

Seeing Snow with New Eyes: What the Bible has to Say about Blizzards, and What Blizzards Teach Us about God

10:00am on Saturday, January 23: With sixteen inches on the ground and sixteen hours left of Jonas I look outside my window and think: “Who can stand before his cold?”

10:00am on Sunday, January 24: Unable to gather with my church family, what can I say to my children about the blizzard of 2016? How can I help them know the God of creation and redemption, through this memorable storm?

What follows is a biblical theological meditation on Jonas (or any wintery storm), along with a short family devotional for any interested parents.

(No) Snow in the Beginning

In the beginning, there was water but not snow. On the second day God separated the waters in the sky from the waters on the earth (Gen 1:6–8); on the third day he gathered the waters on the earth, forming the dry ground (Gen 1:9–10). In Genesis 2, we learn “mist was going up from the land watering the whole face of the ground” (v. 6) and “a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there is divided and became four rivers” (v. 10). So before Adam sinned (Genesis 3) and God subjected the earth to futility (Romans 8:18–22), the had plenty of water, but no subzero temperatures to create ice crystals and snow squalls.

Accordingly, snow is a product of a world fallen from its original goodness. Creation scientists point to [tropical plants and animals in the arctic](#) as evidence that the world as we know it wasn't always snow-capped. Under an “expanse of water” (Gen 1:7), humanity flourished—i.e., they lived for hundreds of years (see Genesis 5)—and the tropics extended from pole-to-pole. But that all changed when the canopy collapsed and the rains began (Gen 7:11). Until the flood, the world was protected under the waters of heaven, nourished by mist from the ground, and unconcerned with tropical depressions and deadly blizzards.

All that changed when God sent a flood to earth to judge human and angelic wickedness (see Genesis 6:1–8). The rest, as they say, is history. Or more biblically, the four seasons of Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter were introduced to bring about redemptive history (see the important connection between the new covenant and the Noahic covenant, Jer 31:35–36). Genesis 8:22 promises “while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” Though these seasons may have existed in some fashion before the flood, its very likely the mention of “cold” and “winter” in this verse signify the unpleasant introduction of these conditions into the world.

Snow in Redemptive History

Fast forward to the time of Moses. Twice in the Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy) “snow” is mentioned—and both times it is related to leprosy. In Exodus 4:6 and Numbers 12:10, Moses hand and Miriam's body were made “leprous like snow.” Presumably their skin was made white like snow. The use of “snow” as Moses' comparison of choice represents its commonality in the

Middle East. In the Bible, when it is not merely an historical descriptor (2 Sam 2:30; 1 Chron 11:22) or a seasonal phenomenon (Job 37–38; Proverbs 31:21; Isaiah 55:10; Jeremiah 18:14), snow is used as a vivid metaphor.

For example, snow describes leprosy (Exod 4:6; Num 12:10; 2 Kings 5:27), cleanliness (Job 9:30), and purity (Lam 4:7). By extension it speaks of the sparkling purity of the Lord's clothing (Daniel 7:9; Matthew 28:3) and hair (Revelation 1:14; cf. Daniel 7:9 [?]). In Proverbs snow is used twice (25:13; 26:1) to convey everyday principles of life. In one instance it is used to depict the refreshment that a faithful messenger gives his master (Proverbs 25:13), a theme that is perhaps repeated in Psalm 68:14. Conversely, in Job snow is used to speak of the icy coldness of "he who withholds kindness from a friend" (6:14–16). So its extreme coldness can be used in different ways in Scripture. Still, the most powerful metaphor regarding snow doesn't relate to coldness but to purity. In Isaiah 1:18, forgiveness is related to snow's white purity; the same concept is brought forth in David's penitential prayer (Psalm 51:7).

In sum, God's Word makes regular mention of snow—[24 times in all](#). Though introduced into the world after the fall and the flood, snow is now a vital part of God's revelation and even his promise of redemption. Therefore, like the confusion of languages has resulted in a myriad of tongues praising God (compare Genesis 11 to Acts 2 to Revelation 7), snow which came as a judgment has become a powerful testimony to God's power and purity. Indeed, with the lens of Scripture in place, December dustings and January blizzards have the potential to awaken awe and conjure up praise for Jesus atoning death. But only if we know what we are looking at.

When the Snow Falls . . .

It would be near impossible to understand Jesus as the Bread of Life without taste buds and the pleasing experience of a full stomach. Likewise, without thirst how would we comprehend Jesus words: "whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35; cf. John 7:37 – 39). In truth, God made a sensate world full of sheep and stones to reveal himself as a good shepherd and a rock of refuge. In truth, there is nothing in creation that in some way does not point back to him--- including snow. (For the best book I know about this subject, see James Jordan, [Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World](#)).

Therefore, from a careful reading of Scripture, we can see at least three ways snow reminds us of God's power and purity. These "creational truths" are not immediately apparent from watching the snow gather around us, but from the Scriptures we begin to see how snow speaks to the glory and grace of God.

First, snow's coldness reveals the power of God.

In Psalm 147 and Job 37–38, God's divine power is poetically esteemed as both passages marvel at the coldness of his frigid winds and boundless supply of snow.

In the former (Psalm 147:15-18), the Psalmist marvels,

He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
He gives snow like wool;

he scatters frost like ashes.
He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs;
 who can stand before his cold?
He sends out his word, and melts them;
 he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.

Likewise, in Job (37:5–6, 8–13; 38:22–24)

God thunders wondrously with his voice;
 he does great things that we cannot comprehend.
For to the snow he says, ‘Fall on the earth,’
 likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour. . . .
Then the beasts go into their lairs,
 and remain in their dens.
From its chamber comes the whirlwind,
 and cold from the scattering winds.
By the breath of God ice is given,
 and the broad waters are frozen fast.
He loads the thick cloud with moisture;
 the clouds scatter his lightning.
They turn around and around by his guidance,
 to accomplish all that he commands them
 on the face of the habitable world.
Whether for correction or for his land
 or for love, he causes it to happen. . . .

*“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
 or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
 for the day of battle and war?
What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,
 or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?”*

From these few verses, we learn that snow is meant to recall the power of God; and copious amounts of snow is meant to convince us of his unmatched omnipotence. Marvel at this fact: the strongest nation in the world is no match for two feet of snow. Though we can predict the time of its arrival and the course of its’ approach, our nation’s capitol is utterly submissive to God’s flaky army. God holds the storm in his hand and no one can hold it back.

In fact, every year snow cripples us. To answer Psalm 147:17: *No one* “can stand before his cold.” When Job questioned God, the Almighty reminded him of his sovereign rule over every flake. Indeed, what electron microscopes reveal is that every flake is shaped differently, and yet there is no concern that God’s storehouse will ever run out.

Even as bread and milk, snow-blowers and shovels sell out, there is no end to God’s supply. Therefore, the sheer volume of his snow ought to humble us and teach us that he alone is Almighty. If snow is result of a world in rebellion, its yearly presence ought to keep us in check—apart from him we can do nothing (John 15:5); we make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps (Prov 16:9); we ought not to boast of next year for storm and snow may preclude our efforts (James 4:13–16).

Such humbling truth protects us against trusting in ourselves and prepares our hearts to give thanks for the many days he does permit us snow-free living. In a world where sub-zero temperatures may last for weeks at a time, marvel at God's common grace that gives us warm clothes, warm homes, and warm food. If God has given such security to you, thank him. And then look for others who need such care. God's severity is perfectly matched by his kindness and those who know him best will minister mercy to those suffering under his righteous severity (Romans 11:22).

Second, snow's unalloyed purity points to the greater purity of God himself.

The power of God is matched by his purity. And just as snow and cold recalls his omnipotent power, it also points to his unblemished purity.

In Daniel 7:9 we are given a vision of the Ancient of Days, seated on his throne, "his clothing was white as snow." As with many references to snow in Scripture, this description highlights the absolute purity of the One who sits on the throne. He is the holy of holies (Isaiah 6; Revelation 4–5) who is separated from John by a great sea (Rev 4:6). He is Light (1 John 1:5) and the One who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16).

In creation, few things are more brilliant, even blinding, than the shining sun on a field of snow. Likewise, untouched by human hands, the snows of heaven exhibit a purity exceeding even the cleanest mountain stream. It's for this reason that the Psalms and the Prophets speak of snow to describe the promise of forgiveness and cleansing. In truth, only God is pure as the snow. But because God gives righteousness and purity as gifts to those who believe, snow also depicts the purity of salvation.

Third, snow's blanketing whiteness illustrates the purifying work of Christ's blood.

Even as snow ought to recall God's power, it also depicts his purity. And thankfully God does not keep purity to himself. Rather, he blankets the earth in white to accomplish his purposes (Isaiah 55:10; cf. Job 37:13) and in so doing shows what he can do to cleanse and cover the ruddiest parts of the world.

Therefore, in two of the most memorable verses in the Bible, snow depicts the kind of purity God offers for us stained by sin. The two passages are Psalm 51 and Isaiah 1.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalm 51:7)

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool. (Isaiah 1:18)

The imagery is as precious as it is purifying. In the first, David prays for God to cleanse him from the sin he committed with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). His prayer is effectively answered in the fact that David and Bathsheba are given a royal heir (Solomon) through the fruit of their illicit

marriage. This heir is set apart to continue the line of David and eventually bring forth the messiah. Despite all the crooked complications of this story, the union of David and Bathsheba is paradigmatic for the whole Bible—what sinful men do in rebellion against God can be redeemed by God and will be used for his greater glory (see Matthew 1:6–7).

This is the promise of Isaiah 1, too. Whereas David prays for his sins to be made white as snow, unsure if God would grant such pardon and purity; Isaiah 1 makes the offer secure. In response to a litany of sins (idolatry, vice, and social injustice), the judge of heaven and earth promises a way for sinners to find forgiveness and cleansing. These words anticipate the new covenant (Isaiah 53–55; cf. Jeremiah 31:34) and promise a kind of purity not seen before in the Bible.

Like the pure, white flakes which have fallen on the blood-soaked courts of Auschwitz, God's forgiveness is able to make the darkest heart pure, the bloodiest hands clean. What is impossible with man and our justice, is possible with God. Jesus' blood washes away the worst sins, so that God's redeemed can share in his purity. The same snow-white raiment that he wears (Daniel 7:9) is shared with those who sins have been washed clean. Revelation depicts the saints of God clad in white (3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 19:14), no longer stained by the world or their sins. This is the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's latent promise.

Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow

Every time it snows, therefore, the children of God are given visible, tangible testimony that their scarlet sins have been washed white as snow. We don't have to wonder if they will be atoned for, Isaiah 1 and the rest of Scripture testifies clearly—"If you confess your sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you of your unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Again, this snowy meditation is not a hidden message discerned by watching for signs in the sky. It is a written message found in the Bible: if you remember what Scripture says about snow, you can storm-after-storm, flake-after-flake be reminded of the greatest news ever recorded—that the omnipotent God of heaven, who sends forth the cold and the snow, has also made a way for sinners who cannot stand before him to know and enjoy his gift of his purity.

It really is utterly astonishing to step back and consider that snow—a product of the fall—is used to demonstrate God's power and direct our thoughts back to the gospel promises of pardon and purity. It reminds us that when we watch the weather report, we only get half the story. The Weather Channel can report the storm and compare it with other years, but only the Word of God can prepare us for the Storm of the Lord and how to stand before the One whose cold strikes us down and shuts us in.

Today, if you are in a place to behold the beauty and severity of this year's blizzard, may it lead you to greater adoration God's power and confidence in his mercy and grace to purify your sin. At the same time, may it lead us all to pray for and assist those in need, so that when they think of snow they will not be stuck in the blizzard of 2016, but rather set free to marvel at the the power and purity of God.

Soli Deo Gloria, ds