

Ted Kirnbauer

(rev. 10/17/14)

Ezekiel 4-5

Chapters 4-24 cover the period from Ezekiel's call to the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Though Ezekiel was mute (3:26-27), he was instructed in 4:1-5:4 to perform symbolic acts to communicate Jerusalem's fall to the exiles. In the relatively small community in exile, Ezekiel's silence, powerful words, and strange actions would spread like wildfire.

Ezekiel 4

4:1 "Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you, and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem.

4:2 Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps, and place battering rams against it all around.

4:3 Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it. This is a sign to the house of Israel."

The word translated as "brick" in verse 1 was probably a tablet (NIV), a tile of soft clay, like those upon which contracts and inscriptions were written (Feinberg, 32). Many of these tablets have been discovered in archeological digs in the Assyrian/Babylonian region. Ezekiel was to draw a picture of Jerusalem so that the people could understand that his acted parable was directed toward the city.

After drawing Jerusalem, Ezekiel built siege walls, as if he were a child playing army games in the dirt. A common military tactic in Ezekiel's day was for an army to surround the city it was trying to conquer. Without the possibility of escape or the ability for fresh supplies to come in, the city would inevitably fall, even if it took years to happen (which it sometimes did). However, more often than not, the enemy didn't want to wait for the inhabitants to die of starvation, so they built ramps (siege walls) by piling up earth and rock against the city walls. This allowed the attackers to observe the movements of those in the city and eventually breach the wall.

Ezekiel also placed an iron pan between himself and the "city". Some commentators see this as representative of either the impenetrable wall of the besieging army (the impossibility of escape) or the barrier that existed between Israel and God due to their sin (Isa. 59:2). I tend to favor a third view: Ezekiel was role-playing God and the pan represented the firmness of God's rejection of His people (cf. Ezek. 6:2; Isa. 1:15; Lam. 3:8-9, 44; Job 30:20; 35:9-13; Block, 173). God was not passively indifferent about what was happening; He had set His face against Jerusalem (4:3). Jerusalem would be under siege because God had become the enemy of Israel.

To understand the reasons why Ezekiel is asked to do this, we must understand the mindset of the people to whom he was writing. Jerusalem was the glory of the nation (Ps. 48:2), the city of the great king (Psa. 48:2), where the glory of God was perpetually revealed. Most Jews could not imagine that it could ever be destroyed. As long as the city and the temple stood, both the Jerusalemites and the exiles continued to believe that they were in God's favor and they nurtured the hope that God would rescue

Ted Kirnbauer

(rev. 10/17/14)

Ezekiel 4-5

them from their current predicament and bring them back home. This gave them an incentive *not* to listen to Ezekiel, or his contemporary, Jeremiah, who were predicting a much bleaker future. In other words, as long as the city and the temple stood, the Jews could cling to their religious system and beliefs without repentance. Thus, the city and the temple had to be destroyed, for as long as the Jews believed that God was obligated to defend them, they would not come to grips with the stench that their sin brought to the nostrils of God.

Verse 3 tells us the purpose of Ezekiel's actions; it was a sign to the house of Israel. The aim of the signs in Ezekiel was to stir an acknowledgment of God (through the signs "they will know that I, the LORD, have spoken" - 5:13).

In verse 3, "Israel" thus represents the nations of both Israel and Judah. Although historically the kingdom had divided, in prophetic language there is only one rightful kingdom ruled by the one who sits on the Davidic throne.

4:4 "As for you, lie down on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; you shall bear their iniquity for the number of days that you lie on it.

4:5 For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their iniquity, three hundred and ninety days; thus you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

4:6 When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah; I have assigned it to you for forty days, a day for each year.

In 4:4-8, we are told that Ezekiel spent some time each day lying on his left side facing the tablet (Jerusalem). We can assume that he did not lay there all the time for the following verses show that he had other things to do as well; he probably lay there during the time of the day when the greatest number of people were present.

When Ezekiel lay on his left side, he pointed north signifying that his actions were symbolically related to the northern kingdom, Israel; when he lay on his right side (v.6), he pointed south toward Judah. Each day that passed represented a year that the people had to bear the punishment for their sins (4:5). Israel was the more rebellious of the two houses and thus they had more guilt to bear (390 days). After the 390 days were completed for Israel, Ezekiel lay on his right side for another 40 days for the sins of Judah, for a total of 430 days (390 + 40 - more than a year!).

When the actual years of judgment began and ended is greatly debated, but what is clear is that the generation of Israelites that provoked God's wrath would be eliminated (40 years of punishment most likely ties into the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness that was allotted for the rebellious generation that left Egypt).

Ted Kirnbauer

(rev. 10/17/14)

Ezekiel 4-5

Though Ezekiel was to bear the sins of the nation (4:6), his actions cannot be viewed as expiatory; that is, he did not *literally* bear the sins of the nation. Rather, he is portraying the need of the nation's sins being removed, just as they were removed by the goat on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:21-22).

4:7 "Then you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared, and prophesy against it.

4:8 Now behold, I will put ropes on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, until you have completed the days of your siege."

With his face set toward Jerusalem, Ezekiel pictures God's resolve to destroy the city (15:7; 20:46). With his arm bared (withdrawn from his robe), he shows God's readiness for battle (Isa 52:10).

In order to show the unchangeableness of the prophet's message, the Lord put ropes on the prophet. These ropes were not literal ropes, but conveyed that Ezekiel's movement would be restricted; he would be forced to stay there until the time is completed.

The structure of the next section is as follows:

- A Siege Diet (e.g. the diet of those in Jerusalem when the city is being attacked- 4:9-11)
- B Exilic Diet (e.g. the diet of those who are taken into exile - 4:12)
- B' Interpretation of Exilic Diet (4:13)
- A' Interpretation of Siege Diet (4:16-17)

4:9 "But as for you, take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in one vessel and make them into bread for yourself; you shall eat it according to the number of the days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days.

4:10 And your food which you eat shall be twenty shekels a day by weight; you shall eat it from time to time.

4:11 And the water you drink will be the sixth part of a hin by measure; you shall drink it from time to time."

Ezekiel was also commanded to eat certain foods in certain portions to picture the scarcity of supplies of a city under siege. This is interpreted in verses 16 and 17.

"Inside a besieged city in the ancient world, as supplies dwindled people were forced to make bread out of dried beans and lentils mixed with the tiny bit of flour that was left. They would eat their impossibly small portions and sip their tiny quota of water, and waste away. They would cook their food on cow patties because there was no more wood" (Carson, For the Love of God).

The weight of the food allotted to Ezekiel was to be 20 shekels each day – a mere 8 ounces of food. His water ration was a hin, or about 2/3 of a quart.

Ted Kirnbauer

(rev. 10/17/14)

Ezekiel 4-5

All this, Ezekiel predicts, is “because of their sin” (Ezek. 4:16-17).

Carson sees this as only Ezekiel’s parabolic actions and believes that Ezekiel ate and drank more when he was not performing his acts. Although this is possible, it isn’t stated and no other commentator makes mention of it.

**4:12 "And you shall eat it as a barley cake, having baked it in their sight over human dung."
4:13 Then the LORD said, "Thus shall the sons of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I shall banish them."**

Although Ezekiel’s multi-grained bread of 4:9 may simply be called a barley cake in generic terminology, it is easier to interpret verse 12 as a separate symbolic act (see Block, 181 n.83; 185 as to why “eat it as a barley cake” may be better translated as “eat a barley cake”). Therefore, in addition to the bread made in 4:9, Ezekiel is ordered to bake barley cakes in front of the onlookers to picture the diet of the exiles after Jerusalem falls (4:13).

Normally, barley cakes were made upon heated stones (I Ki. 19:6). Here, the fuel to heat the stones was to be human excrement. Although some people used dried animal dung as fuel, human waste was to be disposed of outside of the camp of Israel to keep them holy (Deut. 23:11-13). The problem with the meal was not in the food but in the fuel. To use human excrement was polluting and disgusting.

The meaning behind verse 12 is found in verse 13. Eating defiled food dramatized the horrors of living in captivity and being forced to eat the same foods as the nations around them in the aftermath of the city’s fall. Israel’s place as a holy people would be destroyed, and they would be forced to be like the nations.

**4:14 But I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I have never been defiled; for from my youth until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has any unclean meat ever entered my mouth."
4:15 Then He said to me, "See, I shall give you cow's dung in place of human dung over which you will prepare your bread."**

Especially as a priest, Ezekiel had always kept the dietary laws and he rebelled against the thought of such defilement (like Peter, Acts 10:14). The Lord conceded to Ezekiel’s request and allowed him to bake the cakes over cow dung. God’s response showed that He was sympathetic toward Ezekiel’s sensitivities, yet He preserved the dramatic picture of defilement.

4:16 Moreover, He said to me, "Son of man, behold, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they will eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and drink water by measure and in horror,

Ted Kirnbauer

(rev. 10/17/14)

Ezekiel 4-5

4:17 because bread and water will be scarce; and they will be appalled with one another and waste away in their iniquity."

Verses 16 and 17 interpret verses 9-11; God was about to destroy Jerusalem; the food supply will disappear, the water will be sparse, and the people will look upon one another in horror – all the result of their sin against God.

In Sum:

Verses 1-3 drive home the inevitability of the fall of Jerusalem.

Verses 4-8 give the duration of the judgment.

Verses 9-17 explain the conditions of the judgment both in Jerusalem and in the exile.

Next, in 5:1-4, Ezekiel expands upon the details of what will happen to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 5

5:1 "As for you, son of man, take a sharp sword; take and use it as a barber's razor on your head and beard. Then take scales for weighing and divide the hair.

5:2 One third you shall burn in the fire at the center of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. Then you shall take one third and strike it with the sword all around the city, and one third you shall scatter to the wind; and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.

5:3 Take also a few in number from them and bind them in the edges of your robes.

5:4 And take again some of them and throw them into the fire, and burn them in the fire; from it a fire will spread to all the house of Israel."

Ezekiel sharpens a sword and uses it as a straight razor. He shaves his head and beard. After tucking a few strands of hair into his garments, he divides the rest into three piles. The first he puts into the city (i.e., onto the clay tablet that is the model of the city of Jerusalem, Ezek. 4:1) and sets the hairs alight, perhaps with a live coal. Another third he scatters on the ground all around the city, and then whacks them with his sword until only tiny pieces are left. The final third he throws into the wind, a few hairs at a time, until they have all blown away. A few strands tucked into his garments he now takes out and throws onto the smoldering coal and ashes within the model city, and they too burst into flame and are consumed (Carson, *For the Love of God*, meditation for September 17).

In the Bible, shaving all the hair was a sign of humiliation (2 Sam. 10:40-5), catastrophe (Jer. 41:5), and mourning (Job 1:20; Isa. 22:12; Jer. 7:29; Feinberg, 36). The significance of this act is spelled out in Ezekiel 5:12: a third of the people will die within the city (from the famine of the siege), a third will die by the sword in the final breakout, and the remaining third will be scattered into exile (Carson, *For the Love of God*, meditation for September 17). The hairs hidden in Ezekiel's robe represent those in exile. Though they appear to be safe, the fire that began in Jerusalem will spread to the whole house of Israel, even to the exiles (Block, 195).

5:5 Thus says the Lord God, "This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her.

5:6 But she has rebelled against My ordinances more wickedly than the nations and against My statutes more than the lands which surround her; for they have rejected My ordinances and have not walked in My statutes."

In verses 5-12, God states His purpose for Israel and gives His reasons for the judgment.

Israel was placed in the center of the nations. This is not a geographical note, but a redemptive one. Israel was to shed the light of the true God upon all the peoples of the earth. Isaiah 2:2-3 says, "Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.' For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." Also, see Micah 4:1-3. But instead of being a light, Judah rebelled against her covenant with God and against God Himself, and she had become even more wicked than the surrounding nations! Therefore, judgment was inevitable, and it would be meted out in proportion to the knowledge and privileges enjoyed (Feinberg, 37).

Apart from the intervening grace of God, man will naturally always spiral downward. Even though Israel would be judged and the people would go through unspeakable horrors, they would not change because they, like us, are prone to turn from God to vanity and self-seeking pleasures. In Matthew 11:21, Jesus had a message nearly identical to Ezekiel's message; He said to the Jews in Chorazin and Bethsaida, "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon (pagan cities) which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Had the nations around Israel seen Jesus' miracles they would have repented, but Israel herself stood firm in her rebellion against the Lord. Apart from God's intervention, this scenario will be repeated generation after generation.

5:7 "Therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'Because you have more turmoil than the nations which surround you, and have not walked in My statutes, nor observed My ordinances, nor observed the ordinances of the nations which surround you,'

5:8 therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations.

Verse 7 begins with "therefore" signaling the reason why God is against Judah; these are the charges against her:

Israel was in more turmoil than the unbelieving nations that surrounded her. Although in Hebrew the word "turmoil" can be used in a neutral sense like the roar of waves, theologically it is used of insolence

Ted Kirnbauer

(rev. 10/17/14)

Ezekiel 4-5

on the part of humans toward Yahweh (Block, 201). "Israel, endowed with position and privilege, became turbulent; they raged in their opposition against God. The verb is not the same as in Psalm 2:1 but the concept is similar" (Feinberg, 37).

Their insolence is expressed in their repudiating the covenant that God had made with them. They did not walk in His statutes, nor observe His ordinances, nor did they observe the ordinances of the nations around them; the nations had higher standards than they did.

"God's honor, flouted by the people in the sight of the nations, had to be vindicated before the eyes of those very nations. The prophet stressed zeal or jealousy as a determining motive in God's action: to punish His people in order to reveal to them that He could not tolerate sin (16:38, 42), and to restore them so that the nations would not doubt His power (36:5; 38:19; 39:25-29). Then Israel would know by bitter experience that it was the Lord indeed who had spoken. They would have ample time to contemplate it when they became the taunt, reproach and instruction of all the nations. Israel, suffering for their sins under God's righteous wrath, would be an object lesson to the nations. The heathen would be amazed because they had not seen a national Deity so deal with the people who professed his worship" (Feinberg, 39).

5:9 'And because of all your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again.'

5:10 Therefore, fathers will eat their sons among you, and sons will eat their fathers; for I will execute judgments on you, and scatter all your remnant to every wind.'

The rebellion of Israel against God is so severe that God will act in such a way that He has never done before, nor will He ever act in this way again. This unprecedented hostility against Jerusalem and its inhabitants results in the horrors described in verse 10.

Cannibalism is a covenant curse for disobedience that God had already warned them about (Deut. 28:53-57; Lev. 26:29). The actual events that came to pass are recorded in the Lamentations of Jeremiah that describes the destruction and desolation of Jerusalem which was predicted by Ezekiel (for example, compare Ezekiel 5:10 to Lamentations 4:10).

A second announcement of the judgment speech follows in 5:11-17:

5:11 'So as I live,' declares the Lord God, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye shall have no pity and I will not spare.'

5:12 One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.'

Ted Kirnbauer

(rev. 10/17/14)

Ezekiel 4-5

“Since Ezekiel's people were unique in their disobedience, they were to be outstanding in their punishment. . . The declaration in verse 11 is prefaced by the clause “as I live,” a most solemn oath pledging the very existence of God for the carrying out of the prophecy. It is found 14 times in the book, more often than any other prophet” (Feinberg 38).

“The greatest sin Israel committed was the defiling of the Lord's sanctuary (5:11) . . . The loss of Jerusalem meant for them no place to offer the atoning blood to God. For Jerusalem to be cast off meant the nation was left to bear the full punishment for their sins. When the temple stood, they would not engage in the proper worship of God; now they would not be able to do so” (Feinberg, 38).

Verse 12 gives the concrete meaning behind the imagery in 5:1-4. As noted above, a third of the people will die within the city (from the famine of the siege), a third will die by the sword in the final breakout, and the remaining third will be scattered into exile, and even there the judgment of God will follow.

5:13 'Thus My anger will be spent, and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I shall be appeased; then they will know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My zeal when I have spent My wrath upon them.

5:14 Moreover, I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations which surround you, in the sight of all who pass by.

5:15 So it will be a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror to the nations who surround you, when I execute judgments against you in anger, wrath, and raging rebukes. I, the LORD, have spoken.

5:16 When I send against them the deadly arrows of famine which were for the destruction of those whom I shall send to destroy you, then I shall also intensify the famine upon you, and break the staff of bread.

5:17 Moreover, I will send on you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you of children; plague and bloodshed also will pass through you, and I will bring the sword on you. I, the LORD, have spoken.”

God's purposes for judging the nation are found in verses 13-17:

(1) God judges because His holiness must confront rebellion (v.13a).

The wrath of God is purposeful wrath, which when it is executed, will have achieved its intended objectives (Block, 210). . . For the modern reader who perceives God only from one side, the image presented here is difficult to comprehend, if not entirely objectionable. One is tempted to interpret this furious outpouring of wrath as arbitrary and impulsive, or as a sign of emotional instability. That it is none of these is made clear by the purpose statement: *they will know that I am Yahweh*. . . Like Yahweh's mighty acts of deliverance centuries earlier, his acts of judgment on a rebellious people are intentionally designed to bring them to acknowledgment of his presence, character, and claims on their lives (Block, 211).

God insists that when judgment has been meted out, his wrath will subside and his anger will cease (Ezek. 5:13). This outbreak of wrath forms part of a list of punctuated outbreaks of wrath from the Fall on: the curse in Genesis 3, the Flood, Babel, slavery in Egypt, various judgments in the desert (including the wilderness wanderings for forty years), and so on. In cycles of judgment corresponding to cycles of particularly egregious sin, God pours out his wrath. All of this forms part of the necessary biblical theology behind Romans 3:20-26: there is no solution to the threat of God's righteous wrath upon his creatures who have rebelled against him—until in the person of his Son, God himself bears the wrath we deserve, preserving His justice while justifying us (Carson, *For the Love of God*, meditation for September 17).

(2) God judges to make His people realize *He* is the One who is judging them (v. 13b).

The final statement in verse 13 [“then they will know that I, the LORD, have spoken . . . ”] is the key to the chapter, if not to Ezekiel's prophetic ministry as a whole. Yahweh's announcement of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the decimation of its population has been driven by his *passion*. . . The intensity of his wrath at the defilement of the sanctuary and the repudiation of his will arises out of the profundity of his covenant love. Because he loves so deeply, he must respond vigorously. His relationship with his people has been violated (Block, 211).

God's judgment was not an accident of history; it is God's work though He uses Nebuchadnezzar as His tool. God is glorified through judgment for it is through judgment that God is known.

(3) God judges to make His people a reproach and to humble them (vv. 14-15).

In verses 14 and 15, “the attention shifts away from Yahweh's emotional reaction to Jerusalem's infidelity, returning to the effects that His rage will have on the city: a complete reversal of fortunes. She who had previously enjoyed an honorific status among the nations would become a total ruin; instead of inspiring the nations, she would become an object of scorn and derision by all passerby [*sic*]. . . The physical effects of Yahweh's wrath will be difficult enough, but the social and psychological impact of Yahweh's furious chastisements will be even more painful. Instead of the people receiving Yahweh's covenant blessings and Israel being exalted among the nations, Jerusalem, the capital city of the people consecrated to Yahweh, will lie in ruins. She who had been elevated for praise, for fame, and for honor will become the butt of the most vicious derision” (Block, 212).

(4) God judges His people to destroy them (vv. 16-17).

The finale to Ezekiel's first judgment speech approaches the demise of Jerusalem from a different angle, the means whereby Yahweh achieves his designs. Versus 16 and 17 catalog a series of agents standing at Yahweh's disposal, ready to fill his missions of death. . .

Ted Kirnbauer

(rev. 10/17/14)

Ezekiel 4-5

The speech concludes with the frightening image of Yahweh passing through the land and mowing down the inhabitants with his sword. The declaration reaffirms that the fate of the city rests in His hands alone. As if to dispel any lingering doubts about the authority of his message, Ezekiel signs the Oracle verbally by identifying Yahweh is the true speaker behind these horrifying pronouncements of doom (Block, 212).

Once again, Daniel Block does such a fine job drawing application from the text. I quote him at length (pp. 216-217).

. . . With our comfortable perceptions of deity, we may be so offended by the sheer terror of Yahweh's pronouncements and the violence of the divine disposition that we dismiss it as irrelevant and sub-Christian. While these reactions may be natural, we must not let them detract from the profoundly theological nature of the message communicated in Ezekiel's first dramatic performances.

First, in the context of a covenant relationship, the acceptance of the privilege must be accompanied by the assumption of responsibility. In the words of Jesus, "from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded" (Luke 12:48). Jerusalem had been appointed to a unique role among the nations. According to her own teachers, only the nation she represented was party to a covenant relationship with God; only she had experienced the revelation of His will; only in her was His sanctuary to be found. But the Lord's treasured possession, His kingdom of priests, His holy nation, had wallowed in the mud of rebellion, desecrated the sanctuary, and defiled itself. Instead of serving as a model of purity, she had won the international contest in wickedness. Her example serves as a stern warning that "those who have the name and face of God's people may become worse than the heathen."

Second, those who have presumed upon the light of God's grace must reckon with the darkness of His fury. The danger that we should perceive God from only one side is always present and can lead to a romantic view of one's relationship with Him. But God will not condone infidelity, rebellion, wickedness, or abominations. He watches over His covenant with passion. Those who claim to be His people may not exchange Him for another God without cost of themselves.

Third, the relationship between the Lord and His people is open to public view. God had placed Jerusalem at the center of the nations that they might witness the joy of covenant. He had staked his reputation on her. Since she had failed publicly, she must also bear her humiliation before the eyes of the world. Through her experience the nations will learn who God is: He is not only gracious but also passionate, demanding absolute and exclusive allegiance. While Jerusalem bears the insults of mockers, the pain extends to the heart of God. He, too, will ultimately feel the sting of the cynic's slander: "these are the people of Yahweh; yet they have come out of His land?"

Ted Kirnbauer

(rev. 10/17/14)

Ezekiel 4-5

Fourth, the Lord, not the God of the netherworld or his demonic agents, is the master of life and death. He not only wields a deadly sword but also has at His disposal a series of agents through which His sentences against a wicked nation are executed.

Fifth, the word of the Lord is sure; He does not speak in vain. At the time He had entered into a covenant with His people, He had warned them of the consequences of infidelity; those warnings are about to be fulfilled, precisely as uttered. In 593_{BC} Ezekiel pronounced his word of judgment; in 586 his prophetic status was confirmed.

In conclusion, we can never find the solution unless we agree on the problem. If sickness is at the heart of man's problem, we need doctors. If it is economics, we need economists. If our problem is alienation, we need psychologists. However, if the heart of the human dilemma is rebellion against God, what we need is something that reconciles us to God.

We see throughout Scripture that man's problem is that he has a deeply seated rebellion against God. Man desires to be at the center of the universe, but only God is God. There is no hope for mankind apart from God's intervening work of salvation. Christians need to understand that although God is a God of love, mercy, grace, patience, and goodness, He is also a holy God who does not tolerate rebellion. His response to sin is a terrible wrath. It is God's commitment to righteousness that results in the extreme measure of the death of His Son.

Although Jesus' blood has placed us in a right standing with God, He still warns us over and over again that we are not exempt from judgment for sin. We should not presume that salvation is a ticket to heaven without any consequences for rebellion. As the picture of God's grace becomes clearer, so does the picture of His judgment. Jesus warned religious people to "Flee the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7). I Peter 4:17 says, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God." The seven churches of Revelation (Rev. 2-3) are loaded with threats of wrath for their godless living. In the framework of the cross, one side is sin and judgment, the other God's intervention. In the framework of salvation there is the expectation that the believer will grow in holiness or face consequences for his/her apathy and rebellion.