

Psalms 90:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.

Analysis

Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. This verse transitions from describing God's wrath (v.7-9) to acknowledging that its full extent remains incomprehensible. The rhetorical question "Who knoweth?" implies no one adequately understands divine anger's power. The second clause suggests that proper fear of God should correspond to the reality of His wrath—yet few fear Him proportionately to the threat He poses to unrepentant sinners.

"Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" (מִי יָדָע אֶת עֹז אַפְקָהּ/mi-yodea oz apekha) uses yada (to know experientially, intimately) with oz (strength, power, might, force). The rhetorical question expects the answer "no one." Nobody fully comprehends the strength of God's anger. While we observe its effects (mortality, suffering, judgment), its ultimate power exceeds human understanding. Af (anger, nostril) represents God's burning wrath against sin.

We see manifestations of divine anger—the flood destroyed all but eight people (Genesis 7:23). Sodom and Gomorrah burned under fire and brimstone (Genesis 19:24). Egypt experienced ten devastating plagues (Exodus 7-12). Korah's rebellion brought earthquake and consuming fire (Numbers 16:31-33). Yet even these historical judgments only partially reveal God's anger. Ultimate divine wrath—eternal conscious punishment in hell—surpasses comprehension. Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone in Scripture, warning of eternal fire (Matthew 25:41), weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12), and undying worm (Mark 9:48).

"Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath" (וְכִי־יִרְאַתְךָ עֲבָרְתְּךָ/ukheyir'atkha evratekha) suggests correspondence between appropriate fear and actual wrath. Yir'ah (fear, reverence, awe) should match evrah (wrath, fury). The kaf (as, according to, like) indicates proportionality—our fear of God should correspond to the reality of His wrath. Yet it rarely does. People either minimize divine wrath ("God is too loving to judge") or ignore it entirely, living without appropriate fear. Evratekha (your wrath) emphasizes this is personal—God Himself is angry with sin, not an impersonal force or natural consequence.

Historical Context

Moses had witnessed God's wrath more intimately than perhaps anyone in history. He saw Egypt devastated by plagues. He watched Pharaoh's army drown in the Red Sea. He witnessed divine fire consume Nadab and Abihu for unauthorized worship (Leviticus 10:1-2). He saw earth swallow Korah's company. He observed fiery serpents kill complainers (Numbers 21:6). He watched an entire generation—hundreds of thousands—die over forty years under God's sentence. Yet even Moses acknowledged: "Who knows the full power of Your anger?"

The question challenges minimized views of divine wrath common throughout history. Ancient paganism portrayed capricious, easily appeased gods. Modern liberalism denies divine wrath entirely, reducing God to benevolent grandfather. Popular Christianity often emphasizes love while ignoring wrath. Yet Scripture consistently presents God's terrifying holiness and righteous anger against sin.

Jonathan Edwards's famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741) applied this verse, declaring: "The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more... if God should only withdraw his hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God, would rush forth with inconceivable fury." The sermon provoked revival because it awakened people to divine wrath's reality.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Why do you think people generally fail to fear God proportionately to the reality of His wrath?
2. How does proper understanding of God's wrath enhance appreciation for the gospel—Christ absorbing that wrath on our behalf?
3. What is the relationship between fearing God and loving God, and how does awareness of His wrath contribute to healthy fear?

Interlinear Text

מִי	י וְדַע	עַז	אֶפְרַיִם	וּ כְּיִרְאַתְךָ
H4310	Who knoweth	the power	of thine anger	even according to thy fear
	H3045	H5797	H639	H3374

כִּי כִּי־חֲרָתְךָ:

so is thy wrath

H5678

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 33:14 (Parallel theme): The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

Leviticus 26:24 (Parallel theme): Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.