

Between placid lulls, the storm raged. "Rain" had been predicted. "Thunderstorms" had been the warning. But what blew against us was something much more. Something primal.

On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided." (Genesis 22:4-14)



After the previous storm I had cleaned out the rain gutters, opening the way for their watery purchase to run free from the house foundation. A spot here and there on the roof was tarred, patching dry and cracked caulking. But all of it combined could do little against the onslaught that was to come.

It began, as it often does, in harmless sprinkles. One looks to the heavens wondering if the weatherman's report was in error. Or perhaps Providence will take the storm the long way around, missing us all together. But then the sharp angular slices of lightning that had been safely far off, on the other side of the distant hills, move closer, bringing with them the troubling sonorous rumbles of thunder. The intervals between the light

and the sound shorten, until some of them explode simultaneously, near enough to rattle the house to the foundation.

Suddenly the rain intensifies. A staccato drumbeat peppers the roof and the windows facing south and west. The rain forces its way into the tiniest openings around windows and doors. It quickly saturates the ground, until even the underground tiling cannot siphon off the deluge, and rainwater forces its way through cracks in the foundation. We hurry to do what we can with towels and buckets and vacuum to stop the water before any damage is done.

The rain subsides, and all that is left is a wet calm that teases with fleeting relief. Then it begins again. But this time there is a strange, unearthly sound that approaches

out of the west. It is a roar—something between the sound of rain and a jet engine. For a few seconds it remains a mystery. Is it a tornado? There was no siren (although, out in the country, shuttered against the storm, the siren sounded in town is seldom heard). With horror we realize that the hideous sound is that of hailstones crashing through the upper branches of the trees. And then the chunks of ice are crashing against the house. The size of golf balls, the hail makes a hard thudding sound against the roof, but a sharp, sickening strike against the windows. We fear that they will be shattered, permitting the rain and hail inside. But, miraculously, they hold—even the vulnerable skylights.

After several frightening minutes, the onslaught of the hail subsides, and all around the house are left the tattered shreds of oak branches, leaves, white chunks of ice, and destruction. Then the rain begins again in earnest, but this time it is driven by a fierce, unrelenting wind. A straight-line wind with tornadic velocity, it is as if God has opened a fire hose and turned it upon our house. And we turn again to doing whatever we can to minimize damage inside the house, sopping up water, and entreating the heavens for relief.

A God of Grace

When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, "Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book which has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord which is poured out on us because our fathers have not observed the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book." (2 Chronicles 34:19-21)

What a frightful thing it must have been to be alive before Christ made the atonement for sin. If you were a gentile, you had no hope; there was no possibility, short of conversion to Judaism, that you could ever experience God's grace. If you were a Jew, you could only know His saving grace through the priesthood, and strict adherence to the Law. Short of that you experienced only God's wrath.

She said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to Me, thus says the Lord, "Behold, I am bringing evil on this place and on its inhabitants, even all the curses written in the book which they have read in the presence of the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place and it shall not be quenched.' " (2 Chronicles 34:23-25)

Since the fall of Adam, man has never deserved anything less than God's wrath. Man is born in sin. He lives with a fallen, depraved nature. Man has never, on his own, earned anything better than his own death and destruction.

The picture throughout the Old Testament is of God repeatedly stifling His righteous anger against Adam's fallen race through covenants and agreements with His chosen people. The existence of God's wrath could not be denied, but if they would only honor Him, love Him, and obey His laws, He would not release upon them the judgment they so deserved. But, of course, it was impossible for fallen man to uphold his end of the agreement. So, because He is at heart a God of grace, it would be necessary for the Lord Himself to provide the one sacrifice that would end all others. Instead of the repeated, numberless animal sacrifices of blood, He would provide a spotless Lamb that would remove the need, once and for all, for any others.

The next day [John] saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God

who takes away the sin of the world! This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-34)

Like the fierce storm that recently raged against our country home, God's wrath is very real. It is a powerful, destructive force. It is primal. It cannot be quenched by man's efforts alone. At best he can take steps to temporarily soften its blows, to survive bowed but, for a while, not broken. Left to his own devices, however, man will ultimately never survive the Lord's terrible anger against sin.

But now there is Christ. Now there is a new time, a new era. Man need no longer struggle and bargain for God's grace as he did in the old era. In Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God—sin is forever vanquished. It is gone. Finished. Blood has been shed for the last time.

Jehovah has always been a God of grace. Before Christ, His saving grace was demonstrated through His longsuffering, His gracious covenants with man, His Law and priesthood. Now—thank God—His saving grace is manifested in the God/Man, Jesus Christ: the Lamb of God.

*Would Jesus have the sinner die?
Why hangs He then on yonder tree?
What means that strange expiring cry?
(Sinners, He prays for you and me;)
Forgive them, Father, O forgive!
They know not that by Me they live.*

*Jesus, descended from above,
Our loss of Eden to retrieve,
Great God of universal love,
If all the world through Thee may live,
In us a quick'ning spirit be,
And witness Thou hast died for me.*

*Thou loving, all-atoning Lamb,—
Thee, by Thy painful agony,
Thy bloody sweat, Thy grief and shame,
Thy cross and passion on the tree,
Thy precious death and life—I pray,
Take all, take all my sins away.*

*O let Thy love my heart constrain,—
Thy love, for every sinner free,—
That every fallen son of man
May taste the grace that found out me;
That all mankind with me may prove
Thy sov'reign, everlasting love.
(Charles Wesley)*