 3-What if they do not believe or listen to me? (Ex.4.1). 4-I am slow of speech and tongue (Ex. 4.10). 5-Please send someone else. (Exodus 4.13). Then in Exodus 4.14, "The LORD's anger burned against Moses." He then suggests to Moses, "What about your brother, Aaron...he can speak. He is already on the way to meet you"

(Exodus 4.14). In this story, God's anger is displayed by solving Moses excuses. No punishment or fireworks in this scene.

That will change in the second scene of God's anger in Exodus 14-15.

In Exodus 15, God is angry when people act wicked and do not value life. Whereas Moses had five chances or excuses, God will give Pharaoh ten chances. God sends 10 plagues to get Pharaoh's attention. God is slow to anger. He refuses to let the people go until the death of his firstborn son which may have been payment for the Hebrew boys he had killed in Exodus 1.16, 22. After Moses and the people leave Egypt, they cross the Red Sea on dry ground. Then, Pharaoh changes his mind and goes after them. As Pharaoh and his army are crossing the Red Sea, God closes the waters over them, and they perish. Then, Moses and Miriam sing about this event in Exodus 15, "Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea" (Ex. 15.1). Then, in Exodus 15.7, they sing, "In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble." God's anger is displayed after ten chances to Pharaoh as an act of judgment against an evil and unjust nation.

In Exodus 32, God is angry when His people betray His covenant love. The third time we see God's anger displayed is against His covenant people in Exodus 32. After God and the children of Israel have entered a covenant relationship at Mount Sinai, they are waiting for Moses. He's up on the mountain meeting with God. The people come to Moses' brother, Aaron, with the request, "Make us gods who will go before us" (Exodus 32.1). Aaron fashions a golden calf. They hold a festival to the LORD by worshiping the golden calf (Ex. 32.5-6).

Then, we read in Exodus 32.9, "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them."

Moses intercedes on their behalf and God relents and did not bring on the people the disaster He had threatened (Ex. 32.14).

Moses then gets angry with the people and grinds the idol into powder, scatters it on the water and makes the people drink it (Ex. 32.20).

The next day Moses tells the people they have sinned greatly. Then says, "But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your

sin” (Ex. 32.31). Moses offers his life for the life of the people. He pleads with God, “please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (Ex. 32.32). God doesn’t blot Moses out of the book. God is slow to anger.

Another ancient translation of the Hebrew Bible called a Targum offers this translation for Exodus 34.6, “patient, the One who makes anger distant and brings compassion near” (John Mark Comer, *God Has a Name*, p. 158, quoting *Aramaic Targum Neofiti 1: Exodus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994, 138).

Before we leave Exodus, what’s the deal with God punishing children and grandchildren for the sins of the parents? Again, we need to look at some context on this challenging verse of Exodus 34.7. I think two truths are helpful. First, look at the numbers represented: showing love to thousands and punishment to the third and fourth generations. These are figures of speech showing God has lots of love, but He does punish sin. The third and fourth generation was a Hebrew figure of speech. You find it in Proverbs 30. In Proverbs 30.18-19, we read, “There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman.” So, the third and fourth is a common way of talking about life in its complexity.

Second, look at the words. Notice that the LORD says in Exodus 34.7, “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.” God will punish the guilty. Earlier in Exodus 20.5-6, we have a similar wording of this text where God, “punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me” (Exodus 20.5). Each generation will be held accountable for their response to God’s grace.

We have seen children and grandchildren suffer for the sins of parents or grandparents. They are not being punished for their parents' sins, but they must live with the consequences of their parents' sins.

I’ve seen this lived out in the life of my dad. He’s the oldest of three boys. The picture of Brosi men I saw until I was about twelve was sitting in lawn chairs after work drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, and speaking with disrespect to my grandma Brosi. I saw my grandpa, his brother, my uncle, and to a lesser degree my dad. When I was in grade school, we moved hundreds of miles away from my grandparents and only saw them once a

year. Each summer on vacation that was the picture I saw. No faith in Jesus.

Then, when I was around age twelve, my dad became a follower of Jesus. He received God's gift of grace. On a Saturday afternoon in the Seneca Christian Church, my dad, my younger sister, and I were baptized into Christ. It was during that season that my picture of a Brosi man changed. Instead of seeing men sitting in the back yard drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, and speaking disrespectfully, I saw my dad take us to church. I saw my dad step into leadership roles in our church. I saw my dad pray and play with teenagers at youth group meetings. While I've seen some of the punishment of multiple generations for rejecting the ways of Jesus, I've also seen how my dad chose to embrace the love, grace, compassion, and patient anger of our heavenly father that now has blessed two more generations of Christ followers who are taking the love of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34.6).

In Nahum 1.3, the prophet receives a vision concerning Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. Last week, we shared the story of Jonah's ministry in Nineveh that led to a great repentance and God relented from the punishment He had planned. Now about a hundred years later (650 BC), Nahum shares that their repentance did not last in Nineveh. Nahum, the prophet, leads with our text from Exodus 34.6-7, by saying, "The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished" (Nahum 1.3).

One of the images of God's anger or wrath is the phrase, "God gave them up to..." In other words, God will give people what they want. If you want to worship the gods of Babylon, then I will give you over to Babylon. If you want to act like the pagan nations around you, then I will give you over to them. God will give them what they want.

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In Romans 1, three times Paul uses the phrase, "God gave them up (Romans 1.24, 26, 28). In Romans 1.18, we read, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness." Then we read in

Romans 1.24, “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another...” In Romans 1.26, “Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones...” In Romans 1.28, “Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind so that they do what ought not to be done...”

While people may speak against the anger or wrath of God, many times throughout the Bible, God’s anger is displayed in giving people what they want. God says, “If you don’t want a relationship with me or my protection, then I’ll give you over to what you want. If you want to live a destructive lifestyle, then I’ll let you destroy your life.” Hear me, friends. These consequences are not God’s desire. He does not want that to happen.

The word for “gave them over” or “hand them over” is the same word describing what Judas did to Jesus in Mark 3.19—Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him or handed Jesus over. Then, when Pontius Pilate ordered Jesus to be executed by crucifixion we read, “he delivered [handed him over] to be crucified (Mark 15.15).

Paul picks up on this theme in Romans 5.6-11. God shows us His love that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Then Paul writes, “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God” (Romans 5.9). Jesus saves us from the wrath of God—eternal separation from the Father which is hell. Jesus also saves us from the slow anger of God, of being handed over to the consequences of our sinful desires in this life. The cross is the display of God’s love and anger. Sin will be punished. But He loves us so much to forgive our sins and free us to a reconciled life with God now and forever.

H. Richard Niebuhr, “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.” (quoted in *The Good and Beautiful God*, p. 116).

So, where do we go from here?

1—Thank God for His patience.

In fact, He is slow to bring those consequences.

2 Peter 3:9 ESV

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

2—What do you want? Do you want a loyal loving relationship with your Father that will lead to loyal loving relationships with others? Or do you want to live life on your own terms and chasing your own idols? God will give you what you want.