
EXCISING EVIL

Psalm 106:24-48

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GOD'S WITNESSES TO THE WORLD

In order to effectively make sense of the Old Testament, we must realize that the spiritual stage was set a bit differently in that age than it is in the New Testament. For example, whereas individual believers are the primary witness to the nations in the New Testament, it was the nation of Israel—the Jews as a people—who was God's witness to others in the Old Testament. Though the Jews awaited Messiah who would be the “*light to the nations*,” in the meantime, they were the collective light to which the nations could come to learn about the Lord (Isaiah 60:3-5). His word and way was their great “*wisdom in the sight of the peoples*” (Deuteronomy 4:6). It was so crucial—not only for their own well-being, but for the sake of the world—for them to live according to God's prescribed patterns for life. (See Deuteronomy 4:1-8.)

That explains why God dealt with the Jews in such a tough and exacting manner: if their national witness became distorted or intermingled with the practices and doctrines of false gods, the world would be completely void of the truth. All hope for atonement and restoration with the true God would be lost to the peoples of the earth. The world learned about God through His treatment of His people—and through their behavioral testimony.

If they sacrificed their infants to bloodthirsty gods, as the nations round about them did, then God would appear no different than those false gods! Again and again in the Old Testament, we see God attempting to distinguish Himself from “*gods that are no gods*” (Jeremiah 5:7; 16:20), and to distance the worship offered by His followers from the grotesque acts of worship demanded by heinous demons.

It helps to interpret the Old Testament by asking the question: “*In light of trying to preserve a true, loving and redemptive witness to the world, why does God do/say X, Y or Z?*” Where would we be today if, for example, God had not driven Adam and Eve from Eden after they ate the forbidden fruit, thereby preventing them from eating of the tree of life—and living forever? Imagine a world

filled with never-dying humans who have centuries to practice ever-increasing sophistications of evil!

LIFE-SAVING IMMUNE SYSTEM

Many of the episodes in the Old Testament that appear to reveal a cruel, vengeful and uncaring God actually demonstrate just the opposite. Much like a surgeon must, at times, cut out a tumor in order to preserve someone's future life, so, too, does the Lord carefully and completely remove cancerous distortions and malignancies from His people—as a collective group.

The purpose for the human immune system is patterned after God's heart for the world: to identify and eliminate foreign/harmful entities (bacteria, fungi, parasites, viruses, etc.). These *pathogens* (disease-causers) have identity-markers called *antigens* whose patterns differ from ones the body recognizes as normal/friendly. Once distinguished, the abnormal cells are destroyed as the body seeks to purge itself of danger, and sometimes normal cells—ones that have become infected—are also destroyed. Such collateral damage is unavoidable because the normal cells act as host and breeding ground for increased infection.

When fundamental wrongness infected the people of God at points in their history, God chose to preserve His witness—and our hope—by exacting consequences that would, themselves, become lessons for those of us “*upon whom the ends of the ages have come*” (1 Corinthians 10:11). Like a good parent, He is willing to be misinterpreted by His children in order to save them from great peril. But it will completely change the way you read the Old Testament once you grasp this truth:

“The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds.” ~Psalms 145:17

“...With the Lord there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption.” ~Psalms 130:7

PSALM 106:24-48

1. *“They despised the pleasant land...and did not believe...but grumbled...” (vs. 24-25).*
2. *“They joined themselves also to Baal-peor” (v. 28-31).*
3. *“...It went hard with Moses...because they were rebellious” (vs. 32-33).*
4. *“And served idols which became a snare to them” (Refer to vs.34-36).*
5. *“Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were subdued under their power” (v. 42).*

6. *“...They, however, were rebellious in their counsel, and so sank down in their iniquity” (v. 43).*
7. *“Nevertheless He looked upon their distress when He heard their cry, and He remembered His covenant for their sake...” (vs. 44-45).*