

Psalms 85:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.

Analysis

Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. This verse continues recounting God's past mercies, focusing specifically on His withdrawn wrath. The verb *asaph* (אָסַף, "taken away") means "to gather up, remove, withdraw"—like harvesting crops or removing objects from a field. God gathered up His wrath, removing its manifestation from His people's experience.

"All thy wrath" (*kol-evratekha*, כָּל־עֲבָרֶיךָ) emphasizes totality. *Evrach* (עֲבָרָה) denotes intense anger, fury, rage—God's holy response to covenant violation. This isn't petulant human temper but righteous judicial indignation against sin. The exile manifested this wrath (Lamentations 2:1-5, 4:11), as did earlier judgments throughout Israel's history. Yet God removed it completely—not diminishing it but withdrawing its expression through gracious forgiveness.

"Thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger" (*shavta mecharon apekha*, שָׁבְתָּ מִחֲרוֹן אָפֶיךָ) intensifies the imagery. *Charon aph* (חֲרוֹן אֶף) literally means "burning of nose/nostrils"—ancient Hebrew idiom for fierce anger, picturing flaring nostrils of enraged person. *Shuv* (שׁוּב, "turned") means "to turn back, return, turn away"—God turned from anger toward mercy. This turning reflects God's sovereign choice, not human merit. Numbers 25:4 and Deuteronomy 13:17 use similar language for God's wrath being turned away through appropriate action.

Historical Context

The concept of divine wrath pervades Old Testament theology. God's holiness requires response to sin—He cannot ignore covenant violations without compromising His righteous character. Yet His wrath coexists with mercy. Exodus 34:6-7 declares God "slow to anger" yet "by no means clearing the guilty." Throughout Israel's history, cycles of sin, divine judgment, repentance, and restoration demonstrated this balance. The exile to Babylon (586 BC) represented the culmination of God's wrath against Judah's persistent apostasy. Jeremiah warned for decades that judgment was coming (Jeremiah 25:1-11). When it arrived, it was devastating—temple destroyed, Jerusalem burned, leadership killed or exiled. Yet even in judgment, God promised restoration (Jeremiah 29:10-14). His wrath had purpose: correction, not annihilation.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does understanding God's wrath as righteous judicial response to sin differ from viewing it as arbitrary divine temper?
2. What does it mean that God 'turned away' from His fierce anger, and what caused this turning?
3. How does the Old Testament pattern of wrath followed by mercy help believers understand God's character and the gospel?

Interlinear Text

אָס פֶּתָה	כָּל	עֲבָרֶתְךָ	הָ שָׁיב וְתָה
Thou hast taken away	H3605	all thy wrath	thou hast turned
H622		H5678	H7725
מִחֲרֹן	אֲפֶרְךָ		
thyself from the fierceness	of thine anger		
H2740	H639		

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 106:23 (Judgment): Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.

Deuteronomy 13:17 (Parallel theme): And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers;

Jonah 3:9 (Parallel theme): Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

Isaiah 12:1 (Parallel theme): And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.

Isaiah 6:7 (Parallel theme): And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

Psalms 78:38 (Judgment): But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.