

PSA Series – Does Man’s Sin Deserve God’s Wrath? What is God’s Wrath?

Description

This is the second part of an article series examining the biblical case both for ***and*** against Penal Substitutionary Atonement (*PSA*), the [first part being the intro](#).[^] *PSA*’s first core pillar (*of four*) is: “*Man’s sin deserves God’s Wrath*”.[^] Thus, we’ll examine that core pillar in this article

We’ll first examine what the “Wrath of God” is according to the Bible so we’re all on the same page.[^] **That will be the bulk of this article.** [^] Then we’ll see if the Bible supports *PSA*’s first claim that man’s sin deserves God’s wrath.[^] **If you have no interest in *PSA* and simply want to understand God’s wrath better, you can stop reading at the final heading before the conclusion.**[^] (*It’ll be obvious where to stop* .)

Here we go.

Biblically, what is God’s Wrath?

We’ll first look at the Greek and Hebrew words translated “wrath” when that wrath is God’s wrath.[^] Then we’ll look at some of the places they are used to broaden that understanding.

The original Greek and Hebrew words

We’ll start with Greek first.

Greek: “ὀργή” ([orgĕ](#))

Koine Greek is a wonderful language for many reasons, but one of them is how specific its words can be.[^] The New Testament word that’s most often translated “wrath” — when the wrath is God’s — is the Greek word “ὀργή” ([orgĕ](#)), and it means:

3709 *orgĕ*, — (from *orgĕ*, “to teem, swelling up to constitutionally oppose”) â€“**properly, settled anger** (opposition), i.e. rising up from an ongoing (fixed) opposition.

3709 /*orgĕ*, — (“settled anger”) proceeds from an internal disposition which steadfastly opposes someone or something **based on extended personal exposure**, i.e. solidifying what the beholder considers wrong (unjust, evil).

[“*Orgĕ*” comes from the verb *oragĕ* meaning, ‘to teem, to swell’; and thus implies that it is **not a sudden outburst**, but rather (referring to **God’s**) **fixed, controlled, passionate feeling against sin . . . a settled indignation**

(so Hendriksen)” (D. E. Hiebert, at 1 Thes 1:10).]

God’s wrath isn’t an “uncontrolled outburst of anger” as we sometimes think it is. It’s more than that. God gets angry, but it’s a more “settled anger”.

To draw an analogy, it’s the calm, controlled, “silent but deadly” type of anger you sometimes see in a movie where someone is furious, but is also willing to play the long game and remains outwardly calm whilst the fury slowly simmers inside. That’s an imperfect analogy, but it’s much closer to the truth than thinking of God’s wrath like an “outburst of anger”.

Now we’ll look at Hebrew.

Hebrew: “אָפַּח” (aph)

There are two Hebrew words that we’ll look at, although they will be slightly less specific and illuminating. Here’s one typical example, and please keep the whole passage in your mind because it’ll become relevant later in this article.

Judges 2:18-21

18 When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.

19 But it came about **when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.**

20 **So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel,** and He said, “Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice,

21 I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died

The word translated “anger” in that passage is: “אָפַּח” (aph)

- 1. אָפַּח noun masculine Genesis 30:2 nostril, nose, face, anger
- 1 nostril, as organ of breathing
- 2 Du face (especially in phrase אָפַּח פְּנֵי אִשׁוֹךְ אֶבְרָם אָפַּח פְּנֵי אִשׁוֹךְ אֶבְרָם)
- 3 mostly anger,

So basically, it means “anger”. (I believe the “nostril” connection is because your nostrils flare when you make a typical “angry face”, but I’m not certain.)

Interestingly, the verb translated “burned” there is “*charah*” (charah) and it means:

charah verb **burn, be kindled, of anger** (Aramaic *charah* Pa`el **cause, fire to burn** (rare); Zinjirli *charah* anger, NĀZMG 1893, 98. 103; **Arabic burning sensation, in throat, etc., from rage and pain**)

Thus, a more literal translation might be: “*The anger of the lord burned with anger against Israel*”, or perhaps “*The anger of the lord burned angrily against Israel*”. If you wanted to capture the emphatic force better — usually a good thing in translation — I would likely translate it “*The anger of the lord burned furiously against Israel*”.

Hebrew loves to use repetition for emphasis and this seems like an obvious example of that.

Notice the force there.

This isn’t “*God was Angry*”, or even “*God was very angry*”. Both of those downplay — perhaps accidentally, perhaps not — the level of God’s wrath here. (And when you see why God was furious later in this article, I think you’ll understand.) Here’s how that phrase in Judges 2:20 is translated in several modern popular translations:

NIV: Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel

ESV: So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel

NKJV: Then the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel

NASB 95: So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel

The NIV and ESV completely miss the force here. That shouldn’t be surprising since those two are both horrible translations that intentionally mistranslate regularly (*the evidence for that is in [my article on Bible translations](#)*), but — as usual — the NASB 95 gets it exactly right and the NKJV does very well. Again, “*The anger of the lord burned furiously against Israel*” captures the emphatic sense slightly better, but the NASB 95’s translation is — as usual — excellent.

Remember, the Greek “orgē”. Just because God’s “anger burned furiously”, doesn’t mean it was an outburst of anger.

It wasn’t like Israel woke up one day and collectively decided at the same moment to all turn away from God. That kind of thing just doesn’t happen. Israel — like every other nation in world history — didn’t turn wicked in a day; it happened over a period of time. Perhaps a short period of only a few years, perhaps a long period of a few decades, but it takes time.

This reinforces the fact that God’s anger/wrath isn’t an uncontrolled outburst. Like the Greek word “orgē”, it’s a more settled anger that has built up over time.

So don’t worry, God won’t “lash out” in anger/wrath. He has more self-control than that.

Hebrew: “אָפְּסָח” (qatsaph)

There is another word that’s occasionally used of God’s wrath toward man, though it’s more often used of man being “wrathful” toward someone else. It’s the word “אָפְּסָח” ([qatsaph](#)), and here’s the definition from the lexicon:

I. אָפְּסָח verb **be wroth** (Late Hebrew id., **Hiph`il make wrathful** (rare); Syriac **be wrathful**, also be anxious, fearful);-

Qal Perfect3masculine singular אָפְּסָח Genesis 41:10 +, etc.; Imperfect3masculine singular אָפְּסָח Leviticus 10:6 +, etc.; Infinitive construct אָפְּסָח Isaiah 54:9; Participle אָפְּסָח Zechariah 1:15; -**be wroth**:

And here’s one place it’s used of God.

Joshua 22:17-18

17 Is not the iniquity of Peor enough for us, from which we have not cleansed ourselves to this day, although a plague came on the congregation of the LORD,

18 that you must turn away this day from following the LORD? **If you rebel against the LORD today, He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel tomorrow.**

Notice something in that verse: God’s anger is assumed to be delayed. That is, if they sin today, God will “be wrathful” tomorrow. Again, this isn’t an outburst of anger that God can’t control. Despite the vehemence of God’s anger/wrath when “the anger of the Lord burns furiously”, it **still** isn’t an uncontrolled outburst. If you considered the number of verses in the Bible about God being “slow to anger” (*like Psalm 103:8*), this should make a lot of sense.

God’s wrath in the Old Testament vs His wrath in the New Testament

Some people think that God was wrathful and vengeful in the Old Testament but merciful and forgiving in the New Testament. God didn’t change because God doesn’t change, however, I think there is a reason for this perception. **If you know why God was so wrathful against Israel when they strayed, His wrath in the Old Testament makes a lot more sense.**

Please don't miss the word "all" in verse 24 of the following passage.

Leviticus 18:20-25

20 You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to be defiled with her.

21 You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to **Molech**, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.

22 You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.

23 Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.

24 Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for **by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled.**

25 For the land has become defiled, **therefore I have brought its punishment upon it**, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.

The Bible records what Molech worship entailed. The following verse is about the good king Josiah, and is one of a long list of good things he did.

2 Kings 23:10

10 He also defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, **that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for Molech.**

And this verse in Jeremiah tells us something similar about Baal:

Jeremiah 19:5

5 and have built **the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal**, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind

The worship of both Molech and Baal involved taking children — usually babies — and burning them alive.

No, I'm not kidding.

(You can also do some research to confirm this since it's an established historical fact with documentation about how it was done. I wouldn't recommend that though because the details are extremely disturbing.)

How often did Israel turn away from God to Baal? (Every 5 minutes or so?) Every time Israel did that, they started burning their children as burnt offerings to a pagan god.

Does God's wrath against Israel make more sense now?

Israel repeatedly turned away from the God of the universe to worship Molech, Baal, and other gods. Of course, they weren't *always* worshiping Molech and/or Baal every time they turned from God, but it was certainly most of the time. (*With Baal especially.*) And despite this, God was still gracious to them and kept them alive as a people until He broke them of that idolatry.

God gave Israel the equivalent of a heavenly whuppin' when He had Babylon destroy Jerusalem, then put Israel in a 70-year "time out" during the Babylonian captivity so they could "think about what they'd done".

It worked too.

From the time that Israel returned from their Babylonian captivity to this very day, they have not served pagan gods/idols anymore. To be sure they had other serious sins (*like rejecting Jesus/the Messiah and others mentioned in the NT*), but they never returned to idols. Other sins yes, and yes serious sins, but not pagan gods or idols.

Now, given that God had stopped Israel from chasing idols and literally burning their children alive as an offering to pagan gods by the New Testament times, maybe that's part of the reason that God seems less wrathful in the New Testament?

Maybe?

Maybe not committing horrific sin regularly and repeatedly results in less judgement from God? Possibly?

(*This also answers the questions some people have about how God could command Israel to wipe out the Canaanite nations during the conquest of the promised land. Leviticus 18:24 records that the nations in the promised land did "all" these things. God's judgement/wrath upon them was just/righteous and He didn't want His people falling into that. Israel disobeyed by not destroying them, and they were constantly sucked into horrific sin as a result.*)

Notice that God's wrath here is judicial, that is, it's in response to sins/crimes that Israel committed. That leads to another important element of God's wrath which we'll examine next.

The judicial context of God's wrath

As pointed out above, God's anger/wrath was kindled when Israel behaved wickedly. Lest we forget,

God is the righteous judge of the universe and thus His wrath is judicial, as these next few passages clearly show.

Romans 1:18-21

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, **so that they are without excuse.**

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened

For space's sake, we'll skip past the numerous and grievous sins mentioned and go to the relevant part of the next chapter.

Romans 2:3-8

2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.

3 But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God?

4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

5 But **because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath (orgÃ©) for yourself in the day of wrath(orgÃ©) and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,**

6 who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:

7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath(orgÃ©) and indignation.

This next passage makes it even more clear, and I've elected to use my own translation of the passage because it captures the judicial nature of the passage in a way that most translations don't. If you doubt my translation skills — which is totally fine — you can look at the NASB 95's translation of the passage [here](#), and/or use the interlinear to double-check my translation [here](#). (Both links open in a new tab.)

2 Thess 1:5-10 ([my translation](#))

5 This is undeniable proof of **the righteous judgement of God**, for you to be deemed worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer,

6 since indeed **it's righteous** for God to repay the men afflicting you *with affliction*.

7 And you (the men being afflicted) *will* rest with us at **the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire**,

8 delivering **avenging justice** on the men not *knowing God and on the men not obediently listening to the gospel of our Lord Jesus,

9 **They will suffer the sentence of their verdict**: *the ruin of ages*, away from the Lord's presence and away from the glory of His power,

10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at by all the men who believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Notice the legal and judicial terms used here?

This isn't God "getting back" at people for wronging Him because He had an "outburst of anger". This is God Himself — the holy, righteous, and all-knowing judge — "delivering avenging justice" on wicked men so that after being judged, they "will suffer the sentence of their verdict". This isn't an angry God lashing out; this is the judge of all creation judging impartially.

God's wrath is holy.

It is righteous.

And it is just.

Don't be deceived into thinking that God's wrath is a petty thing, or that He has outbursts of anger and can't control Himself. Quite the opposite in fact. As we just saw, Romans 2:5 speaks of wicked men "storing up wrath (org)" and that God waits until "the day of wrath (org)" to release it. And don't forget how Hebrews 10:31 puts it:

Hebrews 10:31

31 It is a **terrifying** thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

It would indeed be terrifying to stand before an all-knowing and perfect judge when you are wicked.

Now, some people — including Christians — think that while God the Father might be like this, Jesus isn't. We'll examine that idea next.

Some say: “*But Jesus isn't wrathful! He doesn't judge people like God did in the Old Testament*”

I humbly submit that this view isn't Biblically accurate for two reasons. First, Jesus *is* God, and to deny that is to deny the Trinity. (And if you deny the Trinity, I have [another article](#) that I suggest you read.)

Second, the Bible explicitly states that Jesus *did* do that:

Jude 1:4-5

4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny **our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ**.

5 Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, **that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe**.

Notice verse 4, which calls Jesus “our only Master and Lord”, and then verse 5 says that “the Lord” — which contextually must be Jesus — was the One who destroyed “those who did not believe”. This obviously refers to at least some of the times God judged Israel while they were in the wilderness for 40 years.

That was Jesus. (Pre-incarnation)

Jesus did that.

And to the idea that the Father judges but Jesus doesn't judge, actually, the opposite is true.

John 5:22

“For not even the Father judges anyone, but **He has given all judgment to the Son**,

We already saw this in the 2 Thessalonians 1 passage we looked at above, where “the Lord Jesus” delivers “avenging justice” on the wicked. Or, for a more complete picture of that judgement, you can skip to the end of The Book:

Revelation 19:11-16

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and **He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.**

12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.

13 He is clothed with a robe **dipped in blood,** and His name is called **The Word of God.**

14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

15 **From His mouth comes a sharp sword,** so that with it He may **strike down the nations,** and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and **He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.**

16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, **“KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”**

Where does the Bible say that Jesus has no wrath? Where did this idea that Jesus is entirely lamb without even a hint of a lion come from?

Remember, Jesus is both Lion and Lamb.

Those verses above capture the “lion” element quite nicely, **but don't forget that He is also the lamb of God.** He comforts the afflicted and helps us in our time of need. Scripture captures this duality in many places:

John 3:36 “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the **wrath of God abides on him.**”

Romans 11:22 Behold then the kindness **and** severity of God; **to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness,** if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

Many other such passages show this duality as well. Jesus is both kind and wrathful, He's both loving and a righteous judge. These days, Christians — and even non-Christians — usually don't need a reminder that Jesus is loving. However, there is a danger in portraying Jesus as only loving without also teaching that He is the righteous and holy judge.

He is both.

Now that we've thoroughly examined God's wrath and what it is, we'll move on to discussing its relevance to Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA).

Examining PSA's First Pillar: "Man's Sin Deserves God's Wrath"

As it concerns our investigation of Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA), this is the first pillar that supports the doctrine. Thankfully, the answer seems quite clear:

Romans 1:18

18 For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against **all** ungodliness and **unrighteousness of men** who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Well, that seems like case closed because "**all** ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" seems pretty clear.

I don't see any wiggle room there.

None at all.

You could also refer to any of the verses we've already looked at, plus countless examples in both the Old and New Testaments where sin provokes God's wrath. There's also John and Romans.

John 3:36

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but **he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**

Romans 2:7-8

7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

8 but **to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.**

There are many other places we could go, but I think the point is made. Man's sin provokes God's wrath. And **since God is perfectly righteous, if our sin provokes God's wrath, then our sin deserves God's wrath.** To say otherwise would be to say that God was unrighteous when His wrath was provoked by our sin. (*And obviously, God can't ever be unrighteous.*)

Thus, PSA's first pillar — that man's sin deserves God's wrath — passes the biblical test with flying colors.

It seems entirely incontrovertible that this first core pillar is true.

Now, that doesn't necessarily establish PSA as a whole is true because there are still 3 more pillars that must stand, or PSA falls.

However, PSA is off to a good and solid start.

Conclusion

God's wrath isn't an "outburst of anger", but rather a "settled anger" that arises not from the passion of the moment. It's a fixed, controlled sort of wrath/anger that is patient instead of impulsive, even when God's "anger burns furiously" against someone.

While some people think that God's wrath against Israel in the Old Testament was excessive, it often arose because Israel was burning their children alive as an offering to pagan gods, most commonly Baal and Molech. (*Plus other sins*) God's judgement against the Canaanite nations that Israel drove out of the promised land was in large part because of this sin, though again, others are mentioned as well.

God's wrath is also judicial in nature, arising from His role as the holy, just, and righteous judge of all creation.

God is *both* wrathful and loving in *both* the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus is the one who executed judgement against Israel after they left Egypt, and He will come again as judge of the Earth with a sword and "His robe dipped in blood". Again, this is a judicial execution of a righteous and just verdict, not an "outburst of anger".

Based on several passages, PSA's core pillar #1 "*Man's sin deserves God's wrath*" passes the biblical test easily.

The next article in this PSA series will focus on Pillar #2: "*Because God is perfectly righteous, just, and holy, He cannot simply leave sin unpunished, even if the sinner repents; to remain true to His own holy character, He **must** punish sin.*" We will thoroughly examine that idea in the next article.

I'll add a link to that article here when it's finished.

God Bless, and I'll see you all soon.

EDIT: That article is finished, and you can read it here: [PSA Series "Does God's Own Character Require Him to Punish Sin?"](#)