

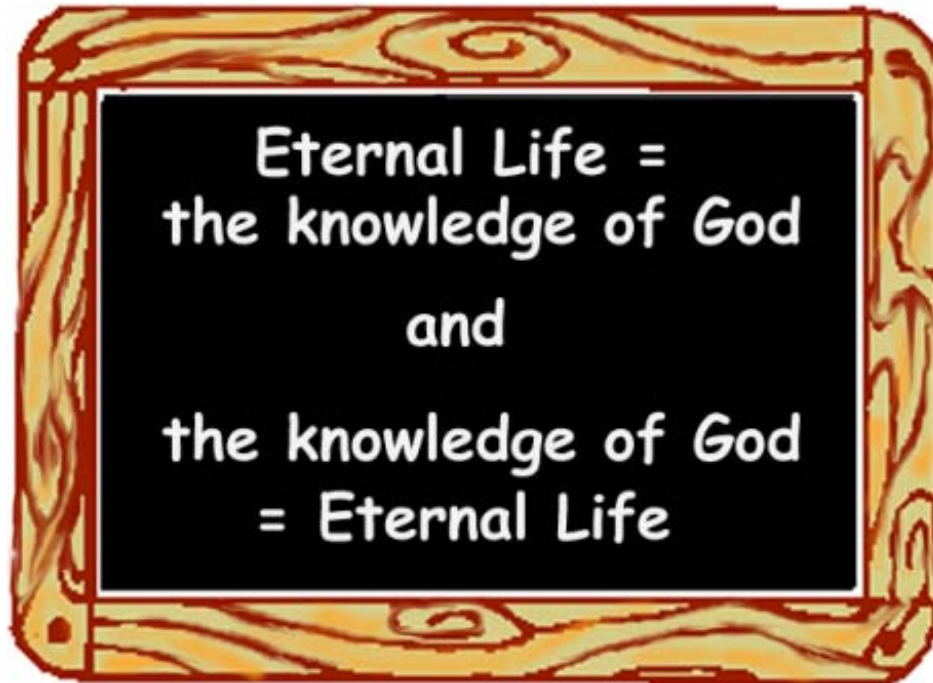
# Behold Your God

by F. T. Wright 1979, edited and expanded by C. G. Hullquist 2005

## It's a matter of Life and Death

Jesus said, "This is life eternal, that they might *know* the only true God and Jesus Christ." John 17:3.

The truth expressed in this verse is actually an equation:



The converse is also true:

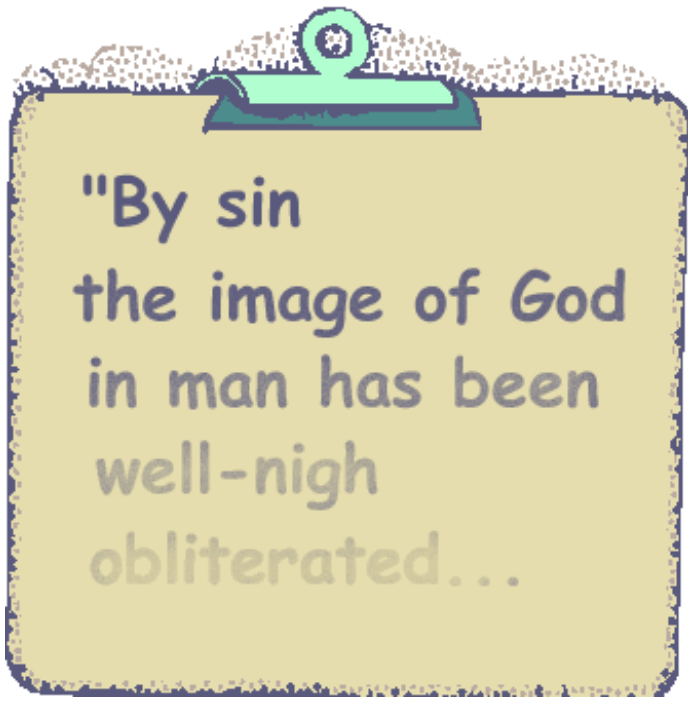
Not knowing God = Eternal Death    or    Eternal Death = Lack of a *true* Knowledge of God

"The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have."  
*Testimonies* 8:289.

Those who will be saved are not simply well advised to have this knowledge.  
They *must* have it. It is absolutely essential, indispensable, mandatory.

Why? Because "This knowledge, received, will re-create the soul in the image of God.  
It will impart to the whole being a spiritual power that is divine." *Ibid.*

This divine spiritual power comes from a true knowledge of God. It is really the Grace of God. Not simply unmerited favor or a positive attitude toward the undeserving sinner, it is that Amazing Grace that come only from God to regenerate, transform and enlighten the willing and obedient. Since God's grace is *His* power, it is the supreme force in all the universe. It creates new life and re-creates fallen lives; it lifts the lost and glorifies the damned. This is why Jesus came to this earth: that we might know God, to show us the Father, that we might be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."  
1 Peter 1:5.



“By sin the image of God in man has been marred and well-nigh obliterated; it is the work of the gospel to restore that which has been lost; and we are to co-operate with the divine agency in this work. And how can we come into harmony with God, how shall we receive His likeness, unless we obtain a knowledge of Him? It is this knowledge that Christ came into the world to reveal unto us.” *Testimonies 5:743.*

In other words, it is impossible to come into harmony with God and receive His likeness without obtaining a knowledge of Him. And when we come into harmony with God we are justified. “Being justified by faith, we have peace (or harmony) with God.” Romans 5:1

“It is by beholding that we become changed. By dwelling upon the love of God and our Saviour, by contemplating the perfection of the divine character and claiming the righteousness of Christ as ours by faith, we are to be transformed into the same image.” *Testimonies 5:744.*

The better we know God, the stronger, more vital and effective our personal Christian experience will be. Adam and Eve originally knew God in the garden of Eden and experienced a perfect, harmonious life with Him. “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.” Romans 1:19,20. But then the human race fell. “When they knew God, they...became vain in their imagination, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.” Verses 21, 22.



Adam and Eve gave up their true knowledge of God and in its place substituted another view of God according to their own imagination. This was the first downward step toward ultimate ruin.

They “changed the glory [character] of the incorruptible God into an image an image made like to corruptible man.” Verse 23. The true revelation of God’s character was replaced by a false one. “Wherefore God also gave them up...who changed the truth of God into a lie...For this cause God gave them up...And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.” Verses 24-28.

Paul declares that all this is the result of rejecting a true knowledge of God; unbelievable wickedness was the sure and certain fruit. But we need only lack a true knowledge of God to have our “foolish hearts darkened.”

“The meager views which so many have had of the exalted character and office of Christ have narrowed their religious experience and have greatly hindered their progress in the divine life.” *Testimonies 5:743.*

This is a cause and effect relationship:

A meager view of Christ's character leads to a narrowed religious experience.  
 a full and rich religious experience results from a broad and expanded view of Christ's office.

Do we long for spiritual enrichment in contrast to those of centuries past?  
 Are we satisfied with our Christian experience? Are we in need of nothing?  
 Do we believe we are rich when really we are poor and blind and miserable?  
 Or do we recognize that we need much more than we have, that we are thirsty for more of the water of life and hungry for the Bread from heaven, to know Him and Jesus Christ whom He has sent?

Our concepts of God, His character, His ways, a true knowledge of Him have not only been severely limited and uncertain, but in many respects, quite inaccurate. In many instances our understanding of God has been distorted to the point where it has become exactly opposite from what God really is. More than we realize, the devil has clouded our minds with his own false representations. His greatest success was just before the first coming of Christ. "For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people." Isaiah 60:2. But then Jesus came, the Light of the world, to reveal to mankind the true picture of God.

"He presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God." *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 177.

Then again Satan plunged the earth into the Dark Ages. With the rise of the Reformation and the restoration of God's Word, the light began to shine. But even yet today we have not come all the way out of Babylon. And once again we are approaching the midnight darkness of the last days; once again the same misrepresentations of God are held by mankind throughout the world.

A revelation of God must once again be given for the final time. Once again it will be "exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy." It will challenge old concepts, but it will also re-create us in the image of God, and transform us into His likeness. Because to know God is life eternal.



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## Avoid Speculation

As we study a knowledge of God there is danger as well as blessing. There is blessing in searching for heavenly wisdom and understanding. But there is danger in seeking a knowledge outside of what God has revealed.

When men attempt to understand the unrevealed things of God through their own power and intelligence, they can only imagine, conjecture and speculate. Nothing could be more dangerous; nothing more certain to produce greater ignorance about what God really is; nothing better designed to inflate human pride and destroy the image of God in the human soul.

Therefore we must guard against any temptation to explore unrevealed areas of divine knowledge. We must limit our quest only to the evidences which God has seen fit to give, and nothing else.



“The secret things  
belong unto the Lord our God:  
but those things which are revealed  
belong unto us and to our children  
for ever.” Deuteronomy 29:29

All knowledge can be divided into two parts—the things which are God’s great secrets, and those which He reveals to us. God, however, does not deliberately withhold His secrets from either men or angels. Rather, He reveals them to us as fully and quickly as He is able to do so.

Paul confirms this:

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles... How that **by revelation He made known unto me the mystery...which in other ages was not made known** unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit... to make all men see what is the fellowship of **the mystery which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God... that now** unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places **might be known by the church** the manifold wisdom of God according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Ephesians 3:1-10.

There was a time when certain things were still secret. For men or angels to have attempted to search out those secrets before they were revealed would have been dangerous, presumptuous, and speculative. But in Paul’s day, after the appearance of Jesus, the hidden things passed from being secret to revealed.

God is infinite. We are finite. There will always be an infinity beyond our comprehension, despite the fact that “the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character.” *Great Controversy*, p.678. Thus, the time will never come, even in eternity, when there will be no secret things remaining. Consequently, because there will forever be a continual transfer of knowledge from God’s secret list to our revealed list, those secrets which once belonged to God alone, will come to “belong to us and our children forever.”

While this will certainly be true throughout eternity, it is also true during our life as well. “In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p.127. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day.” Proverbs 4:18.

God is willing and anxious to fully open to our view the saving vistas of eternal truth, but He is frustrated in doing this by our human blindness and selfish distractions. Paul complained to the Hebrew Christians that they were only milk babies when they should be taking strong meat. He wanted to teach them much about Melchizadek “of whom,” he said, “we have many things to say.” But he couldn’t they were “dull of hearing.”

“In eternity we shall learn that which, had we received the enlightenment it was possible to obtain here, would have opened our understanding. The themes of redemption will employ the hearts and minds and tongues of the redeemed through the everlasting ages. They will understand the truths which Christ longed to open to His disciples, but which they did not have faith to grasp. Forever and forever new views of the perfection and glory of Christ will appear. Through endless ages will the faithful Householder bring forth from His treasure things new and old.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 134.

No one is content with poverty when great riches are within reach. This statement is an encouragement and invitation to enter into the revelations which the Lord delights to give His people, but it does not give us permission to penetrate into that which the Lord has not yet been able to open to our knowledge. There are some things which must remain hidden. Let them be. For example, the nature of God is beyond human interpretation. Here silence is eloquence. The Omniscient One is above discussion.

“Even the angels were not permitted to share the counsels between the Father and the Son when the plan of salvation was laid. Those human beings who seek to intrude into the secrets of the Most High show their ignorance of spiritual and eternal things... We are as ignorant of God as little children, but as little children we may love and obey Him. Instead of speculating in regard to His nature or His prerogatives, let us give heed to the word He has spoken: ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Psalm 46:10.” *Testimonies* 8:279.

“Man cannot by searching find out God. Let none seek with presumptuous hand to lift the veil that conceals His glory. ‘Unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out.’ Romans 11:33.” *Ministry of Healing*, p.438.

With such clear warnings as these, there can be no excuse for any indulgence in speculation about the character of God. But while we should not venture into human speculation, we must be careful not to go to the opposite extreme. Because God is so infinite, so distant, so deep and unsearchable, some have taken the position that we should not study His character at all. This is a mistake of equal gravity and would keep us from knowing God as is our privilege to know.

“It is Satan’s constant study to keep the minds of men occupied with those things which will prevent them from obtaining the knowledge of God.” *Testimonies* 5:740.

We must keep a careful balance in studying this theme of knowing God and understanding His character. We must avoid speculation as well as neglect. To know God is life eternal. To be ignorant of Him is eternal death.

## The Great Controversy

The study of God’s character is not simply one of many issues in the great controversy between Christ and Satan—it is the very subject, the core, *the* issue. The awful struggle between good and evil began when the pride-blinded eyes of Lucifer could no longer see God as He is. Seeing a very different character in the Creator, the archangel committed himself to war against God. Pride had surfaced in his heart long before this, but it did not ripen into open rebellion until he accepted a misconception of God’s character. His objective was then to lead the universe to join him in his opposition to God. He could only do this by deceiving them into believing God was a liar and a destroyer. Those who believed this joined his ranks.



This same policy was used to overthrow man. Billions have accepted mistaken views of God ever since, resulting in multiplied immorality, murder and mayhem—ever extending the great controversy. Wherever Satan’s original misconceptions of God have been accepted, rebellion has raged on. Therefore, only when these distorted concepts of God’s character have been completely removed and eliminated will the rebellion end and permanent, universal peace return to the cosmos.

This does not mean that God has a vendetta against the devil and all who have joined his rebellion. The last thing He would do is to seek a personal vindication of Himself. Rather, He longs to ensure the eternal life and happiness of all His creatures throughout the full immensity of the universe. God knows, and nearly 6,000 years have well demonstrated, that Satan’s lying representations of God’s character have brought only misery and death to our planet. It is from this that God seeks to save. He knows that this is only possible as His character is revealed for what it really is. It is to save us and not Himself that God must vindicate His own character.

### **One does what he does because of what he is.**

This principle is demonstrated by the following statements of what God is:

“Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright are Thy judgments.”

“Thy testimonies that Thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.”

“Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy law is the truth.” Psalm 129:137, 138, 142.

These are statements of what God is. They declare the very essence of His nature. He is the sum of all righteousness. Nothing but righteousness proceeds from Him. As Daniel said, “O Lord, righteousness belongs unto You.” Daniel 9:7. But also notice that His law, His judgments, His testimonies, His commands are also righteous, faithful and true. Thus, the words of God are righteous. He says, “I declare things that are right.” Isaiah 45:19. Therefore, all the laws and commandments of God are but an expression of His righteous character. The “law is a transcript of His own character.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 315.

But there came a time when Lucifer could no longer see this. He saw the law as one thing and God as entirely different. To him, God had one code of behavior for Himself, while His government and creatures had to serve under something else. It was at this point that the great controversy began. But how did this ever happen?

Lucifer was originally created as the brightest and highest of all the angels. He was the second covering cherub that stood next to God, perfect in all his ways till iniquity was found in him. Ezekiel 28:15. The time came, however, when God had to say to him, “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness.” Verse 17. Pride had developed in Lucifer.

We do not know how long the Light Bearer existed from the day of his creation until his fall to pride. No revelation of this is given. However, during this time he would have been constantly developing all his talents and skills through a combination of God’s grace and his own diligent effort. *Great Controversy*, 425. Just like all other creatures he was created with the potential of limitless development. God has made provision that all His creatures, whether in heaven or on earth, could grow in every faculty to the highest levels of achievement.

And as Lucifer was “educated and disciplined in the heavenly courts,” *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 167, he made marvelous progress until he became the brightest of all creatures. These exceeding riches should have elicited only gratitude and loving service. Instead they served to bring him down. “By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the midst of you with violence, and you have sinned.” Ezekiel 28:16.

This same pattern is repeated in the lives of men. We begin small and poor with a sense of need and dependence and faith in God, the Source of all blessings. God’s liberal response evokes gratitude and praise. Now rich in spiritual and material wealth, the pressure of immediate need is relieved; our dependence on God fades and possessions, stuff, become the basis and guarantee of physical security. Yet in spite of all this, men do not lose faith—they merely transfer it from God who gave them every good gift to the gifts themselves! They become preoccupied with accumulating material treasures, adding house to house and land to land, totally absorbed and self-sufficient. They see themselves as masters of their own destiny and, in essence, make themselves god.

This is exactly the same career path originally followed by Lucifer, and both are downhill all the way: from sincere, trusting, loving and grateful to self-centered, self-sufficient, proud and judgmental. Lucifer came to the point where even the Son of God came under his critical scrutiny. So inflated was his view of himself that he considered himself as being actually superior to the Divine One who appeared as Michael the archangel.

Lucifer was certain that God was aware of his splendid greatness and would no doubt promptly elevate him to the fitting position he deserved and confidently anticipated the expected promotion. At this early stage, when pride was filling Lucifer’s life, there was no rebellion, no controversy, no hostility, no doubt concerning God’s character, His law or His government. But the foundation had been laid.

“Little by little, Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation...” until “coveting the glory with which the infinite Father had invested His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power that was the prerogative of Christ alone.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35. “In heavenly council the angels pleaded with Lucifer. The Son of God presented before him the greatness, the goodness, and the justice of the Creator, and the sacred, unchanging nature of His law. God Himself had established the order of heaven; and in departing from it, Lucifer would dishonor his Maker, and bring ruin upon himself. But the warning, given in infinite love and mercy, only aroused a spirit of



resistance.” “To dispute the supremacy of the Son of God, thus impeaching the wisdom and love of the Creator” became his driving purpose. *ibid.*, 36.



At this point God Himself, foreseeing that which none of His creatures could, stepped in to give all a clear picture of what would be the consequences of this rebellion. “He who would have the will of all His creatures free, left none unguarded to the bewildering sophistry by which rebellion would seek to justify itself. Before the great contest should open, all were to have a clear presentation of His will, whose wisdom and goodness were the spring of all their joy.” *ibid.*, 36.

God convened a great assembly where He presented the true position of His Son and the reasons of Christ’s occupying His exalted place in heaven.

The Son was in fact God, taking the role of an archangel that the infinite Godhead might appear in a form that finite creatures like the angelic host would understand. The Son willingly accepted this assignment voluntarily laying aside much of His divine power. In angel form He could no longer be omnipresent, but restricted to the limitations of created beings. Lucifer saw the condescending love of God and almost yielded, but pride held him back. “Leaving his place in the immediate presence of the Father” he went “forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels.” *ibid.*, 37.

It was only when Lucifer substituted the true knowledge of God’s character with a false concept of his own making did he enter into open warfare against God. He attributed to God a motive which in reality was non-existent. It wasn’t that God refused to promote him, He couldn’t. Lucifer could never occupy the place of Christ because he was not God as Christ was. He was not qualified and never would be.

### **The Great Disappointment**

When time passed and Lucifer’s promotion never materialized, his hopes turned to anxiety. Lucifer could detect no indication of any preparation for the grand event. The longer he waited, the more he became concerned that something was definitely wrong. Yet he utterly failed to realize where the problem lay. He imagined a change in God’s disposition when in reality the fault was with him. Lucifer was quick to blame God, but pride would never allow him to consider himself in error, to accept the possibility that his assumption of exaltation was unfounded. He was left with only one possible conclusion: the fault lay wholly and solely with God.

Arriving at this awful point, a radically new concept of God’s character began to grow in Lucifer’s mind and then intensify with his acute disappointment as the realization sunk in that the coveted position would never be his. Denied this, he erroneously concluded that God was simply acting with great partiality in favoring Michael above the other angels and treating Him as His Son. God declares that He “is no respecter of persons.” Acts 10:34. Yet, to Lucifer’s mind, God *was* showing great respect to one person, his fellow covering cherub, the first archangel who stood opposite himself beside the throne of God. Lucifer was incensed. God must be a hypocritical liar, for instead of following His self-proclaimed principle of impartiality, He was in fact practicing the rankest partiality.

Lucifer fully believed that he had discovered a great revelation and it was his duty to unite the creatures of the universe in throwing off the shackles of their terrible bondage. He determined to assert his rights and reform the



government of God. Now the great controversy began and active rebellion against God spread as sympathetic angels and then men accepted Lucifer's misrepresentations of God's character and joined the mutiny.

"Lucifer, the covering cherub, desired to be first in heaven. He sought to gain control of heavenly beings, to draw them away from their Creator, and to win their homage to himself. Therefore, he misrepresented God, attributing to Him the desire for self-exaltation. With his own evil characteristics he sought to invest the loving Creator. Thus he deceived angels. Thus he deceived men." *Desire of Ages*, p. 21.

"By the same misrepresentation of the character of God as he had practiced in heaven, causing Him to be regarded as severe and tyrannical, Satan induced man to sin." *Great Controversy*, p. 500.

"He led them to doubt the word of God, and to distrust His goodness. Because God is a God of justice and terrible majesty, Satan caused them to look upon Him as severe and unforgiving. Thus he drew men to join him in rebellion against God, and the night of woe settled down upon the world." *Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

"Through believe in Satan's misrepresentation of God, man's character and destiny were changed, but if men will believe in the Word of God, they will be transformed in mind and character, and fitted for eternal life."  
*Selected Messages*, 1:346.

Satan's objective of enlisting others in rebellions was achieved by persuading angels and men to believe that God's character was that of a deceiver, an oppressor and a liar. Wherever he has succeeded in having this deception accepted, the rebellion has continued.

## Rebellion in the Garden

Satan's approach to spreading his ideas on this earth began with his words to Eve, "Has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Genesis 3:1. It was a question intended to fill Eve's mind with a false understanding of the character of God and insinuate a world of suspicion. As A.T. Jones suggested, it was a "sneering grunt" expressed "through the nose...Huh!...which conveys query, doubt, suspicion, and contempt, all at once." Ecclesiastical Empires, 590. Eve had never before thought of God as anything but just, good, righteous, fatherly and good. Now it was suggested that He was not what He had appeared to be.



Evidence that Eve digested this doubt is seen in how she mis-stated the words of God in her response to the serpent. She reported Him as saying they should not eat of it lest they die, when actually God said they would surely die. The difference is very important. Eve's version suggested the possibility of death; God's statement declares the certainty of it.

Knowing that his question had taken hold, he boldly informs her, "You shall not surely die." Genesis 3:4. Then he explains why God had made this restriction. "For God knows that in the day you eat thereof, your eyes will be opened, and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil." Verse 5.

Satan argued that God was afraid that they would become equal with Him, then He would have to share with them all the riches He now had reserved for His own pleasure. Satan was therefore saying that God was forced to lie to them in order to protect His own position.

But the Serpent himself lied and impugned the motives of God. God had not denied them access to that tree in order to protect Himself, but to protect them. God needs no protection from anyone, nor is it His character to restrict anyone else to His own advantage. He had given them the whole world. Nothing had been withheld. Even the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a gift to them. It was designed to teach them the lesson of absolute respect for the property of another. As the human race multiplied, all that they had would have to be shared with the increasing population. Unless this lesson of respect for property was fully learned, contention, strife, and open war would develop as men attempted to steal from each other whatever they desired.

Every death that occurs today is the direct result of the failed lesson and the violation of God's counsel that this tree was designed to teach. But wait there's more. In believing Satan's lie, Adam and Eve transferred their allegiance from God to Satan and put another god in the place of the true God. Without the life sustaining power of their Creator, they would have certainly died that very day. But Jesus saved them for instant death.

"The instant man accepted the temptations of Satan...the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, 'Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man's place. He shall have another chance'." SDABC 1:1085.

### Another god

It is critically important to understand why the setting of another god in place of the true God would bring swift and certain death. In the beginning the Lord made the heavens and the earth. But that's not all. Moment by moment the Lord of creation sustains the worlds in space and keeps them on their ordered way. Not only did He make it all, but He eternally maintains it all as well. Our God is both Creator and Sustainer.

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“God...has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, Whom He has appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds: Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power...sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”  
Hebrews 1:1-3.

“The hand that sustains the worlds in space, the hand that holds in their orderly arrangement and tireless activity all things throughout the universe of God, is the hand that was nailed to the cross for us.” Education, 132.

“God is constantly employed in upholding and using as His servants the things that He has made. He works through the laws of nature, using them as His instruments. They are not self-acting. Nature in her work testifies of the intelligent presence and active agency of a Being who moves in all things according to His will.

“Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.  
They continue this day according to Thine ordinances:  
For all are Thy servants.” Psalm 119:90,91

“The hand of the Infinite One is perpetually at work guiding this planet. It is God’s power continually exercised that keeps the earth in position in its rotation. It is God who causes the sun to rise in the heavens. He opens the windows of heaven and gives rain.

“When He utters His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens,  
And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth;  
He makes lightnings with rain,  
And brings forth the wind out of His treasures.” Jeremiah 10:13 *Ministry of Healing*, p. 416.

Unquestionably, God is the only being with the power to make the world in the first place. Likewise, He is the only One Who can sustain it in its order and systems. Therefore, if any of His creatures puts another god in place of the real God, then the power of God to uphold the mighty forces of nature will have been removed and they will then become uncontrollable forces of terrible destruction. In that very day, those who make this fatal mistake will die, not because God will strike them down, but because they have placed themselves where life is impossible.

The only reason that a cataclysm of destruction has not totally obliterated this earth is because of the merciful interposition of Jesus Christ. God’s instruction to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to avoid one specific tree was given to protect *them* from destruction. Rightly understood, the “restriction” placed upon the first couple was an act of kindness and mercy; the work of a Saviour, not a despot.

But the devil misrepresented God’s intentions. He craftily insinuated that God had a completely selfish motive in refusing them permission to touch the tree. He claimed that the tree possessed magical powers capable of elevating them to the position of God Himself. And God was selfishly trying to reserve its powers for Himself, seeking only His own good at the expense of His subjects. He represented the God of truth as a liar.

“It is Satan’s constant effort to misrepresent the character of God, the nature of sin, and the real issues at stake in the great controversy. His sophistry lessens the obligation of the divine law, and gives men license to sin...He causes them to cherish false conceptions of God so that they regard Him with fear and hate, rather than with love. The cruelty inherent in his own character is attributed to the Creator...Thus the minds of men are blinded, and Satan secures them as his agents to war against God. By perverted conceptions of the divine attributes, heathen nations were led to believe human sacrifices necessary to secure the favor of Deity.”  
*Great Controversy*, p. 569.

Therefore, the subject of the character of God is not something apart from the great controversy. It is at the very heart of it. The destiny of every soul hangs upon the position he occupies in this cosmic conflict. The better we understand God’s true character, the more successful will we enter into the battle against evil and at last find eternal life. “This is eternal life, that they might know Thee.”



## The Character Cure

Once the cause of a problem has been established, the remedy for it has been discovered. Since the dissemination of false concepts about God and His character are the cause for sinful revolt, then the cure for reversing this infection will be the presentation of the truth about God. It is this truth that brings men back from sin to righteousness, from mutiny to loyalty.

While it is the work of Satan and his followers to slander God and misrepresent His character, it is the work of God and His children to correctly reveal God's true nature and His righteousness in order to end the insurgency and return the world to the peace and prosperity that can only come with full loyalty to God.

Pre-eminent in this work of divine restoration is Jesus Christ. He came to this earth, not merely to save us from the penalty of sin by sacrificing Himself, but to save us from the power of sin by revealing the truth about God and expose Satan's lies. Christ's role as the Revealer of God's true character was as necessary to ending the great controversy and the salvation of the lost as was His supreme sacrifice as our Redeemer on the cross.

He came to accomplish both these goals at a time when "the earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken.

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8.

"This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He Who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known." *Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

"The Son of God came to this earth to reveal the character of the Father to men, that they might learn to worship Him in spirit and in truth." *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 28.

Jesus came to this earth to reveal the character of God and to destroy the works of the devil. They are the same work. The devil's work to lead men into rebellion depends on his deceptions about the nature of God. Therefore, to reveal God's true nature renders the devil helpless, unable to further deceive—his work is destroyed.

But Christ's mission was no easy task. Had it simply been a contest of force versus force, it would have been over in an instant. God possesses infinite power. In comparison, Satan can muster but an infinitesimal amount. No, the question to be settled in the great controversy is not whether God is physically stronger than Satan. It is the question of the real nature of God's character and His government.

Nor was it a contest between the Word of God and the word of Satan. Confronted with the living Word, Satan and his followers were all the more determined, because they neither believed nor accepted it. The only answer was to allow time for the two opposing positions to demonstrate the true nature of their claims. It is for this purpose that the Lord has permitted the great conflict to continue for all this time, and until the issue is settled unanimously, throughout the entire universe, the controversy will continue. The struggle will go on, Christ will not return, sin will not end and death will reign, until both angels and men see for themselves the real nature of God's character and government in sharp contrast to that of Satan. When every question of truth and error has been forever settled, then and only then will the end come.

## Angelic Sympathizers

It is commonly understood that Satan deceived one third of the heavenly host. Actually, this isn't what the Bible says. Rather, it states that one third of the angels followed him.

“And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth.” Revelation 12:3

“Satan in his rebellion took a third part of the angels. They turned from the Father and from His Son, and united with the instigator of rebellion.” *Testimonies* 3:115

“When Satan became disaffected in heaven, he did not lay his complaint before God and Christ; but he went among the angels who thought him perfect and represented that God had done him injustice in preferring Christ to himself. The result of this misrepresentation was that through their sympathy with him one third of the angels lost their innocence, their high estate, and their happy home.” *Testimonies* 5:291

Two thirds of the angels apparently remained loyal to God and we might assume that they were not in any way influenced by Satan's arguments. The real truth is that every one of the angels was affected in some way by the delusions of the great enemy. Uncertainty about God, His character, and the principles of His government lingered in the minds of the loyal angels for many centuries and millennia. This situation persisted until the cross of Calvary.

“To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, ‘It is finished,’ had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ's victory. **“Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds.** The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion.

“God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order....In the councils of heaven it was decided that time must be given for Satan to develop the principles which were the foundation of his system of government. He had claimed that these were superior to God's principles. Time was given for the working of Satan's principles, that they might be seen by the heavenly universe.” *Desire of Ages*, pp. 758, 759.

Even the loyal angels and the inhabitants throughout the universe were partially deceived by the great deceiver. They were not misled enough to abandon their loyalty to God, but enough to reserve some degree of sympathy for Satan. Finally, at the cross the last link of sympathy between them and Satan was forever broken.

“Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings...**The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.**” *ibid.*, 761.

It is one thing to have sympathy *for* a person, but something quite different to have sympathy *between* you and that person. Having sympathy for the devil is to feel sorry for him in his predicament but not endorsing his behavior or philosophy. Every true Christian, and especially God Himself, will feel sympathy for Satan. But when sympathy exists between us and the devil, then we agree that he might be right to some degree and consider the possibility that he might have a case, that his methods are somewhat successful, and that his punishment and treatment is unnecessarily harsh and excessive. It is impossible to give total allegiance to God while such a sympathy exists between us and Satan.

## The Last Link of Human Sympathy

At the cross the heavenly world finally understood the character of God as it truly was. Christ had destroyed the deceptive works of the devil in them, and for *them*, the purpose of the great controversy had been achieved. If only angels had been involved in the struggle, Satan's end would have come at the cross. But what had been accomplished for angels must also be done for men because this world still does not know the truth about God's character. In fact, it will not be until the time of Jacob's trouble that even the righteous remnant of God's people will lose their last link of sympathy with the devil.

“The Time of trouble is the crucible that is to bring out Christ-like characters. It is designed to lead the people of God to renounce Satan and his temptations. The last conflict will reveal Satan to them in his true character, that of a cruel tyrant, and it will do for them what nothing else could do, uproot him entirely from their affections.”  
*Review and Herald*, August 12, 1884; *Our High Calling*, p. 321.

But this work has yet to be accomplished for human beings. The purpose of the great controversy has not yet been fulfilled for us. We still have some affection for Satan and his ways: selfishness, self-gratification, pleasure-seeking, ease and comfort while ignoring those in need and suffering. For this reason, the battle did not end at the cross.

“Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness.” *Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

Our Saviour took the work of ending the great controversy one giant step toward its completion when at the cross He revealed to the angels in heaven the character of God as it really is and exposed Satan for what he is. The war was being won in a progressive way, battle by battle. After the “war in heaven”... “Satan... was cast out into the earth.” Revelation 12:9. Yet he was still able to accost the angels as they moved to and from heaven and “before them accuse Christ's brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin.” *Desire of Ages*, p. 761. But this came to an end at the cross.

“Christ bowed His head and died... ‘And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.’ Revelation 12:10.” *ibid.*, 761.



No longer could Satan confront the loyal angels of heaven. His delusions had no longer any influence on their thinking. Their loyalty to God was now stronger and more intense than ever. There was great rejoicing throughout the universe. They now saw that God was just as He said He was: interested only in the well-being and salvation of His creatures and would spare *nothing* to secure this.

Now that he was restricted from heaven, Satan focused his attention and energies on the children of men. His fearful losses at the cross only maddened him into a frenzy of desperate and feverish activity as he pours all his efforts into delaying the day of his final obliteration.



Many wonder why in the world God couldn't have just wound things up on resurrection morning. He had won the battle. He had proved His point. He had defeated Satan fair and square on his own turf. Why not wipe him out and be done with the whole mess?

Because there is a big difference between God's winning the great controversy and ending it. The war that began in heaven was won decisively at the cross. Our salvation was forever secured at Calvary. Make no mistake about it. God took the time to win the great controversy at Golgotha's cross in such an impeccably fair way that non will ever be able to challenge the outcome. But the sin problem was by no means finished.

### **The Final Battle**

Another great battle must yet be fought where what was accomplished for the unfallen universe will then be accomplished for man. The world needs to also learn that rebellion against God is lethal. Sin is a deadly poison. It kills without exception, and there is not one thing that Jesus can do for anyone who chooses the fatal separation that sin causes. The victory will once again be gained exactly as it was gained by Christ, for we are to overcome "as He overcame." Revelation 3:21.

How will the last battle be fought and won? It won't be by argument or debate. Counter-accusation is totally ineffective. The use of force has already been ruled out. It merely serves to generate sympathy for the underdog. There is only one way to reveal evil at its worst: it must be exposed to righteousness at its best.

Throughout His life on earth Jesus did precisely this. Every day He was revealing the truth about God's character. To look at Christ was to see the Father. He demonstrated how the Father relates Himself to the sin problems; He showed how the Father treats the sinful and those who are His worst enemies.

"So perfect and complete was the revelation of the Father as given by Christ that, to Philip's inquiry, 'Lord, show us the Father,' He could replay, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known Me, Philip? He that has seen Me has seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?' John 14:8, 9. All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son."

*Testimonies* 8:286.

As Jesus revealed the character of God, Satan mustered his forces to break that perfect revelation. But steadily and faithfully Jesus continued with His witness. Satan was obliged to try ever harder to make Him fail. At last, and still undefeated,

Christ came to the cross  
to give, in that ultimate sacrifice,  
the revelation of the righteous character of God  
at its glorious, undimmed best.  
Eternity will never again be able to provide  
so complete and clear a manifestation of God as He really is.  
It is the central, high point of history, past and future.  
It is the pinnacle of all divine achievement.

### **The Best vs. the Worst**

This matchless unfolding of God's righteousness at its very best forced the devil to reveal his own evil character at its very worst. He had no choice. If he had withdrawn from the battle, fearing that it would expose himself, he would have lost anyway. His only hope was to full out all the stops in his onslaught and hope that he could break faith of Jesus and His dependence on the Father's will. But he failed. The unfallen universe saw the full manifestation of divine light and satanic darkness simultaneously, and Satan's cause was lost forever.

What Christ accomplished upon the cross never needs to be repeated. Christ is not returning to this earth to repeat the demonstration already given. He has other plans. The full and final display of the merciful, gracious, kind, good and just character of God is to be given through His people. The purpose of the great controversy has not yet been fulfilled for man. There must again be exhibited such a complete and full revelation of the righteousness of God, which is the law and character of God, that Satan will again be forced to display the fullness of his evil character to the point where even fallen men who have rejected God's truth will see the difference and reject all allegiance to the cause of Satan.

The war is not over, also because the rest of the universe needs to know if God's plan to restore man will *really* work. They know He can indeed forgive. That's the easy part. But what about man? Can and will he change His opinion of God? Satan no longer argues that repentant sinners do not have the *right* to return to God's fellowship. The cross proves that. Now, he charges that rebels can't be made into stable, reliable citizens of heaven.

Every Christian must understand their role in giving the final revelation of God's character. Failure to comprehend this will lead to inadequate preparation for and disqualification from fighting in the last army of the Lord.

“In order to endure the trial before them, they [the people of God who will live through the final time of trouble] must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government and purposes, and act in accordance with them.”

*Great Controversy*, p. 593.

Having a right conception of God's character will not simply put us in a better position; it is not an optional matter. The importance of having an accurate and thorough knowledge of God's character, the nature of His government, and the scope of His purposes cannot be overstressed.

“Revelation 18 points to a time when, as a result of rejecting the threefold warning of Revelation 14, the church will have fully reached the condition foretold by the second angel, and the people of God still in Babylon will be called upon to separate themselves from her communion. This message is the last that will ever be given to the world; and it will accomplish its work.” *Great Controversy*, p. 390.

“These announcements, uniting with the third angel's message, constitute the final warning to be given to the inhabitants of the earth.” *ibid.*, p. 604.

## Showing God's Glory

This 4<sup>th</sup> angel of Revelation, like the three angels and their messages in chapter 14, represents a message delivered by the people of God.

“The movement symbolized by the angel coming down from heaven, lightening the earth with his glory, and crying mightily with a strong voice, announcing the sins of Babylon.” *ibid.*, p. 604.

With whose glory will the earth be lightened? The first angel implores all the earth to give glory to God. “Another angel came down from heaven...and the earth was lightened with his glory.” It is the glory of the angel that lightens the whole earth. This glory comes from God. But it has been so truly given to the angel and the “movement” that it symbolizes, that it has become his own.

What is this glory? We usually think of a bright light, a dazzling display of luminous splendor. Without question, such an outshining of glory does surround the person and throne of God. Daniel, Isaiah, and Moses all witnessed this glory. Daniel saw how “a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him.” Daniel 7:10. Isaiah saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up...the whole earth is full of His glory.” Isaiah 6:1,4. Moses asked God, “Show me your glory.” In response God said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you.” Exodus 33:19. Then He did saying, “The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.” Exodus 34:5-7. Moses was indeed shown God's glory. It was the wonder of His great and lovely character.

When Jesus came to earth, He left behind His physical glory. According to Isaiah 53:2 He was a very plain and unattractive person: “He has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.” Yet despite His plain outward appearance, Jesus revealed the glory of God. “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.” John 1:14.

“The light of His glory—His character—is to shine forth in His followers.” *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 414.

This is God's real glory, the one He desires us to know and emulate. He desires that people accept the message of truth because it is the truth and not just because of any spectacular display.

The message of Revelation 18 is the final message to be given to the world.

The angel bearing this message represents a movement of people.

The glory of the angel is the glorious character of God.

It is the character glory of this movement which shall lighten the whole earth.

Now we can read this verse with new meaning:

“And after these things I saw another movement of people with a message come down from heaven, having great power, and the earth was lightened with the glory of their character” which is the character of God Himself, formed in them through the saving ministry of Christ in the sanctuary above.

“When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.” *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.



**Perfect Reproduction**

A perfect reproduction repeats itself to the point where it is impossible to tell the difference between it and the original. When Christ was on earth, His manifestation of God's character was so complete and perfect that to see Christ was to see the Father. This is not difficult for us to accept. It is much more difficult to believe, as we look at ourselves with all our defectiveness and imperfections, that Christ could so reproduce Himself within us that one could see the very character and nature of God. Yet, this is how it must be.

If it required a faultless manifestation of God's character to deliver the sinless beings of heaven and the unfallen worlds from the last vestiges of Satan's deceptions, then it will require nothing less than the same faultless and complete manifestation of God's character to deliver fallen mankind from Satan's deceptive power.

This is why "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church." *ibid.*, p. 69.

"The church, being endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depository, in which the wealth of His mercy, His love, His grace, is to appear in full and final display." *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 18.

The closing scenes of the great controversy are right upon us. In the final, finishing work the true understanding and actual manifestation of God's character will play a role so vital that without it there would be no possibility of the work being finished. An appreciation of this great theme must stimulate our earnest searching into the wonderful beauty of God's character, and as it opens before our astonished gaze we will find our lives being changed into the same image from glory into glory.

## Arise, Shine

Revelation 18, showing a people who reveal the character of God in the final message to the earth, is also found in the Old Testament. This should be no surprise, for “In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end.” Acts of the Apostles, 585. The glorious character of God, lightening the earth is first described in Isaiah.

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.  
For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people:  
but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.  
And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and the kings to the brightness of thy rising.”  
Isaiah 60:1-3.

These verses have an initial application to the work and ministry of Christ, but they equally apply to God’s last movement on earth. God sent Jesus to reveal His character and set the angels free. He gave Him the light of truth and the full glory of His character. Then He said, “Arise, shine; for Thy light is come, and the glory [character] of the Lord is risen upon Thee.”

In precisely the same way, God is calling for a people in these last days. To them He is giving the light of His truth and in them He is building the perfect reproduction of His character. As He said to Christ, so

“To His people He says, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.’  
Isaiah 60:1.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 415.

This reference to Isaiah 60 is given in the comments of the wise and foolish virgins of Matthew 25, clearly a prophetic parable of the end times. Both the time of Christ’s first and second advents are times of gross darkness, dark with the misapprehension of God’s nature. The virgins sleep until midnight. The bridegroom comes at the darkest hour. They “arise” and “light” their lamps to illuminate the arrival of the Bridegroom. He depends upon their light to make His arrival possible.



“Their light...helped to swell the illumination for the bridegroom’s honor. Shining out in the darkness, it helped to illuminate the way to the home of the bridegroom...So the followers of Christ are to shed light into the darkness of the world...By implanting in their hearts the principles of His word, **the Holy Spirit develops in men the attributes of God. The light of His glory—His character—is to shine forth in His followers.** Thus they are to glorify God, to lighten the path to the Bridegroom’s home, to the city of God.”

*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 414.

God’s Word is a light as it becomes a transforming power in the life of the reader. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in changing our inward nature so we become formed into the likeness of God as “the Holy Spirit develops” in us “the attributes of God.” The attributes of God are His characteristics, His glory, His disposition, His behavior. First His character is reproduced within, then it shines forth.

Do you desire to know how you can glorify God, to lighten the way to the Bridegroom’s home, to the city of God, to the marriage supper of the Lamb? Then here is the answer.

It is not by just having an intelligent understanding of the truth, knowing the 28 fundamental doctrines, giving a double tithe, or even depending on God’s great gift of justification by faith. It is by having the Holy Spirit form the very character of God, His attributes, His righteousness, within the believer.

“What He taught, He lived. ‘I have given you an example,’ He said to His disciples; ‘that ye should do as I have done.’ ‘I have kept My Father’s commandments.’ John 13:15; 15:10. Thus in His life, Christ’s words had perfect illustration and support. And more than this; what He taught, He was. His words were the expression, not only of His own life experience, but of His own character. Not only did He teach the truth, but He was the truth. It was this that gave His teaching, power.” *Education*, pp. 78, 79.

It will be this that will give our teaching power as well.

“It was on the earth that the love of God was revealed through Christ. It is on the earth that His children are to reflect this love through blameless lives. Thus sinners will be led to the cross, to behold the Lamb of God.” *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 334.

### The Last Message

We don’t generate the love; we reflect it. Blameless lives would suggest that the darkness at the end is a moral darkness exhibited by every iniquity imaginable. And this is correct. But the sinful state of affairs at the end that parallel the days of Noah and Lot are the result of deeper problems: the darkness of Satan’s delusions, his false teachings, his distortions and misrepresentations of God. Satan will work “with all deceivableness of unrighteousness” 2 Thessalonians 2:10.

“It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted... To God’s people it will be a night of trial, a night of weeping, a night of persecution for the truth’s sake. But out of that night of darkness God’s light will shine.”

“At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth.”

“Those who wait for the Bridegroom’s coming are to say to the people, ‘Behold your God.’ The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416.



This message is the very last ever to be given to mortals. As the last warning and entreatings words are given, they will be words proclaiming the character of God. “Behold your God,” will be the keynote and the entire orchestration. Thus and only thus, will the work be finished with the ultimate conquest of Satan and his hordes.

## Character Study

Character is revealed by the way one acts: we do what we do because of what we are. Now, we must allow for the possibility of deception. Some are very adept at making themselves appear to be what they are not. But, ultimately, the time comes when the masquerade is over and the real person is seen for what he is. When we come to the study of God, however, there is no deception for He is the truth. Therefore, what He does, when correctly understood, is always a true and accurate revelation of what He is.

The acts of God may be divided into two general categories. First, the revelation of God's actions prior to the entrance of sin, and secondly, the revelation of His character following sin's appearance. The greatest of these two eras must be the revelation during the great rebellion, when under the pressure of great testing and trying difficulties the otherwise hidden qualities of one's nature are revealed. Therefore, the fullest and clearest revelation of God's character is provided to us because of the emergence of sin. "Where sin did abound, grace did much more abound." Romans... The worse sin became, the greater God's character was revealed.

### The Unchanging God

Some have wickedly charged God with deliberately introducing sin so that He would be provided with the opportunity to display the depths of His grace that would otherwise be impossible. "Should I thus sin that grace might much more abound? God forbid!" The enemy of God is the originator of these charges. While the conditions in these two eras are vastly different, God remains unchanged through it all. Sin's appearance, the tragic problems it imposed, created far-reaching changes in angels, men, and nature, but it produced absolutely no change in God. He is "the same yesterday, and to day, and forever." Hebrews 13:8.

God is unchanged and unchangeable. He declares, "I am the Lord, I change not." Malachi 3:6.  
He is "the Father of lights, with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." James 1:17.  
He is "the incorruptible God." Romans 1:23.

This confirms that God did not behave one way before the entrance of sin and then a different way after the uprising of evil. The emergency of sin only brought forth from God more of the same qualities He had always displayed.

### The Giving God

But, we object, what about punishment for sin? There was no occasion for that before the fall. After that sad day, a dramatic change in conditions demanded God to change His *modus operandi*. Sin changed everything. We point to the reported actions of God in the Old Testament that He resorted to the use of force, the only solution most humans understand. To claim that God did absolutely nothing different after the fall than He did before sin is not just startling, it's seemingly unacceptable.

But it must be true nonetheless. Otherwise we are compelled to admit that sin *did* make changes in God, forcing Him to do things He had never done before. For example, He was compelled to give His Son as a sacrifice for the lost. Yet, when we correctly understand Christ's role in eternity's past, we see that God had in fact given His only-begotten Son to the created world long before sin entered the universe. The incarnation of Christ into the human family was nothing new for Him. It was only a wonderful extension of His role as mediator to created beings, a position he had eternally occupied beginning when the first creatures came from His hand.

Let's begin by investigating the operations of God during the sunny days of universal innocence and harmony. Much evidence exists to demonstrate His policies and principles as embodied in the constitution of His kingdom.

How God organized His government,  
How He related Himself to His subjects,  
What He provided for them, and  
How He ruled them, is a very clear revelation of His character.

## Divine not Human

His government is the only perfect rulership ever to exist, the pattern for all governments to copy. But we must be cautious in our study to avoid the temptation to compare it to our concepts of governmental rule based on human politics. God states very clearly, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways.” Isaiah 55:8.

Jesus was forever faced with the problem of trying to illustrate what His kingdom was like; there was nothing on earth with which to compare it! “Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?” He asked in Mark 4:30.

“He could find nothing on earth that would serve as a perfect comparison. His court is one where holy love presides, and whose offices and appointments are graced by the exercise of charity. He charges His servants to bring pity and loving-kindness, His own attributes, into all their office work, and to find their happiness and satisfaction in reflecting the love and tender compassion of the divine nature on all with whom they associate.” *Review and Herald*, March 19, 1908.

“In society He found nothing with which to compare it. Earthly kingdoms rule by the ascendancy of physical power; but from Christ’s kingdom every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion, is banished. This kingdom is to uplift and ennoble humanity.” *Acts of the Apostles*, p.12.

“‘The kingdom of heaven,’ He said, ‘is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard.’... The man in the parable is represented as going out at different hours to engage workmen. Those who are hired at the earliest hours agree to work for a stated sum; those hired later leave their wages to the discretion of the householder... The householder’s dealings with the workers in his vineyard represents God’s dealing with the human family. It is contrary to the customs that prevail among men. In worldly business, compensation is given according to the work accomplished. The laborer expects to be paid only that which he earns. But in the parable, Christ was illustrating the principles of His kingdom—a kingdom not of this world. He is not controlled by any human standard... ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’ Isaiah 55:9” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp.396, 397.

So, it is impossible to learn anything about the heavenly kingdom and its operations from looking to earthly models. If we use our pre-conceived ideas of what a kingdom should be, we will come to a view of God that is actually opposite of reality.

Just look what happened to the disciples. From their earliest days they had listened to the elders talk of the coming Messianic kingdom. They assumed it would be just like all the kingdoms around them. Every scripture describing this kingdom in the Old Testament was read through the lenses of their misconceptions. When they joined the company of Christ, this misunderstanding of the true nature of the kingdom (and therefore God’s character) proved to be their greatest hindrance to coming into full intimacy with Christ and accepting His divine mission. Despite His continual efforts, they were not delivered from their delusions until after the resurrection.

So, too, we must approach the study of God’s kingdom and His nature with great caution lest we apply our human notions to God’s ways and arrive at an erroneous view of His character. The danger is real, because for many “tradition and misinterpretation have obscured the teaching of the Bible concerning the character of God, the nature of His government, and the principles of His dealing with sin.” *Great Controversy*, p.492.

The remnant must remember that “In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His Word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them.” *Great Controversy*, p. 593.



## The Constitution of Heaven

The entire structure and organization of God's government is perfect. It cannot be improved upon. His way is not the best way—it is the only way. Christ came to our earth, A.T. Jones to rescue us from human ways of law and order and demonstrate God's method of rule. But his representation was totally opposite from what men had been taught. "He presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God." *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p.177. Therefore, we should expect that the real truth about God and His administration will be exactly contrary to what is generally believed.

Essential to the structure of any government is the existence of law. Laws are necessary to place limits on existing forces and the range of powers. God imposes natural law on the forces of nature, forces that are necessary for life to exist, but which also possess destructive potential. Water is required for all life on our planet. But too much and in the wrong location can threaten the loss of life. So also with God's moral law. It, too, is a love gift from Him to His creatures, perfectly designed to save them from destruction.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul:

the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Psalm 19:7

"Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Romans 7:12

This perfect, holy, just and righteous law is the very foundation of God's government.

"In the earthly temple the ark of the testimony took its name from the testimony—the Ten Commandments—which was put within it. These commandments the Lord Himself wrote with His own hand, and gave to Moses to deposit beneath the mercy seat, above which the presence of the glory of God dwelt, between the cherubim. It is therefore evident that the ark of His testament in the heavenly temple takes its title also from the fact that therein, beneath the mercy seat and the cherubim upon it, there is the original of the testimony of God—the Ten Commandments—of which that on earth was a copy. And as this holy law—the Ten Commandments—is but the expression in writing, **a transcript, of the character of Him Who sits upon the throne**, therefore it is written:

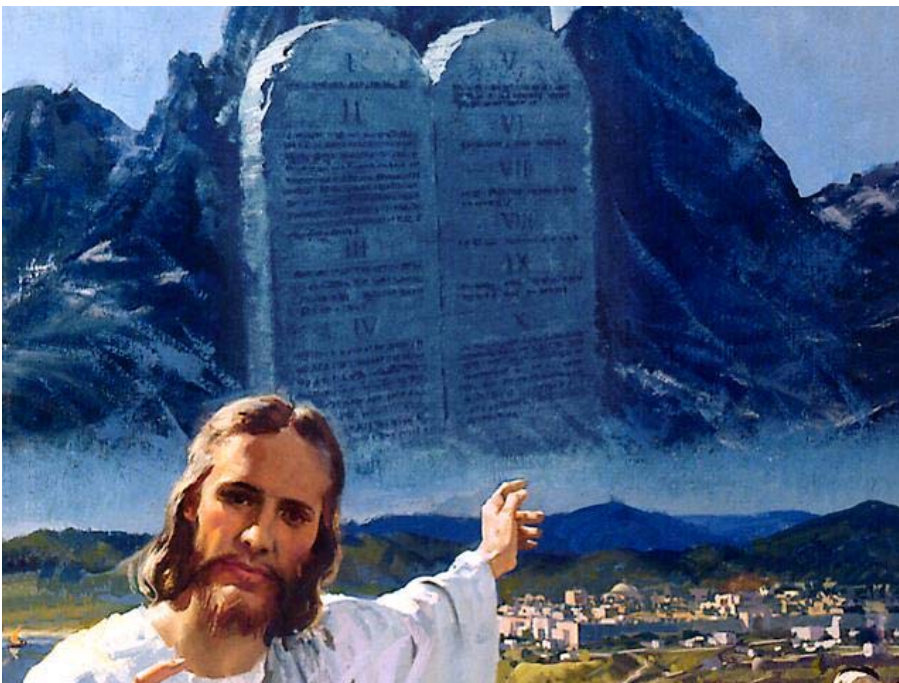
'The Lord reigns, let the people tremble,

He sits upon the cherubim, let the earth be moved.'

'Clouds and darkness are round about Him:

Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.'

Psalms 99:1; 97:2. A.T. Jones, *Ecclesiastical Empires*, 571, 572.



Since the law of God is the very foundation of His throne, then the nature of that law and its relationship to God is a very important aspect of our study of God's character. It is here called a "transcript" of His character. But Alphonso Jones was not the only one to describe it like this.

"His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character." *COL*, p. 315.

"The law of God is as sacred as God Himself. It is a revelation of His will, a transcript of His character, the expression of divine love and wisdom." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 52.

“He has given in His holy law a transcript of His character.” *Testimonies* 8:63.

A transcription is the rewriting of an inscription in a new location. It doesn't matter whether you read the original or the copy: the message is the same. So, in reading the holy law, the character of God is being read. The law describes what God is; it also a guide to what He does. God will do nothing that is out of character; He will do nothing that is contrary to His law. Yet, it is easy for us to consider the Law of God as something distinct and separate from God Himself, something that He decreed for *us* to control *our* conduct, but which has no application to affecting *His* behavior.

### **Human Double Standard**

We tend to think this way because of our experience with human legislators. Congressmen and senators make the laws for citizens but often enjoy special exemptions that leave aspects of the law that don't apply to them. Officers of the law are exposed as perpetrators of crimes themselves—bribery, theft, and even murder. The more absolute the ruler, the more open and obvious is this practice of making laws for the people but not for the potentate.

This is not so in God's government. His law is first of all His very own character, the way in which He will act under all circumstances. He simply invites us to behave as He does. The same law is for God as for His people.

“For I am the Lord your God: you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.”  
Leviticus 11:44.

“But as He which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conversation;  
Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy.” 1 Peter 1:15, 16

“Be therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Matthew 5:48

“Be merciful, even as you Father in heaven is merciful.” Luke 6:36

“Behold in your heavenly Father a perfect manifestation of the principles which are the foundation of His government... If you are the children of God you are partakers of His nature, and you cannot but be like Him. If you are God's children, begotten by His Spirit, you live by the life of God. In Christ dwells ‘all the fullness of the Godhead bodily’ (Colossians 2:9); and the life of Jesus is made manifest ‘in our mortal flesh’ (2 Corinthians 4:11). That life in you will produce the same character and manifest the same works as it did in Him. Thus you will be in harmony with every precept of His law... Through love ‘the righteousness of the law’ will be ‘fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.’ Romans 8:4.”

*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp.77, 78.

Consider what we have discovered so far:

1. The law is a transcript of God's character.
2. He keeps the law because it is the natural expression of what He is.
3. It is not possible for Him to behave in any other way.
4. He calls us to behave as He behaves: holy as He and His law are holy.
5. We are to receive His life through His Spirit so that His law which is His character is written on our hearts.

God's intention is that there be no difference in essence or nature between the character of the Sovereign of the universe and the creatures He made to fill it. The only real difference is that the same love, mercy, justice, goodness, power, tenderness, hatred of sin, and so on, which the true people of God have to a certain degree, God has an infinity. He is the Father. We are the children. He provides us with the perfect example of how we are to live and asks nothing which He does not first do Himself.

It is inconceivable to think of God breaking some of His own commandments, like putting another god in His own place, or taking His own name in vain, etc. The only area which some would dispute God's behavior is with His keeping the commandments "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal," and "Thou shalt not bear false witness." And then only after sin entered the picture. There was no need for God to ever take the life of even the minutest organism in His vast realm before sin. Nor was it necessary for Him to ever act deceitfully, or retrieve by force anything which He had given to His creatures prior to the arrival of evil.

Human reasoning nearly forces us to conclude, however, that when sin did enter the picture, a situation arose that was quite different from that which had existed before. Now the Lord was required to take decisive action to quell the rebellion, cut sedition short and preserve the entire universe from corruption. Suddenly, capital punishment was justified because God had no choice but to kill the insurgents.

But such an argument is inconsistent with the truths we have already established. If God "changes not", if He is "the same yesterday, today and forever," if He exhibits "no variableness, neither shadow of turning," and if His law is the very expression of His own character, then how can we possibly conceive of God taking life when the law plainly states, "Thou shalt not kill" ?

How do we ignore the many events, especially in the Old Testament, where it appears that God did come down and, by the direct and personal exercise of His mighty power, destroy, sometimes with great cruelty, many thousands of people. Each of these incidents will be explored in great detail after we conclude this study of God's pre-sin government and His behavior during this era. We must simply, at this point, remember that God has done nothing this side of the fall that He did not do before. It is impossible to believe the Scriptural truth that God changes not and at the same time hold to the belief that He takes the lives of the disobedient. Only if we are willing to accept inconsistency and illogical thinking on our part or hypocrisy and falsehood on God's part can this be so.

How, then, does God keep the law? He does not do it by gritting His teeth and making Himself follow a code of behavior that is foreign to His nature. He obeys it naturally because it is a statement of what He is. And this is the only kind of obedience God wishes to receive from His creatures—that which springs from a personal conviction that His way is the only way.

"Since the service of love can alone be acceptable to God, the allegiance of His creatures must rest upon a conviction of His justice and benevolence." *Great Controversy*, p.498.

"God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all His grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service." *ibid.*, 493. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.34.

"In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom." *Desire of Ages*, p.466.

"Compelling power is found only under Satan's government." *Desire of Ages*, p.759.

Compelling power is never found under God's government. It is foreign to Him. God does nothing that is contrary to His principles. Men do repeatedly, but God never does. Under no circumstances will He ever use force to solve a problem.

In the Old Testament, God's actions seem to say  
 that He *did* use compelling power to achieve His ends,  
 that He *did* resort to force to put down rebellion, and  
 that He *did* make an example of some by crushing them with terrible punishments and executions.

Every person must choose between the declarations of God in His word and the appearances of what He does. Most, sadly choose to believe what they think they see happening than what God has said. As a result, the nearly universal belief today is that God does use force, that He exterminates entire nations who reject Him, and uses compelling power to put down rebellion.

The true child of God will live by faith in God's Word despite supposed evidence which appears to the contrary. He may not yet understand just what God did, he may not yet be able to explain all the details, he rests on the plain utterances of God's Word that God does not do what He appears to do. This is the way faith works. It is based on the Word of God, not on appearances. In due time we will all learn just what God actually did in each situation. And when we do, we will discover that God did not once act contrary to His principles, but only in perfect harmony with them.

Admittedly, the witness of sight and circumstance is very powerful. When the Old Testament stories report that God rained fire and brimstone or drowned the antediluvians, etc, etc, it is natural to believe that God was personally resorting to the use of force as a weapon. On the other hand, pure faith, the faith of Jesus, which clings to the word of God despite appearances, recognizes that if this is so, then God is truly inconsistent. He has spoken one thing but does another. The indictments leveled by the devil are true. Lucifer was right. The great controversy would be over. It would have been much better for God to simply admit, up front, that He can and will act inconsistently (if necessary to serve His purposes) than to continue with a charade which could be openly seen by all. But the very nature of the great controversy demand that if the Lord is to triumph, He must be utterly consistent with Himself, His law and the principles of His government. To act hypocritically, even once, would give the victory to Satan.

### **Force or Freedom**

The reason this issue of force is so important is freedom. The inhabitants of the universe have complete freedom to serve God and obey His law only to the extent that God does not enforce its observance. Force and freedom are directly opposed to each other; they are mutually exclusive; they cannot coexist.

“God never compels the obedience of man. He leaves all free to choose whom they will serve.”  
*Prophets and Kings*, p.511.

The angels “told Adam and Eve that God would not compel them to obey—that He had no removed from them the power to go contrary to His will; that they were moral agents, free to obey or disobey.”  
*The Story of Redemption*, p.30.

“God made them free moral agents, capable of appreciating the wisdom and benevolence of His character and the justice of His requirements, and with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience.”  
*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.48.

The Lord, however, does not give His creatures the freedom to sin with impunity. Some have proposed that God is so loving, so forgiving, so patient, that He will excuse and protect all sinners so that no one should perish. This is dangerous thinking. Sinners will die. The heavens and earth will be destroyed and the entire universe will be cleaned from the stain of sin. But it will not be God Who wields the scourge of destruction. He will first warn every created being of the terrible consequences that will come to those who choose the path of disobedience. Then, when they do, He will expend every effort to save them from pursuing it. Only when they persist in rejecting His saving efforts will He finally leave them to perish.

All intelligent beings have the absolute unrestricted freedom to serve God out of love based on a conviction that He is just and good or rebel against His invitations, disregard His safeguards, exercise their freedom in the wrong direction. But to do so will paradoxically deprive them of their liberty, for sin is a cruel tyrant that forces its subjects into chains of addictive compulsion. But it is not God Who deprives them of this freedom. This is the work of Satan.

God chooses not to introduce any threat of punishment, because He cannot accept obedience motivated by fear. He desires only a kingdom where devoted allegiance, admiration and love for their Sovereign Ruler springs spontaneously and naturally. God will achieve in the world made new, what every earthly monarch through all time has only dreamed of—the total and loving loyalty of every one of His subjects. No earthly kingdom has ever approached such an ideal. Instead, law and order is maintained only by controlling the masses with some degree of imposed servitude with the threat of penalties and punishment for the noncompliant.

But Jesus came to deliver men from all this. “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free...If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” John 8: 32, 36. Christ did not come to simply transfer us from one form of bondage to another. His mission was to bring real freedom to His children.

### **Programmed Obedience?**

One suggested remedy to the sin problem is for God to just re-wire our brains so that we won't sin. But to do so would be to interfere with our freedom to choose, to make decisions, to exercise judgment, to think! Man would be reduced to a mere appliance, programmed to perform certain functions, but no longer intelligent or free.

The proving ground of history has established the truth of this. Beginning with the powerful influence of the gospel and its liberating effects on the growing church, Christianity set men free in a glorious work. But as the coercive power of the church brought subjugation and restrictions backed by penance and excommunication, the world sank into ignorance of the Dark Ages. Freedom of choice was unknown as the papal hierarch ruled the world with an absolute despotism. Then as the gospel was once again preached during the Reformation, the greatest advancements in knowledge and intellectual development exploded in those lands where freedom reigned.

### **Unconstitutional Punishment**

What are the implications of absolute freedom of choice and absolute lack of coercive force to the constitution of heaven? First of all, these two provisions place God in a position where He cannot punish those who choose to exercise their freedom and reject Him as their Master. This is a very difficult principle for human minds to accept because it is so foreign from our way of thinking. Human governments are based on legislative bodies that pass laws and specify punishments for would be lawbreakers, backed up by a judicial branch with teeth to enforce the laws and execute sentence against condemned criminals. This is how human justice operates. But it is not so in God's kingdom.

Regardless of how it may appear in Old Testament stories that the Lord did punish men as earthly rulers do, the fact remains that a constitution that precludes the use of force as a means to ensure civil and moral obedience while at the same time guaranteeing freedom of choice to all, renders any attempt to punish wrongdoers as simply unconstitutional. God gave them the right to make their choice and He cannot punish them for making the decision He Himself gave them liberty to make. All He can do is to reveal the certain results of choosing a wrong course, the consequences of rejecting His divine principles.

Because it's so hard for us to divorce our minds from this concept, it is difficult to conceive of God placing Himself where He cannot execute penalties upon determined evildoers. He has spelled out the law as the expression of His own character but it is sin and death which enslave and punish the transgressor.

When created beings chose the course of sin, God did all He could to save them, even going so far as to give His own life in the Person of His Son, so that men might have a second chance to choose life instead of death. Man's first choice was made freely from the side of righteousness to leave life for sin and death. His second choice is made from the opposite side where he can decide to either remain in bondage and under the sentence of death, or return to the side of purity and eternal life. But the choice is just as free as it was the first time.



It is when men choose the second time to remain on the side of sin and death, to continue their own course without God, that He has no recourse but to leave them to that which they have chosen.

“God does not stand toward the sinner as the executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.” *Great Controversy*, p.36.

The time has come for a revised understanding of God’s actions. It is imperative that we fully understand the basis of God’s Constitution and the working of His law, the rejection of force, and the guarantee of perfect freedom to choose God’s way.

## A Perfect Law

Human laws are faulty and inadequate. This is obvious by the fact that we are constantly enacting new laws and repealing old ones. What may be legal in one jurisdiction is criminal in another. Furthermore, earthly legislation must include provisions to ensure their compliance which generally consist of escalating fines, penalties, incarceration and even capital punishment.

This is not the case with God's law. It is perfect and complete. Its principles are comprehensive and all-embracing. It stands as the flawless standard of behavior, both human and divine, for the perfect environment of heaven as well as for corrupt conditions on earth. Christ demonstrated the truth of this by keeping His Father's commandments during a time "when the transgressors" had "come to the full." Daniel 8:23.

"The deception of sin had reached its height. All the agencies for depraving the souls of men had been put in operation...The bodies of human beings, made for the dwelling place of God, had become the habitation of demons. The senses, the nerves, the passions, the organs of men, were worked by supernatural agencies in the indulgence of the vilest lust...Sin had become a science, and vice was consecrated as a part of religion. Rebellion had struck its roots deep into the heart, and the hostility of man was most violent against heaven."

*Desire of Ages*, pp. 36, 37.

Under these circumstances, Jesus showed that God's law was the perfect guide for behavior and protection against the consequences of sin. He kept it perfectly disproving Satan's claims that the law of imperfect and needed modifications to meet changing circumstances.

### Natural Laws and Nature's Powers

And, while men must resort to negative reinforcement to maintain law and order, God is not required to do so. In His system, breaking the law brings its own terrible consequences: pain, suffering and finally, destruction. Law became essential as it was the only way to safeguard power by constraining it to predictable physical characteristics.

While power is handled in strict accordance with the laws governing it, there is no problem and power can serve a useful role. But let the law be disregarded and serious problems arise. God did not formulate physical laws with deliberately built-in systems of punishment, He created them with consistent and predictable behaviors that allow his creatures to conduct themselves safely and remain fully protected from the destructive effects of nature's power when His laws are observed and obeyed. If anyone chooses to bypass the protective benefits of cooperating with these laws, there is nothing to prevent them from suffering the consequences. First God gave us the powers of nature, then He gave us the laws that allow us to safely handle them.

Now, if God decided to become personally involved in the administration of punitive rewards to those who intentionally disregard His laws, there are two ways in which He could conduct Himself:

1. He could decree specific punishments for each infraction and then directly execute them when the law is broken. Most people believe this is how God operates.
2. He could skillfully design into His laws pre-determined punishments that would automatically execute when the law's boundaries have been breached. In other words He could booby trap His creation. This would afford Him some degree of isolation from the punishment itself; He would merely act indirectly in the process.

But both of these alternatives would effectively deny His creatures "full liberty" to yield or withhold obedience. The first is a blatant denial; the second would simply be a deceitful, underhanded denial of liberty.

But God is not deceitful or devious. He is the God of truth and desires all to make free decisions based on truth. He gave the liberty; therefore He cannot punish any who exercise what He has given them.

Everyone who is to participate in the final presentation of God's character must come to understand the real character of God's law. The awful punishments which will fall upon the violators of God's great principles are exactly what the law was devised to protect them from, not what it was designed to bring upon them. The law is a masterpiece of protection for all creatures great and small. It is so wonderfully designed that obedience to it ensures absolute immunity from sickness, suffering, sorrow, fear, suspicion, robbery, violence, and death. On the other hand, violation of its principles guarantees the introduction of these tragedies in their worst forms.

“The wages of sin is death.” Romans 6:23

It is universally accepted that a worker is always paid by the employer for whom he provided service. If I work all week for Mr. Jones and then on payday go to Mr. Smith to collect my paycheck, I would not very likely get paid. Mr. Smith might very well respond indignantly, “I'm not responsible for your wages! You'll have to see Mr. Smith about that. I don't pay money earned by working for someone else. If you work for me then I will pay your wages but not otherwise.”

The same reasonable response is made by God. In the spiritual realm there are two masters. God and Satan, or more correctly, righteousness and sin. Neither of them pays the wages earned by serving the other.

The wages of sin is death and the gift of righteousness is life. No one believes that Satan every pays the gifts of God. All who live a life of righteousness know that they can never expect the devil to reward them for their faithfulness. God alone pays the gift of life; Satan has no part in this whatsoever.

It should, then, be equally clear that the Lord never pays the wages owed by sin to its subjects. Sin and Satan alone dole out their payments. God does not deal with the currency of death for He is the great Giver of life. That is His merchandise and He dispenses no other.

“God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive, to build up and restore us.”  
 “Sickness, suffering, and death are work of an antagonistic power. Satan is the destroyer; God is the restorer.”  
*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 112, 113.

The Law of God, then, was not designed as an instrument of destruction but of salvation and protection. It is most unfortunate that many modern Christians has so much hostility toward the law. When its true purpose and role are understood, then with the Psalmist, we will exclaim, “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.” Psalm 119:97.

### **The First Commandment**

“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” Exodus 20:3.

Most people see this injunction as a way for God to make sure He gets the respect and worship that He deserves. They imagine Him almost saying, “I am God and you better not forget it! I will not tolerate anyone else taking my position, honor or glory. I demand exclusive recognition from every one of my subjects. If I catch you giving attention to another god, I will come in the fury of My anger and punish you without mercy.” This is how most of the world views God, because if *they* were in the same position with the same power, that is how *they* would act.

But this is exactly the reverse of God's intention. He was not thinking of Himself in creating this precept. He was entirely concerned with the security and safety of His creatures. This is because we are exposed to two types of power, internal and external, and both are necessary for our survival, development and highest aspirations. These powers are absolutely necessary for us to live our lives to the fullest potential. The internal mental and physical powers endow us with the capabilities of creative thought, reasoning, planning, invention, expression, love and joy and so forth. The external powers of nature provide us with light, heat, gravity, wind, water, inertia, friction, electricity, magnetism, and many, many more.

God knew that the aspirations of his intelligent creatures, made after His image with creative ambitions would require the availability of tremendous amounts of energy and power. These sources of power were designed for blessing and benefit only, but, unavoidably, they have within them the potential for destruction. Take, for example, the sun.



The fiery orb that lights our sky and warms our earth was spoken into existence on the fourth day of creation. But like all other powers, it is nothing more than unintelligent, uncontrolled raw power. Yet it must be controlled and this can be achieved only by an intelligent Power outside of and great that itself. The only power that can do this is the power that made it. That creative power is exercised through the Son of God, Christ, Who not only “made the worlds,” but is constantly “upholding all things by the word of His power.” Hebrews 1:2,3.

“God is constantly employed in upholding and using as His servants the things that He was made. He works through the laws of nature, using them as His instruments. They are not self-acting. Nature in her work testifies of the intelligent presence and active agency of a Being Who moves in all things according to His will.” *Ministry of Healing*, p. 416.

“Nature is the servant of her Creator. God does not annul His laws, or work contrary to them; but He is continually using them as His instruments. Nature testifies of an intelligence, a presence, an active energy, that works in and through her laws. There is in nature the continual working of the Father and the Son. Christ says, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’ John 5:17.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.114.

“You, even You, are Lord alone; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things therein,...and You preserve them all.” Nehemiah 9:6.

“It is not because the mechanism that has once been set in motion continues to act by its own inherent energy, that the pulse beats, and breath follows breath; but every breath, every pulsation of the heart, is an evidence of the all-pervading care of Him in whom ‘we live, and move, and have our being.’ Acts 17:28. It is not because of inherent power that year by year the earth produces her bounties, and continues her motion around the sun. The hand of God guides the planets, and keeps them in position in their orderly march through the heavens. He ‘bringeth out their host by number; He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth.’ Isaiah 40:26. It is through His power that vegetation flourishes, that the leaves appear and the flowers bloom. He ‘maketh grass to grow upon the mountains,’ and by Him the valleys are made fruitful. All the beasts of the forest seek their meat from God, Psalms 147:8; 104:20, 21, and every living creature, from the smallest insect up to man, is daily dependent upon His providential care. In the beautiful words of the psalmist, ‘These wait all upon Thee...That Thou givest them they gather; Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good.’ Psalm 104:27, 28.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 115.

God is the active Controller of all the power which He has installed in the universe for the good of His creatures. But, why is it necessary for God to do this? Because He is determined to maintain control all by Himself? Or is it because He is the only One who *can*?

The sun must have an intelligent controller to maintain its energy output at a constant level, its mass at a constant level, both of which are critical to the survival of life on this planet. A slight decrease in thermal output or a drop in its mass and our planet would be thrown into a frozen solid ice age. A reverse of its energy expenditure or increase in mass and we’d be toast. And the Sun is not the only power so tightly regulated.

Behold Your God Wright 1979 / Hullquist 2005

The finely tuned physical parameters that allow for life to exist on planet Earth have caused great wonder and amazement among astrophysicists for many decades. The density of space, the exquisite balance between the weak and strong nuclear forces, the proportional masses and spins of protons and electrons, the half-life of isotopes, the many and marvelous properties of water, etc., etc., etc. are simply far too precisely controlled to be coincidental. Far more than we do, we need to be grateful and appreciate how dependent we are on the Lord's controlling and sustaining hand in the universe.

Because there is no other being capable of maintaining control of the forces in nature, it is absolutely essential that no other god be placed in God's position as Sustainer and Controller of these mighty powers. To remove God from His position would inevitably cause these powers to unleash a wild holocaust of destruction.



To help understand this on a human level, consider a jumbo jet, a large commercial passenger aircraft, like the Boeing 777-300ER which is powered by two of the most powerful turbofan engines in existence, the General Electric GE90-115B, producing 115,300lb of thrust to lift its 660,000 pounds to a cruising speed of 893 km/hr. Any pilot who would fly this craft must undergo extensive training and rigorous practice to develop the highly developed skills necessary to control such tremendous power. Suppose a passenger who has never previously flown a plane hijacks the craft in flight over the Pacific and attempts to fly it.

What are the prospects for a successful flight and, more importantly, a safe landing? The 777 is a complex device wielding enormous power, and at high altitude and speed, possessing catastrophic potential. Without an intelligent and skilled pilot at the controls, the flight can only end in certain disaster.

This is exactly the situation our world faces. God alone has the power and skill to accurately guide the celestial bodies safely on their courses. Should that guiding hand be removed and another attempt to fill its place, then inevitable desolation would be the certain result. But wait, you say, God could prevent this. Yes, He does have the physical power to do so, but in order for Him to regain His position of control He must force Himself back into the place from which He was dismissed. But this God will never do. This would violate the freedom of choice which He Himself gave to His creatures and which He will never invade in the least.





How could it be possible to make God vacate His position of control in the first place? Quite easily, actually. What's more, it has already been done. Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, were granted ruler and ownership of this world. God gave them "dominion...over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Genesis 1:26. As long as they retained that dominion, God could and did maintain perfect control over the sun, the moon, and all the other mighty powers that blessed and benefited the human family with prosperity, comfort and perfect security.

But then humanity delivered their kingdom into the devil's hands so he could become "the prince of this world." John 14:30. When Adam and Eve allowed Satan to step into God's place they broke the first commandment and lost the protection it was designed to give. The new god could not control the mighty powers of nature. Sudden destruction immediately threatened them. But Christ stepped in to divert the punishment which the sinners had created to Himself. He had to move quickly to save them.

"The instant man accepted the temptations of Satan, and did the very things God had said he should not do, Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, "Let the punishment fall on Me."  
*SDABC 1:1085.*

Had not Christ intervened, all nature would have gone wildly out of control wreaking increasing havoc. But He gave our world a period of probation in which to make a second choice to serve the God of life and love or the god of death and destruction. When at last the time of probation is ended, this is just what will happen. Jesus will step out of His place as Mediator and all nature will collapse in a cataclysm of horrific destruction.

**The second commandment** protects against the same divine displacement. Bowing to an image or idol also replaces God from His position of control. God is the only source of life. To turn from that Source and seek it elsewhere is certain death. God doesn't need to kill idol worshippers; they kill themselves.

For example, consider the situation of an aviator at high altitude where supplemental oxygen is required to maintain consciousness. Flight procedures explicitly detail the connection of the oxygen mask tubing to the clearly labeled oxygen outlet port. But the pilot deliberately chooses to plug his line into another socket with no connection to the oxygen supply. What will happen? He has but seconds to correct the error or he will die as the direct result of disobeying the procedure manual's specific instructions.

In precisely the same manner, the man who bows before an idol in search of life has pronounced his own death sentence. He has cut himself off from the Source of life. This is no fault of God's. He provided the channel for life and warned of the consequences of discarding it.

**The third commandment** warns against discarding your family relationship, as a child of God, by willfully living contrary to the family standards and principles. This can only result in separation from the blessings and benefits inherent within the family.

**The fourth commandment** maintains respect for God's possessions, His day and His time. Disregard of this precept opens the door to every kind of sorrow.

**The fifth commandment** prohibiting theft is the basis for next three. Killing, lying and adultery are but variations of stealing: stealing a life, stealing the truth or one's reputation, stealing a spouse.

All the commandments can be reduced to this: having respect for that which belongs to another. The first four deal with our respect for that which belongs to God; the last six deal with our respect for that which belongs to our neighbors.

Just imagine what our world would be like and how long it would last if all law was repealed, if there was no respect for God or man and every person was a thief, a liar, an adulterer, a murderer, and so on. Everyone, who

managed to survive, would live in a state of perpetual terror...no security, no peace...anarchy would reign, and the total extermination of our race by its own hands would be the swift result. Lawlessness is its own punishment; it is simply a matter of cause and effect.

No truer is this demonstrated than in the laws of health. The human body can thrive and endure many decades when exercised, fueled and rested in accordance with known medical facts that have been established through careful epidemiological research over centuries of study. But self-destructive behavior can drastically shorten life expectancy, severely damage organ systems and remove protective mechanisms to allow disease and death to quickly overwhelm our bodies. Alcohol, tobacco, drugs, dead food, fat, salt, sedentary habits are proven killers to the human organism. God doesn't cause strokes, heart attacks, cancer or infections. They are the natural consequences of exposure to damaging substances and lifestyles.

In conclusion, the laws of nature, the laws of society, the laws of health and the Law of God all exist for the protection of the human race. The greater the power the greater the danger it poses. But observing the laws that govern these powers is the only guarantee to avoid the danger and enjoy the benefits of the powers that God has blessed us with.

## Disasters Strike Home



Recent string  
of ‘killer storms’  
push claims to record high

**New York (EPI): Hurricane Paula smashed into the gulf states causing billions of dollars in damages. Summer lighting storms in the northwest turned millions of forested acres into charcoal. Another California earthquake leveled the west coast.**

Hartford and Prudential insist that this flood of disasters is not covered in the standard policies. An unnamed Allstate representative explained, on condition of anonymity, that “these claims just can’t be honored when you’re dealing with acts of God.”

A giant sink hole devoured an entire nomadic tribe in the Middle East after fire (allegedly from the sky) literally consumed a nearby city. Later, there was one report of a victim who was killed on contact. Investigators are pointing with reverent fear to these and many other accounts as typical acts of God

But are they?

The entire world has been lead to believe that God will put up with us miserable creatures for just so long and then His patience runs out. A divine frown curls His brow. He gets mad, angry, blows His top, and lets us have it. What a pity. The fact is, He never loves the sinner any less. Never.

We simply do not understand how God handles judgments. Rather, we misunderstand the circumstantial evidence. We’ve been told that the wrath of God will be poured out without mercy when He comes to judge the world. Many even look forward to that great event with the anticipation of tremendous satisfaction. Then all the mean, rotten, dirty jerks who ever did us dirt will get what’s coming to them.

But the maligned Creator who cried in deep sorrow for a doomed city does not think that way. His thoughts are not like ours, and His ways of doing things are not anything like our ways.

This is why His wrath is nothing at all like our wrath. It is a loving kind of wrath that is seen as He sadly turns away, still loving those who are pushing Him out of their lives. But He leaves only with great reluctance, because He knows that He must leave them to the inevitable consequences of their own choice. They are left alone without any protection.

When men exchanged the glory of the immortal God in order to worship birds and bugs and cows, their patient Creator regrettably gave them up to have their own way. And that’s the way it has always been: we demand to be left alone, and He honors our decision. But no more awful sentence can be pronounced on anyone than for God to say, “Leave him alone.” It is the loving wrath of God which says, “How, oh, how can I give you up? How can I hand you over? My heart recoils within Me.”

Free of His protection, a person is left helplessly exposed to the certain threat of death that awaits him—at the hands of the Destroyer.

Lightning bolts from heaven? Floods and hurricanes? Earthquakes and AIDS? Yes, they are all acts of a god.

## But What About...

The human mind has long been educated to believe that the only way to overcome rebellion is by force. We know of no other way, and the Lord certainly has a serious problem which must be solved. It would seem that He, too, has no other alternative but to use force to achieve His goals. Furthermore, many Scriptural references appear to support the conclusion that God does punish, destroy and exterminate.

“And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.” Genesis 6:5-7.

“And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh.” Genesis 6:17.

“Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.” Genesis 19:24, 25.

“Thus said the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.” Exodus 32:27.

“He has used His people as instruments of His wrath, to punish wicked nations.” *SDABC*, 1:1117.

“The Canaanites lived only to blaspheme heaven and defile the earth. And both love and justice demanded the prompt execution of these rebels against God, and foes to man.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 492.

“The Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.” Joshua 10:11.

“But when the king [God] heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies [the Romans], and destroyed those murderers [the Jews], and burned up their city [Jerusalem].” Matthew 22:7.

“And fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.” Revelation 20:9.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of such statements. But they are quite sufficient to demonstrate that there are many such Scriptures which, when interpreted according to the way our minds have been accustomed to think, leave us with no option but to conclude that God does, in fact, use physical force to eliminate those who have rebelled against Him.

But to really believe this we must ignore an equally impressive number of statements that say just the opposite:

“The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works.” Psalm 145:17.

“Your testimonies [commandments and laws] that You have commanded are righteous.” Psalm 119:138.

The Lord is righteous and the law is righteous. Therefore God is what the law is and the law declares “Thou shalt not kill.” Exodus 20:13. Therefore, it is not in the character of God to kill.

“God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 84.  
“God destroys no one.” *Testimonies* 5:120.

“God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown, which yields its unfailing harvest. The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan.” *Great Controversy*, 36.

“Sickness, suffering, and death are work of an antagonistic power. Satan is the destroyer; God is the restorer.” *Ministry of Healing*, 113.

“Satan is the destroyer. God cannot bless [protect] those who refuse to be faithful stewards. All He can do is to permit Satan to accomplish his destroying work. We see calamities of every kind and in every degree coming upon the earth, and why? The Lord’s restraining power is not exercised. The world has disregarded the word of God. They live as though there were no God...Wickedness prevails to an alarming extent, and the earth is ripe for the harvest.” *Testimonies* 6:388, 389.

“This earth has almost reached the place where God will permit the destroyer to work his will upon it.” *Testimonies* 7:141.

“In this age a more than common contempt is shown to God...Many have well-nigh passed the boundary of mercy. Soon God will show that He is indeed the living God. He will say to the angels, ‘No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy. Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience; for the cup of their iniquity is full...I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work.’” *Review and Herald*, September 17, 1901.

“You know not what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Luke 9:55, 56.

“There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work, or who act contrary to our ideas.” *Desire of Ages*, 487.

“Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan’s government. The Lord’s principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy and love.” *ibid.*, 759.

“The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority.” *ibid.*, 22.

These statements are just as clear and emphatic, asserting that God is not an executioner, does not punish nor destroy. How can these possibly be reconciled with the first set of opposing statements? Some have taken the position that this is just another example of contradiction within “so called” inspired writings and discard their faith on the grounds that the Author is guilty of duplicity and inconsistency. Others simply ignore one or the other set of statements and build their faith accordingly.

This was the approach taken by the Pharisees and Jews just prior to the first advent. The Old Testament contained many prophetic statements describing both the first and second coming of Christ. They dismissed the verses which described His coming in obscurity, shame, rejection and final crucifixion. They did so because they could not reconcile their seeming contradiction to the many other verses which described a Messiah who was coming with indescribable power, glory and triumph in which all their enemies would be totally annihilated. They couldn’t harmonize the two, so they ignored the ones that didn’t fit their world view (the problem texts) and emphasized their “key texts” that supported their Messianic ambitions. Their rejection of Christ resulted in the loss of their temple, their city and their lives.

Satan cleverly used the Scriptures themselves to condition their minds to actually reject the Saviour when He came. We, too, can take the same approach. When confronted with conflicting statements about God’s use of force, we can carefully gather and select the ones we prefer to believe while discarding or ignoring the others that just “don’t fit” our theology. If we follow the example of the past then we will also arrive at an equally erroneous view and will reap the same tragic results.



The true student of God's word will not make this mistake. He will ignore no statements, no matter how contradictory they may appear. But he will rest in the conviction the problem is only apparent and not real. Confessing the weakness and limitations of the human mind, he will recognize that the difficulty lies in our inadequate depth of spiritual perception. He will move forward in quiet faith, patiently studying God's Word, knowing that, under His instruction, such revelations of the mysteries will come that will remove all contradictions and in their place reveal a perfect harmony where previously only confusion existed.

Faith maintains that there are no contradictions in the Word of God.

Faith maintains that we must take both sets of statements as they read.

Faith maintains that we must be patient; that in due time, the God of heaven will provide the answer.

### **Winning the War**

It is God's plan to win the great controversy in such a way that the stability of the universe will be secured against any future possibility of sin's return. He desires a permanent solution that will unify the hearts and minds of every created being throughout His vast cosmic kingdom. He is not interested in a quick fix.

The facts of the case are these:

Satan instigated his rebellion on the premise that God is a self-serving, unfair, hypocritical tyrant.

This earth has become the battleground for the great struggle between good and evil.

Satan can and will use deception to gain support for his cause; God will only deal truthfully.

Satan can and will use coercion, pressure, threats, torture, pain and suffering to achieve his goals.

God's approach must conquer upon its own merits without any assistance from overpowering physical force.

If the first destruction of this world with water is a model for the final destruction with fire, then we must understand how God dealt with that global emergency. The implications of drowning of all life forms on planet earth are very serious indeed. It seems inescapable that God was backed into a corner and forced to admit that the cause of righteousness on earth was failing. With only eight faithful followers left, God and Christ had to step in and exercise their own infinitely superior power to reverse the tide of evil, level the playing field by eliminating the devil's entire population of evil doers while preserving alive Their own people.



Such an explanation implies that God had to revise His method of dealing with the sin problem. He started out with noble intentions, but then found Himself obliged to change tactics when His prospects of winning started to appear compromised. Such an interpretation makes God less than infinite, omniscient, and omnipotent. It could only mean that He is not really God after all, because God has perfect foreknowledge and needs no revisions, no compromises, no modifications over time.

There are very real problems in need of solutions that arise because of these apparent contradictions in the Word of God.

Yet those who persevere in faith will discover marvelous revelations of God's true nature and His methods of dealing with sin that is completely consistent with His character, His law and His constitution.

## Principles of Biblical Interpretation

The problem before us is obviously one of interpretation, determining just what the words used in Scripture are intended to say. If we are to arrive at a correct, life-saving knowledge of God's character, we must first understand the correct principles of Bible interpretation. Few people approach the study of God's Word with any real system of interpretation clearly laid out. They read and form their own opinion of what they think the passage means. This is haphazard and dangerous. Only by letting the Bible explain itself can we have any confidence in arriving at the correct interpretation.

Not only does the Bible give us the message of truth but it also informs us how those messages are to be understood. The first principle is given in 2 Peter 1:20. "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." This verse is not limited to only prophetic passages that deal with future events. In the broadest sense prophecy applies to *any* message from or about God: counsels, admonitions, the gospel as well as predictions of the future.

### The Dictionary Method



Private interpretation emanates from the mind of man; it is man's opinion based on what he understands the meaning of words to be. This is called the "Dictionary" method of Biblical interpretation. It inevitably results in a view that is consistent with human understanding because the definitions are based on *human* behavior. When we read in Scripture that God "sent" the flood upon the earth or that He "destroyed" men by raining fire and brimstone, the commonly understood definitions of these words can only lead the Dictionary Method to conclude that God is a grim executioner.

It appears that He operates much differently now that sin has entered our world than He did before the fall. The problem with this method is that it leaves us with inexplicable contradictions.

The Scriptural Method of interpretation is free of such distortion. It does not rely on human definitions because, as God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways." Isaiah 55:8. God doesn't think like we do. God's ways are different and God's definitions are much different. Any interpretation that depicts God behaving as a man is incorrect.

Man destroys. We know that. We also know *how* man destroys. We have no difficulty in defining this word as it applies to human behavior. The Bible says, "God destroys." Therefore, it is true that God does destroy and no attempt should be made to deny that. But the Bible also says that God's ways are not men's ways. From this we can conclude that God's way of destroying is altogether different from man's way. There is no similarity between the two. Therefore, when the Word declares that God destroys, it must be understood that He does so in a manner that is altogether different from the way that man destroys.

God, understanding the problem with human thinking, carefully incorporated clear definitions for the words He uses within the Scriptures themselves. If you desire to know what God means by a certain word, "Search the

scriptures, for they are they which do testify of Me.” John... The definitions are there. This was the method used by William Miller as he determined to systematically study the Bible for himself.

“He reasoned that if the Bible is a revelation from God, it must be consistent with itself; and that as it was given for man’s instruction, it must be adapted to his understanding... Endeavoring to lay aside all preconceived opinions, and dispensing with commentaries, he compared Scripture with Scripture by the aid of the marginal references and the concordance... When he found anything obscure, it was his custom to compare it with every other text which seemed to have any reference to the matter under consideration. Every word was permitted to have its proper bearing upon the subject of the text.” *Great Controversy*, p.319

He endeavored to discard his “preconceived opinions.” This was the problem with Christ’s disciples and most of the Jewish leadership. So today, we should approach the study of God’s Word with a humble opinion of our own wisdom and understanding. We dare not rely on our own private interpretation.

“The stamps of minds are different. All do not understand expressions and statements alike. Some understand the statements of Scriptures to suit their own particular minds and cases. Prepossessions, prejudices, and passions have a strong influence to darken the understanding and confuse the mind even in reading the words of Holy Writ.” *Selected Messages* 1:20.

“You must lay your preconceived opinions, your hereditary and cultivated ideas, at the door of investigation. If you search the Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says. If conviction comes as you search, if you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the truth, do not misinterpret the truth in order to suit your own belief, but accept the light given. Open mind and heart that you may behold wondrous things out of God’s Word.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 112.

This concept is being emphasized because in the field of knowledge dealing with the character of God, wrong concepts are prolific. Any emergence of truth must be from a background of error and misconception. We only see through a glass darkly. We live in a world that lies in ignorance of God as He really is and we are unconsciously influenced by its dark atmosphere. There is no subject, then, in which the need to lay aside preconceived ideas and opinions is more critical.

### **A Comparative Example**

As an exercise in comparing the Dictionary Method with the correct principles of letting the Bible interpret itself, let’s consider the two sets of statements present in Scripture that seem to contradict each other on the subject of hell fire and the final punishment of the wicked.

On one hand, there are many verses which inform us that the wicked will be as though they had not been, that we shall tread down their ashes under our feet, that they shall burn up, leaving neither root nor branch, that the dead know nothing, that their very thoughts are gone. But then there are those Scriptures which make it appear that the wicked do burn forever in the eternal flames of hell and the lake of fire.

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” Revelation 20:10.

The dictionary defines “forever” to mean “a limitless time or endless ages, everlasting, eternally, at all times, always, continually, incessantly.” If we apply this dictionary definition to the terms of our text, then the only possible understanding of this verse would be that the wicked suffer eternally—without end. I hope you can see how a certain method of interpretation will yield its corresponding conclusions regarding truth. Serious doubt concerning the validity of this method comes when we examine the sharp contradictions expressed in other Scriptures:

“So shall all the heathen drink continually, yes, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.” Obadiah 16.

“For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” Malachi 4:1

It is obviously impossible for the wicked to be as though they had not been, to be burned up leaving nothing behind—not even root nor branch—and at the same time exist forever in pain and torment. That is a contradiction which will continue unresolved until our understanding of these verses is changed. Notice carefully, that it is not the Scriptures that must be changed: it is our *understanding* of them.

This was resolved years ago as pioneering Bible students searched for all the texts on this subject:

“We read of ‘Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them...suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.’ Jude 7. Are those cities, set ablaze long ago by a divine judgment, still burning? No; their ruins are quite submerged by the Dead Sea. The Bible itself specifically states that God turned ‘the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes.’ 2 Peter 2:6...When we turn to the Old Testament we discover that ‘everlasting’ and ‘for ever’ sometimes signify a very limited time.

“The Passover was to be kept ‘for ever.’ Ex. 12:24. But it ended with the cross. (See Heb 9:24-26). Aaron and his sons were to offer incense ‘for ever.’ (1 Chron. 23:13), and to have an ‘everlasting priesthood.’ Ex. 40:15. But this priesthood, with its offerings of incense, ended at the cross. (See Heb. 7:11-14). A servant who desire to stay with his master, was to serve him ‘for ever.’ (See Ex. 21:1-6). How could a servant serve a master to endless time? Will there be masters and servants in the world to come? Jonah, describing his watery experience, said, ‘The earth with her bars was about me for ever.’ Jonah 2:6. Yet this ‘for ever’ was only ‘three days and three nights’ long. Jonah 1:17. Rather a short ‘for ever.’ “Thus by the acid test of actual usage we discover that in a number of cases ‘for ever’ has a very limited time value.” F.D. Nichol, *Answers to Objections*, pp. 360, 361.

OK. Now it’s quiz time. After reading the above discussion by F.D. Nichol let’s answer a few questions in following the Socratic method of teaching.

Question: How many references were made to standard dictionaries in seeking a definition for the terms “everlasting” and “for ever” as used in Scripture?

Answer: None at all.

Question: What then was used as a dictionary in arriving at a definition?

Answer: The Bible only.

Question: Were the words found to mean the same in Scripture usage as in everyday usage?

Answer: No. The meanings are very different.

Question: What is the meaning of “everlasting” and “for ever” in everyday speech as found in dictionaries?

Answer: These words mean eternally, without ever ceasing, without end, etc.

Question: What is the meaning of these words when used in Scripture?

Answer: They indicate time in unbroken duration so long as the nature of the subject allows. In the case of the wicked, their sinful human nature does not allow a very long time in the fire before they are reduced to ashes, though the fire will continue without cessation until they are totally consumed. On the other hand the nature of God and the redeemed is such that they can “endure eternal burnings” in the presence of God “who is a consuming fire” as long as their immortal natures allow throughout eternity without ever ceasing.

The correct method of Biblical interpretation, which uses all instances of a word’s usage to explain itself, must be applied with unflinching consistency throughout the entire study of the Bible. It is astonishing to see those who have no trouble in believing that the wicked do not burn forever by applying this method, then reject the interpretation that God only “destroys” by removing Himself and His protection from the unrepentant by resorting to the Dictionary method of interpretation.

Most of the time, dictionary definitions will not conflict with scriptural definitions. But when they do, and a serious contradiction is encountered, it is time to search out the true Scriptural meaning instead of just accepting the common dictionary definition.



## How God Destroys

“Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.” Genesis 19:24,25.

This text is frequently offered as proof that God, after working with great love and patience to bring these rebels to repentance, finally laid aside the garments of mercy, took hold of the mighty power of fire and personally poured it on their bare heads resulting in such total obliteration that no trace of these cities can be found today. This conjures up visions of medieval warriors defending themselves by pouring burning oil on the enemy below the castle walls. This is exactly what we would expect from our human perspective. The difference is only one of magnitude. We might be able to torch small groups but God is able to engulf whole cities.

Satan succeeds in misrepresenting God’s character by making it appear to be identical to man’s. God is considered to behave just as any earthly potentate would under the same circumstances. To our human minds it is a very reasonable approach. But the word of God expressly advises us that His ways are entirely different from man’s. This is why Jesus “presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God.” *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 177.

### Who Killed King Saul?

“And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was wounded of the archers. Then said Saul to his armor bearer, Draw your sword and thrust me through with it; lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me. But his armor bearer would not; for he was very afraid. So Saul took a sword and fell upon it.”  
1 Chronicles 10:3-6.

This is a simple, easily understood, account of Saul’s death. After a certain critical point in his life, after persistently rejecting the appeals of mercy, the king took himself further and further outside the circle of God’s protection. Eventually he came to the point where it was impossible for the Lord to help him, not because the Lord wouldn’t, but only because He couldn’t. When he entered his final battle, he went without the Lord’s protection and he knew it. Without God’s presence, there was nothing to save him from the dreadful power of the Philistines. His destruction was an inevitable, predetermined, foregone conclusion. He had taken himself away from God, placing himself where there was no defense from Satan’s power. In fact, he destroyed himself.



The only actions we see on God’s part were to extend every possible effort to save him. But Saul only resisted the outreach of the Holy Spirit. For God to have maintained a connection with Saul against his will, would have been only to force His presence where it was not desired, and this He cannot and will not do. Now, look how God describes what He did just a few verses later:

“So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; and inquired not of the Lord; therefore He slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.” 1 Chronicles 10:13, 24.



God exerted every possible influence of love and truth to save Saul, and when he refused, then the Lord went away and left him to what he wanted—his own way. God didn't have to raise His own hand to slay Saul; he killed himself just in time to prevent the Philistines from doing it. Yet Scripture says that "He (the Lord God of Heaven) slew him."

This is certainly not how we would use these words. When we say "he slew him" we understand that the slayer would approach the victim, not move away; that he would have carried a weapon in his own hand, not retreat empty handed. Yet this is how God destroys.

### Who Destroyed Jerusalem?

Saul is an example of the entire nation of Israel. For centuries the Children of Israel spurned loving appeals, persecuted and even martyred the prophets. Finally, the Son of God Himself came with a personal message from the Father. But their rejection of Him was even more emphatic. When the time finally came that they passed the point of no return, what did Christ do? What did He say?



"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone them that are sent unto you. How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Matthew 23:37, 38.

He declared that Jerusalem was beyond hope, and then He quietly left them to their fate, not because He wanted to, but because there was nothing else He could do that was consistent with His character of love.

For the same reasons, and consistent with the same principles, God left Israel exactly as He had left Saul. For centuries the devil had thirsted for the blood of Israel. Knowing that he could not touch them as long as God's protection surrounded them, he led them with terrible success to reject their only effective defense. When they did it was removed and there was nothing to shield them from disaster.

"The Jews had forged their own fetters; they had filled for themselves the cup of vengeance...they were but reaping the harvest which their own hands had sown...Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. [Who presents it this way?] It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work. By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will."

*Great Controversy*, p. 35

"O Israel; you have destroyed yourself." Hosea 13:9

"It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan...[It is] God's mercy and longsuffering [that is] holding in check the cruel, malignant power of the evil one...God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown...The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan."

"The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace, and resisting the pleadings of divine mercy. Never was there given a more decisive testimony to God's hatred of sin, and to the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty." *Great Controversy*, p. 36.

God's actions in the destruction of Jerusalem are identical to His dealings with King Saul. What befell the Jews was the natural outworking of their own course of action. But it is a technique of the devil to conceal the true nature of his own work by attributing it to God., while to himself he credits the work and character of God.

As we have already noted, God described what He did to Saul in words very different from which we would use. God said, "I destroyed him." We would say, "He destroyed himself." Now, because God is consistent, we should expect Him to describe the His action in the fall of Jerusalem with the same language. In His parable of the vineyard, as He tells of a king's repeated rejections and then the murder of his own son, Jesus said,

"But when the king [God, the Father] heard thereof, he [God] was wroth: and he [God] sent forth his armies [the Romans under Titus in 70 AD], and destroyed those murderers [the Jews], and burned up their city [Jerusalem]." Matthew 22:7.

But how did He destroy them? God is said to destroy sinners when He accepts their demands to be left alone. The fate which then befalls them is not by either God's election or administration. It is the inevitable outworking of the transgressor's choice and a demonstration of Satan's vindictive power.

### Who Sent the Serpents?

Another example of how God administers judgment is the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness. They were traveling through an area infested with deadly serpents. There were completely unaware of the danger. Because of God's protecting care they traveled unharmed. But then they murmured once again against God and Moses. When they drove away His protection through their own ingratitude and sinful rebellion, the shield was removed, there was nothing to hold back the invasion of those reptiles. As a result many died a terrible death.

Again it is seen that the Lord did not decree the punishment, He simply left them alone just as they wanted. The poisonous snakes were lurking there all the time only waiting for the opportunity to strike.



"As the Israelites indulged the spirit of discontent, they were disposed to find fault even with their blessings... Moses faithfully set before the people their great sin. It was God's power alone that had preserved them in 'that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought...' Every day of their travels they had been kept by a miracle of divine mercy... If with all these tokens of His love the people still continued to complain, the Lord would withdraw His protection."

"Because they had been shielded by divine power, they had not realized the countless dangers by which they were continually surrounded. In their ingratitude and unbelief they had anticipated death, and now the Lord permitted death to come upon them... As the protecting hand of God was removed from Israel, great numbers of the people were attacked by these venomous creatures." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp.428, 429.

As in the previous two examples, what God actually did and how He described His actions were exactly opposite to how we would express it. Here again the consistency of God stands forth without variableness neither shadow of turning as He states what He did:

“And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.”  
Numbers 21:6.

### **Who Persecuted Job?**

Yet another confirmation of this truth about God’s way of “sending” judgment is revealed in the story of Job. Satan demanded the right to destroy him. God withdrew and left him to the power of the devil with one restriction—that he could not take his life. Everything that happened to Job was at the hands of Satan, not God. The picture of God’s behavior was exactly the same as before except for one difference. In the previous examples, it was the rejection of God’s mercy that drove Him and His protection away. But this time God withdraws from Job whom God Himself calls “a perfect and an upright man.” Why would God that?

Every true child of God has given his life into God’s hands to be sacrificed for the cause of truth if necessary to further advance the work. This is a privilege the Lord will never deny when the hour comes. The hour came for Job and the Lord did not stand in the way of his offering.

When God described how He dealt with Job, again He uses the same language as before.

“Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God and eschews evil? And still he holds fast his integrity, although you moved Me against him, to destroy him without cause.” Job 2:3.

Quite different words than we would use. A regular dictionary will not help here, only the Word of God can provide the correct meaning, and only from it can the right interpretation be made.

Now, let’s compare the differences between human and divine behavior when it comes to destruction:

When man destroys, he moves toward the victim with a deliberate intention to kill.

When God destroys, He moves away from the subject with no intention of killing.

When man destroys, he carries the weapons of death in his own hands.

When God destroys, He carries no weapons but relinquishes control of the powers that become destructive.

When man destroys, he guides the sword or arrow or bullet or missile on to its target.

When God destroys, there is no personal administration of punishment; the sinner destroys himself.

Some might argue that there is really no difference between actively delivering the punishment and allowing it to happen. Either way, God’s action brings destruction and so in both cases He is a destroyer. This would be true if God’s withdrawal was His own deliberate choice, but it is not. The fact is that He is driven away.

### **A Technical Issue**

To illustrate the difference, let us suppose that there is an atomic power plant located in the midst of a small township. The nature of this facility is such that a specially trained operator must be in the control room at all times to monitor its operation. Should this post be left unattended for even a few hours, the nuclear fission can quickly run out of control, become critical and escalate into a holocaust of destruction.





The situation arises where every technician but one is removed from the plant and the full responsibility rests upon this single worker. No one else in the area has the training, knowledge, or skill to operate the volatile equipment. But he is healthy, conscientious and faithfully stays by his post of duty.

However, an old enemy shows up and determines to run him out of town. He circulates a pack of lies about him until the villagers agree that the technician must leave their village. They begin to persecute him in every conceivable way.

For some time he patiently endures the attacks in hopes that they will realize that if he does leave it will be disastrous for the villagers. Finally his patience runs out. "I've had enough of this," he cries. "I've put up with this long enough. These people don't have a lick of sense. They don't deserve to live. I'm out of here." So he storms out of the control room, jumps in His SUV and drives out of town. After several hours and many miles away the melt down and atomic blast utterly destroys the village and all within it.

While it is true that the villagers brought the destruction upon themselves, it is equally true that this technician effectively participated in their destruction for he left his post of duty knowing that his departure would bring certain death. This is how many view the acts of God.

God faces much the same situation. He is the great Technician who is in charge of the power house of nature. When He lets go of those powers, there is no one else who can control them and keep them from causing unimaginable catastrophic disaster. An enemy has come in and generated a ground swell of hate against God. At this point many see God coming to the end of His patience, and like the technician in our story, voluntarily leaves men to perish. If so, they we should all agree that God is, after all, a destroyer.



But now let's retell the story as it really is in describing God's character. We start with the same technician, the same control room, the same villagers stirred up into mob action by the same enemy. But this time the technician never thinks of leaving. No matter what they do to him, he sticks it out, for their concern, knowing that if he leaves they will all be dead men. He never thinks about himself at all.

The persecution becomes more intense until the people begin to demand that he leave. He protests, explaining that if he does, they will die and for their sakes, not his own, he desires to stay at his job.

In their blinding hate, ignorant of the real danger, and over-confident of their own ability to manage the reactor, they laugh derisively at him and shout, "We don't need you here, get out!"

With deep concern for them he holds on, cringing with fear as he considers the consequences to the people if he should leave. He tries to think of how he might win their confidence, maintain his control of the power plant and preserve them alive. But then their anger erupts in a wild frenzy. They break into the control room, jostle him out the door, angrily shouting for him to leave. They push him out to the parking lot and force him to drive away. There is no choice left. Slowly, he leaves town but stops at the top of the hill to look back toward the angry crowd. He spreads his hands in one last appeal. The response is instant shouts and gestures indicating their persistent demand that he go.

What more can he do? Nothing. He has exhausted every possible source of hope. With the heaviest of hearts he turns toward the distance and is gone forever. The village is destroyed just as it was before, but no one can say that this technician is a destroyer. He acted only as a Saviour to them. He could not and did not save them, but only because they wouldn't let him. This is the true picture of the character of God.

“Christ will never abandon those for whom He has died. We may leave Him... but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life.” *Prophets and Kings*, p.176.

Since Christ died for all men, this statement is really saying that it is impossible for Him to turn away from anyone. Men may turn away from God, but God cannot turn away from men. That is impossible. God comes to man in one role only, that of a Saviour. But the effect of His approach is not always a saving one. With the majority, the effect is to harden them in rebellion and to cause them to withdraw themselves from the voice of loving entreaty. The more He exerts His saving power, the more men resist and drive themselves to destruction. It is in *this* sense that He destroys.

“It is not God that blinds the eyes of men or hardens their hearts. He sends them light to correct their errors, and to lead them in safe paths; it is by the rejection of this light that the eyes are blinded and the heart hardened.” *Desire of Ages*, p. 322.

“It is not God that puts the blinder before the eyes of men or makes their hearts hard; it is the light which God sends to His people, to correct their errors, to lead them in safe paths, but which they refuse to accept—it is this that blinds their minds and hardens their hearts.” *Review and Herald*, October 21, 1890.



### **Who Hardened Pharaoh's Heart?**

Of course, the outstanding example of this effect is the Pharaoh of Egypt. God said, “I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.” Exodus 7:3. To harden someone's heart is spiritual destruction which always precedes physical destruction. God's action was to send spiritual light and loving appeals to Pharaoh, designed to soften and save. But, because he rejected it, that which was sent to save, destroyed him instead. Notice: it was not the light, but his rejection of it that destroyed him.

“Pharaoh saw the mighty working of the Spirit of God; he saw the miracles which the Lord performed by His servant; but he refused obedience to God's command. The rebellious king had proudly enquired, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord...Exodus 5:2. And as the judgments of God fell more and more heavily upon him, he persisted in stubborn resistance. By rejecting light from heaven, he became hard and unimpressible ...these manifestations, unacknowledged, were the means of hardening Pharaoh's heart against greater light... Every rejection of light hardens the heart and darkens the understanding; and thus men find it more and more difficult to distinguish between right and wrong, and they become bolder in resisting the will of God.” *SDABC* 1:1100.



“Every additional evidence of the power of God that the Egyptian monarch resisted, carried him on to a stronger and more persistent defiance of God. Thus the work went on, finite man warring against the expressed will of an infinite God. This case is a clear illustration of the sin against the Holy Ghost. ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’ Gradually the Lord withdrew His Spirit. Removing His restraining power, He gave the king into the hands of the worst of all tyrants.” *Review and Herald*, July 27, 1897.

“The patience and long-suffering of God, which should soften and subdue the soul, has an altogether different influence upon the careless and sinful.” *Review and Herald*, August 14, 1900.

“Let ministers and people remember that gospel truth ruins if it does not save. The soul that refuses to listen to the invitations of mercy from day to day can soon listen to the most urgent appeals without an emotion stirring his soul.” *Testimonies* 5:134.

We must clearly understand that the only effort God puts forth, is to save. That effort produces two opposite effects. In the hearts and lives of those who accept God’s urgings, it softens, changes, cleanses and restores. But in the lives of those who reject His saving efforts, a terrible process of destruction takes place that breaks down every spiritual response, hardens the heart in rebellion, develops every sinful tendency, and compels the Spirit of God to withdraw His presence and protection.

God destroys, but not as man destroys. God is a Saviour and a Saviour only.

As we study the flood,  
 the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,  
 the plagues of Egypt,  
 the stoning of the Sabbath breaker, adulterer, glutton, and Achan,  
 the slaughter of the Canaanites,  
 the obliteration of Sennacherib’s army  
 the crucifixion of Christ,  
 the seven last plagues,  
 and the final judgment in the lake of fire,  
 this principle will be seen with greater impact and clarity.

## The Supreme Revelation

To Summarize our findings so far:

- There are no contradictions in the Word of God
- It must not be interpreted according to private or human methods.
- The Bible is its own dictionary and its own interpreter.
- God's ways and man's way are entirely different from each other.
- The only way in which God destroys is by trying to save.
- Any destruction is because of man's rejection of God's mercy.

Many Bible students, after reading the many Old Testament accounts of Divine judgment on the wicked have come to view God as a stern judge Who, ruling His kingdom like any earthly potentate, executes deadly punishments on those who do not obey Him. This standard view of God's conduct in the Old Testament is widely accepted without question. After all, they reason, He is the Creator, He does have absolute power, and so He has the right to destroy.

But others shudder as wade through gruesome accounts of bloody massacres where men, women, little girls and boys, and even infants in arms were ruthlessly put to the sword. That God should command such atrocities projects a rather frightening picture that is disturbing and revolting. But this is not surprising. Not even the holy angels were able to understand God's character until the advent of Christ; not until His demonstration of infinite love and justice was made on Calvary were they able to see God as He really is.

‘Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion.’ *Desire of Ages*, p.758.

If holy angels with superior intelligence and mighty spiritual power still had a clouded view of God even after personally participating in His workings during the Old Testament times, then it is impossible for human minds to understand God from these evidences alone. And when they are compared with Christ's revelations of the Father in the New Testament, a totally contradictory picture emerges. God must have changed or else there are two different gods. The Father is seen as stern and exacting, while Jesus is tender, loving and forgiving. But how can this be? Jesus said that He and the Father are one in authority, character, spirit and work.

This dichotomy has spawned the belief that Christ is the Appeaser of the Father's fury, pleading with Him to accept the confessing sinner and show mercy when He really doesn't feel like it. In its worse form, this appeasement doctrine has lead religions to even offer human sacrifices to their deities to placate “the wrath of the gods.” This makes the gods no different than us. Yet, many today appear to accept this arrangement without question. But the question needs to be asked: Are Christ and the Father one, or not?

The scriptures are emphatic that they are one in every particular. Jesus confirmed this repeatedly.

“I and My Father are one.” John 10:30.

“The Father is in Me, and I in Him.” John 10:38

“Philip said unto Him, Lord show us the Father, and it suffices us.”

“Jesus said unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not know Me, Philip? He that has seen Me has seen the Father...Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.” John 14:7-11

“The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do: for what things soever He does, these also does the Son likewise.” John 5:19

Division is Satan's objective. But God's great purpose is to bring all things into unity “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.” Ephesians 1:10.

Because Satan had so misrepresented the character of God, there was a crisis of trust in the universe and on earth. God needed to demonstrate what He was really like to the watching universe. The only One who could provide that demonstration was Jesus, “being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” Hebrews 1:3.

“Christ came to the earth to reveal to men the character of His Father.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.469.

“...Jesus, the express image of the Father’s person, the effulgence of His glory; the self-denying Redeemer, throughout His pilgrimage of love on earth was a living representative of the character of the law of God.” God’s *Amazing Grace*, p. 102.

“Christ, the outshining of the Father’s glory, came to the world as its light. He came to represent God to men.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 416.

“All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son.” *Testimonies* 8:286.

There are several reasons why Christ came to this earth.

### **The Lamb of God**

It is a serious mistake to limit His role to that of a sacrifice for the penalty of sin. He certainly came to pay our ransom and this aspect of His work must never be minimized.

### **The Second Adam**

But it is just as important to recognize that He also came to demonstrate that any human being by living faith may let go of the old nature, become a partaker of the divine nature, and through the indwelling Spirit live in perfect harmony with God’s law.

But, great and essential as these accomplishments are, they are not sufficient to end the great controversy.

### **The Word of God**

It is Christ’s third work that will secure this: that of revealing God’s righteous character to the point where Satan’s lies are shown for what they are. “He was the Word of God—God’s thought made audible.” *Desire of Ages*, p.19.

No matter what contradictory pictures of God may be presented, the only acceptable ones are those in harmony with Christ’s representation of God. Those who wish to know what God is like, how He deals with sin and sinners, have only to look at God in the face of Jesus Christ. Any concepts about God which find no reflection in Christ’s life and example must be rejected.

Therefore, in our efforts to find harmony between apparently contradictory pictures of God, we should always begin where the truth is clearest. This means that the starting point must always be the life of Christ and not the Old Testament tales. Christ brought that which was distant into intimate contact with the human race, and that which was obscure into perfect focus for all to see. His impeccable righteousness embodied all that is precious and lovely. Not a more convincing argument of God’s goodness could ever be given. What Christ came to accomplish, He was pre-eminently successful in doing. The question of what God is like, has been forever settled.

### Contrasting or Consistent?

Yet, some have resolved the apparent differences between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New by suggesting that Jesus simply came to show a different side of God, a shift in emphasis, the softer, gentler God. But this is not the message of Scripture. God does not change. Like Father, like Son. If you have seen the Son you have seen the Father. Whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Son does nothing of Himself, but only does what He sees the Father do. John 5:19.

Actually, the verse says: “what things soever He does, these also does the Son likewise.”

This word “whatsoever” means everything, all, complete, without any exception.

And the word “likewise” means just like the Father, exactly like Him.

Therefore, the revelation of God as given by Christ was not only complete but it was an exact facsimile.

If the Father Himself had come down instead of Christ, the picture would have been so identical that it would have been impossible to tell the difference.

This is a serious challenge to the old, time-honored ideas about God. Any idea that God is a destroyer of those who refuse His offer of mercy, can be sustained only if we can find Christ behaving the same way. If God is seen to have a limit to His patience, to rise and perform His “strange act” with terrifying power, wiping rebels off the face of the earth, demonstrating that He is not a God to be scorned—then it can be validated only if we can find an example of such conduct in the life of Jesus. But where is it?

Search His life as exhaustively as possible. Investigate every word and act. Listen to His inspired utterances. Observe how He deals with those who rejected His appeals of mercy. Notice how He responded to abuse and mistreatment. Jesus displayed no duality, but consistently conducted Himself as a Saviour and a Saviour only. Not once do we find Him lifting His hand to destroy anyone. He lived only to bless, to heal, to restore, to save.

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.” Acts 10:38.

“He came as an expression of the perfect love of God, not to crush, not to judge and condemn, but to heal every weak, defective character, to save men and women from Satan’s power... He was kind to all, easily approached by the most lowly. He went from house to house, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the mourners, soothing the afflicted, speaking peace to the distressed.” *Welfare Ministry*, pp. 54, 53.

How tragic that so many have failed to appreciate that Christ is the exact and complete revelation of the Father of lights. When this truth is seen as it should and must be, then it will be understood that God is committed to only one work—that of going about and doing good. He, as one with Christ, is the great Healer, Restorer, Saviour, and Friend of all mankind. “For the Father Himself loves you.” John 15...

“The life of Christ was filled with words and acts of benevolence, sympathy, and love.” *Early Writings*, p. 160.

His life was not just partly benevolent, sympathetic and loving, but filled to overflowing—there was no space left. A study of His life will fail to expose a single act of destruction or the administration of any punishment whatsoever.

But, some may object, what about His cursing of the fig tree? And His driving the money changers out of the temple—twice, and using a whip no less! These are the only events which can be offered as exceptions to Christ’s otherwise peaceful ministry. But are they exceptions? Where they inconsistent with the rest of His life’s example? Was He acting out of character? Let’s see.

## Urged to Destroy

When Jesus lived upon this earth, He had ample opportunity to strike out in acts of punishment and destruction. He was constantly confronted with those who despised His offers of salvation, not only refusing to obey, but actually working in open rebellion against Him. There was no lack of opportunity for Him to exercise His divine powers in bringing judgment on these rebels. He certainly had the power to do so. This was well demonstrated in His many miracles of healing, in calming the wild forces of nature and restraining demons. Even when urged to raise His hand and rain down fire upon those who turned against Him, He refused.

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him. And they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. And when His disciples, James and John saw this, they said, Lord will You that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did?”

“But He turned, and rebuked them, and said, You know not what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.” Luke 9:51-56.

The Samaritans could have offered no greater insult to the Son of God. The offer of hospitality to a stranger is regarded in the east as a universal obligation; to refuse it is indicated rejection of the worst possible kind. If ever, from the human point of view, such an affront needed to be punished to teach a lesson of warning to others, then this was it.

The Sons of Thunder had just recently seen Christ glorified by God on the mount of transfiguration. They had experienced the power of His divine majesty and witnessed Moses and Elijah in person. Now they were filled with indignation at the rude treatment given by the Samaritans. “Seeing Mount Carmel in the distance, where Elijah had slain the false prophets,” they remembered how God has sent fire from heaven to show His might and triumph over Baal. They thought they understood how God had acted in the past. They thought they were merely asking for permission to do just what God would do. As an awesome Being of judgment He would assert His authority because Christ was obviously on His way to Jerusalem for His coronation. The timing was right for a spectacular demonstration of His mighty power. This misunderstanding of His character is what prompted them to seek His endorsement of their bright idea.



But Jesus would not even consider doing any such thing. Instead, He rebuked the disciples. Christ did not use this opportunity to show the Father as an executioner because that is not God’s character. But He did take advantage of the situation to reveal the truth about His Father—and He made the most of it. He informed His disciples that the course they proposed came from an alien spirit, foreign to Him and His Father. This spirit and its fruit came from the heart of Satan. It was his policy, not God’s, to destroy those who failed to serve him.

Then Jesus repeated His mission, the reason He had come to this world. “The Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Now, notice what He didn’t say. He did not say, “The Son of man is come to save all who will be saved and then destroy everyone else.” Yet this is what most people think. If this was indeed what He meant, then He would have been obliged to actually destroy all the Samaritans who refused to accept Him.

But He neither said this, nor did that. Instead, with great plainness, He said, “The Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives...”



Men typically begin any great achievement with the best of intentions and noble principles only to discover unforeseen complications. Too often, they find it necessary to compromise their principles and modify their original plans. Not so with God. At the beginning He is fully aware of every difficulty which will develop. He outlines the course He will pursue. With infallible consistency He adheres to His stated principles.

Since Christ did not come to destroy, and since He did only what His Father did, then we know that the Father does not come to destroy. Christ came only to save. Likewise, the Father comes to us as a Saviour and a Saviour only.

“It is no part of Christ’s mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, that seek to compel the conscience... There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work, or who act contrary to our ideas.”  
*Desire of Ages* p.487

The Samaritans didn’t appreciate Christ’s work; they acted contrary to His ideas. If Jesus had shown any disposition to hurt or destroy them, He would have given conclusive evidence that He possessed the spirit of Satan. But didn’t because He didn’t because He doesn’t possess the devil’s spirit.

The position taken by Jesus against His apostles in the matter of the Samaritans, is a valuable revelation of His utter refusal to be involved in any kind of punitive judgment involving destruction. He made it quite clear that such tactics were not part of His nature or His Father’s.

### **Cursing the Fig Tree**

A few days before the last Passover, Jesus had ridden triumphantly into Jerusalem as one last appeal to the Jewish leaders. But their rejection placed them beyond any further hope of deliverance. Christ spent the night in Bethany and then returned the next morning to the temple.

“On the way He passed a fig orchard. He was hungry, ‘and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, He came, if haply He might find anything thereon: and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.’ It was not the season for ripe figs, except in certain localities;... But in the orchard to which Jesus came, one tree appeared to be in advance of all the others. It was already covered with leaves. It is the nature of the fig tree that before the leaves open, the growing fruit appears. Therefore this tree in full leaf gave promise of well-developed fruit. But its appearance was deceptive.

“Upon searching its branches, from the lowest bough to the topmost twig, Jesus found ‘nothing but leaves.’ It was a mass of pretentious foliage, nothing more. **Christ uttered against it a withering curse.** ‘No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever,’ He said. The next morning, as the Saviour and His disciples were again on their way to the city, the blasted branches and drooping leaves attracted their attention. Jesus looked upon the pretentious, fruitless fig tree, and with mournful reluctance pronounced the words of doom. And **under the curse of an offended God,** the fig tree withered away.” *Revelation and Herald*, February 25, 1902.

Christ directed a “withering curse” against the pretentious fig tree. And it was the curse of “an offended God.” All will agree that these words describe a situation where the children of Israel’s unabated apostasy brought God to the point where He became offended, indignant, infuriated and downright angry. So He cursed this tree which symbolized the Jew’s hypocrisy.

Now let’s consider another picture. A witch-doctor, offended by a hostile villager, utters a withering curse against his enemy. The man then withers away and dies. This “curse of death” happens regularly in the dark sinister regions of heathenism. The two incidents appear quite similar except for the differing moral characteristics of the perpetrators: God is allegedly righteous while the witch-doctor is undeniably evil. But here is where millions are deceived by invalid reasoning. A good character can only produce good deeds. It cannot legitimize, what would otherwise be, evil deeds.

The Scriptures emphasize that God's ways are different from those of man, and especially witch-doctors. Surprisingly, the disciples who only days before expected such behavior from Jesus, were now astonished!

“It seemed to them unlike His ways and works. Often they had heard Him declare that He came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. They remembered His words, ‘The Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.’ Luke 9:56. His wonderful works had been done to restore, never to destroy. The disciples had known Him only as the Restorer, the Healer. This act stood alone.”  
*Desire of Ages*, p.582.

God “delights in mercy” Micah 7:18

“As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” Ezekiel 33:11

The work of destructive judgment is “a strange work.” Isaiah 28:21

“It is in mercy and love that He lifts the veil from the future, and reveals to men the results of a course of sin. The cursing of the fig tree was **an acted parable**. The barren tree, flaunting its pretentious foliage in the very face of Christ, was a symbol of the Jewish nation. The Saviour desired to make plain to His disciples the cause and the certainty of Israel’s doom. For this purpose He invested the tree with moral qualities, and made it the expositor of divine truth... In the barren tree they might read both their sin and its punishment... The fig tree showed what the Jewish people would be **when the grace of God was removed from them**. Refusing to impart blessing, they would no longer receive it. ‘O Israel,’ the Lord says, ‘you have destroyed yourself.’ Hosea 13:9.”  
*Desire of Ages*, pp. 582, 583.

Christ’s surprising behavior was actually a prophecy. He was demonstrating in advance just what was going to happen to the Jewish nation. “I have told you before it comes to pass, that, when it is come to pass, you might believe.” John 14:29. But prophecy is never fully understood until it has been fulfilled. For instance, the early Christian believers understood the rise and fall of the four great empires of Daniel 2 and 7; they fully expected the Roman Empire to break up into ten divisions, but they did not understand the 1260 days, the image of the beast, or the battle of Armageddon. By the time of the Reformation, Luther, Knox, and their contemporaries clearly saw that the little horn was the papacy but did not fully understand the second beast of Revelation 13, the two witnesses of chapter 11 and other unfulfilled prophecies.

From our perspective, this side of AD 70, we know very well the fate of Jerusalem. But God did not personally decree the nature of the punishment which fell. Instead, He sorrowfully and reluctantly submitted to their insistent demands that He leave them to their own way, thus exposing them to whatever potential of destruction was nearest to them. In this case, it was the enraged Romans who, freed from any restriction imposed by God’s presence, were able to wreak their vengeance upon the helpless Jews.

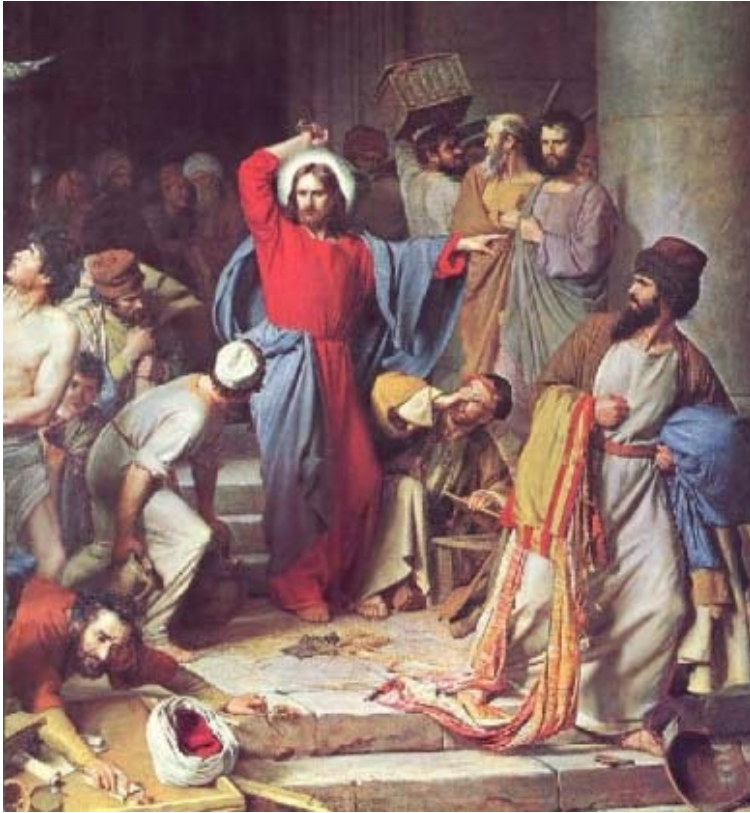
Therefore, in enacting His prophetic message delivered through the fig tree, Jesus simply withdrew His presence leaving it exposed to whatever plague, blight, pest, or other destructive forces just waiting to consume it. The fact that we are unaware of the thousands of unseen dangers lurking all around us and all of nature every moment, explains why we, like the disciples, are amazed that the tree could succumb so fast. Were we better aware of this, we would keep a much greater spirit of gratitude and dependence toward God than we now do. It is only by His constant care that we survive a moment.

“And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.” Mark 11:20.

If the Lord had used His own power to “curse” the tree, we would certainly expect the effect to be instantaneous—the bolt of lightning from heaven, the flash of Divine glory. But it was not so. Christ did not strike this tree, as he delivered His prophetic message, any more than He struck the Jews in the fall of Jerusalem when the prophecy was fulfilled.

## Cleansing the Temple

Jesus also drove the money changers and traffickers out of the temple. Did He do so with physical force? Let's see.



“And the Jews’ Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and when He had made a scourge of small cords, **He drove them all out** of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, ‘Take these things hence; make not My Father’s house a house of merchandise.’” John 2:13-17.

Attention is drawn to the words, “He drove them all out.” Christ drove them out, it is true, but not as we would it, depending on physical power and force. Remember, “Compelling power is found only under Satan’s government. The Lord’s principles are not of this order.” *Desire of Ages*, 759.

For Christ to have attempted to expel the many men involved in the commercial exploitation of God’s sacred temple by physical power would have been a very rash and foolish enterprise. He was vastly outnumbered, and they would have strongly

resisted in order to protect their valuable assets.

“Why did the priests flee from the temple? Why did they not stand their ground? He Who commanded them go was a carpenter’s son, a poor Galilean, without earthly rank or power. Why did they not resist Him? Why did they leave the gain so ill acquired, and flee at the command of One Whose outward appearance was so humble?”  
*Desire of Ages*, p.162.

But Jesus didn’t approach them as a mere man. Christ stood before them that day as the eternal and righteous Judge. The crowd of entrepreneurs knew that He was reading the closely guarded secrets of their lives. They could not endure His righteous scrutiny. One compelling desire filled them. They fled in abject terror from the presence of the Righteous One. They did it that day in the temple courts, when in panic they scattered all their prized wares as they struggled to escape. They will do it again when the Saviour returns in the clouds of heaven as they plead to be hid from the face of Him that sits upon the throne.

“Christ spoke with the authority of a king, and in His appearance, and in the tones of His voice, there was that which they had no power to resist... When divinity flashed through humanity, not only did they see indignation on Christ’s countenance; they realized the import of His words. They felt as if before the throne of the eternal Judge, with their sentence passed on them for time and for eternity.” *Desire of Ages*, p.162.

It was the power of their own condemnation that drove those men from the presence of Christ. They could not endure it. God does not need to raise a single finger of physical power to drive them away. When the time comes that He must stand before them in that role, they will do nothing else but flee.

So we see that even here, Jesus was consistent in His revelation of the character of God. Every instance in His life demonstrated the truth that God simply “leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.” *Great Controversy*, 36. “All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son.” *Testimonies* 8:286.

## Magnifying the Law

“He will magnify the law, and make it honorable.” Isaiah 42:21

Jesus is not only the Revelator of His Father’s character, He is also the Magnifier of God’s law. But these are not two separate role, they are one and the same work.

“His law is a transcript of His own character.” *Christ’s Object Lesson*, p.315.

Therefore, God the Father, Christ the Son, and the law are three identical entities. We must grasp the real significance of this truth. Those through whom the Lord will finish His work must understand that the law of God is just as high, as great, as infinite and wonderful as Himself.

“The law of God is as sacred as God Himself. It is a revelation of His will, a transcript of His character, the expression of divine love and wisdom.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.52.

“Since the divine law is as sacred as Himself, only One equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem man from the curse of the law.” *ibid.*, p.63.

“The law of God is as holy as He is holy, as perfect as He is perfect. It presents to men the righteousness of God.” *Mount of Blessing*, p.54.

The last conflict to take place on this earth will be over the law of God. Many are aware of this issue as it relates to the Sabbath and the Mark of the Beast. But the issues in the final struggle will go much deeper than this. The entire law will ultimately be contested, not just the fourth commandment. More importantly, the question at the end will involve the issue of how God keeps the law. Does He punish, execute, destroy, kill, and annihilate? Since the law is the very expression of the righteousness and character of God, the final debate will center around the commandments of God and His relationship to them.

“From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven, it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God...and though he was cast out of heaven, he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God’s law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same.”

“The last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition.” *Great Controversy*, p.582.

It is surprising to see how the simple statements of God’s law, “Remember the seventh day to keep it holy, Thou shalt not steal, bear false witness or kill,” have one meaning in the Bible, and another in the minds of men. It was to correct the distorted understanding of God’s law that Christ came to magnify it—to enlarge its hidden details that they may be brought to light and seen with a new appreciation for what is really there. A drop of pond water may look just like any other drop of water to the unaided eye. But placed beneath the lens of a microscope and an amazing world is brought to view. Christ came to magnify the law and show us what could never have been seen before.

### Legal Crimes

When men read the law, they tend to add another word into the Scriptures. Humans say that the law really means, “Thou shalt not lie, steel, or kill—unlawfully.” We make a distinction between accidental homicide, defensive killing and intentional murder. For example, a man may kill lawfully in self-defense or in the defense of others. A state, in which capital punishment is legalized, may take the life of a convicted murderer. The

execution is considered lawful killing in defense of society. Finally, men regard the slaughter of any attacking enemy as absolutely necessary during times of war and in the face of battle, and regards it as a perfectly lawful form of killing in the defense of one's nation.

Human ethics has exonerated all three types of lawful killing as not only right, but as the only solution to the problems presented in each situation. This is situational ethics. The situation demands an exception to the rule and sanctions what would otherwise be a criminal act. In fact, the highest recognition with military honors go to those who are most effective in inflicting the largest number of enemy casualties.

The devil's ability to continually reinforce this philosophy is stronger today than ever before. The notion of lawful killing is being promoted and applauded in printed novels, movies, and on TV, through satellite, cable, internet and DVD's. Consumers of these media think they are being entertained when actually they are being effectively educated and thoroughly indoctrinated.

### Movie Plots

Just consider the typical movie plot. It's always the same whether you watch a western, a detective murder mystery, a police thriller, a military epic, a dramatic account of espionage, etc, etc. The consistent message is that the law must be broken in order to uphold it.



The scene opens with a view of society. We identify with these very normal, likeable, law-abiding people; they are just like us; we share the same values, hopes and aspirations. Then the villain is introduced. You know he's bad because the music changes, he's dressed in black, he's armed with weapons. He has a gang of cruel, mean, no-good bad guys who look just like him. They are rough, touch, ruthless, and show a total disregard for human life. Anyone who gets in their way is eliminated. They do whatever is necessary to achieve their ends:

lying, stealing, and killing. We have very negative feelings about this group. Next they attack our friends, the peace-loving people we were introduced to in the beginning. First we are alarmed and then indignant. We hiss and boo. This is unfair. It's not right. Something needs to be done!

So far, this archetypal movie plot has accurately portrayed the universal problem of man. The world today lies under the threat of Satan and his thugs. Mankind is completely helpless and unable to rescue themselves from the devil's powerful grip. A hero is needed to come and save the day. And every film has one.

In a western he's the handsome stranger from out of town who rides up on a white horse packing a pair of pearly white pistols, one on each hip. As he sizes up the situation, he is stirred as he realizes the plight of the oppressed people. Alone and unassisted, at any sacrifice to himself, he pledges to set them free and rid the earth of their dreaded terrorists. He seeks neither fame nor reward. This is his mission. He is only motivated by knowing that justice has been done.

So far the typical movie plot continues to portray the truth. Our world needs the arrival of a Hero with a self-sacrificing spirit: Jesus Christ Who came to redeem our race. Like the movie hero, His soul was stirred as He saw our predicament and He resolved to save us, no matter what the cost. His only motive was love and mercy.

But here the story line deviates from truth. The great white hero rides off to deal with the liars, thieves and murderers. But look how he does it! In order to outwit the liars, he lies; to catch the thieves, he steals by helping himself to whatever is needed (a horse, a saddle, a rifle, whatever); and to end all the killing of those murderous



outlaws, he kills. And at every stage of his string of victories, the audience, the viewers cheer and applaud! When he deceives the villains and they fall for it, we are thrilled with his cleverness. When he steals their weapons or ammunition, we smile at his ingenuity. When he kill the last desperado, we nod with approval. Good for them! They deserved it!

When the smoke finally settles, the law-breaking is ended. The law has been upheld. But the message comes through loud and clear: In order to *keep* the law, the law must be *broken*. Only by lying, stealing, and killing could liars, thieves and murderers be controlled, stopped and brought to an end. The law had to be broken in order to ensure that it was kept. This is Satan's message. He doesn't say that the law is totally bad or that it should be done away with. He even admits that under most circumstances it should be obeyed. But it has its limitations; it is not perfect. Sometimes it just has to be disobeyed in order to solve a serious problem.

The villains were unlawfully lying, stealing and killing, but the hero was doing all the same things but it was lawful. The villain was a criminal, but the hero was not.

It is truly amazing to see that even evil men want a law. They want it to protect them from the threat of others. They just don't want to be required to obey it themselves. Consider a despotic king in olden times. If he wanted a piece of land, a house, a wife, slaves, horses or even the life of his subjects, he took it. But let any of his subjects take a fish from his pond or a quail from his field and he was severely punished. The law protected the king from his people, but it didn't protect the people for their king. This is how the devil and evil men want to "use" the law rather than obey it.

Most people actually agree with this use of the law. They may feel impotent and frustrated under the demands of government or their employer. They feel that the law protects the government or big business more than it protects them. All of us, consciously or subconsciously, dream of being in a position where the law would protect us but we don't have to keep it ourselves. In the world of make-believe the situation is reversed. That's why we so easily identify with the victims of every movie plot, and are "entertained" with immense satisfaction as we vicariously experience the "freedom" granted to the hero who is *not* bound by the law, but who can lie, steal, and kill with impunity. The villain does not *have* to be protected by law from the hero, because the hero has a "right" to break the law in this situation. He is exempt because "the end justifies the means." As long as you have a good motive you don't have to keep the law.

### **Two Magnifiers**

This is how Satan magnifies the law that states, "Thou shalt not kill, lie, or steal." We know that this ethic comes from the devil because of the media through which it is promoted and because we find no evidence of this philosophy in the life or teachings of Jesus. Jesus showed that there is no such thing as lawful and unlawful lying, stealing, and killing. He devoted His whole life to ending all such. Yet, He never once lied, stole or killed. Not once. In every circumstance, under every possible pressure, threat or danger, Jesus told only the truth, respected the property of all and took the lives of none.

In so doing, He demonstrated forever how we are to keep the law and how, in turn, He and His Father keep it. He did not add caveats, provisos or exceptions. The words were still "Thou shalt not..." With God killing is always unlawful. There is no situation where His ethics are modified; obedience is never situational. The law is the one and only code for perfect behavior.

### **Securing the Birthright**

Anyone who maintains that it is lawful to kill, steal or lie, is essentially implying that the law (and therefore the God of that law) is imperfect, inadequate, and less than infinite. It is to make the truth of God a lie. The story of Jacob and his mother Rebekah in their quest for the promised birthright, illustrate the consequences of adopting this policy of breaking the law in order to ensure that it would be kept.

“And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.”  
Genesis 25:23.

Rebekah clearly and correctly understood this prophecy to mean that Jacob should receive the birthright and not Esau, his older brother.

“Rebekah...read with clearer insight than did her husband the character of their sons. She was convinced that the heritage of divine promise was intended for Jacob. She repeated to Isaac the angel’s words; but the father’s affections were centered upon the elder son, and he was unshaken in his purpose.” *Patriarch and Prophets*, p.178.

God’s selection of Jacob as the inheritor of the birthright was not arbitrary. God knew that Esau would disqualify himself from the right of its possession. Isaac should have the decree especially when Esau’s behavior confirmed the correctness of God’s decision. The law stipulated that all rights to the birthright would be automatically forfeited should the firstborn marry among the heathen. This Esau had done, and to make matters worse, he did it twice!

“And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah.” Genesis 26:34.

Isaac, in strict obedience to the law, should have relinquished his paternal preference for his elder son and prepared to confer the birthright blessing on Jacob. But he allowed his affections to overrule his conscience, and he chose his own way over the clear will of God. Rebekah exerted all the influence she could to dissuade him from his decision. But all her reasoning and pleading were to no avail. The only thing she did manage to achieve was a deferment of the day when the blessing would be bestowed.

But as Isaac experienced the increasing infirmities of advanced age, he realized that he would need to pronounce the blessing soon or it would be too late. He determined to do this privately and secretly instead of the usual joyous and public occasion. So he instructed Esau to go and catch his favorite venison. They would have a little feast together after which he would receive the prized blessing. But Rebekah heard this conversation and a chill went through her heart as she realized what her husband was about to do.

“Rebekah...was confident that it was contrary to what God had revealed as His will. Isaac was in danger of incurring the divine displeasure and of debarring his younger son from the position to which God had called him. She had in vain tried the effect of reasoning with Isaac, and she determined to resort to stratagem.”  
*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.180.

Rebekah reasoned that she must prevent Isaac from breaking the law both for his own good and for the good of Jacob. In order to save Isaac from being a law-breaker, she decides to become a law-breaker herself and even induced Jacob to become one with her. They acted out the same principles (or lack of them) as depicted by the heroes of the silver screen, movies, novels and make-believe fiction. But it was an evil sowing which brought them only a bitter reaping.

“Jacob and Rebekah succeeded in their purpose, but they gained only trouble and sorrow by their deception. God had declared that Jacob should receive the birthright, and His word would have been fulfilled in His own time had they waited in faith for Him to work for them. But like many who now profess to be children of God, they were unwilling to leave the matter in His hands.” *ibid*, p. 180.

God’s words, “Thou shalt not bear false witness, steal, or kill,” set forth the pattern of behavior no matter what the circumstances, pressures, threats, demands, necessities, advantages or whatever else it may be. In God’s kingdom and under His principles the end can never, never, never justify the means. Therefore, in every situation, the law, and not expedience, is to be consulted and obeyed. When God has a people who will stand by these principles and be guided in this way, He will have a people whom He can trust to finish the work and it will then be finished.

## Go the Second Mile

Christ magnified the law by His words as effectively as He did by His living. His first great sermon, the one on the mount, was actually the second giving of the law. Assuming His position as Lawgiver, Jesus became the second Moses, declaring the Law in its fullness to the people gathered there on the hillside.

But the people came with erroneous concepts of the law and the kingdom of God. Their background and training had set expectations of the Messiah's kingdom that were quite different from God's reality. Jesus knew He was confronting preconceived ideas and opinions, but He would make no concessions. He knew what the people wanted to hear, but He told them only what they needed to know. As the people sat waiting there on the hillside, Jesus knew that what He was about to say would be dynamite. He realized that they would accuse Him of discarding the law. So, before He even began, Jesus reassured them that, despite what they might think He was saying, He was not going to abolish the law.

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whoever therefore shall break one of the least of these commandments, and shall teach men to do so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:17-20.

The scribes and Pharisees regarded themselves as the greatest exponents of the law of God in existence. They believed that they taught and lived it to perfection. They considered themselves as models of righteous behavior. Their claim was indeed true as far as man's interpretation of the law goes. But it was to deliver men from their human concept of law-keeping that Jesus now began to speak.

“You have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say to you.. Matthew 5:38, 39.

That was a far cry from what they had been taught. To many it appeared that He was disavowing the law given by God Himself to Moses. Following the ten commandments, when the people plead with Moses to speak with God rather than endure His voice themselves,

“The Lord said to Moses...And if any mischief follow, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” Exodus 20:22; 21:23-25.

### **Out with the Old, in with the New**

Now, that's justice. Following the letter of the law, the people obey these instructions for generations, confident that they were indeed following the Lord's instructions. Then Jesus came and swept them all away, giving the people a new code of behavior. No wonder the Pharisees who vigorously subscribed to the old Mosaic law regarded Christ as a heretic, the worst kind of lawbreaker. Graham Maxwell tells the story as no one else.

To prove their point they came to the temple dragging their victim through the crowds right up to Jesus. Then they announced loudly so that all could plainly hear, “This woman was caught in the very act!” And when they got everyone's attention, they added, “You know what Moses said we should do with the likes of this. Don't you agree she ought to be stoned?” They cried out for justice! Now what would God say? What would God do?

He said nothing. But they never expected Him to do what He did. He could have exposed those self-important men right in front of everyone. He could have completely blown their cover by simply revealing a few embarrassing facts. He could have publicly humiliated them right on the spot. But God is not like that. He finds no pleasure in our embarrassment.

Jesus said they had the spirit of their father, the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning. To them He killed the law which said, “A life for a life.” Therefore, they felt entirely justified in putting Him to death. It was His life for the life of the law He had taken. His crucifixion, in their thinking, was a lawful killing.

Today, men have solved Christ’s apparent contradiction between the law that was and His replacement of it by adopting dispensationalism. This belief teaches that there was one law for those who lived before the advent of Christ, and another, more beautiful law for those who live after the cross. But this would admit that the law of God was not perfect, that it needed modifications rather than being as unchangeable as the God Who gave it. If this was the case, then Satan would have just the argument needed to win the great controversy. He left heaven contending that the law of imperfect and needed changing. He would seize on this open admission by God that the law was inadequate after all, just as Satan charged, and now it would be changed to meet changing conditions.

There is another explanation. It does not compromise the truth of God’s perfect, immutable law; it does not set Christ at variance with His Father; it confirms the truth that its Author is the “same, yesterday, today and forever.” It begins with the amplification of the law that Jesus presented.

“But I say to you, That you resist not evil: but whoever shall smite you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue you at the law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloke also. And whoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two. Give to him that asks you, and from him that would borrow from you, turn him not away.” Matthew 5:39-42.

This is not the way the movie heroes operate. If the bad guy strikes, then he gets decked; if he takes the hero’s coat, then the coat is not just retrieved, the crook is stripped! Viewers are not satisfied with just evening the score, they want to see vengeance pound the enemy with overwhelming force until he *really* regrets what he did. To the human way of thinking, *this* is justice.

How completely opposite this is from the teachings of Christ. They make absolutely no sense to the macho man. “Real men” reject Christ’s turn-the-other-cheek approach fearing that it would only allow everyone else to take advantage of them until they would have nothing left! They would have to surrender the security they now have in defending their rights and protecting their possessions. Maintaining the threat of retaliation is man’s method of insuring deterrence. Individuals and nations both engage in their own arms race.

### **Love Your Enemies—Forever**

To make sure that none would be tempted to think that after turning the other cheek, then you could retaliate, Jesus continued His instruction with these words:

“You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans so? Be therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”  
Matthew 5:43-48.

Notice that Jesus did not put any time limit on his admonition to “Love your enemies.” In other words, He didn’t say to just love them as long as there was any hope of saving them, but then when it’s obvious they don’t want to be saved, wipe them out of existence. He simply said, “Love your enemies.” Forever. The time can never come when we cease to love our enemies, bless them and do good to them.

Later, Peter came to Jesus, on behalf of the rest of the disciples, to clarify this matter of dealing with our enemies. Surely, there must be a limit to this stipulation!

“Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Seven times? Jesus said to him, I say not to you, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” Matthew 18:21,22.

Four hundred and ninety times. Does Christ intend for us to keep track of the number of offenses and then stop forgiving when this magic number is reached? No, the number is impractically large to illustrate the principle that there is no time limit to forgiveness. Anyone who keeps such careful score hasn't really forgiven.

“The rabbis limited the exercise of forgiveness to three offences. [Three strikes you're out] Peter, carrying out, as he supposed, the teaching of Jesus, thought to extend it to seven, the number of perfection. But Christ taught that we are never to become weary of forgiving.” *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 243.

Human philosophy and ethics allow for equal pay back. If your enemy strikes you, strike back. If he kills one of yours, kill him or one of his. If he curses you, curse him in return, etc, etc. This is considered fair and appropriate retribution. But Jesus said to return love for hate, blessing for cursing, and goodness for evil. If they lie about you, don't lie in return; if they still your goods, don't try to steal them back; if they seek your life, don't seek theirs. In other words, the law is to be kept under *all* circumstances.

This is the standard for every follower of Christ even as Jesus confirmed that this was the way in which His Father practiced the law. He blessed the good and the evil. God blesses those who curse Him; He does good to those who spitefully treat Him. God's children will behavior exactly the same way; they have the same character as He has. This character comes only through spiritual regeneration, rebirth, becoming a new creature.

“By the transforming agency of His grace, the image of God is reproduced in the disciple; he becomes a new creature. Love takes the place of hatred, and the heart receives the divine similitude.” *Desire of Ages*, p. 391.

“If you are the children of God you are partakers of His nature, and you cannot but be like Him. Every child lives by the life of his father. If you are God's children, begotten by His Spirit, you live by the life of God. In Christ dwells ‘all the fullness of the Godhead bodily’ Colossians 2:9; and the life of Jesus is made manifest ‘in our mortal flesh’ 2 Corinthians 4:11. That life in you will produce the same character and manifest the same works as it did in Him. Thus you will be in harmony with every precept of His law.” *Mount of Blessing*, pp. 77, 78.

Jesus taught of a Father Who

loves His enemies—forever  
blesses those who curse Him—forever  
does good to those who ate Him—forever  
and prays for those who spitefully use and persecute Him—forever.

The implications of this is so far reaching that some would rather dismiss it as only a fine piece of rhetoric with no practical application. But Jesus demonstrated in every aspect of His life the truth of His teachings. But even more impressive than His treatment of His earthly enemies is God's treatment of Satan, His greatest enemy.

No one has ever hated God more fiercely,  
cursed Him more savagely,  
done evil to Him more extensively,  
or persecute Him more relentlessly than Satan.

Could it be possible that:

God loves Satan even to this very day;  
blesses him in return for his cursings;  
does good to him who hates Him so much;  
and prays for him who so spitefully uses and persecutes Him?

Yes, Jesus witnessed in His life this attitude of eternal forgiveness. But God has no fellowship with the devil. They do not see each other, nor do they work together. Their interests and objectives are completely opposite. God does not support any of the devil's activities, even though Satan receives God's blessings of life just as the



evil person receives the sun and rain without partiality. But the devil takes all these blessings and uses them to war against God. God is not responsible for this perversion of His blessings; it is the responsibility of those who misuse His gifts.

Be assured on the strength of Christ's witness of His Father, that God loves the devil and will therefore only bless and do him good. This means that God will never take Satan's life but would reach out to save him if possible. This is love on an incredible scale. Many reason that God's position of custodian of the universe and His possession of omnipotent power make it His responsibility to destroy Satan and end the damage and pain and death and suffering He is causing. This is to argue that the law must be broken in order to ensure that it is kept. But this is not God's way. He and His law are perfect and He will never break it.

## The Mystery of Iniquity

In addition to movies, novels, and computer games, Satan has also use another medium through which he has successfully educated an unwitting world in his misrepresentations of God's character and His law. This is the mystery of iniquity, also known as Babylon, the man of sin, the son of perdition, the antichrist. The arch-deceiver has used numerous forms down through the ages to disseminate his propaganda. Beginning with Nimrod, the architect of the first tower known as Babel, the list continued with the worshipers of Baal, the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, the papacy, apostate Protestantism and, finally, Babylon the Great at the end of time. His message has always remained the same—it is his masterpiece of deception.

“It is Satan’s constant effort to misrepresent the character of God, the nature of sin, and the real issues at state in the great controversy. His sophistry lessens the obligation of the divine law, and gives men license to sin. At the same time he causes them to cherish false conceptions of God, so that they regard Him with fear and hate, rather than with love. The cruelty inherent in his own character is attributed to the Creator; it is embodied in systems of religion, and expressed in modes of worship. Thus the minds of men are blinded, and Satan secures them as his agents to war against God. By perverted conceptions of the divine attributes, heathen nations were led to believe human sacrifices necessary to secure the favor of Deity; and horrible cruelties have been perpetrated under the various forms of idolatry. The Roman Catholic Church, uniting the forms of paganism and Christianity, and, like paganism, misrepresenting the character of God, has resorted to practices no less cruel and revolting.”  
*Great Controversy*, p.569.

“The teachings of popes and priests had led men to look upon the character of God, and even of Christ, as stern, gloomy, and forbidding. The Saviour was represented as so far devoid of sympathy with man in his fallen state that the mediation of priests and saints must be invoked.” *ibid.*, 73.



Satan’s masterpiece of deception finds its manifestation predominately in the teachings of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches of today. At one time Protestants could remember why they were protesting. They could remember the iron hand of the Inquisition. But history bears evidence that even Protestants, when placed in the position of power, have used terrible repression against their own heretics. Even so, it is a mistake to assume that Babylon uses only the weapons of force in perpetrating her picture of God. The real truth is that oppression is only used when every other means has failed.

“Force is the last resort of every false religion. At first it tries attraction, as the king of Babylon tried the power of music and outward show. If these attractions, invented by men inspired by Satan, failed to make men worship the image, the hungry flames of the furnace were ready to consume them. So it will be now.”  
*Signs of the Times*, May 6, 1897, *SDABC* 7:976,

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Gregory determined to convert Great Britain to Catholicism. He sent 41 missionaries in the summer of 597. They were led by Augustine who settled in Canterbury only to find that the Christian religion had already preceded him and was well established among the original Britons. Augustine bypassed the pagan Anglo-Saxons and focused his attention on the already Christian Britons. Using the Church’s traditional strategy, he patiently began to woo the Britons to the papal cause. But at the council in 601, the archbishop’s “arguments, prayers, censures, and miracles” failed to convince the Britons to join Rome. After a second persuasive approach failed, Augustine said, “If you will not receive brethren who bring you peace, you shall receive enemies who will bring you war. If you will not unite with us in showing the Saxons the way of life, you shall receive from them the stroke of death.” *The Reformation in England*, Volume 1:38, Merle d’Aubigne.

Rome then resorted to the sword. This pattern has become all too familiar to millions as they have seen it repeated in every land where the papacy has set her foot. The impression of God which she promotes is just what the majority have accepted. Most see God looking down upon the unconverted as Gregory looked upon the Britons. In His great love for the lost and the dying, they see God sending His personal ambassador, the Holy Spirit, Who works through self-sacrificing human agents to woo and to win the erring.

But as time passes, the blessings of God are taken for granted and squandered without gratitude. God is ignored and people move away from the only One who can protect them from the threatening powers of destruction. When the calamities fall, instead of seeing the work of the devil, the prince of the power of the air, they call them “acts of God” and believe He is trying to enforce an allegiance where persuasion has failed. When even this fails they accept God’s right to destroy the wicked from the face of the earth.

### **Pictures of God**

The picture of God as men suppose Him to be and the picture of Him as presented by the papacy are the same in every respect. In both cases the law is broken to enforce the law. Babylon offers a picture of God as One Who loves His enemies, blesses them, does them good, and forgives them—for a time. Then His countenance changes and He arises to do to them the very things He has commanded them not to do. First, He treats them cruel punishment, then finally kills them.

The picture of God as demonstrated in the life of Christ is that of a Father Who loves His enemies, blesses them, does them good, and forgives them—forever. He never rises to do that which He has instructed His children not to do. The choice then is Christ or antichrist, God or the devil, the heavenly Jerusalem or Rome.

“And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus...  
And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”  
Revelation 17:6; 18:24.

God lays the blame for all that are slain on earth on the man of sin. But Satan has made the same charge accusing God of all this spilt blood. Men seem to believe Satan at least to some extent. While it is clear that the devil has unquestionably taken the lives of millions, they also believed that God has done His share of killing too. But the words of Revelation do not subscribe to this notion. This verse is strong evidence of the truth that God does not destroy. If the mystery of iniquity has kill all that were slain, then the Lord has killed none.

The papal understanding is that God is above the law. While God orders His people not to kill, lie, or steal, He is not bound by these restrictions. Because the pope believed that he was God on earth, he adopted this principle as his own and fulfilled the words of Jesus when He said, “the time comes, that whoever kills you will think that he does God service.” John 16:2. The terrible anarchy and atheism of the French Revolution was the direct result. The people of France reacted to this distortion of God’s character by rejecting not only the Church but the God it claimed to represent. If this was how God operated they wanted none of Him at all.

The time is coming when another absolute rejection of the tyrannical God will be made. And when that time comes, all the horrors of the French Revolution will be repeated—world wide. In this final conflict, every person on earth will have to choose their side in the great controversy. This decision will be determined by each person’s understanding of God’s character, His way, His nature, His behavior.

If you believe:

God does not concern Himself with personally keeping His own law;  
He does as He pleases because He is above the law;

Then you are on the side of the greatest agency of all time through which Satan has misrepresented the character of God.

If you believe:

God first seeks to win the lost by extending a loving invitation of mercy;  
But when His patience runs out executes those who do not serve Him;

Then your position is no different from that of Babylon and the devil behind it.

Conversely, if you believe:

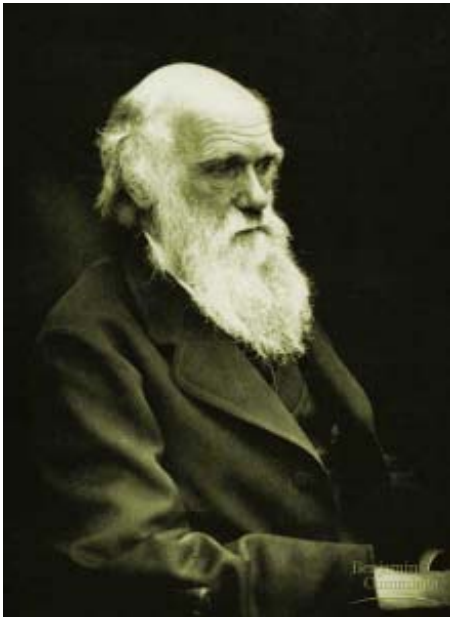
The law is the perfect transcript of God's character;  
God is righteous only and keeps His law perfectly;  
He loves His enemies of whom the devil is the greatest.  
He blesses those who curse Him—forever;  
He does good to those who hate Him—forever;  
He never uses force as a last or any resort;  
He never destroys those who refuse to obey Him;

Then you have taken a big step out of Babylonian darkness, you have discovered the truth about the Father and His Son.

Therefore, to “know God [as He really is] is to love Him.” *Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

Likewise, to know God as He is not, is to hate and reject Him.

The fruit of the first is faith; and that of the second is infidelity and atheism.



This fact is dramatically demonstrated in the life of Charles Darwin. Young Charles began a career in the Church when he enrolled in Cambridge to become a minister in the Church of England. But it was the concept of an eternally burning hell dictated by a vengeful God that turned Darwin away from religion and sent him down the path of biological evolution.

He came to this conclusion because he viewed the Old Testament as a “manifestly false history of the earth.” Why? Because of some scientific inaccuracy? No, but because “its attributing to God the feelings of a revengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos, or the beliefs of any barbarian.” Darwin, like so many others, had obtained a distorted view of God's character, propagated by zealous teachers intent on securing piety through intimidation. Darwin came to the conclusion that even the New Testament ended with the prospects of being “everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.”

His contribution, *The Origin of Species*, ensured the grip of atheism in both England and Russia and Cuba and East Germany and America and...

# Fear God

Fear God, the angel cries.

A lot of people have no problem with this. They are so afraid of God, they wouldn't dare to not fear Him. Personally, I don't like to be afraid—it makes me scared. But why do we have to fear God anyway? Does He still have some kind of appetite for blood and sacrifice? What does it take to satisfy His demands?

An endless stream of blood seems to gush from the pages of the Old Testament as countless victims were offered before the Lord. The sacrificial system grew and expanded through the centuries until, by the time of the exile, it was in high gear and totally out of control. The Lord, Himself, even questioned the reason for it's continued operation in Isaiah 1:11:

“What is the purpose of all these sacrifices?,” asks the Lord? “I have seen so many burnt offerings I'm sick to my stomach! I detest all this blood. Whoever required you to do all of this?”

The prophet Micah asked pretty much the same thing in chapter 6:

“What does the Lord require of us? Burnt offerings? The sacrifice of my first-born? 1000 rams? 10,000 rivers of oil? No. All he asks is that we do justly, love mercy, and be humble.”

The only payment the Lord requests in Psalm 22 is praise. And in Psalm 116, David said He would offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

So where did things go wrong? When Jesus first visited the temple “He saw the distress of the poor, who thought that without the shedding of blood there would be no forgiveness for their sins...The worshippers had been taught to believe that if they did not offer sacrifices, the blessing of God would not rest on (them).”<sup>1</sup> Who taught them? Who gave them such ideas? It certainly wasn't God.

It was Satan, God's enemy, who “with intense interest watched the sacrifices offered by Adam and his sons. In these ceremonies he discerned a symbol of communion between earth and heaven.”<sup>2</sup> Originally, then, the ritual of offering an innocent animal was providing a unique opportunity for guilty sinners to associate once against with their Father...on the basis of the deep symbolism of the occasion. There was meaning, there was fellowship, there was participation and a sense of unity and understanding.

So what did Satan do?

“He set himself to intercept this communion.”

And how could he do it? By attacking the symbol.

So “he misrepresented God, and misrepresented the rites...Men were led to fear God as one who delighted in their destruction. The sacrifices that should have revealed His love” came to be “offered only to appease His wrath.”<sup>3</sup> Satan maligned the reputation of our heavenly Father, plastering Him with terrible accusations, so that men no longer saw a Father, but some grotesque thing that looked like Molech—they were so afraid they decided they better do something, do anything—just keep Him happy.

Eventually, things got so bad, that in Ezekiel 23 the Lord said they had committed adultery with their idols. “They offered My children to them for food! The children that I've given them! They have defiled my sanctuary and desecrated My rest.”

God said they were playing the prostitute after Molech. What is a prostitute? It's somebody who sells love. They were trying to buy the favor of God by sacrificing animals and even their own children. They were trying to prostitute themselves and turn God into a whoremonger. When John sees the great whore sitting on the beast,<sup>4</sup> he is seeing a preview of the great world-wide religion at the very end of time that says, ‘God will save this world if you will obey. God will give you safety, if you give Him something.’ That's prostitution.

No wonder our Father was sick at the sight of dying animals and burning carcasses when the only reason they were being offered was to buy His good favor. He never intended that His creation should be exploited like that. God had not given them “the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love.”<sup>5</sup>

Our Father wanted His people to appreciate His promise to die for them so much that they would bow in holy awe and reverence before the demonstration of such love. Instead, they cowered in fearful dread of divine retribution. What a sad, sad disappointment to the One Who only sought to save them.

Jesus came to clear up this deception. He came as a gift. God gave Him to us, while we were yet sinners. The Gift was total. Never once was a penny asked; never once was one ounce of life demanded in exchange. And when God gave us His Son, He ended the prostitution.

<sup>1</sup>Desire of Ages, pp. 155-157.

<sup>2,3</sup>*ibid*, p. 115

<sup>4</sup>Revelation 17:3,4

<sup>5</sup>Isaiah 55:1



## The Mystery of the Cross

“The mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries. In the light that streams from Calvary, the attributes of God which had filled us with fear and awe appear beautiful and attractive. Mercy, tenderness, and paternal love are seen to blend with holiness, justice, and power. While we behold the majesty of His throne, high and lifted up, we see His character in its gracious manifestations, and comprehend, as never before, the significance of that endearing title, ‘Our Father.’” *Great Controversy*, p.652.

It is impossible to understand the character of God as it really is until we take all our questions about Him to the light shining from Golgotha. Not even the angels could be delivered from Satan’s slanderous lies against the Omnipotent One, until Jesus cried, “It is finished.” And if even the angels could not understand all of God’s workings in the Old Testament period until they saw them in the light of the cross, then we will never solve those mysterious acts in any other way. We must be not draw any final conclusions about God until we have assessed all our problems in Calvary’s light.

“In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary, and in connection with the wondrous, central truth of the Saviour’s atonement.” *SDABC* 5:1137.

No one, then, who studies the mysteries of God’s behavior without reference to the sacrifice of all sacrifices, can come to a correct understanding of Scriptural truth. There is no mightier revelation of God’s character than the cross of Calvary. Before it, all other arguments sink into insignificance and all errors are exposed for what they are.

“If sinners can be led to give one earnest look at the cross, if they can obtain a full view of the crucified Saviour, they will realize the depth of God’s compassion and the sinfulness of sin. Christ’s death proves God’s great love for man. It is our pledge of salvation... Without the cross, man could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour’s love; and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fullness of joy; for his sins are pardoned... Through the cross we learn that the heavenly Father loves us with a love that is infinite. Can we wonder that Paul exclaimed, ‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’? It is our privilege also to glory in the cross, our privilege to give ourselves wholly to Him who gave Himself for us. Then, with the light that streams from Calvary shining in our faces, we may go forth to reveal this light to those in darkness.”  
*Acts of the Apostles*, 209, 210.

“The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster... I present before you the great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, salvation and redemption—the Son of God uplifted on the cross. This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers.”  
*Gospel Workers*, p. 315.

“The cloud of vengeance that threatened only misery and despair, in the light reflected from the cross reveals the writing of God: Live, sinners, live! ye penitent, believing souls, live! I have paid a ransom. In the contemplation of Christ, we linger on the shore of a love that is measureless. We endeavor to tell of this love, and language fails us. We consider His life on earth, His sacrifice for us, His work in heaven as our advocate, and the mansions He is preparing for those who love Him; and we can only exclaim, O the height and depth of the love of Christ! ‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.’ ‘Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.’

“In every true disciple, this love, like sacred fire, burns on the altar of the heart. It was on the earth that the love of God was revealed through Christ. It is on the earth that His children are to reflect this love through blameless lives. Thus sinners will be led to the cross, to behold the Lamb of God.” *Acts of the Apostles*, pp.333, 334.

“I am determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” 1 Corinthians 2:2.

## How God Treats Sinners

The cross is God's personal demonstration of the way in which He will deal with the finally impenitent. Christ took the sinner's place and God dealt with Him there exactly as He will deal with every sinner throughout the annals of time. This point must be clearly seen and accepted. God did not relate Himself to Christ any differently from what He does to the sinner. It is exactly the same. It must be, for if God should do otherwise, then Satan could justly charge God with partiality.



Christ wholly took the sinner's place. This was so real, so complete, that He, in fact, became sin for us. God saw His Son as a sinner in the garden, on the cross, and it was as a lost and condemned sinner that God treated Him. It was no make-believe substitution. It was a full and complete ransom. Christ in no way received any "preferred treatment" from His Father. He was not punished in a different way from that of the lost sinner. Look to the cross of Calvary for a clear view of exactly how God acts when a sinner has eternally refused the offer of repentance.

To determine the nature of the sentence to fall upon man, we need study only the way in which Christ died. There are two ways in which it could have happened.

One is under the power of an offended God who rises to vindicate His authority. God directly executes the sinner. If this is the way that sinners must die, then Christ must die in an identical fashion. God cannot administer one sentence on the sinner and a different one on His Son. To have done so would deny the truth that Christ took man's punishment and stood in man's place.

The other possibility is for God to leave the sinner to the fate which he has chosen, once he has rejected every possible effort on God's part to save him. His death would then be the outworking of the broken law. If this is the way man is to die, then that is the way Christ must die.

There are certain individual statements which give the impression that it is God who personally administers the punishment on sinners:

"There are limits even to the forbearance of God. The boundary of His long-suffering may be reached, and then He will surely punish. And when He does take up the case of the presumptuous sinner, He will not cease till He has made a full end. Very few realize the sinfulness of sin; they flatter themselves that God is too good to punish the offender. But the cases of Miriam, Aaron, David, and many others show that it is not a safe thing to sin against God in deed, in word, or even in thought. God is a being of infinite love and compassion, but He also declares Himself to be a 'consuming fire, even a jealous God.'" *Review and Herald*, August 14, 1900.

"It is a fearful thing for the unrepentant sinner to fall into the hands of the living God. This is proved by the history of the destruction of the old world by a flood, by the record of the fire which fell from heaven and destroyed the inhabitants of Sodom." *SDABC* 5:1103.

It is natural for us to understand these words in human terms and imagine God as the One Who, with patience exhausted, personally punishes the presumptuous sinner. As we would say, “Just let me get my hands on him!” But the witness of the cross does not support this interpretation.

“The death of Christ was to be the convincing, everlasting argument that the law of God is as unchangeable as His throne. The agonies of the Garden of Gethsemane, the insult, the mockery, and abuse heaped upon God’s dear Son, the horrors and ignominy of the crucifixion, furnish sufficient and thrilling demonstration that God’s justice, when it punishes, does the work thoroughly. The fact that **His own Son, the Surety for man, was not spared**, is an argument that will stand to all eternity before saint and sinner, before the universe of God, to testify that He will not excuse the transgressor of His law. Every offense against God’s law, however minute, is set down in the reckoning, and **when the sword of justice is taken in hand, it will do the work** for impenitent transgressors that was done to the divine Sufferer. **Justice will strike**; for God’s hatred of sin is intense and overwhelming.”  
SDABC 3:1166.

Since God’s ways are not like man’s ways, God’s justice and man’s justice are not the same either. Notice also this statement reminds us again that the same work to be done in destroying the impenitent, was done to Christ when He died. It was a “fearful thing” for Christ to fall into the hands of God’s justice. This was quoted above, but notice the very next sentence:

“It is a fearful thing for the unrepentant sinner to fall into the hands of the living God...But never was this proved to so great an extent as in the agony of Christ, the Son of the infinite God, when He bore the wrath of God for a sinful world.” SDABC 5:1103.

When we look first at God’s judgment at the flood and at Sodom and Gomorrah we arrive at a much different view of what it means to fall into the hands of the living God than if we begin with the death of Jesus. The details of that judgment continues:

“Human nature can endure but a limited amount of test and trial. The finite can only endure the finite measure, and human nature succumbs; but the nature of Christ had a greater capacity for suffering; for the human existed in the divine nature, and created a capacity for agony which Christ endured, broadens, deepens, and gives a more extended conception of the character of sin, and the character of the retribution which God will bring upon those who continue in sin.” *ibid.*

From these statements it is clear that:

The sword of justice did to Christ exactly what it will do to the finally impenitent;  
He received the full outpouring of the wrath of God;  
He fell into the hands of the living God;  
and thus died as man will die if he remains in sin.

### **How Christ Died**

On the cross of Calvary, Christ died the death of the sinner. It was a death which met the full demands of God’s law. It was God’s punishment on sinners, but it was not at the hand of God that Christ died. The Father did not slay His Son. It was sin which killed Jesus. His Father simply withdrew from Christ and left Him to perish because there was nothing else He could do.

Christ took the very same position of the sinner who wants nothing of God and demands His withdrawal. As the sustaining, life-protecting, life-giving power of God was withdrawn, there was nothing to save Christ from the awful, destructive power of sin. Its fearful weight crushed His life forces into extinction. This is why Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” His Father was gone and Jesus was left alone.

“It was not the spear thrust, it was not the pain of the cross, that caused the death of Jesus. That cry, uttered ‘with a loud voice’ Matthew 27:50; Luke 23:46, at the moment of death, the stream of blood and water that flowed from His side, declared that He died of a broken heart. His heart was broken by mental anguish. He was slain by the sin of the world.” *Desire of Ages*, p.772.

There is no doubt as to the way in which Christ died. Likewise, it is plain to see how man will die at the destructive hands of sin. At the cross, when the full penalty which Christ bore in man’s place was exacted, Jesus did not discover His Father standing before Him as an executioner to extinguish His last breath of life. It was sin that filled that role. Man places himself under its obliterating power by his total rejection of God and acceptance of another god which is powerless to sustain or protect him.

The particular weapon used by sin to punish the sinner will vary according to circumstances. Sometimes it is fire, or an earthquake, a tidal wave, a volcanic eruption, the fearful ravages of disease, or the onslaught of other men. The exact means of its administration is not important. The important thing is that it comes as a result of the sinner’s casting off of the protecting and sustaining hand of God to expose the pent up forces of destruction.

## The Way of the Cross

The revelations of God's character and purposes as given at the cross are infinite in the scope. They are inexhaustible. Throughout endless ages the redeemed will continue to unfold ever new discoveries of the humility, the love, and the character of God. Eternity will never exhaust the beauty, the power, and the wonder of God's grace and His dealing with sin. In comparison, today we have only a poultry, meager understanding of God's ways.

“Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which ‘angels desire to look,’ and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song.”  
*Desire of Ages*, pp.19, 20.

“All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it.” *Testimonies* 5:740.

The focal point of all that love, that glory, that beauty is the cross of Christ.

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:18.

This is the only way to become like Christ. It will never happen by the threat of punishment or the offer of eternal riches. It is by devoting our lives to the study of God's wonderful character and the power of His infinite love that we are changed into the very likeness of God.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God... And it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure.” 1 John 3:1-3.

Behold the love! When the full implications of this truth are grasped as they should be, there will be such an intense study of the sacrifice of Christ as this world has never seen. We, with Paul, will all be “determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” 1 Corinthians 2:2.

Even in Paul's day the preaching of the cross was being perverted by the master counterfeiter. The Gentiles had already been deluded by a different, spurious version of the cross. Therefore, Paul said, “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:18. The cross of which he spoke was the one representing the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is the symbol of self-denial, self-sacrifice, the ultimate declaration that God will never use His limitless powers to compel anyone to follow and serve Him. It is totally opposite from the cross despised by the Gentiles. This cross is the creation of Satan, a revelation of the spirit of selfishness at its worst. It is a declaration that those who will not submit to the one in power, will be subjected to the cruelest torture and death.

Still today, many worship the cross of Christ while not knowing the true principles that are its foundation. Day by day Christ pursued with unwavering fidelity the way of the cross to the cross. As He did, the devil mounted an ever-intensifying campaign against Him in which he attempted to force Christ to deviate from His chartered course by making His mission as costly as possible through personal inconvenience, suffering, pain, humiliation, rejection, and deprivation. Finally, he exacted the supreme sacrifice under conditions of extreme



torture and fearful mental suffering. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13. This was the service which Christ came to give, to demonstrate the very heart of God, to save the creatures He had made, no matter what the cost to Himself. If Calvary does not prove this, then it proves nothing.

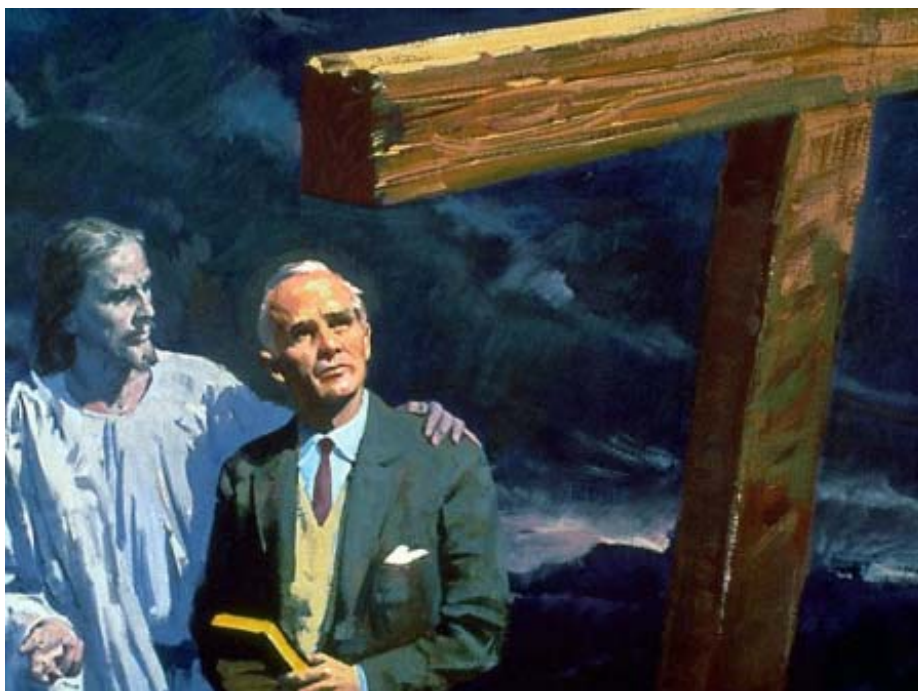
Long before He went to Calvary, Jesus lived the life of a servant without regard for His own needs. Therefore, the crucifixion was nothing new to Him. It was but the ultimate confirmation of what He had been and lived from eternity past and would continue to live forevermore.

On the other hand, Satan sought to impose the greatest pressure on the Son of God in order to achieve his goals no matter how high the cost to someone else. Therefore, Calvary was nothing new for Satan. It was the ultimate manifestation of his character of total selfishness. It demonstrated that there was no length to which he would not go, no suffering he would not cause, no price that we would no exact even to taking the life of the very Being who gave him life and everything he ever had—the One who had only given him kindness, love, mercy.

Thus, on Calvary’s hill, the cross on which our Saviour hung, was, in reality, two crosses. There was the Roman cross, inherited from the Greeks and they from the Babylonians, and in turn from Nimrod’s wife, Semiramis, traced back clear to the very beginning of Satan’s rebellion. It has been accepted and adopted by every power hungry ruler, dictator, mogul and leader who aspires to be Top Dog, letting nothing get in their way until they reach the prize of wielding total control.

The other cross speaks of unselfish love, expecting nothing in return; to serve others no matter how great the cost; to lose all that would ever make life worth living; to become a slave, to be exploited, used, humiliated, deprived, oppressed, despised and finally discarded. Such a prospect is indeed foolishness to the Greek.

But when this cross is truly seen, it constitutes the finest revelation of God’s character. Period. The Lord of glory and His righteousness will appear at their wondrous best while Satan and his evil works stand forth at their very worst. Calvary challenges every person in the universe to discover and then follow the way which received it most magnificent, explicit, and comprehensive exhibition on Golgotha’s hill. Look again, deeper and still deeper into its splendors.



To the Greek, it was foolishness;  
to the Jew it was a stumbling-block.  
But to them which are called,  
both Jews and Greeks,  
it is Christ,  
the power of God,  
and  
the wisdom of God.

## Who is God?

Is He the stern, angry Judge of the Old Testament or the humble, loving Saviour of the New? Are we to hold two differing view of God? God forbid. God has not changed. He cannot. Sin has not and cannot change Him. But sin has changed angels and men into destroyers. As a poster I saw once so plainly teaches, “War doesn’t kill people. People kill people.” God has never sinned, therefore He has never destroyed.

The time has come to study the events of the Old Testament without the colored lens of human preconception, but in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary and flowed from the life and lips of Jesus. We will begin with the story of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. In his day, the mighty Pharaoh, greatest ruler in the world, defiantly refused to release God’s people from Egyptian bondage. “Who is God? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go,” He sneered. Exodus 5:2. But then the plagues came and pounded the king and his kingdom until everyone admitted, “We are all dead men.” Exodus 12:33.

This story is viewed by the average person as a case of superior power pitted against inferior power. Backed by His own omnipotence, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe quite able to make Pharaoh obey His ultimatum. When the Egyptian ruler resists, it is generally accepted that God has no option but to obtain by force what He could not achieve by persuasion. Most people do not question God’s justice or His right to take, what is in this case, necessary action. The plagues, therefore, are the weapons God uses to win the battle. They see the blood, the flies, the lice, the frogs, the hail, the boils, the darkness, etc., as part of His tactical arsenal released at God’s signal against His enemies.

And this is just what the Scriptures seem to support:

“And the Lord said to Moses, See, I have made you a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you... And **I will harden Pharaoh’s heart**, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not listen to you, **that I may lay My hand upon Egypt**, and bring forth My armies, and My people the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, **when I stretch forth My hand upon Egypt.**” Exodus 7:1-5.

### **Holy Organized Crime or The Gangster God**

If this is understood as it appears, then the ways of God are no different than organized crime. Notice the comparison. Agents of the organization go to a business man and offer him “protection” in return for his “contributions.” The businessman courageously refuses, whereupon the syndicate decides to use a little persuasion. They smash his store windows and throw his merchandise into the gutter. Continued refusal results in harder and harder punishment until he is pounded into submission. No decent citizen, no Christian, can approve of these tactics. Yet, oddly we have accepted God’s version of the very same behavior, which puts Him in the same class as the godfather. Thus, the methods used by the world’s leading criminals to secure their ends are exactly the same as those used by God. Both achieve by force what they could otherwise never gain.

It makes no difference that the motives may be different. This belief teaches that “the end justifies the means.”

The means used by the criminal are unjustified because the end is selfish.

The same means used by God is justified because the end is unselfish.

Once this line of reasoning becomes established, any crime can be justified. Millions have been martyred on the basis of this rationale. The end can *never* justify the means. We must deny the traditional view of God’s behavior in Egypt because it makes God’s ways to be the ways of wicked men. Intentions and motives are not the issue. There is no question that God’s motives are totally different from those of criminals, gangsters and the Mob. He says so. “My thoughts are not your thoughts.” But to stop here would be to admit that God differs from man in only some respects. Remember, He also says, “Neither are your ways, My ways.” Isaiah 55:8.

God is not a God of force.

“Compelling power is found only under Satan’s government. The Lord’s principles are not of this order.”  
*Desire of Ages*, p.759.

“In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve.” *ibid.*, p.466.

If God builds His kingdom by using compelling power, as so many believe, then His ways and man’s ways are the same. But they are not. Man rules by exercising force. God does not employ this means at all. Therefore, the standard view of what God did in Egypt is a false one and needs to be replaced with the truth.

### Rods and Serpents

God has always looked with saving love upon the land of Egypt. He sent Joseph, providentially kidnapped, to the southern kingdom that Egypt might also hear the tender voice of mercy. Joseph was a type of Christ.

#### Joseph

betrayed by his brothers  
sold for 20 pieces of silver  
the price of a slave  
no record of sin in Scripture  
was a savior to his nation

#### Jesus

betrayed by his own people  
sold for 30 pieces of silver  
the price of a slave  
no record of sin in Scripture  
was the Saviour to the world



In the mysterious dreams given by God to the king and in the marvelous interpretations given by Joseph, the Egyptian ruler recognized the voice and power of God and obeyed His directions. This resulted in Egypt not only being saved from starvation, but also becoming the wealthiest nation in the world. Under God’s blessings they prospered beyond imagination. This has always been God’s plan. Prosperity is the natural consequence of obedience to the laws of God’s kingdom. Whenever and wherever the people of God obey Him they are wonderfully blessed with health, wealth, knowledge and power so that they can share more and more of God’s blessings to others in self-sacrificing service. They receive more so that they can give more.

But, as material possessions accumulate, little by little they displace faith in God as the basis of security. Faith is not lost, it is just transferred from the God of gifts to the gifts of God: to the money in the bank, a good solid house, a prosperous business which you can see, instead of a distant God whom you cannot see. Step by step they slowly remove themselves from the protecting circle of God’s love and care until they stand fully exposed to Satan’s malice. So it was with the Egyptians.

Egypt became proud, self-confident, self-serving, and oppressive. The people of God, Israel, through whom all their blessings had come, were now their slaves. Satan saw the day drawing nearer when there would be none of God’s protection left. As the Israelites became increasingly depraved, he planned to include them in his plot: a destructive cataclysm of such proportions as to exterminate the entire nation including Israel and, therefore, the promised Seed of the woman.

As the Egyptians removed themselves from God’s protection, Satan marshaled his destructive forces to surround the nation ready for attack. All that was needed now was for the Egyptians to make their final

dismissal of God from His position as Protector. This was the very same situation when Adam and Eve rejected the law as their protector. All nature became deranged and was poised to collapse into an obliterating devastation. But Jesus immediately stepped in.

“Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, ‘Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man’s place.’” *SDABC* 1:1085.

Ever since the fall in Eden, Christ by His personal power has been holding in control the fearsome wrath that surrounds us. Whenever sinful, defiant men make a total rejection of the Saviour and dismiss Christ from his post, His restraining power is removed, reluctantly, and the flood of death pours upon the unprotected. There is nothing else God can do.

But the Egyptians neither understood nor believed this. They believed they had no further need of God; they could get along without Him very well, thank you. And, now, they had come to the point of making the final dismissal of Christ from their world.

### **The Parable of the Rods**

It was at this point that Moses and Aaron appeared with the rods. This was God’s last message of mercy to the haughty king. It was given in the simplest possible way—an acted parable. Moses represented God as he had previously been told, “See, I have made you a god to Pharaoh.” The rod in Aaron’s hand, was a symbol of the powers of nature which God had given to mankind for their blessing. Now, because of sin, these powers were poised to destroy. Yet, through Christ’s interposition, they still remained in God’s hands and under His control. Many scriptures use the rod as a symbol of power. Psalm 2:9; 110:2; Isaiah 11:1; 14:5.



The difference between the rod and Aaron must be appreciated. The rod is not Aaron, it is only held by him. Likewise, the powers given to mankind are not the powers of God, they are only held in control by Him. Finally, the parable has one last symbol: the serpent into which the rod turned. The serpent, obviously, is a symbol of the destroyer, the devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world. Revelation 12:9.

Now, the parable is acted out: Moses and Aaron go before Pharaoh. Aaron lets go of the rod he is carrying and it drops to the floor in front of Pharaoh. It immediately changes form, turning into a writhing, hideous, poisonous snake, right before their eyes. But Pharaoh calls for his wise men and sorcerers and magicians, who throw down their rods and voila! they turn into snakes, too! But then Aaron’s snake promptly swallowed up all the other “snakes.” Finally, Aaron picked up his snake and it became a rod again.

Now, the point of all this was to show Pharaoh the folly of trusting in his own power. It was no match for the powers that only God could control. And as long as the rod was held firmly in Aaron’s hand, it was under his personal control, and remained a rod: it never became a serpent. Only when it passed out of his hands and control did it change and become a snake. But the moment it returned to his hand it returned to being a rod. So also, the powers of nature are under God’s personal control as long as they are in His hands. If man should displace God from his position as Controller, these powers will instantly become destructive forces.

With simple clarity yet elegant beauty, the Lord was telling Pharaoh a vital truth: at no time whatsoever, while the powers of nature are still in God’s hands and under His control, can they be agents of destruction. Only when they are forced out of His hands and control can they become such. The truth of the rods and serpents has always been and will ever remain the same.

## Powers of Nature

This truth was also illustrated in the experience of Elijah. He had fled from Jezebel in fear and now collapsed in discouragement, finding refuge in a cave on mount Horeb. Then the Lord spoke to him.

“And He said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire a still small voice.”

1 Kings 19:9-12.

If God *had* been in the wind, it would have been under His control and no storm would have been possible. Likewise, the earthquake and fire were manifestations of great natural forces that had become agents of destruction because they were *not* under God’s control and direction, for He was not “in them.” If God had been in control of these powers, the results would have been entirely different. Firm ground would have been beneath Elijah’s feet instead of the earth rolling like the sea; a peaceful mountain vista instead of a roaring inferno.

This is the message with which God wanted to convict and convert the heart of Egypt’s king. He still controlled the forces of nature, even as Moses and Aaron held the rod in their hands. But the time had come when God would be forced to let go of these powers, and when they passed out of His hands they would become fearful scourges of destruction. Their only hope was to quickly repent and return to God , His care and protection.

Instead, Pharaoh called in the wise guys, the magicians, and with slight of hand they were able to make it *appear* that they could turn rods into serpents, too! Satan couldn’t produce life, but he could make a counterfeit. They looked like the real thing; they wiggled and squirmed around like snakes. Egypt’s response was one of arrogance. They were in essence stating they were not impressed with the Lord’s power: they had more than enough force to contain the plagues. Just look at all the snakes they were able to produce! What hope did one have against so many? So, go ahead, bring it on, let the Lord release His control. We’re not afraid. We are not intimidated.

But God’s snake was the real thing and it quickly devoured up the phony reptiles. Pharaoh was simply ignorant of the extent and magnitude of the powers that a merciful and loving God was able to hold in check. He had no idea of the awful danger he was in; no sense of his real need of God. Instead of recognizing his dire dependence of God, he foolishly flaunted his independence.

In resisting the appeal of the Holy Spirit, he took the final step and placed himself and his nation outside the limits of God’s protection. There was no more that God could do. His control of the assembled forces of destruction passed out of His hands and the plagues began. Yet, even then, God’s love for Egypt and His reluctance to see the people suffer was so great, that He only released His grip as far as He was compelled. He could have let go completely and leave the land to face the full force of all the plagues at once, but instead He stepped back only one step at a time. Each retreat was made only as Pharaoh’s increasing stubbornness forced Him to do so. Thus the plagues were not what God did to the Egyptians, they were what the Egyptians did to themselves. And so it will ever be.

God will not deviate from His ways for He knows that the use of force is self-defeating. But sin must be allowed to run its course until it ultimately destroys itself and all who cling to it. Then the Lord will be free to create the new heavens and the new earth without danger of sin every returning again.



## Cleansing the Temple

The same message which God brought to the stubborn Egyptian ruler, Christ endeavored to impress upon the minds of the temple traders when He cleansed His Father's house the first time. The statement which Jesus was making when He held the scourge in His hand is an exact New Testament parallel of what Moses did in the Old when he held the rod in his hands.

The symbolism is identical. As Moses gripped the rod, so Christ held the scourge—both symbolized God's control of nature's powers. Just as Moses' rod could not, and did not, turn into a serpent while it remained in his hands, so the scourge could not and did not strike a single person while it was in Christ's control.

The story can be easily misinterpreted, just as the plagues of Egypt often are. Most would argue that, while Christ didn't actually strike anyone, He most certainly threatened to do so and most likely would have if they had resisted Him. But adopting such a view is to regard the character of Jesus as just the same as that of men, while missing the message which the Saviour wanted so much to convey.

When Christ entered the temple, the offenders were already practicing serious injustices, extortion and disregard for the sanctity of the holy temple area. This continued behavior would only serve to separate them from the protection of God and ultimately exposing them to terrible destructive forces. Jesus wanted to save them from this fate, so He demonstrated for them the real situation that was developing and transforming the political and military forces from powers of stability into a punishing scourge of destruction. The only reason they had not yet been smitten was because Christ still held the powers within His control and would continue to do so until their time of probation was fully ended.

Even the overturned tables and the scattered coins were an object lesson of the reality that faced them in the near future. Their earthly treasures would be of no help, no support to them in their time of trouble. Christ was showing these greedy merchants the terrible consequences of their continued course of action. He did exactly in the temple what He and His Father had done in the land of Egypt. In both situations, the Father and the Son were living out the truth in contrast to what the devil was planning to do. Jesus made this very comparison:

“The thief comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy:  
I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”  
John 10:10.

## Smiting with the Rod

When Moses smote the waters of the Nile and they turned into blood, we must understand how God smites. In Matthew 22:7 Jesus told the Jewish leaders exactly what the fate would be for rejecting and killing God's Son:

“When the King heard thereof, He was wroth: and He sent forth His armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.”

And how did this happen?

“By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will. The horrible cruelties enacted in the destruction of Jerusalem are a demonstration of Satan's vindictive power over those who yield to his control.”  
*Great Controversy*, pp. 35, 36.

The rod of power was forced from His hand and Satan was given full access to accomplish his evil designs. Therefore, the same wording used in Exodus 7:25, “the Lord had smitten the river” must be understood in exactly the same way as “the king...sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers.” God's wrath is just the opposite from that of man's. Romans 1:18 “For the wrath of God is revealed...” How? In the next few verses Paul describes how God simply “gave them up to uncleanness” verse 24, “gave them up to vile affections” verse 26, “gave them over to a reprobate mind” verse 28.

Behold Your God Wright 1979 / Hullquist 2005

This is the wrath of God, He leaves the sinner to their own destruction. This is how God smote the river, He left and withdrew His power to maintain its life-giving water as a blessing to the land. Each plague was a progressive release of His control and an increase of Satan's destructive power.

### Flexing God's Muscles

If God is obsessed with making sure that everyone recognizes His authority as absolute ruler of the universe, then His motivation in flexing His infinite muscles would be to instill respect and obedience through shock and awe. His message to the nations would sound something like this:

“Take warning, people of the earth. I am making an example of the Egyptians so you will know just how I treat those who don't give Me the respect I deserve. Don't even think about resisting My power. Just look what happened to Pharaoh, the greatest king on earth, more stubborn than anyone else. He dared to resist My will. So, you better serve Me, or I'll you'll end up just like him.”

Is this the message that God wanted to send? It seems that most people believe it was. But consider the implications of this position. It would mean that He is self-centered, self-exalting, self-absorbed and insecure rather than loving, merciful, longsuffering and patient. Both views cannot be held.

The evidence is that God actually tries to prevent catastrophe from coming, because He is motivated by consuming love for His endangered children. First, He endeavors to arouse individuals to see their need of protecting hand. But when, because of their blind and persistent refusal to receive His offers of love, they force Him to remove His hand from the helm, He still continues to salvage as much as possible from the resulting loss of life and property.

“Before the infliction of each plague, Moses was to describe its nature and effects, that the king might save himself from it if he chose. Every punishment rejected would be followed by one more severe, until his proud heart would be humbled, and he would acknowledge the Maker of heaven and earth as the true and living God.”  
*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.263.

God will never engineer these conditions in order to teach these lessons, but when they develop in spite of His best efforts to prevent them, then He will use them to fulfill a valuable service to the helpless masses. Many Egyptians who lived in the Nile Valley saw how powerless their gods were to deal with the disasters and turned to serve the Creator. When the Israelites left Egypt, many of these went with them. In the meantime, when Moses announced the plague of hail and warned Pharaoh to shelter the livestock, they responded and saved themselves and their herds.



When the last plague fell, it selectively touched only the first born of each household. Even to the end, God retrained Satan from destroying every Egyptian. Note carefully who did the destroying.

“All who failed to heed the Lord's directions, would lose their first-born by the hand of the destroyer... The sign of blood—the sign of a Saviour's protection—was on their doors, and the destroyer entered not...”

All the first-born in the land...had been smitten by the destroyer.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 278-280.

“Satan is the destroyer. God cannot bless those who refuse to be faithful stewards. All He can do is to permit Satan to accomplish his destroying work. We see calamities of every kind and in every degree coming upon the earth, and why? The Lord’s restraining power is not exercised.” *Testimonies* 6:388, 389



Even to the end, Pharaoh never learned the lesson of the rods and serpents. Though he saw with his own eyes the power of God to hold back the waters of the Red Sea, his own defiance and rebellious spirit was so complete that the Holy Spirit was unable to remain in his presence. One more final time the rod of power is forced out of God’s hand as the Egyptians charge into the parted waters. There was only one possible result. Mountains of water fell upon him and his army, destroying them all.

This entire episode is a revelation, not of what God sent upon the Egyptians, but of what they brought upon themselves despite God’s best efforts to preserve them from it. No blame can be placed on God. He emerges from the scene as a perfect law keeper Who did not break the law in order to preserve it; a loving and complete Saviour; Who was not the destroyer; nor the one who executed the impenitent.

## God Shows His Power

One final aspect of the Egyptian plagues still remains. Essential to the success of the divine purpose was the presence of an extremely stubborn king. The more resolved Pharaoh was to resist God's will, the more victorious was Israel's deliverance. These are God's words:

“For this cause have I raised you up, for to show in you My power; and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth.” Exodus 9:16.

“Not that God had given him an existence for this purpose, but His providence had overruled events to place him upon the throne at the very time appointed for Israel's deliverance. Though this haughty tyrant had by his crimes forfeited the mercy of God, yet his life had been preserved that through his stubbornness the Lord might manifest His wonders in the land of Egypt. The disposing of events is of God's providence. He could have placed upon the throne a more merciful king, who would not have dared to withstand the mighty manifestations of divine power. But in that case the Lord's purposes would not have been accomplished.” *Patriarchs and Prophets* pp.267, 268.

This same truth is repeated in Daniel 4:17:

“This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the Holy Ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will, and sets up over it the basest of men.”

In what way did God place the hardened monarch on the throne just at that time?  
 Why was God so anxious to give a demonstration of His power to the people of that day?  
 How was the revelation of His power given?  
 Why did God wait so long before delivering His people?  
 There is more than one possible solution to these questions.

For instance, God could personally determine who is to be the leader of each and every nation, regardless of whether there is free democratic elections or not. But for Him to act in this manner, would be no different than a ruthless despot who climbs to power over the bloody corpses of his many opponents, or by rigged elections, intimidation or power plays to gain office. Furthermore, if God purposefully arranged for the world's worse dictators to ascend to power, then responsibility or blame for the reigns of terror and awful atrocities committed by them must be charged to God.

The solution to this apparent contradiction is to once again recognize that “Gods ways are not our ways.” The answer lies in the way that God sets up rulers which is distinctly different from the ways of men. When men set out to make someone king, they bring to bear every means of force and coercion, bribery or persuasion at their disposal; the greater the pressure used, the more successful they are.

Since God possesses infinite power and wisdom, if He were operate as men do, then only those of God's specific choice would every occupy any position of leadership. We would then expect His choices to be the very best available selections: wise, strong, merciful, and just rulers. But history reveals very few such men ever arising to the seat of power. Instead, most have been despotic, unjust, and cruel.. If men like Pharaoh, Nero, Herod, Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein were specifically chosen by God and exalted to rulership through His support, then some serious questions must be asked in respect to God's character.

The only occasions when God has made direct choices of individual leaders have been those times when His people were in harmony with Him and totally submitted to His will. Examples of these are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Daniel, John the Baptist, Paul, and many others. It is important to note that every one of these individuals had a character like that of God.

Kings are always “set up” in accordance with law, either used or misused. It is the result of the working out of all the powers which God has invested in mankind, irrespective of whether those powers are rightly or wrongly, justly or unjustly used. As those powers are provided by God, then in this sense it is God who sets up and takes down kings.

Look at the rise and fall of the great empires of history. In their formative stages, the leaders and their people are hard-working, self-sacrificing, closely united and intensely loyal to each other and their leaders. God’s laws provide the opportunity for success when abstemiousness, self-sacrifice, hard work, and unity are adopted and followed. Those leaders who obey these principles are certainly “set up.”

The additional use of military force may be totally unjust and cruel, yet it is not the legitimate use of God’s principles, but their misuse. God only provides the powers and the guiding principles for their use, warns men of the tragic results of their misuse, but, in love, grants them the perfect freedom to use or misuse them as they choose.



Not only do these laws of success “set up kings” by their use, they also “take them down” by their misuse. The conquest achieved, the riches of the world flow into the hands of the victors. A life of ease, luxury, and licentiousness takes the place of industry, hardship, and self-denial. The result is ultimate weakness, division, and internal strife. Thus by the outworking of law, nations rise and fall. It is not a personal dictate on God’s part. It is the natural results of applying the principles of success and failure.

We can now easily understand how God placed a leader of exceptional stubbornness on the throne of Egypt. He was a peer of Moses’. Both were educated together in the royal court. Moses remained faithful to the Creator God of

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He shared the truths about God, His power, His love and His plan for Egypt to be a light to the world. But Moses was the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter and thus the crowned prince of Egypt and heir to the throne. His fellow prince chose the competing gods of Egypt even as he competed with Moses for the throne. When Moses fled to Midian after trying to rescue Israel with his own bare hands, his mid-life career change allowed the second in line to take his place. The years of witness for Jehovah by Moses in the court were now discarded by the one who jealously coveted his position. He would now be Pharaoh.

### **Why not sooner?**

To believe that God forcibly subdued the Egyptians in order to obtain the release of His people, is to level a terrible indictment against the Lord. It is to charge Him with deliberately and callously leaving the Jews to suffering for centuries when they could have been released long before the Exodus. If God is free to exercise His omnipotent power as He wishes and when He chooses, then every day that Israel continued in servitude was because God chose not to release them. The fact is, their release was not dependent on God’s power, but on the Egyptians’ deepening apostasy.

The long servitude of the Israelites and God’s refusal to move them out until Pharaoh released them is clear proof that God does not use force. He is bound by the principles of righteousness to act only within the limitations of His law. He had to wait until the inevitable consequences of Egypt’s wickedness brought its own harvest of self-destruction.



## The Flood

Perhaps no other Bible story has such disturbing implications as that of Noah's Flood. The thought that God drowned the entire world and everyone in it (except for one lucky family) has lead countless sensitive minds to either reject such a ruthless deity or the Biblical account. Here is just one example from a recent blog:

I choose not to believe [a global earth-covering flood] because it shows God to be one nasty guy, ready to MURDER thousands of men, women, CHILDREN and BABIES in the single most painful way a human being can die, struggling to the point of sheer exhaustion...only to finally have their energy give out, gulp in that first 'breath' of seawater, setting their lungs on fire...seeing their babies eyes BUG OUT as they asphyxiate, pleading with their little faces for the mommies to tell them why they were being tortured this way. If that is what you CHOOSE to believe, you go right ahead. I would rather believe that is not something God would do, that is some BS made up by corrupt men trying to command obedience.

That's one way to get God off the hook: make the flood story just a mythical legend. But despite the universal evidence of diluvial sediments and hydraulic activity throughout the geologic column (75 percent of the rocks seen on the earth's surface are sedimentary in origin; Brian Skinner and Stephen Porter, *The Dynamic Earth: An Introduction to Physical Geology*, 1989, p. 20), evolutionists reject the prospect of a global flood for much the same reason. Their denial of a world engulfing flood eliminates both the blame for planetary extermination and geologic confirmation that the Biblical account might be correct.

The discussion here, however, will not be to validate the Noachian flood but to explore the possible mechanisms for its cause which are consistent with God's character of love and His principles of free choice. We will discover the truth that God does not execute sinners nor destroy the world. Far from actually sending the flood, God held it back as long as He could. It finally came because He could no longer prevent it without forcing His presence where it was no longer wanted. In fact, God's behavior during the Flood of Noah was exactly the same as during the plagues of Egypt.

A number of flood models have been proposed and one or more of them may have participated in the flood event. Most models incorporate one or more of the following features:

### A. Flood water came from a displacement of **existing planetary stores**.

1. **Atmospheric Water.** The popular water canopy theory is suggested by the Genesis description of "the waters above the firmament" that occurred on the second day of creation. The proposed canopy has ranged all the way from simple clouds in the sky to an extensive water vapor reservoir in the upper atmospheric layers. Possible mechanisms for initiating its "collapse" include a drop in the sun's thermal output, a cometary disintegration in the upper atmosphere, and seeding from geothermal eruptions.
2. **Subterranean Water.** Massive geysers erupted under tremendous pressure as earth's crust fractured over vast underground water channels. Rapid tectonic plate movements were facilitated by the low viscosity of the underlying water as the "fountains of the deep" were broken up. Possible mechanisms for initiating the release of these massive artesian jets include large scale seismic and volcanic activity associated with either a planetary impact (comet, meteor or asteroid) or gravitational disturbances from a near orbit close encounter with Earth by another planetary body.
3. **Tidal waves and Tsunamis.** Massive flood surges from the existing pre-flood oceans would be expected following an impact or close encounter to sweep the globe and cause significant secondary erosion and sedimentary deposition.

### B. Flood water came from **extraplanetary sources**.

Other hypothesized water sources are not as clearly indicated by Genesis. these include:

1. Ice from a large comet
2. water from another planet, like Saturn, as it passed close to earth loosing part of its icy rings.



Let us now explore how the flood could have occurred as God released His hand from the control of Earth's stable environment.

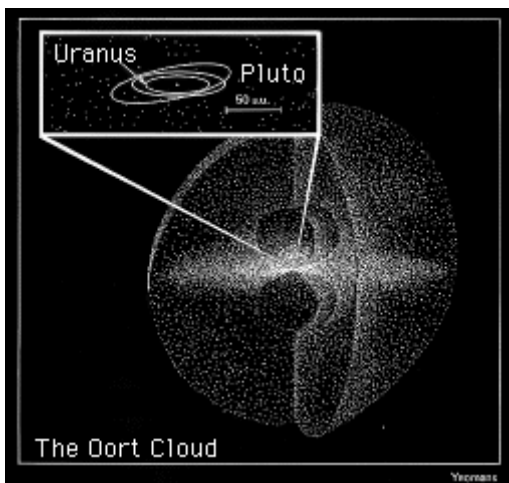
Without His continuous adjustment of the orbiting planets, dangerous changes in orbital trajectories could lead to disastrous interactions and even collisions within the solar system; without His constant control of the sun's thermonuclear power output, our planet's ability to sustain life would be immediately jeopardized.

The constancy of these two celestial parameters are taken far too much for granted. Though in recent years, astrophysicists have raised increasing concern about the consequences of ignoring them. The evidence of past impact craters on planet Earth and the prospect of future threats from the sky are the source of much research, speculation and Hollywood movie plots. Hurricanes, Tsunamis, Volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and devastating flooding is becoming all too real in today's world as global warming, green house gases, El Nino, deforestation and fossil fuels are implicated. All these factors plainly illustrate the fragile balance in which the fate of our planet lies.

### **Mechanism Number One: Collapse of a Water Canopy**

The water canopy was first suggested by Isaac Newton Vail in his 1874 publication, *Waters Above the Firmament*, in which he described "A vast cloud-canopy of primitive earth-vapors, such as now envelop the planets Jupiter and Saturn, lingered as a revolving deluge-source, in the skies of antediluvian man." Vail decided upon a pre-existing set of Saturn-like ice rings positioned high above the earth which descended into Jovian cloud bands and then fell upon the Earth as snow and ice in the polar regions, where they were concentrated by the Earth's magnetosphere. Vail followed this with *The Deluge and its Cause, Canopy Skies of Ancient Man*, and many others. The concept was then popularized in 1961 by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb by the publication of their book, *The Genesis Flood* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961). The idea springs from the Genesis description of day two in the creation account:

"And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament...And God called the firmament Heaven." verses 6-8.



Just what is the firmament? The Hebrew word is *raqiya* which is also translated "expanse." In Psalm 19 it "shows God's handywork." Since Ezekiel 1:22 mentions this word with an appearance of "crystal" and that it is "stretched forth above" has lead some to speculate that the firmament was just that: firm, solid, ice crystals. Daniel 12:3 describes the firmament as "bright." This agrees with Genesis 1:14. On day four God created "lights in the firmament of the heaven." This verse has created much confusion because it appears to conflict with Genesis 1:7 where the waters are said to be "above the firmament." This seems to create an illogical arrangement where at least some of the water from earth or our solar system were elevated to at least beyond the outer planets!

This dilemma may be resolved in one of two ways. First, by considering that just beyond the outermost members of our planetary system exists a vast swarm of icy planetoids called the Oort Cloud. This immense spherical ice field was discovered by Dutch astronomer Jan H. Oort in 1950. The total mass of the Oort cloud is considered to be approximately only 40 times that of Earth making it a very thin cloud. It extends some 30 trillion kilometers from the Sun which represents the outer limits of its gravitational influence. There appears to be a concentration of comets in the Sun's equatorial plane known as the Kuiper Belt. The estimated six trillion icy bodies in this region are thought to be the source for the periodic comets that occasionally invade the orbital territories of the inner planets. One such encounter with Earth could have caused the Flood.

Job 38:22, 23 is a possible reference to this collection of celestial snow balls: "Have you entered the treasury of snow, or have you seen the treasury of hail which I have reserved for the time of trouble?" Revelation 16:21 describes the seventh plague to fall at the end, just before Christ appears: "And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent," thought to be about 100 lbs. This may very well come from the Oort cloud's "treasury of hail."

The second solution to the waters-above-lights-within-the-firmament problem appeals to semantics. Genesis 1:14 specifies that the Sun, moon and stars are located in the firmament "of the heaven." This could suggest that there is more than one firmament just as the term "heaven" has several different locations: the lower atmospheric heavens, the solar system heavens, the galactic heavens, the universe, and God's throne. Waters "above the firmament" could be located in the earth's upper atmosphere, while the sun, moon and stars are located within the celestial firmament. So, there is still room for the possibility of having at least some of the flood waters come from the earth's own atmosphere.

### **Seven Times Hotter**

Currently, the moon is a planetoid satellite of Earth that merely reflects light from our closest star, the Sun whose energy output amazingly matches our distance from it and allows life to thrive. Our relatively thin atmosphere permits thermal and ultraviolet radiation to easily penetrate and become absorbed by the massive stores of water in our oceans. Scriptural evidence indicates that prior to the flood the sun's output was seven times that of today's capacity and the moon was as bright as the sun is now!

"The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord binds up the breach of His people, and heals the stroke of their wound."  
Isaiah 30:26.

This is both a prophecy of the future and a description of the past. When God "binds up" and "heals" He will restore our world to its original condition, as it was before "the breach" and "the stroke." When our Creator makes a new heavens and a new earth, the combined light and heat produced by the sun and moon will be eight times the current amount...as it was in the beginning.

Now, imagine that a portion of the ocean's water is suspended in the form of water vapor very high above the earth, possibly in the thermosphere. This immense blanket of water would serve as both a reflective shield (increased albedo) and a thermal diffusing insulator to produce a perfect world-wide climate: ideal, uniform temperatures from pole to pole. God made reference to this in His conversation with Job when He asked,

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?...When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it..." Job 38:4, 9.

The Genesis creation account describes the original condition of the earth as a dark, water-covered, formless body. "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," Genesis 1:1. At first there was no dry land, no rock, sand or soil, only water. The entire planet was flooded, the continents submerged. Then on day two, the waters were separated above and below the atmospheric firmament. It was not until the third day that enough water was displaced and moved so that dry land appeared.

On day four of creation, the sun and moon were set ablaze and adjusted to maintain the tremendous quantity of water in balanced suspension above the earth. The exact language used is very important:

“And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night.”  
Genesis 1:16.

“To rule,” is to govern, to exercise a controlling influence. The sun and moon shared a responsibility beyond that of simply lighting the earth. An enormous amount of water had been elevated above the globe where it rode in suspension in the form of water vapor and clouds. To hold it there required a considerable supply of heat without which the water vapor would chill, condense and fall in torrents. The sun and moon were to rule in this situation, governing the moisture mantle, wrapped like swaddling clothes around the planet, adjusting the heat to precise values that would prevent all that water from returning to the surface and cause complete flooding.

During the flood, this sequence was exactly reversed. The sun ceased to rule. It’s heat output dropped precipitously. As the water vapor canopy chilled, it began to condense and water fell from the sky, no longer suspended above the earth, swamping the entire surface. The earth was once again as it was in the beginning, nothing but void and the face of the deep.

The original arrangement was a masterpiece of balanced technology. The amount of heat produced by the two stars was calculated to keep just the correct volume of water vapor at the optimum altitude. Most of the heat was absorbed by the water vapor to keep it in suspension, but enough was left over to diffuse and distribute a uniform amount of heat to the earth’s surface.

In our present world, without a cloud cover the earth warms quickly during the day and cools rapidly at night. This is why clear, still, winter nights are cold and crisp while cloudy ones tend to be warmer. Conversely, cloudy days are cooler at the earth’s surface, while cloudless days are hotter. Our current global climate has only a partial cloud cover, but the original design had a massive continuous blanket of high altitude clouds which limited the rise of convection currents, and thus limiting winds to gentle breezes which evenly distributed the warmth from pole to pole. The climate was uniform all over the planet, devoid of sweltering tropical regions and frozen polar zones. Without dramatic differences in temperature, there were no significant high and low pressure systems, no storms, no violent weather as we see today. The climate was perfect, stable, dependable, consistent. The fossil record bears this out. Tropical flora and fauna are found in the sedimentary deposits at all latitudes from the arctic north pole to the Antarctic south pole.

When Noah announced the coming of a deluge by a global rain storm, the antediluvians scoffed at the idea. It had never rained for over 1,600 years. The great scientific minds of the day could prove mathematically that condensation of the atmosphere was impossible even as today the physics of maintaining enormous amounts of water in our present atmosphere can be shown to be mathematically impossible under our current solar and atmospheric conditions. They boldly declared that the sun would continue its radiation of heat and energy for millions of years. But they did not appreciate that the powers of nature require the continued presence and control of their Creator.

Whether the water came primarily from a water canopy or from a cosmic deluge or from astral body tidal forces or from the rupture of subterranean aquifers, etc, etc, is, while important in establishing a credible mechanism for scientific hypothesis and testing a valid hydraulic model, is only secondary to understanding the underlying principle that determines God’s behavior and involvement in the Noachian flood.

- If His release of control involved the precision maintenance of orbital trajectories within the inner solar system then the cause could have resulted from Earth’s close encounter with a large planetary body where gravitational forces generated huge sweeping tides from the existing seas across low leveled crustal land masses that buckled, shifted, rose and fell during the fly by event.



or

- If His level of protection included the course of meteors and comets then the cause of global inundation might have resulted from an impacting bolide which struck the continental plates overlying subterranean reservoirs with the release of the pressurized water through crustal slits and fracture zones forming a massive array of sheet geysers followed by wide-spread volcanism, heavy precipitation, continental rafting, subsidence and flooding, and the final stratigraphic profile and global topography would be much the same.

The actual mechanism by which the flood occurred is not as important as the response by God to the initiating event: either He decided to personally direct and maneuver the precipitating actions He reluctantly conceded to the decision of His creatures to remove His restraint and allow natural forces now disposed to the control of Satan to simply do what they do.

“As time passed on, with no apparent change in nature, men whose hearts had at times trembled with fear, began to be reassured. They reasoned, as many reason now, that nature is above the God of nature, and that her laws are so firmly established that God Himself could not change them. Reasoning that if the message of Noah were correct, nature would be turned out of her course, they made that message, in the minds of the world, a delusion—a grand deception. They manifested their contempt for the warning of God by doing just as they had done before the warning was given....and they went to greater lengths in wickedness, and in defiant disregard of God’s requirements, to testify that they had no fear of the Infinite One.” Patriarchs and Prophets, 96, 97.

As God was removed from His position of control, various physical changes would have occurred. Consider the change in the solar “constant.” The sun and moon would have begun to wane in heat production. “The light of the sun” became as “the light of the moon” and the light of the “sevenfold” sun became as the light of our current sun. The result was “the breach of His people,” “the stroke of their wound.”

The moon extinguished altogether and the sun faded to one seventh of its former brightness. Suddenly, the vast volume of water vapor in the upper atmosphere found itself deprived of 7/8ths of the heat it had been receiving. Its heat content rapidly dropped. Chilling followed. Then came condensation. The suspended water vapor cooled down to the condensation point and heavier-than-air water droplets began to form. Practically all the water that had been taken from the earth to the sky by God’s direct command on the second day of creation, came falling back to earth through natural causes for the next forty days and nights. So great is the power of God that He could speak into position a volume of water which took forty days to return by its own power. So great was the stroke and the resulting breach in the human family that it almost resulting in total extermination.

Uncertainties regarding the thermodynamics involved in a ocean-sized vapor canopy have encouraged most flood geologists to reduce the role of a global water canopy to a much more minor position in the Noachian Flood and focus rather on the second sources of water. These are mentioned in Genesis 7:11 which add that “all the fountains of the great deep were broken up.” This is listed first in a sequence that continues with “the windows of heaven were opened.” Other Scriptures confirm this order of events:

Proverbs 3:19–20: “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge **the deeps were broken up**, and **the skies dripped with dew**.”

Walter T. Brown, in his 1996 book, *In the Beginning*, 6th edition, (5612 N. 20th Place, Phoenix Arizona at the Center for Scientific Creation, [www.indirect.com/www/wbrown](http://www.indirect.com/www/wbrown)) suggests that this sequence indicates a cause and effect relationship. Consequently, he promotes what he calls the Hydroplate Theory of the flood.

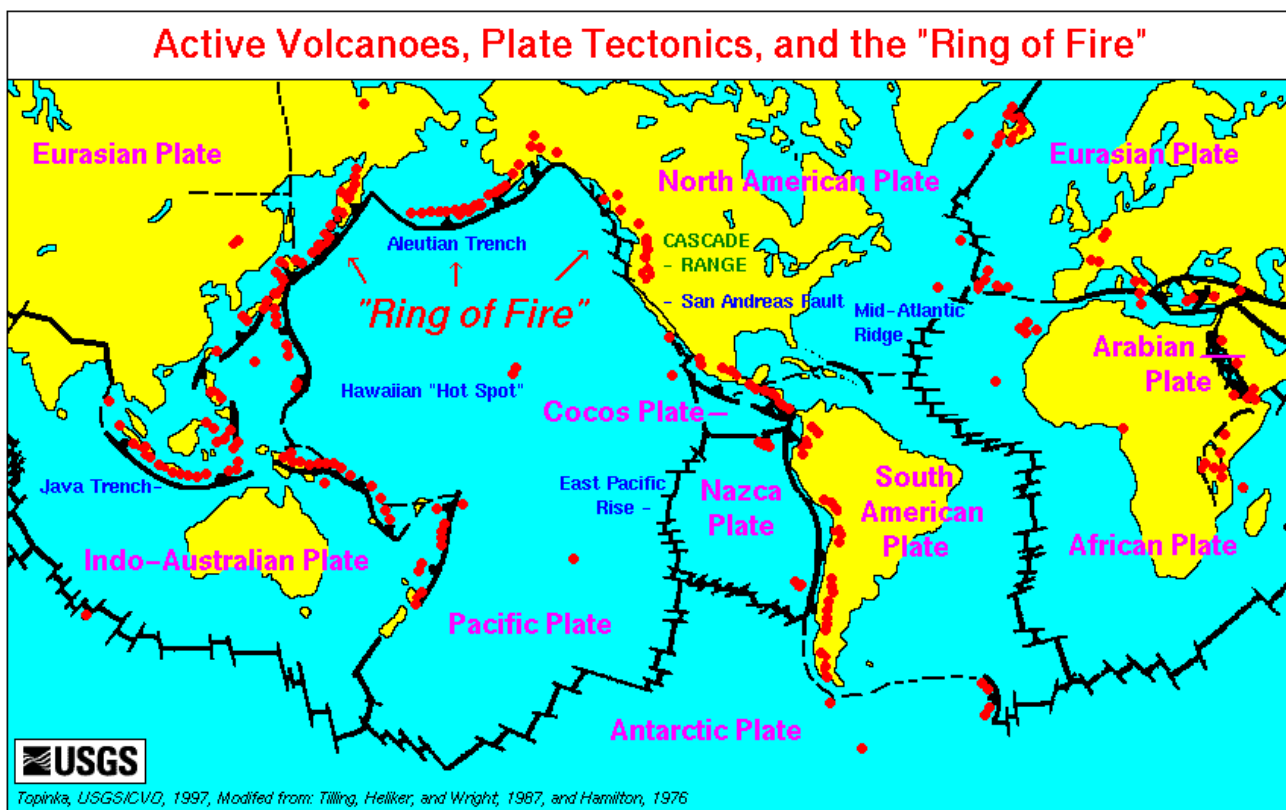
Similar to this is the Catastrophic Plate Tectonics model.

S.A. Austin, J.R. Baumgardner, D.R. Humphreys, A.A. Snelling, L. Vardiman, and K.P. Wise, "Catastrophic Plate Tectonics: A Global Flood Model of Earth History," *Proc. Third ICC*, 1994, pp. 609-621.

This theory postulates geyser activity on a massive, world-wide scale, concentrated along the mid-oceanic ridge system. Genesis 7:6-10 seems to indicate that the flood waters were already rising for about seven days before the fountains of the deep "were broken up" in verse 11. "And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, **because of the waters** of the flood."

Thus great amounts of water were already being added to the Earth's seas at least seven days before the rains even began. Sea levels were already rapidly rising; flooding low lying coastal areas and sending wildlife to higher ground. Then, seven days into the flood the undersea fountains broke through the crust in full fury, and sending columns of superheated water upwards in sheets to form linear geysers erupting through the crustal slits, breaking the ocean's surface and jetting skyward into the upper atmosphere, perhaps as high as 30 km to form a globe encircling curtain of steam. As it came into contact with the colder air it would condense and produce cloud cover and relentless rainfall on a planetary scale.

The most likely location for the flood's fountain/geysers is along the 46,000 mile long globe encircling line of underwater Tectonic Plate boundaries called the mid-oceanic ridges. Today the Earth's oceanic crust on either side of these ridges is spreading apart at the rate of a few centimeters per year.

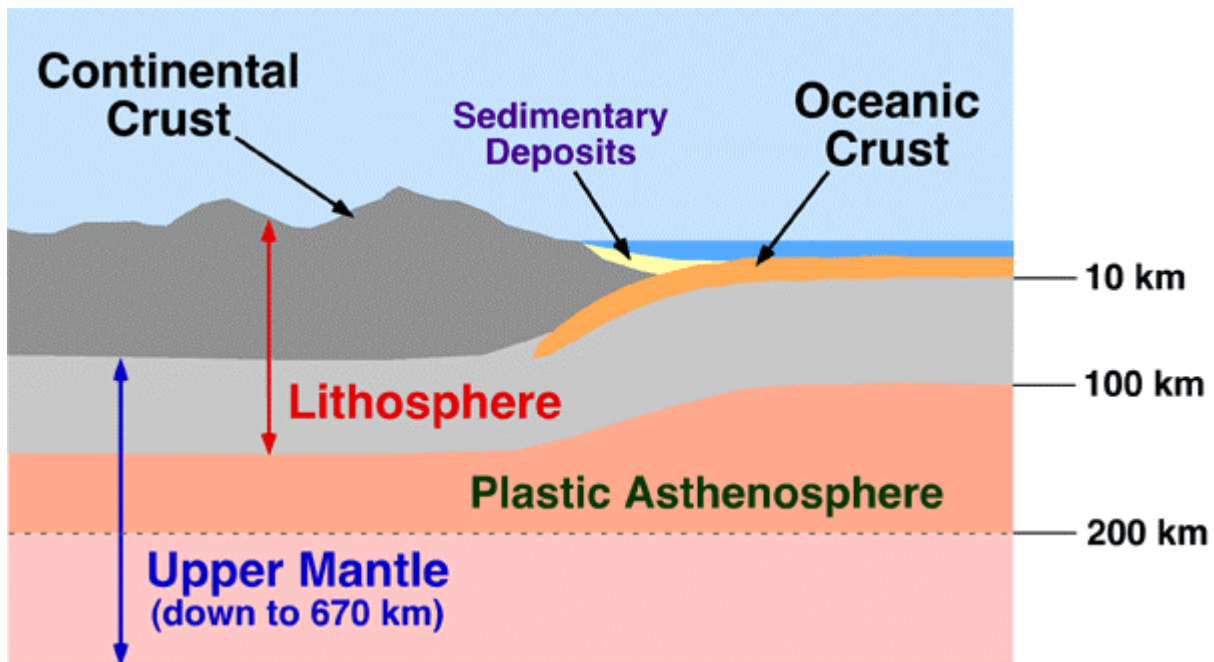


When the geysers began to create the world-wide cloud cover and heavy rains at the start of the flood, the heat energy from the geysers would have traveled upward as a column while rain waters condensed from the steam. This would have created soaring thermal air currents on a massive scale. These thermal jets would drag the lower atmospheric heavy gasses (oxygen, nitrogen, etc.) into the upper atmosphere. Heated air rises and most of the heat from the geysers would be dissipated high above the Earth's surface, while the cloud cover would act as a shield from heat in the regions above the cloud cover.



The boundaries of the heated upper atmosphere would expand, push outwards and further away from Earth's gravity even as the troposphere today bulges around the tropics compared to the cooler polar regions. If the atmosphere distended enough, portions of it would be ripped from Earth's gravitation field by the sun's solar winds and its gases would be lost into space. After the heat sources abated, the upper atmosphere would cool and shrink back to today's more normal size. With great volumes of gas lost through this process, the remaining air pressure at sea level would be reduced to present levels.

Large volumes of water have recently been detected deep inside the earth, enough to fill Earth's ocean basins 10 times over. In spite of the high temperatures, the tremendous pressures prevent the water from changing to the gaseous state. Subterranean water, being much less dense than the magma would tend to accumulate under the highest portions of the earth's crust. Continental crusts of granite being denser than the basalt oceanic crusts sink deeper into the underlying magma. Thus, any water under the crust would preferentially be located under the oceans.



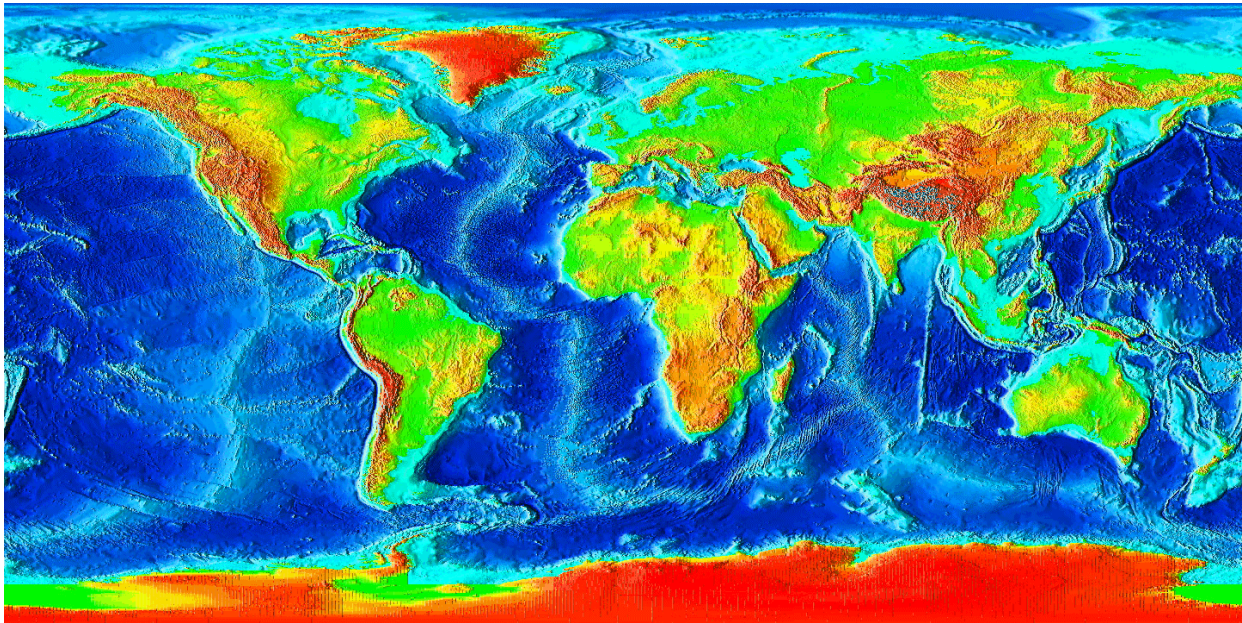
The earth's crust is much thinner under the ocean floors (5 - 12 km) than under the continents (35 km on average). Water saturated magma would collect above the Asthenosphere at the Mohorovic discontinuity.

The hydroplate theory posits that a large amount, about 1.5 million cubic miles, of water with twice the salinity of our current oceans was trapped in interconnected chambers that averaged about 5/8 mile thick and some 10 miles below the earth at the Moho level.

Earth's sedimentary geology is replete with evidence of shallow-water depositions. This is consistent with a pre-flood ocean basin profile that was much more shallow than at present. Fluctuations in global sea levels is demonstrated throughout the geologic column, but to extents that greatly exceed those caused by the formation and melting of polar caps. "Sea floor warping" and periodic accumulation then release of waters from supersaturated magma could account for such fluctuations.

The sudden release of tremendous pressure in the supersaturated magma below the crust from the loss of the water volatiles, would cause a relative cooling effect on the remaining magma body and resultant reduction in magma volume. At the same time the condensing steam, precipitation and build up of the ocean volumes would increase pressures on the sea floors. These two actions would cause the oceanic crust to sink to lower levels.

The following contour map of the earth's crust was produced by orbital radar measurements and clearly displays the mid-oceanic ridge system and the dramatic separation that occurred between the Americas and the European-African land masses at the time of the flood.



The sinking ocean basins would provide increased capacity for the oceans to receive additional runoff of the flood waters from the continents. Sea mount and Continental Shelf measurements indicate that sea levels today are about 1,000 meters higher than they were before the flood.

A postulated "Georeactor" at the Earth's core came out of a low activity cycle that had previously been carefully monitored and controlled by God Himself. (J. M. Herndon (2003) Nuclear georeactor origin of oceanic basalt  $^3\text{He}/^4\text{He}$ , evidence, and implications. Published on line before print March 3, 2003 in the American journal, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.) Without His personal supervision it now began generating higher than normal levels of heat energy. Increasing pressure in the subterranean water caused the crust to "balloon" out, stretching critical weak points along the mid-Atlantic ridge. Finally the crustal rock reaches its breaking point and a crack occurs in what is now the Atlantic oceanic crust, but was in pre-flood times just a thinner continental area that joined the thicker Americas and Afro-European continents. Mounting stresses propagated the crack north and south at the speed of sound in rock (about 2 miles per second). The pressure below drove large volumes of water upwards, ripping the crack into the "Fountains of the Deep" which roar out of the ten mile deep slit in the crust at supersonic speeds, into and above the atmosphere.

The subterranean pressures begin to drop and the geyser walls begin to wane, but lots of water continues to surge out the slit for days, inundating the earth and covering the modestly elevated pre-flood mountains. The force of the water eroded the continental shelf and underlying basalt to cause enormous surges of muddy sludge which quickly buried millions of plants and animals in huge shoals. Sediments increase until they are nearly equal in volume to the flood waters. "Liquification" of the sediment slurry takes over and hydraulic sorting arranges the dead animals and vegetation into layers according to size and mass as they settle out leaving the vast layers seen today in the geologic column.

Due to the kinetic energy from the compression of the weight of the continents, the water temperature is much higher and less dense than the colder water already accumulating in the future ocean basins. This hot water rises to the top and evaporates, leaving behind a heavy mineral content which supersaturates the lower water levels where the minerals settle out in a pasty salt layer that ultimately forms plumes to come the huge salt domes seen today.

With decreasing pressures, dissolved CO<sub>2</sub> from volcanic gas bubbles out combining with Ca ions and precipitating vast sheets of CaCO<sub>3</sub> or limestone. Limestone deposits hold more calcium than today's atmosphere, oceans, coal and oil deposits, and living matter combined. The surprising purity of most of these deposits demonstrate their formation through precipitation not by the slow accumulation of small marine organisms over eons of time.

Most vegetation is uprooted and floated to regions where it accumulated in vast quantities. Later during the continental drift phase this vegetation is rapidly covered and heated and turned to coal and oil.

### **Expanding Rock**

The original rupture of the earth's crust begins along a line which is now the Mid-Atlantic ridge. The continental edges were eroded during the geyser phase exposing underlying basalt. This rock had been compacted previously by the overlying continental structure forcing its crystalline structure to undergo a phase change resulting in a reduction of the rock's volume. Now with a release of pressure, the basalt experiences a reverse phase change and expands rapidly, upward and outward. A ripple effect propagates the expansion around the earth following the original path of the crustal fissure over a period of hours. Fracture zones and magnetic anomalies form in its wake.

The continents, riding on a lubricating layer of water that still remains between the plates and the underlying magma, begin to accelerate and move away from the mid-Atlantic up thrust.

'In some regions, the **high temperatures and pressures formed metamorphic rock**. Where this heat was intense, rock melted. This high pressure magma squirted up through cracks between broken blocks, producing other metamorphic rocks. Sometimes it escaped to the earth's surface **producing volcanic activity and "floods" of lava outpourings such as we see on the Columbia and Deccan Plateaus**. This was the beginning of the earth's volcano activity.' Brown, W., *In the Beginning*, p. 88

As the water film is finally depleted, the continental plates begin to make contact with the magmal surface. The massive inertia of the continent causes an enormous kinetic energy release of heat to form magma pools with buckling of the plate itself. This is most dramatic where the westward moving American plates and the eastward moving European plates collide with the upsurging mid Pacific ridge. Here the sudden and catastrophic halt of the plates cause massive upward and downward buckling along the leading edge to create the Pacific Ring of Fire and deep-sea trenches. The Indian plate slams into the Asian continent to form the Deccan uplift. Plate buckling and compressions occur everywhere to form new mountain ranges from the still wet sedimentary layers, pushing them up and out of the flood waters.

Magma from the pools forming beneath the leading edge of the plate is forced up into the fractured granite and cools into deposits like the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, the inner gorge of the Grand Canyon and the Yosemite valley formations.

Water runoff from the continents now begins to settle into the 6 to 8 mile deep but widening basin formed along the eroded edges of the plates and the original rupture line. The continental plates, now thickened and shortened from lateral compression, sink into the basalt floor and causing an uplift of the adjacent ocean floor. At the same time massive lakes formed on the uplifted continents begin to drain creating huge canyons in the ocean floors. Grand Lake and Hopi Lake, holding more water than is contained in all the Great Lakes, pour through a gap that becomes Marble Canyon to form the Grand Canyon. In modern times we witnessed the catastrophic formation of the Toutle Canyon following the eruption of Mount St Helen in 1980 through the same mechanism.

In other parts of the world, the Black Sea carves out the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles as it drains into the Mediterranean Lake which then empties into the much lower Atlantic basin forming a deep notch at the straits of Gibraltar. Deep V-shaped gorges in solid rock (now filled with ocean sediments and river muds) lay under



the Nile and Rhone Rivers, suggesting that these rivers were once great torrents of water surging into the empty Mediterranean basin. Other filled in gorges are also found around the world.

Deep earthquakes (200-450Km beneath the earth's surface) send shock waves created by the rapid phase transformation of many minerals that undergo a "packing" or "unpacking" of the atomic structure under intense pressure. Shallower earthquakes occur as the remaining trapped water seeps up into cracks in the plates allowing movement to take place.

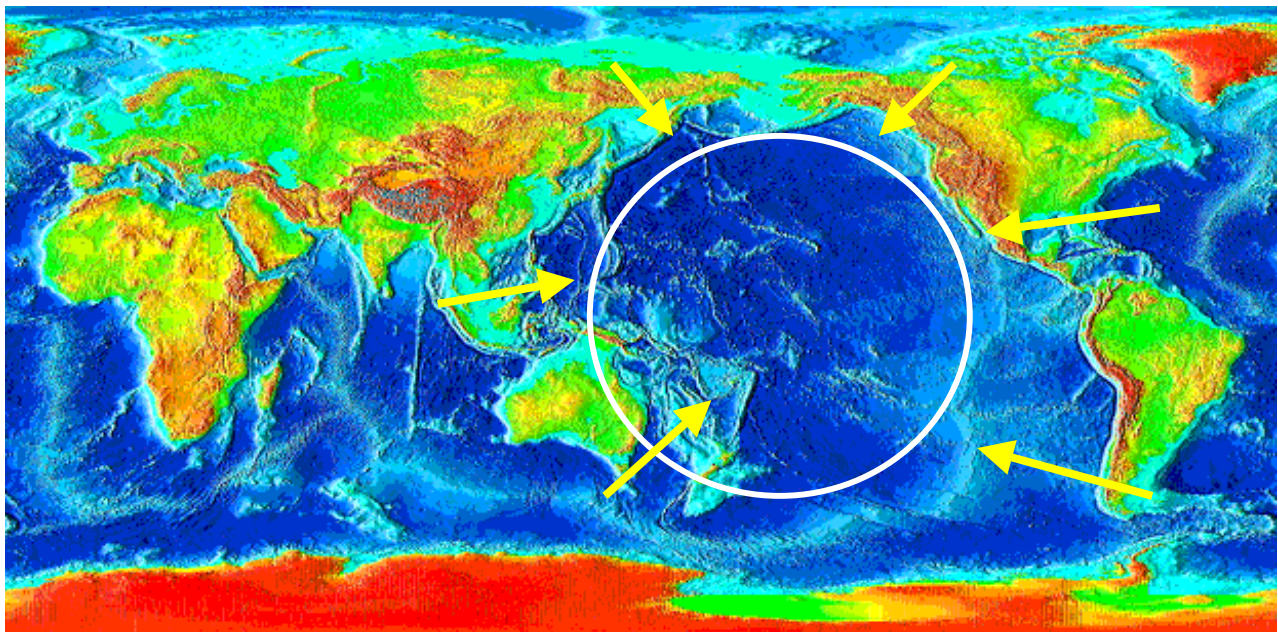
Frictional heating at the bases of the continental plates causes the remaining water to heat up the oceans and increase evaporation leading to heavy cloud cover and increased precipitation. Frictional heating along the leading edges of the moving plates also caused an increase in volcanism throwing massive amounts of ejecta into the upper atmosphere, blocking the sun and producing a "nuclear winter"

The Indonesian volcano of Krakatoa exploded in 1883 sending an ejecta of rock, dust and steam into the atmosphere to a height of 55 km. The explosion was so intense that it could be heard 4,600 km away. Dust fell at a distance of 5,327 km ten days after the explosion, and a tsunami tidal wave 30 meters high traveled right across the Indian Ocean at 720 km/h (McWhirter, N. (ed.), *Guinness Book of Records*, Guinness, London, p. 61, 1983).

Large temperature differences between the cool uplands and the warm ocean caused high winds carrying heavy moisture loads to the increased newly risen mountains producing heavy snowfall as much as 100 times today's snow burden.

Table mounts rise up from the ocean floors and are eroded by the wave action of the much lower ocean. Eventually the temperature differential between the land and the ocean moderates which ends the "Ice Age" and the glaciers begin to retreat, putting their water back into the ocean, bringing the oceans up to modern levels.

In the fracture zones, the fractures fill with sediment. Basalt contains magnetite and hematite that are strongly magnetic. At a Curie Point of 578<sup>0</sup> C the basalt loses its magnetic properties. The fractures, filled with sediment, circulate cool water down into them and pump it back out again as a "black smoker". **This cools the Basalt down past the Curie Point and causes magnetic intensities at the crack.** Exactly as seen today.



The Pacific Ocean basin represents a loss of one third of the Earth's crust either by impaction or extraction. The eastern margin is sharply demarcated by the American continental shelves while the western edge is obscured from the inflow of the heavily fragmented Austral-Asian land forms. The picture is one of gravitational slumping of continental plates toward the scarred face of the Pacific basin where a major portion of the crust appears to have been ripped from the face of the earth. This may well explain why the Pacific basin includes the deepest marine trenches in the world.

### Enough Water?

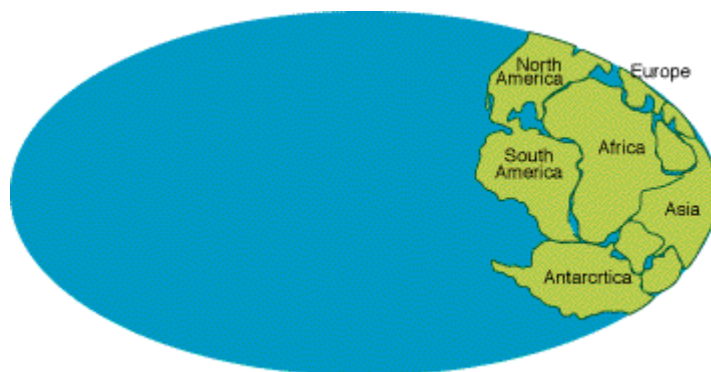
Though a water canopy is consistent as a source of rain and with the "windows of heaven" being opened, it is difficult to explain significant quantities of water on a global scale. More plausible is the position that torrential rain made a rather minor contribution to the total flood waters and was the result of climatic instability following other more cataclysmic processes.

One common argument against a world-wide flood claims that inundating the entire antediluvian landscape with enough water to cover Mt. Everest is just impossible. Mount Everest is presently at a height of 29,028 feet, about 5½ miles, above sea level.

This assumes that the pre-flood topography was the same as what we observe today. However, it is quite apparent that our planet's present mountains have experienced considerable uplifting from lateral plate collisions *since* the deposition of their overlying sedimentary layers. With a more normalized crustal contour prior to the flood, there were not the dramatic extremes of elevation we experience today. Even limiting the total flood waters to those presently contained within the existing oceans there is quite an adequate supply to do the job.

Our planet has a surprising amount of surface water. There are 326,000,000,000,000,000 gallons (326 million trillion gallons,  $2 \times 10^9 \text{ km}^3$  or  $340 \times 10^6$  cubic miles) of water on our planet. Most of Earth's "free" water is in the oceans. But even more water is contained in the rocky crust of Earth, all together there is enough to cover the whole surface with a layer about 2.5 km deep. Another 50 meters of water is currently stored in the major ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica.

Earth is unique within our own solar system, having so much more water than any other celestial body that it is called "the water planet." Nearly 98% of all this water is in the oceans. 71% of the world's surface (140 million square miles) is covered with water. If you could clump all the land masses together, it would leave this much water to cover the surface:



The deepest point in the oceans is the Marianas Trench in the Western Pacific at 36,198 feet, about 10,000 feet deeper than Mount Everest is high. The Pacific Ocean is about two miles deep on average and all oceans taken together have an average depth of 12,200 feet (a mean depth of 3,800 meters), while the mean elevation of all land above sea level is only 840 meters or less than a mile. This demonstrates the fact that if one bulldozed all the continents into the ocean depths, the earth would be entirely covered by about a mile of water.

## Great Changes

Isaiah in the Old Testament and Peter in the New point to the Flood as the great change affecting the world.

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment.” 2 Peter 3:3-7

Peter divides history into the antediluvian “world that then was” and the post-diluvian “earth which now is.” But notice that he also includes the heavens as participating in this change (not the starry heavens or the heaven of God’s throne) as the atmospheric heavens are part of earth and were thus affected by man’s sin. Once again, in Isaiah, God repeats the promise to remove the long lasting effects of the flood in the earth made new:

“Your sun shall no more go down; neither shall your moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.” Isaiah 60:20.

We use the expressing “when the sun goes down” and “sun set” to indicate the close of day and the beginning of night. In actual fact, the sun does not actually go down below the horizon; rather, the earth rotates on its axis, and we go down, or around or behind or below the horizon. Then what would be so special about preventing the sun from “going down?” It would be of little benefit to perpetually fix the sun in the sky for the opposite side of the earth; there it would remain in perpetual darkness. The real meaning of Isaiah 60:20 must be linked with Isaiah 30:26. Yes, in the new earth the sun *will* still appear to move across the sky and sink below the horizon, but it’s brilliance and energy output will be forever constant: it’s thermal radiance will not go down, will not drop, will not wane as it did at the time of the flood. Now, *that’s* a promise worth something.

Also notice that the Lord’s promise here in Isaiah 60 is not simply that the sun’s energy levels will not fluctuate, but that they will not do so every *again*. “Your sun shall *no more* go down.” If it is to happen no more, then it must have happened already. Therefore, this verse along with Isaiah 30 and 2 Peter 3 are all directly referring to the great change which occurring in our solar system, in both the heavens and the earth, when the sun went down in intensity and the sun withdrew itself altogether. Consequently, the world “that then was” was very different from the “heavens and the earth, which are now.”

There is no contention over God’s ability to destroy the earth by flood or earthquake or fire or whatever. The controversy is over whether He would use His infinite powers in this way. The evidence is that while God has the power to destroy, He does not because He is bound by immutable principles of righteousness not to use His powers in that way. We can only praise the excellence of character which, while equipped with infinite might and pressed under the severest provocation, does not retaliate. That is righteousness at its beautiful best.



## The Great Contest

The etiology of sin, in the very midst of heaven, with the rise of Lucifer's opposition to God, His principles, His law, and the divine response to this terrible rebellion was not a struggle to prove who was physically stronger. Lucifer never challenged this. Had that been the issue then God could have promptly resolved it. He would not have needed to wait almost 2,000 years to bring a world wide flood to prove His superiority. The contest was over the respective merits of two opposing and irreconcilable systems of government: one long established by God versus one newly espoused by Satan.

God declared that His system was perfect, needed no modifications or improvements and guaranteed for those who faithfully respected it, the permanence of eternal life and prosperity. Satan claimed that the divine order was no longer effective, moreover it was actually a sinister plot formulated for the express exaltation of the Father and Son. Satan predicted that an oppressive era was about to be introduced which would accelerate in severity throughout eternity, and confidently declared that the future would clearly reveal the defects of the divine system. He challenged every member of the angelic host to stand for themselves and assert their rights before falling into irreversible bondage.

The question was raised. Would the established ways of God's government emerge impeccably from the most searching scrutiny which Satan could subject it or would it be shown to be faulty and defective? God was confident. He had no hesitation in submitting to the ultimate test. Let the devil attack. Let him use all the weapons of force and deception. God knew that His system would emerge immaculate, vindicated, and perfect. This earth became the theater of operations. But a clear distinction must be seen between the strength of God's principles and the personal power of God Himself. God's principles are under test; they must stand or fall on their own merits. Should the Lord find it necessary to use omnipotent power to win the contest, then He would be departing from His original commitment. It would be an automatic admission that His principles are indeed defective and were insufficient to stand by under their own intrinsic virtues. Satan would win by concession.

But as time passed and men began to multiply upon the face of the earth, things went from bad to worse for God's cause. Continually, in increasing numbers, the inhabitants of earth were joining Satan's side. Finally, God could account for only eight within His ranks. It was desperately important to God that the situation not be allowed to continue to the point where there was no one left on the side of Good for, essential to the ultimate success of His plan, was the birth of the Redeemer through the righteous line, the "Seed of the woman."

The Redeemer was absolutely necessary. The only successful way to solve a problem is to remove its cause. It is a mistake to limit the solution to simply removing sin from those who will be saved, while the rest are left to their annihilation. The problem with sin will not be solved until the cause of sin has been removed from the mind of every creature who has ever lived—including all those who will, in the end, be eternally lost. And the cause of sin is the misrepresentation of God's character. As long as that misconception remains in the minds of men or angels, the rebellion will continue. Therefore, to end it, the misconception must be corrected. But it can't be corrected merely by a statement on God's part and certainly not by the use of force. The only way the distorted ideas, the lies about God can be corrected is to manifest the truth about God, to demonstrate the true character of God by One Who is equal with God in the thick of battle, on this planet as a human being.

Knowing this, Satan's strategy was to win as many human beings to his side as possible and exterminate the rest. Success with this game plan would deprive God of the means whereby Christ could enter the earthly arena and make His demonstration of truth. Never did Satan come so close to absolute success than just prior to the flood. God saw His forces of loyal followers dwindle to a doubtful eight while the devil numbered millions. With the future of His entire kingdom throughout the reaches of infinite universe at stake, God was under enormous pressure to step in and take direct and decisive action to save the situation from total and eternal disaster.

The popular view of the flood is that God viewed with growing dismay the deterioration of His situation, held out until the last possible moment and then succumbed to unavoidable pressure. Popular theology asserts that the Lord found Himself obliged to resort to the use of His limitless powers, step in and completely wiped out Satan's forces by drowning every last individual, and so thoroughly curbing the advancement of Satan's cause.



Should God at the last moment resort to the use of destructive power to wipe out the efforts of His competitor, then no one will believe in Him. He would be literally giving the case way to Satan. Satan could rightfully complain that he never had any real chance of proving anything. God would have no defense against this argument and it would actually serve to increase the spirit of rebellion in the universe. No fair minded person would stand on God's side once these issues were clearly understood.

But God did not send the flood to obliterate Satan's forces. In fact, He had done His very best to keep the flood from coming for as long as He possible could.

When it finally came, it was not because He had sent it, but because He could no longer prevent it.

The solution to the moral dilemma presented by the flood story lay in the application of two principles:

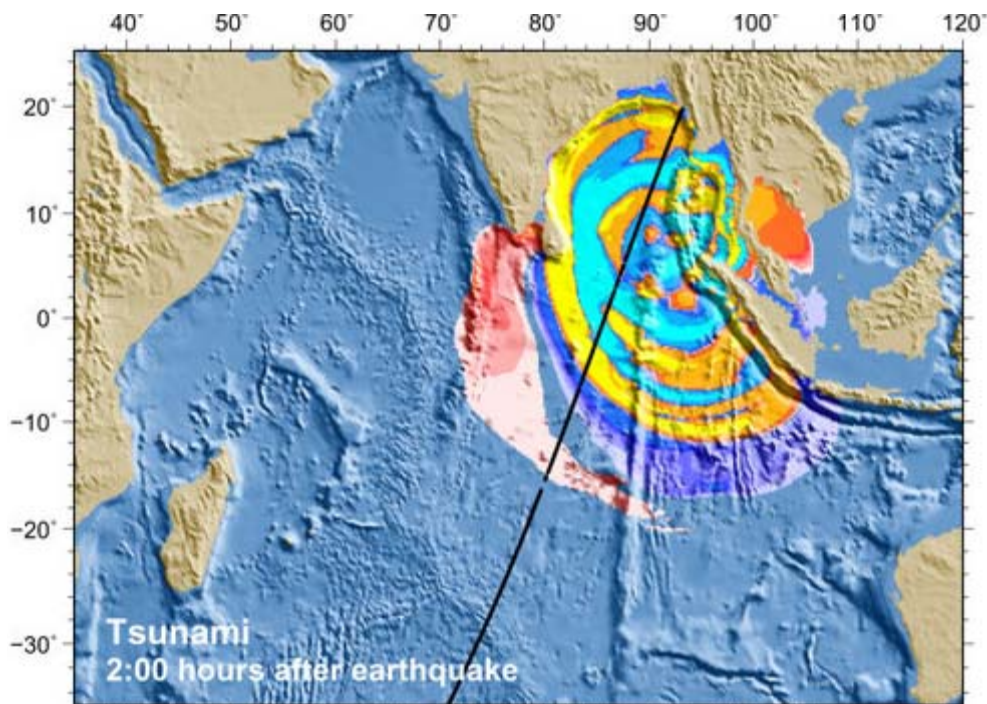
1. God will never force His presence where it is not desired
2. Every power in nature is directly and continually dependent on God's creative power to keep it under control.

The sun, the moon, and other planets and comets within the solar system were all critical factors in the initiation of the flood. They were dependent on the presence of God's power to keep them burning at exactly the correct heat level, stationed at the proper distance from earth, and orbiting within save distances from each other. Under Satan's determination and relentless influence, men increasingly desired total separation from God. God, knowing the dreadful consequences of such a course, sent message after message pleading with them to correct their misdirected ideas, but they insisted on His departure. Because He will never force His presence where it is not desired, He had no choice but to depart. In doing so, He gave them what they wanted.

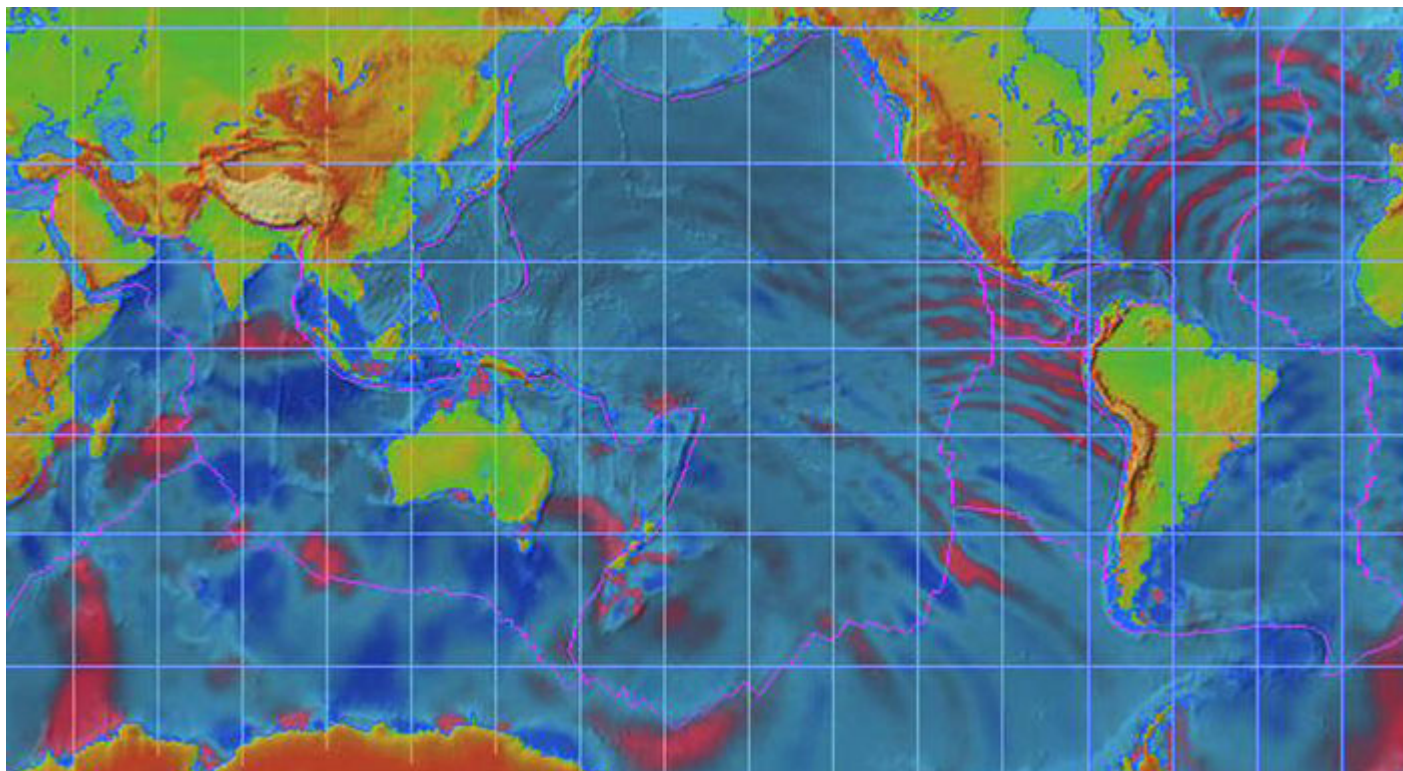


## Sodom and Gomorrah

It was one minute before 8 O'clock in the morning, the day after Christmas, 2004. A rare 9.1 underwater earthquake shook 30 km beneath the Indian Ocean 160 km off the western coast of northern Sumatra, Indonesia. The unusually long 1200 km fault line slipped 10-15 meters laterally and 5 meters vertically, releasing the energy equivalent of from 0.25-0.8 gigatons of TNT, sending a massive tremor that lasted 10



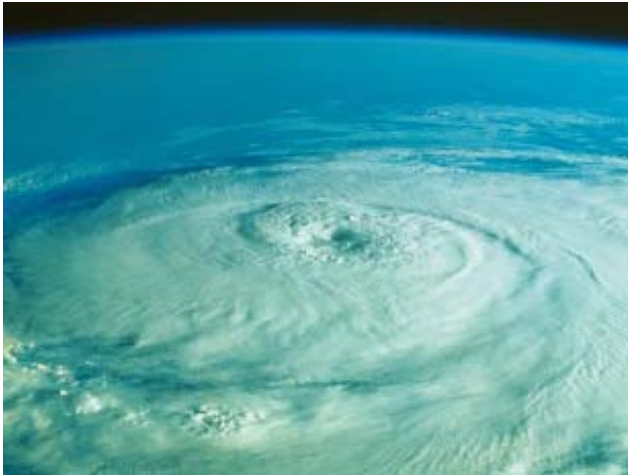
minutes, moving the entire Earth's surface vertically by up to 1 cm, and sending shock waves that were felt from Bangladesh to Singapore to Oklahoma. GPS measurements demonstrated that Sumatra itself and a number of nearby islands moved from 20-36 meters away from their former locations. The shift in mass increased the rate of Earth's rotation and shortened the length of a day by 2.68 microseconds by decreasing the oblateness of the planet. The rupture raised the sea bed several meters, creating large thrust ridges up to 1,500 meters high and displacing an estimated 30 km<sup>3</sup> of water to trigger the deadly tsunami with waves reaching 30 meters



high that crashed minutes later into the coastlines of Thailand, India, Sri Lanka and east Africa and observed as far away as Mexico, Chile and Antarctica. More than 300,000 lives perished in the wake of the greatest disaster of modern times.

The response from around the world was immediate. One sage in India said the quake was “God’s fury unleashed...because of our sins of this age of indiscipline and hedonism...When you ridicule the God, it hurts Him and the sigh He heaves unleashes destruction like this.” Others claimed it was a “sign of retribution against Christians” since its occurrence one day after Christmas “wasn’t mere coincidence.” The Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas believed it to be a harbinger of the Great Day of Judgment aimed especially at the 20,000 Swedish homosexuals and pedophiles who were vacationing in the area “thereby incurring God’s irreversible wrath...Have you ever heard of the great flood? Have you ever heard of Sodom and Gomorrah?”

Sadly, such comments from Christians have lead many to conclude that God is bipolar. “One minute He’s loving and merciful and the next He’s angry and wiping thousands of people off the map.”



And then there was Katrina. August 27, 2005 New Orleans was in the bull’s eye of the Category 5 hurricane. When Katrina put an end to the annual celebration of sin known as the “Southern Decadence” celebration with its planned attendance of over 150,000 gay and lesbians famous for engaging in sexual acts in the public streets, many were quick to identify the worst natural disaster in American history as “a modern day divine judgment similar to that inflicted upon Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Why do these two “cities of the plain” get such bad press? Was their infamous reputation more deserving of such proverbial status in the Devil’s Hall of Fame than that Icon

of wickedness, Las Vegas, the self-proclaimed “Sin City?” More importantly, is God culpable for the cataclysmic devastations of the Sumatran Tsunami, Katrina, Sodom and Gomorrah?

The Scriptures report the destruction of these two cities and their occupants in the very same way in which all other destructions which fell upon abandoned sinners are described:

“Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven: and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.” Genesis 19:24, 25.

To millions of Bible readers, these words appear to picture God as personally pouring great sheets of flame from His own hands upon the helpless victims below. But, those who have come to learn and accept the principles of God’s character as we are exploring here and have learned to use the Bible as its own dictionary, know that such an interpretation is fully unfounded. Rather, the true Biblical interpretation of these words is that the Lord had no option but to withdraw and leave the stubborn and rebellious to the fate they had chosen. But this He did only after completely exhausting every means of appeal and there was nothing more He could do. Then, whatever potential for destruction already in the area was released, the result was inevitable.

Suppose, however, (only for a moment please) that a certain kind of God would actually pour the fire personally upon the dwellers of the plain. Death by fire is one of the cruelest and most feared. When both twin towers of the World Trade Center were attacked on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001, many hundreds of victims were trapped in the upper stories above the impact zone and the ensuing fire level. Cut off with no way of escape, the world watched in horror as many chose to leap to the death from the doomed upper levels rather than face the hungry flames. Death by burning would only be imposed as a sentence upon those whom a judge wished to suffer as much as possible.



Picture the scene when the consuming flames first fell upon those cities of the plain. Scripture tells us that “when the morning arose,” Lot and his family were hurried out of the city and, as soon as they were clear, the destruction fell in flaming torrents. It was an early morning conflagration.

The sun was just beginning to rise in the sky. The family is astir. Breakfast is on the table and mother is busily bathing and dressing the young children. Suddenly the ordinary noises coming from the street are exchanged for frantic cries of alarm and then terrible agony. The golden glow of the morning is changed to fiery orange and red. Father and mother glance with fearful apprehension through the window and see an appalling spectacle. Fire is running like a river down the street engulfing victims in its path who fall writhing and twisting in searing agony. Their son rushes into the house screaming with clothes and hair burning like a torch. He flings his body into his mother’s recoiling arms. Within the house, there is protection for only a short time. The flames are consuming the timbers, licking their way through doors and windows, reaching out for the trapped ones inside. They retreat to an inner room, but though it provides them moments longer to live, it makes the end more agonizing. Steadily and quickly, the temperature soars until the room becomes an oven in which they are slowly but terribly baked alive. Their clothes ignite and burst into flame. As they tear them off, their flesh comes away in great sheets and the stench of cooking flesh chokes the air. When the flames at last break through the walls they are already dead, lying naked, in twisted, bloated, horrible postures with grim expressions of extreme suffering frozen on their faces.



It is not a pleasant scene to contemplate. It would have been far worse to behold. Yet visualization is necessary for us to comprehend that no God of mercy, justice, and love would ever inflict such a death personally and deliberately upon anyone. If God poured the fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, it could only be because it was in Him to do it; it would have to be a part of His character, a spirit of cruelty by which He is motivated to select the cruelest possible death for those who refuse to obey Him. But that is not God’s character. He is not sadistic and revengeful.

It is no coincidence, however, that this very kind of capital punishment was the preferred form of torture and death administered by the papacy during its zenith of power. It was the church’s practice to burn at the stake those who refused to submit to her assumed authority. If the papacy had been in God’s position at the time of Abraham, she would have behaved as God supposedly behaved, and committed the souls of the Sodomites to the cleansing fires, administering the will of God as she believes He would do it.

It is with horror and repulsion that we read of the papal practice of burning its heretic victims to death. Yet a surprising number of civilized professedly Christian people concur with the ancient judgment as an act of God and would approve of a repeat performance aimed at any number of modern cities. But while God may be forced at times of ultimate rebellion to allow the destruction of His creatures, we should be very careful about blaming Him for it.

The ultimate witness to God’s character is found in those who have drawn so near to Him as to possess His character. Such a person cannot be brought to take up any weapon of destruction against anyone, not even their very worst enemies. They would much rather die themselves than take the life of another. That is the example of the life of Christ. He would rather die Himself than require that the life of another be taken. It was the ultimate example of turning the other cheek. A God who counseled this kind of behavior as the reflection of His own, could never pour fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. He did just what He did on every other occasion. He did not “stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He” left “the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.” *Great Controversy*, p. 36.



Then how were these cities destroyed? Careful examination of all the information available must begin with a determination of their original location. Most scholars agree that the cities now lie beneath the waters of the southern end of the Dead Sea. Zoar, one of the 5 cities of the plain mentioned in Genesis 14:2, was located at the southern end of the Dead Sea during the time of Christ.

A number of streams enter the southern part of the Dead Sea from the east, a region that is still very fertile. This suggests that the valley in this area was once the exceptionally fertile plain that drew Lot's attention. Higher on the hillside of the southeast side of the Dead Sea, Kyle and Albright discovered an elaborate archeological site dated to 1800 BC suggesting a large temple area that could have once accommodated a large population.

Genesis 14:3 suggests that the 'vale of Siddim' where the cities were located is associated with the 'salt sea.' The northern two-thirds of the present Dead Sea reaches a depth of 1,328 feet while the depth of the southern portion nowhere exceeds 16 feet. Submerged trees protrude above the surface in this area indicating that the water level in the southern third has risen only in relatively recent times. Furthermore, asphalt naturally occurs along the southern end of the Dead Sea. The Vale of Siddim is said to have been 'full of slimepits' or as the RSV renders them, 'bitumen pits' (Genesis 14:10). Bitumen or asphalt still erupts from the bottom in this area and frequently floats to the shore. This correlates with references from ancient sources that named the Dead Sea as Lake Asphaltites because of the "semisolid petroleum washed up on its shores." Encyclopedia Britannica 1975, 14:165. Some of the largest floatsum are massive enough to support several persons.

The ancient geographer Strabo (*Geogr.* xvi. 2. 42-44), classical authors, Diodorus Siculus (ii. 48. 7-9), Tacitus (*Hist.* v. 6, 7), and Josephus (*War* iv. 8. 4), all describe the area just south of the Dead Sea (presumably now covered by the rising waters) as scorched by a fiery catastrophe that destroyed several cities whose burned remains were still visible in their day. Cf Deuteronomy 29:23.

Today, geologists have located oil reserves and natural gas deep below the southern end of the Dead Sea. Inflammable gasses still escape from rock crevices in the area. This same area also experiences frequent earthquakes. A local rock salt formation along the southwestern shore is named *Jebel Usdum*, the 'Mount of Sodom.' The heavy mineral deposits here have been capitalized by the Israelis who have established potash and sulphur extraction plants on the same southwestern shore.



The combination of petroleum deposits, natural gas, sulphur, potash (sodium and potassium nitrates) are dangerous natural ingredients with significant explosive potential. Coal and oil are the products of buried forests and mass graves deposited, compressed, petrified and liquified under the pressure of heavy sediments laid down during the flood. The evidence clearly indicates that Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain were located directly over a powder keg, a disaster just waiting to happen.

But the Lord desired their salvation. Fearful of the risks to which they were exposed, He performed His role as Protector of the wicked cities, while His Spirit pleaded with them to repent and escape. But, as they continued in stubborn self-confidence of their sinful lifestyle, the time finally came when the protecting Presence which had been holding the seething elements in check, was forced to withdraw and leave them exposed to the dangers below. Long restrained, the pressures had mounted to tremendous levels. Now released, they exploded in one spectacular, all-consuming fireball of destruction.

Once again, the terrible conflagration came, not because the Lord sent it, but because He could no longer hold it back. There was no one the Sodomites could blame for their destruction but themselves.

This was not a singular event unique to Sodom and Gomorrah. A modern counterpart was demonstrated in the destruction of St. Pierre, on the morning of May 8, 1902. It was on that date that this town on the lush West Indies island of Martinique abruptly died. At exactly 7:50 AM, 4,583-foot Mont Pelee, a dormant volcano, erupted in one of the world's most cataclysmic explosions. The entire French-held island of Martinique shuddered from the massive jolt. From the yawning mouth of the volcano, a huge black column of superheated air and gas emerged, forming a clastic flow that rolled down the sloping side of the mountain like a monstrous tumbleweed. In its path, at the foot of the mountain, lay the harbor town of St. Pierre. Within seconds the cloud swept over the city. Street by street, buildings instantly burst into flame turning people running through the streets into human torches. The hideous black ball (later estimated to have reached 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit) quickly reduced the town to smoldering ashes. Only two people survived the fiery devastation. The rest of the populace—more than 30,000—died. Elapsed time from the moment of eruption to extinction was less than two minutes. (Modified from *Nature at War*, Hal Butler, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1976, pp. 131, 132).

The similarities between St. Pierre and Sodom are impressive. Both were located in an area of intense volcanic and earthquake activity and both were suddenly overcome by the descent of fire of such ferocity and intensity that it obliterated everything and everyone. Only three survived Sodom; only two escaped from St. Pierre. And both were centers of unbridled wickedness.



In 1902, St. Pierre was the glittering center of social activity known as the 'little Paris of the West.' The two mile strip of shoreline at the city center was bejeweled with brightly colored stucco homes and red-tiled roofs that jumped out in front of the lush green mountain slopes framing a backdrop behind the fabulous paradise of the Caribbean. Its major industry was a rum distillery funding a line of banks, stores, cafes, a theater, nightclubs, emporiums, and even "a stately Catholic cathedral"—fully equipped "to cater both to the soul and the gratification of the flesh."

The French colonists owned plantations of tobacco, coffee, cocoa and sugarcane for all the rum and lived in ostentatious villas in the mountains where they could relax sipping cognac. This wealthy segment of Martinique's elite represented one fourth of the city's population. Life in Sodom was similar. The balmy climate and abundant wealth fed an unquenchable craving for entertainment and a wild, exciting life that reached a fever pitch of unrestrained rejection of God. Yet Sodom was not irreligious. Worship of the sun god was the devoted spiritual exercise of the day. The Roman religion which dominated the spiritual life of St. Pierre also promotes the Sun day, the modern counterpart of ancient sun-worship, and its policy of human confessionals, indulgences and penance have made it the spawning ground for every type of legitimized sin.

St. Pierre, then, provides a splendid illustration of the demise of Sodom and Gomorrah. God acted exactly the same in both the ancient and the modern situation. He left the rejecters of His mercy to themselves to reap that which they had sown. A wide variety of destructive modalities befell the wicked. There are those who, as in the cases of Sodom, Gomorrah, and St. Pierre, are wiped out by volcanic eruptions, while others are taken by earthquake, hurricane, hailstorm, accidents at sea, on land, in the air, fires, famine, flood and the savage outbursts of human passion. And besides this, there is a wide range of severity experienced by the victims of destruction.

Too often there is a great disparity between the deserving and the innocent. Ruthless, power-hungry dictators, suicidal terrorists and violent criminals quickly go out in a “blaze of glory” while common sinners have lingering deaths tortured with intense suffering. The cities of the world allow every human perversion to flourish and corruption to prosper under the apparent patronage and protection of God Himself. Then disaster strikes a poor, third world country with merciless ferocity and thousands of peasants perish.

Where is justice? It is turned on its head. If this is the decree and work of God, He is a strange God indeed. But this cannot be. We know that our Creator is absolutely just and fair and strictly impartial. He never excuses one nor favors another. If God were administering these punishments through natural disasters then the penalty would be exacted according to the offence. The very fact that it is not, is clear proof that these situations are not the result of God’s handiwork. The nature and location of catastrophes are clear proof that they are not the work of God. Where disaster strikes has more to do with the location of potential forces established during the flood than any decision of God. But those who live in these danger zones, by their impenitent lifestyles grieve away the shield of omnipotence and expose themselves to the killer storms, the earthquakes, fires, floods, eruptions and whatever else is poised to obliterate them. As the withdrawal of God’s presence becomes more extensive, the uncaged powers of nature are reaching out to waste areas previously untouched. At the end of time, this will become fully universal.

## Execution

Though the flood was the first occasion when nature, out of God's control, broke into cataclysmic fury on the human race, it was certainly not the last. A long list of judgments followed: the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt, the drowning of Pharaoh's army, invasion of the fiery serpents, the swallowing of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in an earthquake, the destruction of Jericho, Joshua's hailstorm, the death of Sennacherib's army, the fire which consumed the men who came to take Elijah captive, etc, etc, etc.

We have already seen how the principle of God's judgment has been applied to the first few of these examples. The remaining episodes should be no different. But there are other occasions, different in many respects, where God's actions are most difficult to understand. These are the times when God commanded the Israelites to slay utterly, men and women, old and young, children and infants and even all the livestock. For example, the execution of the defiant worshipers of the golden calf, the genocide of the Amalekites, and the extermination of the Canaanites were all performed in obedience to God's direct command. It would appear that here, at least, God did act the role of a destroyer.

But when these incidents are correctly understood, it will be found that God has not subverted His code of ethics and bend the rules to meet an emergency. Rather, He has acted, even here, with impeccable consistency. However, the only way we can arrive at any satisfactory solution to this problem is to reaffirm the conviction that there are no contradictions in the Word of God and to maintain complete confidence in His consistency.

### Horrible Horeb

“And [Moses] said unto them, Thus says the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.” Exodus 32:27, 28

“Those who performed this terrible work of judgment were acting by divine authority, executing the sentence of the King of heaven. Men are to beware how they, in their human blindness, judge and condemn their fellow-men; but when God commands them to execute His sentence upon iniquity, He is to be obeyed. Those who performed this painful act, thus manifested their abhorrence of rebellion and idolatry, and consecrated themselves more fully to the service of the true God. The Lord honored their faithfulness by bestowing special distinction upon the tribe of Levi.

“The Israelites had been guilty of treason, and that against a King who had loaded them with benefits, and whose authority they had voluntarily pledged themselves to obey. That the divine government might be maintained justice must be visited upon the traitors. Yet even here God's mercy was displayed. While He maintained His law, He granted freedom of choice and opportunity for repentance to all. Only those were cut off who persisted in rebellion.

“It was necessary that this sin should be punished, as a testimony to surrounding nations of God's displeasure against idolatry. By executing justice upon the guilty, Moses, as God's instrument, must leave on record a solemn and public protest against their crime. As the Israelites should hereafter condemn the idolatry of the neighboring tribes, their enemies would throw back upon them the charge that the people who claimed Jehovah as their God had made a calf and worshiped it in Horeb. Then though compelled to acknowledge the disgraceful truth, Israel could point to the terrible fate of the transgressors, as evidence that their sin had not been sanctioned or excused.

“Love no less than justice demanded that for this sin judgment should be inflicted. God is the guardian as well as the sovereign of His people. He cuts off those who are determined upon rebellion, that they may not lead others to ruin. In sparing the life of Cain, God had demonstrated to the universe what would be the result of permitting sin to go unpunished. The influence exerted upon his descendants by his life and teaching led to the state of corruption that demanded the destruction of the whole world by a flood. The history of the antediluvians testifies

that long life is not a blessing to the sinner; God's great forbearance did not repress their wickedness. The longer men lived, the more corrupt they became.

“So with the apostasy at Sinai. Unless punishment had been speedily visited upon transgression, the same results would again have been seen. The earth would have become as corrupt as in the days of Noah. Had these transgressors been spared, evils would have followed, greater than resulted from sparing the life of Cain. It was the mercy of God that thousands should suffer, to prevent the necessity of visiting judgments upon millions. In order to save the many, He must punish the few. Furthermore, as the people had cast off their allegiance to God, they had forfeited the divine protection, and, deprived of their defense, the whole nation was exposed to the power of their enemies. Had not the evil been promptly put away, they would soon have fallen prey to their numerous and powerful foes. It was necessary for the good of Israel, and also as a lesson to all succeeding generations, that crime should be promptly punished. And it was no less a mercy to the sinners themselves that they should be cut short in their evil course. Had their life been spared, the same spirit that led them to rebel against God would have been manifested in hatred and strife among themselves, and they would eventually have destroyed one another. It was in love to the world, in love to Israel, and even to the transgressors, that crime was punished with swift and terrible severity.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp.324-326.

Two observations must be made at this point. First, the problem was one of persistent and determined rebellion, and incurable because the rebels refused to repent of their behavior. Secondly, the insurrection was overcome by force at the hands of the Levites, with sword in hand, as they slaughtered the rebels. But this occasion was critically different from previous situations because God ordered the execution. The sinners were not simply left to themselves to reap that which they had sown. Rather, a direct sentence was pronounced and summarily carried out.

It would appear that this is an exception to the principles of God's policy in dealing with sin and sinners. God has declared that He will not overcome rebellion by force, yet here He directed that force should be employed. He has previously claimed to leave the sinners to themselves to reap what they have sown, but He certainly did not do that in this instance.

### **The Swords**

The answer to this question is to be found in the source of the swords. Where did they come from and when? The tragic introduction of these weapons to the children of Israel seriously changed their relationship with their divine Leader. It initiated the institution of human policy and procedures in place of God's. Israel made the choice, not Jehovah. Therefore, once they made their decision, He could not and did not compel them to discard it. All the Lord could do was to labor to save them from the worst effects of what they had elected to do.

They should have remembered the witness of their father Israel for whom they were named. The lesson was a distinct parallel between Jacob's situation, when he was a prisoner of his scheming uncle, and their release from Egyptian bondage. Jacob left without a word and it took Laban seven days to catch up with him. Determined to bring his son-in-law back, he pursued after the fugitives with his temper seething. “He was hot with anger, and bent on forcing them to return.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.193.

But Jacob, while knowing full well that he was being chased, made no attempt to arm his servants or prepare for physical combat. He put his entire trust in God as his Protector. So effective was the Lord in this role that Laban not only didn't force Jacob's little band to return, but ended up blessing him!

This peril gone, Jacob now faced the great threat of Esau who was approaching with 600 warriors. Esau was determined to prevent his twin brother from returning to dispossess him of their father's wealth. His intention was to slaughter Jacob and his family and thus assure his security.

Jacob had two different options: resort to powerful weapons and physically defend himself, arm and train his servants or continue to depend on God for protection and deliverance. He understood that the use of force is not God's way. Instead he continued without deviation to rely on the Lord, placing his entire confidence in the



assurance that God would faithfully fulfill His promise to protect him and his entourage. But on the night before the expected encounter, Jacob turned to prayer, deeply concerned (not that God would lack the power to deliver him) but that his sin if unconfessed would obstruct God's work and leave him exposed to his enemy.

God did protect Jacob, but not by forcing Esau to leave his brother unmolested. Instead He sent an angel to reveal to him Jacob's true character, his sufferings, his spirit, and his honest intentions. Esau awoke to a new understanding of his brother and realized that he was not a threat. Sympathy replaced his rage and when they finally met, the two embraced in loving acceptance of each other.

This was the great experience of Jacob, a lesson worthy of emphasis. Whenever the children of Israel left to God the task of protecting them, not one of them lost their lives or suffered injury. But when they went forth in the might of their own strength, when they took up the sword, there was nearly always the loss of life and in some cases heavy casualties. Jacob's experience speaks an everlasting message which should never be forgotten.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed,  
and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;  
Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,  
though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.” Psalm 46:1-3

The great controversy is not between us and Satan, but between Christ and Satan. We are powerless to overcome the enemy. God alone can do that. Our task is to leave Him to do what He has promised. The victory is ours as a gift which is demonstrated in the wonderful experience of Jacob. For him to see the Lord's salvation was much more wonderful than a victory gained by the sword at the cost many lives, sons and servants. Through this experience, God intended to teach the Israelites a perpetual lesson of the security available to them if they committed the keeping of their lives to Him.

As the time of the Exodus approached, God prepared Moses to fulfill His plan for Israel's deliverance. Thoroughly trained in the courts of Egypt, Moses proved himself to be a brilliant tactician and a natural leader. Naturally, he expected that the Lord would deliver his people through a military campaign and saw in his position as a prince of Egypt the hand of divine providence. But it is significant that God made no use of this military training, for not once did Moses lead the armies of Israel into battle. During the reign of sorrow as the plagues fell on Egypt, the Israelites had no part to play other than to simply let the Lord intervene for them.



When the time came to leave the land of slavery, they went out “unarmed and unaccustomed to war.” *Patarchs and Prophets* p. 282. Like their father Jacob, they were to return to the promised land an unarmed people, trusting God entirely for their protection. But Pharaoh, heavily armed and in full battle array, charged after them with the goal of forcing them

back to Egypt. When the army charged into the dry sea bed and between the towering walls of water it was a terrible act of presumption. Pharaoh had deliberately and defiantly rejected the Spirit of God. Now he dared to enter the circle of divine protection that sheltered Israel through the Red Sea. The Spirit had no choice but to retreat as the army advanced, and unable to maintain their position, the waters rushed back drowning them all.

“As morning broke, it revealed to the multitudes of Israel all that remained of their mighty foes—mail-clad bodies cast upon the shore.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 287.



While the Lord made it absolutely clear that Israel was not to arm themselves as they departed Egypt, He did not make it impossible for them to do so. The issue involved whether God would continue in his role as their sole Protector or whether they would take this grave responsibility into their own hands. Would they maintain implicit trust in God or prefer confidence in their own fighting abilities. The weapons were there for the taking—and they took them.

There are no direct records confirming their collection of these implements of war, the tools of battle, the Egyptian armour and weapons scattered along the shore. But there is much evidence that strongly suggests it. They approached, crossed, and emerged from the Red Sea with nothing but shepherds staves in their hands. Shortly thereafter they engaged the fierce Amalekites with a lot more than just sticks and stones.

The only way they could have become so well equipped was to have salvaged all that Egyptian weaponry that had washed ashore at the Red Sea. What makes their decision so significant is that God had just spoken to them in the most thrilling and convincing demonstration of His ability and willingness to defend them from their worst enemy according to the principles of eternal righteousness. With a God like that what need did they have of weapons? To lay hands on them in such a setting was totally inexcusable, highly irresponsible, and a tragic failure on the part of Israel. It prevented the nation from giving a true representation of God’s character and eventually led to their final dismissal as the channel of God’s mercy to the world.

“The Lord had never commanded them to ‘go up and fight.’ It was not His purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict obedience to His commands.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 392.

It was not God’s purpose because it is not His method. The use of force is exclusive to the kingdom of Satan. It has no part in God’s order. But the human mind finds great difficulty in understanding how a vicious, warring nation can be dispossessed without using force. Israel couldn’t accept it either, even though they had just witnessed the mighty power of God’s deliverance from Egypt. The plagues fell on the dwellers of the Nile because they refused God’s every effort to save them. The same resistance among the Canaanites brought them to the place where only destruction remained for them. But Israel couldn’t see how the Lord could just give them the land, so they determined to take it in the only way they understood—by force.

It is true that they ultimately gained the land by force, but let it not be forgotten that they also lost it in the same manner. Their sad history confirms the truth of Christ's words to the valiant Peter, "Put up again your sword: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Matthew 26:52. This was not a new command. He stated an eternal truth: the use of force engenders counter-force. The proof of this is borne in thousands of years of human history. And the recognition of this truth is essential in understanding the directives from God which sent the Israelites forth with the sword to utterly destroy. But in every instance where they did so, their actions were not a revelation of the character of God nor were they acting in "strict obedience to His commands."

If they had been truly obedient, they would never have taken up the sword at all. If God's will had been respected, the Levites would never have executed those who worshiped the golden calf, nor would there have been the many bloody battles whereby they gained possession of the land. But in spite of God's best efforts to dissuade them, the sword became established in the camp of Israel.



## The Ever Loving Father

When Israel took the sword and rejected God's way in favor of their own, the Lord was faced with several possible options:

1. He could have simply abandoned them to their own devices. Though this would have been perfectly just, it would have been justice without mercy.
2. He could have forced the Israelites to pursue His way anyway. But this would have deprived them of their freedom to choose.
3. He could have just ignored their sin. But this would have condoned their action.

Because they have not yet tasted the bitter consequences of their choice, they are not disposed to repent and return to the will of their divine Leader. But they haven't gone beyond the possibility of restoration. So, the fourth alternative is for God, in His infinite love, will not abandon them, but works to save them from the evil results, to make their sufferings as mild as possible, and to extend the time of opportunity for them to learn and ultimately repent.

### My Son, the Hunter

Let's illustrate God's dilemma with the following example. A rural town is close to a game reserve where bear, deer, elk and big cats abound. Most men living in the area never miss the opening of hunting season and are eager to track down their game. But one man, with the love of God in his heart is not inclined to kill the beautiful creatures of the forest. So he is never seen with the men who take their guns into the rough in the hopes of making a kill and bagging the big one. While the God loving non-hunter only goes shooting with his camera.



This man has a son whom he is most anxious to protect from the influence of his hunting neighbors. He constantly instilled into his son the same love of wildlife that he had. This father was gratified to see his boy sharing the same values he had through persuasion alone. He did not take away the son's freedom of choice.

One day, after his son had matured into a teenager, some other boys at school invited this man's son on a camping trip, a sneaky plot by the town's hunters to lure him into the thrill, excitement and challenge of the hunt. Curious, he tried it out for himself. Soon he became an enthusiastic devotee, and even purchased a shiny brand-new beautiful rifle of his own.

The son was eager to show it off to his father. With dismay, the father realized that his son had made his own choice. Now he was confronted with several alternative responses:

1. He could disown his son and send him packing, rationalizing his decision on the basis that their conflicting philosophical points of view were irreconcilable.
2. He could impound the weapon and demand that his son never go hunting again.
3. He could quietly ignore the incident, deny that the rifle even exists, act as if all were well when, in fact, it was not.

The father rejects these options and chooses a fourth. Recognizing that his son, an inexperienced and untrained rifleman, has placed himself, other people, live stalk and wild animals in a position of great danger, his father decides to educate his son in the proper and safe usage of the rifle he has chosen to use. While the father could no longer save the youth from taking the gun, he could, if permitted, save his son and others from the serious consequences of what he had chosen. Sadly, but with tender dignity, the father drew his son aside and expressed disappointment but assured him that he would respect his decision fully. He then gently suggested that there were dangers associated with the use of such a weapon, and the only safeguard was to receive and obey a number of specific precautions.

He patiently instructs the boy in the importance of looking beyond his target to ensure that no buildings, people or farm animals are in the line of fire; of how to carry the weapon so that while climbing through fences or undergrowth he does not, as so many have done, shoot himself or his friends; of the awful potential for ricochets, when bullets, glancing from a rock or tree, embed themselves in targets far to the side of the original sighting; of the necessity for waiting until a close range firing will eliminate the possibility of only wounding the animal and allowing it to drag itself away to suffer a lingering death.

God, likewise, is by nature a Saviour. When God is prevented from saving people in one area, He will still exercise His saving power in whatever possibilities remain. He too has been placed in a similar position by the determination of His children to take up weapons of destruction. He also gave them a solemn warning that His effort to save them from the worst effects of what they have chosen does not imply that He has changed. “I am the Lord, I change not;” “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever;” “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17. The father in our story did not have to change his stand on the issue of killing or the use of weapons in order to instruct his son how to be a kind killer; neither did God have to change His position in regard to these same issues in order to save Israel from being cruel users of the sword.



### **Seeing Is Believing**

Now suppose that one of the villagers happens to come down the road as this training session is in progress. From a distance all he sees is the father instructing his son in the use of firearms. What assumptions might this man make? What conclusions will he draw? The onlooker would surely announce to the rest of his hunting buddies that the father is now one of them—a gunman. As proof, he offers his personal eye witness account.

Even as this father was misjudged, so God has been. At the golden calf, God gave direct instructions through Moses for the Levites to take their swords and execute the unrepentant rebels. Men have taken these facts and from them draw their own conclusions.

While the facts are correct, the conclusions drawn are wholly wrong. They have declared with great satisfaction that God has become one of them—a destroyer. But they could not be more mistaken.



Thankfully, God has not changed. He has not become like men; He is not a destroyer. He did nothing different at the golden calf than He did in the garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve made their choice to go their own way, God was faced with the same options that confronted the father when his son come home with a gun.

1. He could have left them alone to go their own way. How thankful we can be that He didn't do this!
2. He could have forced them to stay away from the tree in the first place. But God can only accept the obedience that comes from a willing heart.
3. He could have ignored their offense and pretend that nothing had happened.

But God chose to do something better. In His great love and mercy, He does not leave man to reap the worst consequences of his own doing, but, while there are unavoidable consequences of sin, He still provides mankind with counsel and blessing so that life is less severe and painful.

Yet, in doing this, God makes Himself suspect of becoming a participant in man's delinquency, of compromising His principles, and of changing His policies. But the Lord does not change, compromise, or participate in the least with man and his wayward behavior. It is more important for Him to do the right thing than to be understood in why He does it. In the end He will be understood and when He is, the loyalty of every one of His true children will be assured forever.

### **Off to Babylon**

The horrible episode at Horeb, the slaughter of the unrepentant worshipers of the golden calf, is not the easiest place in the Bible to see this principle. Perhaps a clearer example should be presented first, then we will return to apply a full assessment of God's part at the golden calf. Let's review how God reacted to the later rebellion of Israel just before they were carried off into Babylonian captivity.

Never did a nation pursue a more provocative course toward God than did Israel in those years of apostasy, rebellion, and idolatry between the reigns of David and Hezekiah. God's people took gifts and blessings received during the glorious reign of David and transferred their trust from God to the blessings and then entered into the darkest period of their history. They turned their backs on God and His sanctuary, worshiped heathen gods, made Baal their Lord, offered their own children as living sacrifices to Molech, slaughtered each other, robbed the poor, the widowed, the fatherless. They did everything possible to offend and drive the Lord away. From a human point of view, God had every right to reciprocate with destructive punishments or gladly abandon them to their enemies with a righteous "I told you so." But there is none of that. God pleads with them to repent, to return, to avoid the dangers that threaten them.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel...If you thoroughly amend your ways and your doing; If you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; if you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt; then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever." Jeremiah 7:3, 5-7.

If God had possessed even the slightest trace of the spirit men think He has, His attitude would have been very different and His love must be less than infinite. It would have a limit. It would go so far and then stop, to be replaced by a spirit of revenge and retribution. Such may be the fickle nature of human love, but it is never the way of God's infinite love. Nothing can change it.

When Pharaoh teetered on the brink of self-destruction, God sent Moses to plead with him to repent so that the calamities might be averted and his people could be saved. When Israel faced the menacing shadow of Nebuchadnezzar's power, they, too, were standing on the edge of an abyss. But God had not changed. He did for the Israelites what He had done for the Egyptians: He sent a prophet, Jeremiah, to plead with them.

Notice, God did not judge them worthy of punitive damages or even a period of penance before reinstating them “to dwell in this place.” This is very unhuman. We universally agree that if a person wrongs someone, he should pay for it. Human justice demands appropriate punishment. Our courts seek to measure out a sentence equal to the crime committed. We render evil for evil. This satisfies our demands for revenge. Furthermore, whenever possible, the penalty is administered publicly in order that it might serve as a warning deterrent to other would be offenders. This aids in bolstering our collective hope that future security will be secured.

### **The Prodigal Father**

But God does not operate along these lines. He does not mete out evil for evil. Instead, He only returns good. If any should doubt this beautiful attribute of God, just recount the story of the prodigal son. In this parable, both sons share the same belief that appropriate punishment must be endured before there can be reconciliation and restoration. The errant, prodigal asked for it, his older sibling demanded it, but the father would hear none of it. All he required was true repentance. The son was prodigal with his fortune; his father is prodigal with love.



The younger son believed that his request to forfeit his sonship and be demoted to the level of servant would be a fitting punishment for his offence—his just desserts. The elder brother was incensed by his father’s prodigal forgiveness and immediate reinstatement to full status in the family. He should have had to grovel in the servant’s quarters, scrubbing floors for several years at least, but to receive a royal welcome and accepted back as if he’d never gone was outrageous! No punishment? It was too much for his human morality to swallow.

The father accepted his son back into the household as if he had never left. Exactly so, God receives the sinner back and accepts him as though he had never sinned. “If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.” Steps to Christ, p. 62. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1.

### **War in Heaven**

Those who insist that God must have a limit to His love argue that their position is proven by Revelation 12.

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out...he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” verses 7-9.

Most readers picture an intense physical struggle between the loyal and rebel forces of heaven where God’s supernatural power is pitted against angelic supernatural power. Artists have portrayed Christ leading the hordes of shining angels and raising high his unsheathed sword before which Lucifer plunges down over heaven’s rim into the darkness of empty space.



But this is a superficial, human, and inaccurate view of that cosmic battle. It depicts God as behaving just like human beings. There was war in heaven, it is true, but not war as men fight. Satan and his angels were, indeed, cast out, but it was performed in God's way, not man's.

The struggle in heaven was very real nonetheless. It was war—a total effort by Satan to secure a regime change in heaven's heartland. It was a battle over the allegiance of angels on two sides of a philosophical divide. But the only sword Satan used was deception. God's only weapon was truth. As the battle raged on the time came when the devils had penetrated as far as he could. Each angel had made their decision, they had cast their vote and a majority chose to stand by the truth. God was able to maintain His position as Protector of the heavenly host; Satan failed to inaugurate his new cosmic order. In the end, it was the truth of God which drove Satan out, not the use of any physical force. The same reason Satan fled from God's domain is the reason why the lost would never be happy in heaven.

“A life of rebellion against God has unfitted them for heaven. Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; the glory of God would be a consuming fire. They would long to flee from that holy place. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them. The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God.” *Great Controversy*, p. 543.

With man, however, there must always be the exacting of a penalty. We are never satisfied until the malefactor has “paid his debt to society.” But our God, the real prodigal Father, would have gladly received Lucifer back, had he truly repented of his evil course, and reinstated him in his office of archangel next to His throne as if he had never sinned. Satan desperately fears that men will become acquainted with such a God, for he knows they will then have confidence to come to Him for deliverance from his seducing delusions. Therefore, he presents God as a being no different from sinful men—severe, exacting, and determined that the full measure of punishment for sin be borne before mercy can be extended. When men reject such a god they plunge into sin so terrible that they are discouraged from every seeking God again, even though they learn the truth about their loving, prodigal Father.

But God is wonderfully willing to forgive and restore. The wayward son, the apostatized nation of Israel, even Satan are not exceptions. Every person, no matter how bleak and dark their past or present condition should be inspired and encouraged to return once again to the God of mercy and light. God says to every sinner,

“I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins.” Isaiah 44:22.

“I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31:34.

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah 55:7.

“The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found.” Jeremiah 50:20.

“Return unto Me; for I have redeemed you.” Isaiah 44:22.

“Do not listen to the enemy’s suggestion to stay away from Christ until you have made yourself better; until you are good enough to come to God. If you wait until then, you will never come. When Satan points to your filthy garments, repeat the promise of Jesus, ‘Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.’ John 6:37. Tell the enemy that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Make the prayer of David your own, ‘Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.’ Psalm 51:7.

“Arise and go to your Father. He will meet you a great way off. If you take even one step toward Him in repentance, He will hasten to enfold you in His arms of infinite love...Never a prayer is offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after God is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 205, 206.

## God Goes the Second Mile

Israel chose to reject God's way by taking up the sword. Once they had made that choice, it was impossible for both the way of God and the way of man to operate within their society at the same time. God's method of dealing with sin could no longer be used in confronting the rebellion at Sinai. Therefore, what happened at Mt Horeb was not according to the principles of God's original will for Israel. It was the application of procedures instituted by Israel when they brought weapons into their way of life. God's only involvement was to apply some restraint and guidance to their use and minimize the evil effects of armed conflict.

What complicates this situation is that Israel is still regarded as God's people. Therefore, it is reasoned, God must still be their leader, and as such is ordering them to execute the rebellious, so consequently He is responsible for the massacre. But it should be remembered that the Israelites were God's people only to the extent that He was permitted by them to be their Sovereign. This is the sad tragedy of human history. Men are inclined to go just so far with God, but not all the way. It is the perversity of humanity which will refuse to obey God in some things and yet implicitly follow His guidance in others. So it was with Israel. While they didn't have enough faith to rely on God for their protection, they were fully prepared to follow His directions for dealing with crime in the camp to the letter.

This did not mean, however, that the Lord ceased to be their Saviour. He could still save them from the worst effects of their choice. The record of God's doing this is beautifully recorded in the Scriptures. Likewise, the devil is shown within the Bible as the evil one who works incessantly to afflict and destroy.

“When any part of the body sustains injury, a healing process is at once begun; nature's agencies are set at work to restore soundness. But the power working through these agencies is the power of God. All life-giving power is from Him. When one recovers from disease, it is God who restores him. Sickness, suffering, and death are work of an antagonistic power. Satan is the destroyer; God is the restorer.” Ministry of Healing, p. 112, 113.

God acts in this capacity to not only Israel, but to other people as well. Of all the people in the ancient world, none had been more committed to aggression and hostility against God than the Edomites (descendants of Esau), the Moabites (children of Lot) and the people of Tyre. We would not expect God to act toward these rascals as a Saviour too. Yet the Lord made no distinction between them and the Israelites. When they were in great danger for listening to the enticements of Satan and their own wretched human desires, God sent them the same warnings through Jeremiah that He had given to His own people. But their rebellious hearts were not prepared to accept God's saving efforts. Thus they deprived God of any hope of saving them from their own foolish selves. The disasters which subsequently fell upon them were not from God, but they reaped the harvest that they had sown. All that happened to them was the inevitable consequences of their own actions. They provided the cause and the effect was determined.

God's efforts during the first mile were directed at saving Israel from the risks of taking the sword back in the days of Moses. He gave them the example of Jacob's deliverance, Moses' mistake in killing an Egyptian, and their marvelous deliverance at the Red Sea as powerful evidence that they would never need resort to armed warfare. But He could not make the choice for them, neither would He deprive them of the opportunity to make it. When they saw the armor-clad bodies of the Egyptians lying on the shore, school was over and final exams had begun. How would they answer this difficult question? The results of the test are in and it shows all too plainly that they chose to fight for themselves, to put their faith in the arm of man.

But God didn't abandon them. God will never leave or forsake us. He would lead, protect, forgive, bless and teach them, offer them counsel in how to avoid the worst effects of their choices and wait patiently for them to possibly return to His way. This was love. This was returning good for evil. This was going the second mile.



## The Consistency of God

One of the great characteristics which sets God apart from all others is His utter consistency and total reliability. He is “the Father of lights with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,” James 1:17. He is not capricious; He is not motivated by self-interest; He does not seek to justify certain means because of a desired end. Especially is this so when He deals with sin.

There are two different kinds of situations in which sin develops.

1. One is where God alone is in the position of leadership and He assumes sole responsibility of dealing with the problem. If the sinner remains unrepentant, then the Lord sadly leaves them to themselves to reap that which they have sown; to perish at the hands of whatever calamity is lurking nearby.

Examples: The flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt, the fiery serpents, Sennacherib’s army, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the seven last plagues, the final destruction of our solar system.

2. The other is where man has replaced God with himself as the administrator of his own affairs, the determiner of his own fate, the investigator, the judge, and executioner of those who sin against him. God lets man have his own way. But wherever He has the opportunity to offer counsel (which the Bible calls “commands”) He does so in order to save man from the worst effects of his chosen course.

Examples: The golden calf, the conquest of Canaan, the battles against foreign rulers, the captivity in Babylon.

Those who worshipped at the golden calf exposed themselves to terrible consequences. At first they enjoyed a general revelry filled with wild stimulation, feverish excitement, the heady intoxication of “going wild” that humans love so much. But when their physical and emotional powers were finally exhausted, the lack of God’s restraining Spirit to quiet and control their jaded nerves and lift their depression, left them irritable and vulnerable to an explosion of bitter strife throughout the camp. As is so often the case, the wild party usually ends in an ugly brawl.

“And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp.” Exodus 32:17.

As the strife broke out, the swords were brandished and a few were killed in the melee. Then the families of the dead struck back in a vendetta of revenge. Many more were now slain as a feuding mob mentality intensified and escalating retaliation threatened to decimate the Israelites. Surrounding heathen nations quickly saw their opportunity to launch a surprise attack on the confused and rioting mob and destroy the entire nation. If God had not intervened with instructions to Moses, the worst possible outcome would have resulted. If no action was taken, millions would perish. If they followed the Lord’s suggestions, then only a few thousand would die, and a great deal of tragedy would be averted. But, if anything was done at all, it had to be done by *them* because they had deprived God of any opportunity to take appropriate action Himself. Thus, all He could do was advise them how best to contain the crisis. It was better to destroy the incurably affected than to leave the cancer to contaminate millions more. The Levites chose to obey and thus not only saved themselves, but the whole of Israel, and the world from the most terrible of consequences.

But the Levites, faced with the prospect of using their weapons, could have repented there and then from taking up the sword. Had they done this, had they discarded their arms, bowed before the Lord and confessed their foolish choice to defend themselves and returned to God the sole responsibility of shielding them from their enemies, both without and within, they would have been spared the macabre experience of slaughtering their own relatives, God could then have resumed His role as Protector of Israel, and allowed the blighted rebels to destroy themselves. Sadly, they continued to rely on the sword instead of the Lord to solve their problems.

And they had many. Every disciplinary action had to be addressed by the Israelites, personally. The man gathering sticks on the Sabbath, the adulterer, Achan's sin—all received capital punishment at the hands of the people themselves. But there were exceptions. Korah's rebellion, Miriam's criticism, and the people's murmuring against Moses and God were dealt with by exposing the offenders to natural disasters and disease: an earthquake, leprosy, plagues, and serpents. In none of these punishments did the people have a part. Yet the people were still carrying their swords. So, why are these situations handled differently?

God is neither capricious nor inconsistent. He responded in both cases on an unwavering principle that was based on the offended party. Since the people had placed themselves under the protection of the sword, they had reconstituted their government so that when any offence that threatened the government was committed, it must be dealt with by the weapons of force wielded by the people themselves. These threats could be internal (such as the rebellion following the golden calf incident) or external (such as when the Amalekites attacked them).

But when an offence was directed toward the office of Moses, which was not under the jurisdiction of the people, God's method of removing His protection from those who did not wish it could be fairly exercised. God had appointed Moses to his position as leader, therefore he answered to the Lord and no one else. Furthermore, Moses had never joined with the people in taking up the sword in spite of the fact that he was the best trained in military matters of all the Israelites. He had learned the lesson of relying fully on the Lord's protection and wasn't tempted in the least to even pack a dagger on his belt. Not once do we ever read of him leading Israel into battle with a sword in his hand.

Therefore, when Moses himself sinned by striking the rock, the people could not touch him. Only God could deal with him according to His righteous procedures and principles. In like manner, when the people sinned against Moses and against God, they transgressed against a domain which was not under their jurisdiction; the sovereignty of the sword did not reach that far. God could only depart from them and leave them exposed to the surrounding perils.

The same principle applied in the case of David when he committed adultery and murder, both of which were punishable by being stoned to death. But the king was no ordinary citizen. His sin, however, separated him from God's protection and his punishment was directed by the Lord.

A careful study of the various incidents confirms that, with the utmost consistency, God dealt with each situation according to its nature. It is thus made evident that, when rightly understood, the Old Testament records do not reveal a different God from the One portrayed by Christ during His earthly sojourn.

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord.” Deuteronomy 6:4. He does not show one face in the Old Testament and another one in the New. There is no inconsistency, nor does He at any time or under any circumstances, resort to force or compulsion to resolve any difficulty whatsoever. He is the Saviour while Satan is the destroyer.

## The Wars of Israel

The fact that Israel went to war and slaughtered their enemies, down to the last man, woman and child—and goat, sheep, ox and ass—is not the real problem. It's when God “commanded” them to do it. When they did, they received His approval, but when they didn't, He reproved them strongly. For instance, when Saul did not utterly destroy the Amalekites, He was severely rebuked by God through the prophet, Samuel.

Now, whenever a conscientious objector to military service stands before an officer and declares that he will not bear arms and kill because the law of God forbids him, the questions put to him always include a reference to the wars of Israel. Not only did Israel provide trouble for themselves by taking up the sword, they have created problems for God's children right down to the end of time.



God never intended that they should secure the land of promise through the use of the sword. He told them how it would be done and assured them that He would do it, not they. Long before they reached Kadesh-barnea on the boarder of Canaan, it was spelled out for them.

“I will send My fear before you, and will destroy all the people to whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their back to you.”

“And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against you. By little and little I will drive them out from before you, until you be increased and inherit the land.” Exodus 23:27-30.

Unfortunately, God was never given the opportunity to show us exactly how this would have happened. This is not because there was any weakness in His plan, but because the people didn't believe God's promise. They decided that this just didn't seem possible. They must do it themselves. This determination intensified when they reached Kadesh-barnea. God's plan was to lead them directly into the promised land under the leadership of Moses. Moses recounts what happened.

“And when we departed from Horeb, we went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which you saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites, as the Lord our God commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. And I said unto,.. “Behold, the Lord your God has set the land before you: go up and possess it.” Deuteronomy 1:19-21.

Had the children of Israel had the spirit of trust and submission, they would have responded without doubt or question. The inhabitants of the land could have fearfully retreated or would have rashly attacked them out of desperation. Such an action would have been complete and final defiance against heaven, whereby their separation from God would have been so total as to remove all divine protection. Exposed to the natural perils and dangerous forces about them, they would have quickly perished.

But Israel did not trust God. They approached Moses and said,

“We will send men before us, and *they* shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way *we* must go up, and into what cities *we* shall come.” Verse 22.



The whole idea of sending spies into the land on a reconnaissance mission was entirely their own. They ignored God's command and substituted their own plan in its place. Divine leadership was discarded in favor of human.

How did God react to such a development? Was He offended? Did He demand His rights and insist that they do it His way? Not for a moment. If that was the way they chose to go, then all He could do was respect their choice and bless them as far as He could in their execution of it.

“Eleven days after leaving Mount Horeb, the Hebrew host encamped at Kadesh, in the wilderness of Paran, which was not far from the borders of the promised land. Here it was proposed by the people that spies be sent up to survey the country. The matter was presented before the Lord by Moses, and permission was granted, with the direction that one of the rulers of each tribe should be selected for this purpose.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 387.

The account in the book of Numbers confirms this.

“The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Send you men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall you send a man, every one a ruler among them. And Moses by the commandment of the Lord sent them from the wilderness of Paran.” Numbers 13:1-3.

If these verses were read without considering the statements in Deuteronomy, it would appear that the whole idea of sending the spies was from God. But, in fact, it was the people's decision, contrary to God's plan. Even so, it is said to be by the *commandment* of the Lord. When the word “commandment” is used in connection with human behavior, it indicates an authoritative statement which is to be obeyed whether you like it or not. It is clear, however, that when used by the Lord, it is more in the form of instruction or counsel with the choice of compliance left to the people themselves.

The people's decision in this matter of leadership was a further step in the wrong direction. They had already replaced God's protection with their own by taking up the sword. Now their self-confidence had grown to the point where they were ready to discard the leading of His pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. Their decision to rely on their own leadership, investigation, and human intelligence demonstrated their lack of faith in God's leadership. But what a disaster it proved to be. It was a mistake which prevented an entire generation from entering the wonderland of promise.

Forty years later, after all the unfaithful had died, only Caleb and Joshua remained of the original generation. Once again they were on the borders of the land and again spies were sent to Jericho. But the situation is quite different. It was not the decision of the people. The two spies were sent at the order of Joshua, not because of any distrust in the Lord's leading but under the direction of God's Spirit for the salvation of Rahab.

As they crossed the Jordan on their way to Jericho, the Lord spoke to them once more through a might demonstration of His ability to provide for all their needs and deliver to them the land without any effort on their part. As the waters had parted by the miraculous power of God when the previous generation crossed the Red Sea, so the flooded waters of the Jordan separated before them. They were given another opportunity to lay down their use of weapons and rely totally on the arm of the Lord. As the Egyptians had been prevented from reaching them while they crossed the Red Sea, so in crossing the Jordan, the Canaanites made no approach,

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even though, from a military perspective, it would have been an excellent time to attack. This also should have convinced them in God's tremendous power to preserve them under all circumstances.

The Lord then gave them specific instructions for taking the city. The divine protocol was intended as an exercise in faith designed to develop in them the sense of complete distrust in human power and intelligence, on the one hand, and total commitment to God's leadership and instruction on the other.

“‘By faith the walls of Jericho fell down.’ The Captain of the Lord's host communicated only with Joshua; He did not reveal Himself to all the congregation, and it rested with them to believe or doubt the words of Joshua, to obey the commands given by him in the name of the Lord, or to deny his authority. They could not see the host of angels who attended them under the leadership of the Son of God. They might have reasoned; ‘What unmeaning movements are these, and how ridiculous the performance of marching daily around the walls of the city, blowing trumpets of rams' horns. This can have no effect upon those towering fortifications.’ But the very plan of continuing this ceremony through so long a time prior to the final overthrow of the walls, afforded opportunity for the development of faith among the Israelites. It was to be impressed upon their minds that their strength was not in the wisdom of man, nor in [human] might, but only in the God of their salvation. They were thus to become accustomed to relying wholly upon their divine Leader.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 493.

God's whole design in this adventure was to call them back from their position of self-defense. Indeed, it should have been enough. Right there, they should have disarmed themselves, thrown down their weapons, and confessed Jehovah as their Lord and Defender and expressed their complete trust in Him to give them the land He had promised in the way that He said He would.



But they didn't do it. When the walls fell by supernatural forces, they rushed into the city to add their own efforts to those of the Almighty. Soon their swords were dripping with the blood of men, women and children. What a scarring psychological effect that experience must have had on them! Actively participating in the death of these people could only make them callous to sacredness of life and numbing them to the most precious attributes of the divine character. Such actions by the people were never intended by God.

But the people continued to cling to their swords. They couldn't feel secure without them. This choice made at Jericho determined how the conquest of Canaan would be achieved—by their own physical force and the edge of the sword. God could only stand by and let them make their choice—wrong as it was—and instruct them in how to conduct their wars mercifully. They were not to torture their victims, but obliterate them as thoroughly as they would have been destroyed had they left the matter in God's hands.

Next they would fully reject God's leadership by demanding that they have a king over them like the other nations. Though Samuel warned them of the negative consequences (they would lose their sons, their daughters, their fields and a tenth of their goods), they insisted anyway. Later, they rejected God entirely and worshiped gods of their own making who, obviously, could never save them from being hauled off as captive to the land of their enemies.



But they would never learn. They persisted in their determination to rule themselves and go their own way until, finally, they cried out, “We have no king but Caesar.” John 19:15. This was the final step in a long, long road of persistent and determined substitution of God’s ways with their own. They had finally stepped outside the circle of God’s presence and protection and the destruction of the city, the temple, and the nation was no longer preventable.

# Real Justice

The wisest man who ever lived once said, “Don’t be surprised if you see a perverted form of justice that leads to violence.”<sup>1</sup>

It’s not surprising to find that men will reject real justice. Even after Jehovah gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the people weren’t satisfied. Like there was a conspicuous absence of any sort of penal code. Nothing about punishments and penalties for various infractions. So the leaders marched right up to Moses’ tent the next morning and asked for “ordinances of justice,”<sup>2</sup> something they could be happy with—where they could “smite with the fist of wickedness...to make their voice be heard on high.”<sup>3</sup> You know, make a big scene in public, draw attention to some guilty culprit, force ‘em to confess, bring ‘em to their knees, and then execute justice!

But God never chose that brand of justice. He prefers the kind that will “loose the bands of wickedness, lift heavy burdens, free the oppressed, feed the hungry, shelter and clothe the poor.”<sup>4</sup> This is “true justice”<sup>5</sup> or as Jesus called it, “right justice.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ecclesiastes 5:8

<sup>2</sup>Isaiah 58:2

<sup>3</sup>Verse 4

<sup>4</sup>Verse 6, 7

<sup>5</sup>Ezekiel 18:5-9

<sup>6</sup>John 7:24 Jesus healed a man and made him “every whit whole.”

Unfortunately human beings have never seemed to catch the drift of what God was trying to say. His warning in the third commandment<sup>7</sup> that parental influences do have their detrimental effects on the offspring, was used as a license to kill not only wicked fathers but innocent sons as well.<sup>8</sup> When the Lord tried to correct the situation, His people objected.<sup>9</sup> They wanted their kind of justice.

But God said no. Only “the soul that sins should die. And I don’t even enjoy having to see that happen.”<sup>10</sup> But the people still grumbled among themselves. “The Lord’s way is just not fair,” they complained.<sup>11</sup>

Do you see the pattern yet? God’s justice has to do with giving—giving life, giving pardon, relieving suffering, giving freedom, giving food, giving shelter, giving clothing.<sup>12</sup> But man’s justice is a perverted form of judgment that is punitive and condemning. Instead of giving, it demands taking—taking by violence whatever it takes to settle the score, whether it be an eye, a tooth, or a life.

<sup>7</sup>Exodus 20:4-6. Actually, God was being merciful in limiting the effects of sin to only four generations.

<sup>8</sup>Ezekiel 18:19

<sup>9</sup>Verse 25, 29

<sup>10</sup>Verse 23, 32

<sup>11</sup>Ezekiel 33:11-20

<sup>12</sup>Psalms 37:4, Romans 8:32

## An Eye for an Eye

Shortly after the Ten Commands were delivered to Israel at Sinai, God provided additional directions to His people in the wake of their decision to take up the sword after crossing the Red Sea. Included in these instructions was the principle of limited retribution.

“If men strive and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman’s husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” Exodus 21:22-25.

These words were spoken by the Lord Himself. This is verified by the introduction given to them in Exodus 20:22. “It was Christ who, amid thunder and flame, had proclaimed the law upon Mount Sinai.” *Mount of Blessing*, p. 175. Therefore, it was Christ Himself who told Israel to exact an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Yet, in His sermon on the mount, after warning His audience that He had not come to do away with the law, Jesus repudiated these very words.

“Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law... Ye have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say to you, That you resist not evil: but whoever shall smite you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also, and if any man will sue you at the law, and take away you coat, let him have your cloke also. And whoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two... But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matthew 5:38-46.

God delivered His original counsels to the Hebrews at Sinai because their unbelief had caused them to depart from the pathway of faith, to self-protection with instruments of coercion. It was out of loving consideration for the victims that He admonished them to limit the exaction of their justice to only one eye for the loss of a single eye and only one tooth for the loss of a tooth. God knew that the human spirit of revenge would not be satisfied with imposing a punishment that was only equal to the offence. Human revenge demands many eyes for an eye and many teeth for one tooth.

In responding to injury and attack there are three possible positions:

1. God’s perfect way, that which Jesus lived and taught, calls for the witness of love which never retaliates, always turns the other cheek, goes the second mile, loves all enemies and only does good to those who do evil. The weapons of force are never used. There is no vengeance, no retribution, no violence, no punishment, and certainly no killing. This position requires an abiding faith in God as the only defense, the source of infinite love, and respect for His perfect law.
2. Ruthless, cruel revenge, torturing enemies with the greatest possible suffering. There is no regard for God or His counsels. The worst of human passions reign: hit as hard as possible those who dare to hurt you to permanently convince them that it would be suicidal to launch any further assault against you; return multiplied evil for evil; destroy your enemy as cruelly and painfully as possible to guarantee one’s security by the rule of fear.
3. An intermediate situation is offered by God to those who cannot trust Him enough to accept His perfect way (1) in order to spare them from descending into the worst alternative (2). This position shares God’s compassion for the oppressed and therefore seeks to minimize as far as possible their suffering and loss. Yet, because there is not a complete dependence on God as Judge and Protector, apply a humane justice with its sense of equal punishment for all offences; limit your revenge to match your injury.

It can be seen that there is not a single story in the Old Testament to prove that God destroys. Man does, and Satan certainly does, but never God. He knows no other work than to restore and heal and save.

# The Final Verdict

There is a lot of confusion about what happens in the judgment. Some very strange ideas are often suggested about God and how He works. Though a number of variations have been popularized, the general view goes something like this:

God just can't make up His mind about who to save. So He convenes a court in order to reexamine the evidence before handing down His final decision. The books of record, listing the good and bad actions of every person, are opened and scrutinized. As the list of sins is reviewed, the Father's face begins to darken. The verdict looks doubtful. But, then Jesus steps up to the bar and pleads the gracious merits of His blood over and against the stern justice of His Father. If the defendant has registered enough good works on his record, then Jesus just might be able to swing the case in his favor.

As each case is settled, it is stamped either ACCEPTED or REJECTED and a person's probation is closed. The divine court clerk proceeds to the next case, and when the entire list of repentant believers has been finally examined, then the judgment is over.

So, it's apparently the heavy case load, what with the current population explosion and all, that accounts for the delay in Christ's second coming. This concept has led some to question whether God is just short on secretarial help.

Too often we assume that the real issue here is God's opinion of us. "Does He treat me guilty but pardoned, or am I innocent and acquitted? Does He accept me or just tolerate me?" But remember, it was man, changing his opinion of God, who brought sin into this world. And it is man's opinion which must be changed before sin can be eradicated from planet earth.

## The Heavenly Court

Daniel chapter seven describes the final judgment. In the Jury Box we see a vast array of holy angels intensely interested in the fate of their future neighbors.<sup>1</sup> On the Judge's bench is, of course, the Father, with all the dignity befitting His supreme office.<sup>2</sup> Then Jesus, clothed in humanity, fills the role of defense attorney.<sup>3</sup> Please notice right from the start that in all decisions regarding the redeemed, Jesus and His Father are not adversaries. On the contrary, they stand totally united on the side of the saints. They work under a council of peace.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus told His disciples that He would not pray to the Father on their behalf lest they think that the Father needed to be coaxed into granting their requests.<sup>5</sup> There is no disunion in the Godhead.<sup>6</sup>

And who's the prosecuting attorney? Who else, but the adversary himself, the accuser of the brethren.<sup>7</sup> Yet, annoying as Satan's continual objections are, God still treats his charges with respect. It has never been God's method to "pull rank" on the enemy—to order him into silence because of his inferior status. Nor does God ever erase the evidence against His people as a means of winning the case. This is because the primary issue at stake is not the destiny of individual persons, but the character and methods of the Judge Himself. Thus, Satan cross-examines each of God's decisions, not so much in order to get us, but because he hopes to catch the Judge Himself on a technicality.

Satan charged that genuine faith does not exist. If God gets any followers, it's by paying them off, buying their loyalties. No one, Satan claims, will serve God for God's sake. Thus, the charge against Job was really against God. So God placed Job on His list of witnesses for cross-examination—not so He could make a decision about him—He had already made up His mind about Job!

This is a vital concept. The judgment is not a time for God to decide who are His. He already knows. Rather, it's a time for Him to defend His decisions. He turns to the on looking universe and says, "I believe in My people. I believe that they have been fully restored to unshakeable loyalty. They can be trusted with eternity." And to emphasize His confidence, He stands up and leaves the sanctuary courtroom, no longer do dispense any more forgiveness for specific sins.<sup>8</sup>

"What sort of persons ought we to be, then, in lives of holiness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God... to be found by Him without spot or blemish?"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Daniel 7:10, Revelation 5:11

<sup>2</sup>Daniel 7:9, Revelation 4:2, 3

<sup>3</sup>Daniel 7:13, 1 John 2:1

<sup>4</sup>Zechariah 6:13

<sup>5</sup>John 16:26, 27

<sup>6</sup>John 17:5, 11

<sup>7</sup>Revelation 12:10, Zechariah 3:1

<sup>8</sup>Daniel 12:1, Revelation 15:5, 6, 8

<sup>9</sup>2 Peter 3:11

## Difficult Statements

The life and teachings of Jesus are the final, comprehensive declaration of what God is and does. His manifestation of the Father is so bright, so clear, and so total, that nothing more is needed. It is the standard by which every argument about the Father's character is tested. The revelation of God in the Old Testament is no different from the revelation of the Father by Christ in the New, when rightly understood.

Yet, not every statement has as yet been resolved. The correct understanding may still be pending, but the Lord will make them clear in time. In the meantime, there is more than sufficient evidence in the great principles which establish beyond doubt the truth of God's character.

### The Same Powers

For example, one difficult statement regards "the Same Powers."

"A single angel destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians, and filled the land with mourning. When David offended against God by numbering the people, one angel caused that terrible destruction by which his sin was punished. **The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He permits.** There are forces now ready, and only waiting the divine permission, to spread desolation everywhere." *Great Controversy*, p. 614.

This appears to suggest that holy angels destroy in exactly the same way as do evil angels. But now notice that this statement does not say that the holy angels exercise the same destructive power *in the same way* as evil angels. We tend to read these words into the original statement making no distinction between the work of God and Satan. It makes no difference between the character of each. This is serious.

There is, however, a very decided contrast between the roles of good and evil angels. Righteous angels are appointed by heaven to hold back the four winds of strife for as long as possible. They will only release them when God determines that any further restraint will only impose their presence where it is not wanted.



"I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree." Revelation 7:1.

"Then the angels will be bidden to let go that the four winds may blow upon the earth." Testimonies 5:152.

"Angels are now restraining the winds of strife, that they may not blow until the world shall be warned of its coming doom." *Education* p. 179.

"It was God that restrained the powers, and that He gave His angels charge over things on the earth; that the four angels had power from God to hold the four winds." *Early Writings* p. 38.

"Soon God will show that He is indeed the living God. He will say to the angels, 'No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy. Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience... I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work.'" *Review and Herald*, September 17, 1901.

“Satan is the destroyer. God cannot bless those who refuse to be faithful stewards. All He can do is to permit Satan to accomplish his destroying work. We see calamities of every kind and in every degree coming upon the earth, and why? The Lord’s restraining power is not exercised.” *Testimonies* 6:388, 389.

Each of these statements confirms that the role of righteous angels is to hold back those terrible powers which are only waiting to be released so that they can begin their destructive work. This is the way in which the destructive powers are brought into active exercise by holy angels when God *commands*, but it is not the way evil angels exercise them when God *permits*. But, whether they are released by holy angels or manipulated by evil angels, they are the same powers.

### Doing as He Pleases

“The Lord is regarded as cruel by many in requiring His people to make war with other nations. They say that it is contrary to His benevolent character. But He Who made the world, and formed man to dwell upon the earth, has unlimited control over all the works of His hands, and **it is His right to do as He pleases**, and what He pleases with the work of His hands. Man has no right to say to his Maker, Why dost Thou thus? **There is no injustice in His character.** He is the Ruler of the world, and a large portion of His subjects have rebelled against His authority, and have trampled upon His law... He has used His people as instruments of His wrath to punish wicked nations who have vexed them and seduced them into idolatry.” *Spiritual Gifts* 4:50, 51.

The message in this statement is a warning to not question the actions of God. If God does it, it is right and just, not just because God is the Creator, but because His *character* is righteous. But what troubles us is the part that says God has the “right to do as He pleases and what He pleases with the work of His hands.” This is because we can’t seem to help imagining God as if He were human. When men have the power to do as they please, then their behavior depends on how they just might feel at the time. If God operates this way, then it all depends on what mood He’s in as to how severe His judgments might be.

But God is not like men, thank God! He is never motivated by feelings. He finds no pleasure in unrighteousness in any form. He has no desire of and finds no pleasure in killing, lying, stealing, or in breaking any other of the commandments which are the transcript of His wondrous character. Therefore, we need never fear that the Lord will destroy us simply because He has the right to do “as He pleases, and what He pleases.”

### The Walls of Jericho

Some statements regarding the fall of Jericho could lead the reader to conclude that God and His angels personally brought down those mighty battlements.

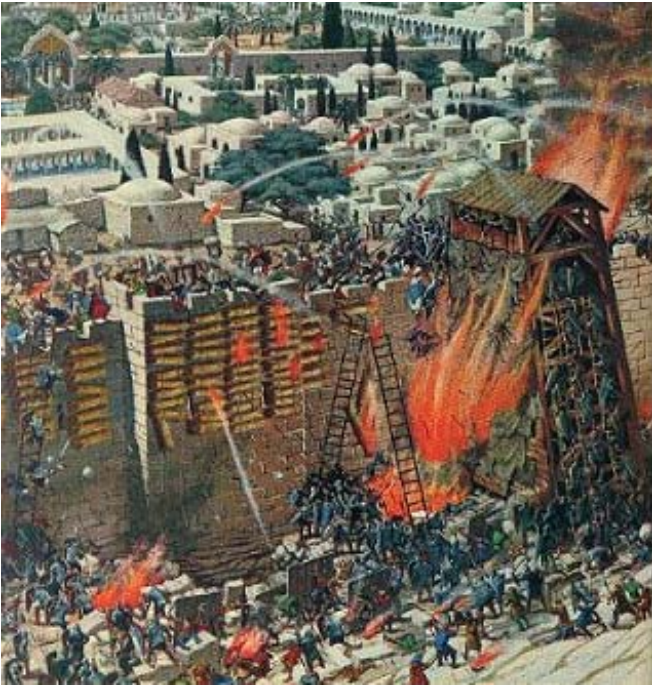
“How easily the armies of heaven brought down the walls that had seemed so formidable to the spies who brought the false report! The word of God was the only weapon used. The Mighty One of Israel had said: ‘I have given into thine hand Jericho.’ If a single warrior had brought his strength to bear against the walls, the glory of God would have been lessened and His will frustrated. But the work was left to the Almighty: and...the Captain of the Lord’s host led His legions of angels to the attack.” *Testimonies* 4:161, 162.

“God’s judgments were awakened against Jericho. It was a stronghold. But the Captain of the Lord’s host Himself came from heaven to lead the armies of heaven in an attack upon the city. Angel of God laid hold of the massive walls and brought them to the ground.” *Testimonies* 3:264.

“The Lord marshaled His armies about the doomed city; no human hand was raised against it; the hosts of heaven overthrew its walls, that God’s name alone might have the glory.” *Review and Herald*, March 15, 1887.

It would seem that these words allow only one interpretation: the angels of God with Christ at their head, took hold of the walls and with their own hands literally threw them to the ground. But there were more than just walls involved. Undoubtedly the walls were crowded with curious onlookers besides the many people who actually lived in the wall as did Rahab. If angels of God did in fact throw down those walls, then they took the lives of a great number of people.





The explanation of this difficult event can be found in examining a similar incident: the destruction of Jerusalem. Like Jericho, it too had filled up its cup of iniquity. Its walls were likewise brought down until not one stone was left upon another.

“Men will continue to erect expensive buildings...these buildings will share the fate of the temple in Jerusalem. That magnificent structure fell. Angels of God were sent to do the work of destruction, so that one stone was not left upon another that was not thrown down.” SDABC 5:1098, 1099.

The same language is used here as that was earlier applied to Jericho. In both cases the angels of God were identified as the agents of destruction. But a study of history shows that, at least in the case of Jerusalem, those stones were cast down by human hands, not angels.

The Romans, once they had captured the temple, razed it and much of the city to the ground. Josephus, who was actually present at the fall of Jerusalem and the greatest authority on Jewish history, recorded the events.

“Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as were of the great eminence...and so much of the wall as enclosed the city on the west side. This was spared... but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.” *Wars of the Jews*, Book VII, Chapter one, paragraph one, by Flavius Josephus, Translated by William Whiston.

This would be a hopeless contradiction if we had not already discovered how the Bible is its own dictionary and the way in which God is said to destroy. First, it is clear that holy angels do not perform the work of destruction as man does. Yet, it is undeniable that they did, however, perform a work which resulted in those walls being thrown to the ground. The angels have already been shown to hold back the winds of strife, human anger and natural powers. But when the time comes that God’s protection is no longer possible, when to remain any longer would be to force God’s presence where it is not wanted, then angels are sent from heaven to instruct the restraining angels to let go. These messenger angels are in this sense on a mission of destruction and are called messengers of destruction. But let it be emphasized once more that this is not an arbitrary act of God. He leaves only at the demand of those He seeks to save.

When the angels of God fully withdrew their restraining power over the evil passions of men, the infuriated Roman soldiers were so totally uncontrolled that not even their officers, generals, or Titus himself, could restrain them.

“Titus found it impossible to check the rage of the soldiery... The centurion Liberalis endeavored to force obedience with his staff of office: but even respect for the emperor gave way to the furious animosity against the Jews.” *Great Controversy*, pp. 33, 34.

This throws great light on the fall of Jericho. While the angels unleashed the furies in men which did the work of destruction in Jerusalem, at Jericho it was the release of the pent-up forces of nature. But the role of the angels in both instances was the same. Christ, Himself, led the messengers to the walls of Jericho to give the sad report that the people had forfeited all divine protection, leaving God with no option but to call away the restraining angels. Then the furies of nature, until that moment held under control, burst forth to flatten the proud metropolis. Violent geophysical forces hurled the great walls to the ground.

### **The Wrath of God**

Frequently mentioned in Scripture, the wrath of God describes the savage fury of men or nature in a rampage of destruction. The seven last plagues are referred to specifically as the wrath of God which is to be poured upon those who worship the beast and his image. The danger is that God's wrath is confused with man's wrath.

Man's wrath is the development of anger *within himself*, and a desire to retaliate against those who have hurt, injured or offended him. But the wrath of God is very different, for the ways of God are not the ways of men. God's wrath is not the expression of His personal feelings, for, while His wrath most certainly results in the destruction of man and the world, God is pained with sorrow and distress to see His handiwork and His children committed to such a terrible fate.

Yet without question it is wrath. The roar of a hurricane, the thunder of falling buildings, the rumble of an earthquake, the blast of a crackling inferno, the shriek of a tornado, the fiendish fury of war—this is wrath. The message God gave through Moses' rod is that the wrath of nature in such states of destruction occurs when these forces have passed out of God's control. In actuality, it is the wrath of God's *powers*.

## The Seven Last Plagues

So far, we have studied only events of the past. Now, we will direct our attention to events yet future. The greatest destruction yet to come before the second coming of Christ will result from the outpouring of the seven last plagues. The finally impenitent will at that time drink “the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation.” Revelation 14:10.

Prior to this the judgments of God have always been mixed with mercy; the wicked were shielded from the full penalty of their guilt. *Great Controversy* p. 629. This terrible future destruction is described in the same language as the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah, the flooding of Noah’s world, the plagues of Egypt, the serpent invasion in the wilderness, and the fall of Jericho, Nineveh, and Jerusalem, and many more such catastrophes.

In studying the outpouring of the seven last plagues, we should expect then, that the Scriptures, rightly understood, will show that once again, fully consistent with all previous judgments, the restraining, protecting hand of God is to be removed from the rod of power, so that, freed from His direction and out of His control, the powers of men and nature will break loose in unfettered fury, and men will reap the harvest of their own sowing.

We are greatly assisted in our study of the seven last plagues by two events of the past:

(1) the plagues of Egypt and (2) the fall of Jerusalem. We are told that these two events were a preview of what is to happen in the final crisis.

### The Egyptian Model

“The plagues upon Egypt when God was about to deliver Israel, were similar in character to those more terrible and extensive judgments which are to fall upon the world just before the final deliverance of God’s people.”  
*Great Controversy* p. 628.

The difference between the plagues of Egypt and the seven last plagues is in their character. The plagues of Egypt will not be duplicated by the seven last plagues. In the final plagues there will be no frogs, lice, flies or specific death of the first-born, and in Egypt there was no earthquake, drying up of the River, or scorching men with great heat.

Egyptian Plagues	7 Last Plagues
1 Water Turns to Blood	1 Grievous Sore
2 Frogs	2 Seas Turn to Blood
3 Lice	3 Rivers Turn to Blood
4 Flies	4 Sun Scorches Men
5 Cow Disease	5 Darkness
6 Boils	6 Euphrates River Dries up
7 Hail	7 Hail, Earthquake, Islands Flee, etc.
8 Locusts	
9 Darkness	
10 Death of the Firstborn	

But while the seven last plagues will not be an exact repetition of the Egyptian scourges, they will be similar. In both cases it is the people’s continued determination to shut God out of their lives that brings them to the place where God is compelled to accept their desires and leave them to reap their harvest of pain and loss as natural forces, no longer under His control, release their fury of destruction. At the end, however, the catastrophic powers of nature are not tempered with God’s mercy. This time they will smite the earth and its inhabitants until nothing and no one remains.

## The Jerusalem Model

“The Saviour’s prophecy concerning the visitation of judgments upon Jerusalem is to have another fulfillment, of which that terrible desolation was but a faint shadow. In the fate of the chosen city we may behold the doom of a world that has rejected God’s mercy and trampled upon His law.” *Great Controversy* p. 36.



The Spirit of God, persistently rejected and abused, had at last no choice but to leave the people to themselves. With nothing to restrain the fierce passions of the Jews, they rebelled so treacherously and seditiously against the Romans that they brought the mighty power of Rome, stirred with the most intense spirit of retaliation, to bear upon the city of Jerusalem. The powers of human passion ran riot on both sides. The resulting slaughter and atrocities were worse than human language can picture. Even after the city had been conquered and there were no more to be slain, the Romans vented their wrath on the remaining structures until they had systematically removed all traces of the city, tearing stone from stone until the destruction was absolute.

In the fate of that city the doom of the world is to be read. The time is coming when the sins of men will compel the Spirit of God to totally depart. With nothing to hold in check the deadly powers demons, nature, and men, the earth will be plunged into a time of trouble such as never was. The seven last plagues will in no sense be the manipulation of destructive powers by the hands of God. Instead, just as in Egypt and Jerusalem, God will not even be there. Everything that happens will be the result of His absence, not His presence.

“When *He leaves* the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor. The *restraint* which has been upon the wicked is removed, and *Satan has entire control* of the finally impenitent. God’s long-suffering has ended. The world has rejected His mercy, despised His love, and trampled upon His law. The wicked have passed the boundary of their probation; the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last *withdrawn*. Unsheltered by divine grace, they have *no protection from the wicked one*. Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the *angels of God cease to hold* in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old.” *Great Controversy* p. 614.

“As Jesus moved out of the most holy place, I heard the tinkling of the bells upon His garment; and as *He left* a cloud of darkness covered the inhabitants of the earth. There was then no mediator between guilty man and an offended God. While Jesus had been standing between God and guilty man, a *restraint* was upon *the people*; but when He stepped out from between man and the Father, the *restraint* was removed, and *Satan had entire control* of the finally impenitent. It was impossible for the plagues to be poured out while Jesus officiated in the sanctuary; but as His work there is finished, and His intercession closes, there is nothing to stay the wrath of God, and it breaks with fury upon the shelterless head of the guilty sinner, who has slighted salvation and hated reproof.” *Early Writings* p. 280.



These statements verify the cause of destruction: it is the removal of God's restraining power and the assumption of Satan's full control. But we must guard against misunderstanding the expression "there is nothing to stay the wrath of God." Without properly understanding the principles of God's character and the nature of His "wrath" it could possibly be misunderstood to mean that God gets angry and desires to strike the wicked but Jesus restrains Him through His intercession.



If such an interpretation is correct, then Christ and His Father would be working against each other! God would be longing to destroy man, while Christ holds Him back. But notice that the second reference above clearly identifies where the restraint is being applied: it was "upon the people." The great and precious truth that Jesus and the Father are one, fully united in the task of saving man is not threatened! "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Corinthians 5:19. "The Father Himself loves you" John 15:... God is not seeking the sinner's destruction while the Son works to stifle the Father's fury. They are working together to the limit of their resources in bringing men back to eternal life.

"The Spirit of God is being withdrawn from the earth. When the angel of mercy folds her wings and departs, Satan will do the evil deeds he has long wished to do. Storm and tempest, war and bloodshed—in these things he delights, and thus he gathers in his harvest." *Review and Herald*, September 17, 1901.

"It is God that shields His creatures, and hedges them in from the power of the destroyer. But the Christian world have shown contempt for the law of Jehovah; and the Lord will do just what He has declared that He would—He will withdraw His blessings from the earth, and remove His protecting care from those who are rebelling against His law, and teaching and forcing others to do the same. Satan has control of all whom God does not especially guard. He will favor and prosper some, in order to further his own designs; and he will bring trouble upon others, and lead men to believe that it is God Who is afflicting them." *Great Controversy* p. 589.

"God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown, which yields its unfailing harvest. The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan." *Great Controversy* p. 36.

Thus the Lord makes it very plain how the seven last plagues will come. God will make an assessment that the wicked have fully and universally resolved to depose Him from their hearts, their affairs, and the world. Their decision leaves God no choice but to let them have all they want. So He leaves them, and Satan quickly seizes the powers of nature and men, stirring them to even greater hearts of frenzy and terror. The wicked have sown the seed. The harvest is inevitable. But it is not the work of God. It is the work of men against themselves.



## The Brightness of His Coming

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.” 2 Thessalonians 2:8.



The common picture portrayed by this text is that of Christ descending from the skies, while before Him precede great flowing sheets of devouring flame which reach out to consume any of the wicked who somehow managed to survive the plagues. Such an interpretation, in spite of how obvious it may seem, is not in harmony with the character of God or of Christ. If fire emanating from Him kills the wicked, then He is, after all, an executioner. But He is not, nor ever will be.

When Jesus came the first time to this earth, He testified that He had not come to destroy men's lives but to save them. The purpose of His advent does not change with the second coming. He comes to deliver His people from an earth which has been so reduced by the final disasters as to be incapable of supporting life any longer. He is on a rescue mission, not a mission of destruction.

“Then shall they that obey not the gospel be consumed with the spirit of His mouth, and be destroyed with the brightness of His coming. Like Israel of old, the wicked destroy themselves; they fall by their iniquity. By a life of sin, they have placed themselves so out of harmony with God, their natures have become so debased with evil, that the manifestation of His glory is to them a consuming fire.” *Great Controversy*, p. 37.

Here, the parallel is drawn between the way in which Israel perished and the final destruction of the wicked. As the one perished, so will the other. Thus, the Israelites were also destroyed with the brightness of His coming. The manifestation of God's glory was the brightness of His character in the life of Christ. As the light of His glorious character shone upon them, they were driven to desperate lengths of resistance until they were finally pushed to the extremes of complete apostasy. This was not God's intention, but once they determined to reject Christ, it became the only possible outcome. Truly, they were destroyed by the brightness of His coming.

In exactly the same way, the destruction of the wicked in the final overthrow of mankind, will follow the same sequence:

They will be in a state of deep apostasy.

The brightness of His coming will be revealed to them in the loud cry.

Their rejection of this invitation will drive them to separate themselves from God's protection.

Their destruction then comes from the unleashing of natural forces within themselves and nature.

The fall of the wicked comes when they are obliterated by the furious outburst of their own fierce passions and the outpouring of the seven last plagues.

“In the mad strife of their own fierce passions, and by the awful outpouring of God's unmingled wrath, fall the wicked inhabitants of the earth—priests, rulers, and people, rich and poor, high and low. ‘And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered nor buried.’ At the coming of Christ the wicked are blotted from the face of the whole earth—consumed with the spirit of His mouth, and destroyed by the brightness of His glory.”

*Great Controversy* p. 657.

This reference indicates that the immediate cause of their destruction will be the terrible onslaught of maddened men and nature. But the deeper, underlying cause will be the prior revelation of Christ's character as the last effort of God in offering them salvation. The truth is first stated and then repeated in different words of just how the wicked will perish. They are parallel declarations.

The brightness of Christ's coming begins to shine long before He actually appears in the clouds of heaven. As the message of the loud cry goes forward, the brightness of that coming shines with increasing intensity, pressing upon all throughout the earth to surrender their ways and accept God's perfect righteousness. Unfortunately, very few will respond to this powerful, drawing, message of love. The rest will resist it with all the determination they can muster.

The presentation of the gospel is the key factor in finishing the work. If the advent people had accepted and preached the gospel in its full power, the work would have been finished more than a hundred years ago. Even earlier than that, it would likewise have ended if the apostolic church had lived true to all the light they had received. The only reason the earth has escaped destruction so long is because it has not been subjected to the spirit of His mouth and the brightness of His coming.

## The Final Showdown

When Christ returns, the earth will have been the proving ground for the validity, the power, justice, indestructibility, and perfect righteousness of the principles of God's kingdom for sixty centuries. During this time Satan and his minions will have mounted every possible assault in their desperate search for a single weakness or flaw to which they could present as evidence that God's ways are not perfect and are, as he has claimed all along, in need of reform or even replacement. This has been no trivial test for God.

“Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him. When there came upon Israel the calamities that were the sure result of separation from God—subjugation by their enemies, cruelty, and death—it is said that ‘His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.’ ‘In all their affliction He was afflicted... and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old.’ Judges 10:16; Isaiah 63:9...

“As the ‘whole creation groans and travails in pain together’ (Romans 8:22), the heart of the infinite Father is pained in sympathy. Our world is a vast lazaret house, a scene of misery that we dare not allow even our thoughts to dwell upon. Did we realize it as it is, the burden would be too terrible. Yet God feels it all.”  
*Education* pp. 263, 264.

“Christ feels the woes of every sufferer. When evil spirits rend a human frame, Christ feels the curse. When fever is burning up the life current, He feels the agony.” *Desire of Ages* p. 823.

“Not a sigh is breathed, not a pain felt, not a grief pierces the soul, but the throb vibrates to the Father's heart... In all our afflictions He is afflicted.” *ibid*, p. 356.

We are inclined to think that Jesus came to this earth, suffered for thirty-three years, and then returned to the perfect bliss of heaven. This is anything but true. The Father and Son have suffered and will continue to suffer to a depth we can never imagine as long as sin ravages our planet. They desire to end the sin problem and all the suffering it brings even more than we do. But during all the long ages of darkness and death, God has never deviated from the stated and perfect principles of His government. He has never violated the freedom of any individual, has never taken a single life, has never destroyed, and has never broken His own law. He has been a Saviour, and a Saviour only, ever and only working to bless, heal, and restore.

For this, every redeemed soul shall be eternally grateful. But while God has been immaculately perfect in all His dealings with sin and sinners, He has not been seen as such. In the eyes of men, Satan has dressed our pure and holy God in his own evil garments. Billions have gone to their graves with a totally distorted view of the true nature of God and His character. Yet, God is not just concerned about His reputation. He knows that His character and the principles of righteousness are one and the same. The justification of one assures the establishment of the other. He further understands that the eternal happiness and security of the universe depend on the vindication of those principles.

Because of this, every person who has ever lived must be assembled for the final showdown in the great controversy. Every principle upon which the kingdom of God is built and operates must be revealed in sharply defined contrast to the principles of Satan's government.

Some, may accept that perhaps God has restrained Himself from slaying anyone or destroying anything during the six millenniums of the great controversy. But when it comes to the final destruction of the wicked after the seventh millennium, they cannot see any other alternative, but that He will arise to personally exterminate the willfully unrepentant lost of all ages. They reason that, since everyone who has ever lived, are given a complete review of all the details and can see for themselves that God was fair and just and righteous in all his activities during 6,000 years, that now He will finally have the right to destroy the sinners without being regarded as cruel

or unjust. In fact, the unfallen worlds and the redeemed within the city will be so incensed with the records and behavior of the lost that they will expect and even demand God to destroy them.

This reasoning, if true, would turn God into a politician Whose policies are shaped by public opinion. But God is motivated only by righteousness, not by the feelings or wishes of His creatures. Before the great controversy began, throughout its entire duration, and in its final resolution, God has and will act with unvarying consistency.

This truth has been poorly understood by earthlings, most of whom have gone to their dusty graves with distorted understandings of God's character. Therefore, in His great love and mercy, He will raise every human being for one last time, so that all can be shown God's workings and their own rejection of them. Every person, including Satan Himself, will acknowledge that God has been just and that the loss of their own souls is their own doing. "Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess..."



When the earth is once again filled with men, Satan springs into action. As Esau gathered his army against his younger brother Jacob, so now Satan marshals the billions of all history, the greatest army ever assembled on earth. "Skillful artisans construct implements of war." *Great Controversy* p. 664. According to the principle of freedom which the Lord extends to all, they will be given as much time as they wish to prepare for the last great battle. But there is no battle.

As they make their final assault, their approach is arrested by the appearance of Jesus. They are halted in their tracks. They who refused to be warmed by God's love and mercy throughout their lives, now witness a gigantic panoramic display of God's all-out effort to save them down through the ages.

It is the complete, unabridged, multimedia presentation of the entire great controversy from beginning to end. "And the glory—the character—of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." Isaiah 40:15.

Even though their eternal decision has long been sealed, God makes one last demonstration of His heart of love, a love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." 1 Corinthians 13:7, 8. Jesus goes out to entreat all the older brothers as He holds out the hands that were pierced for them.

"Your hand shall find out all your enemies: Your right hand (that nail-scarred hand) shall find out those that hate You... for they intended evil against You, they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform." Psalm 28:8-11. They have come as enemies to take by storm the Holy City—a silly, impossible scheme concocted by Satan as a last-ditch effort to win a losing battle.

Now, Jesus speaks to them as His lost sons. "Is My hand not shortened that it cannot save? (Isaiah 50:2) Return to Me for I will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7). I am able to utterly save all that come to God by me (Hebrews 7:25). I am merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth (Exodus 34:6), not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).



I desire that all men be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). As I live, I have no pleasure in your death, but that you turn from your way and live. So, please, turn back from your ways; for why will ye die?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

But again His love is spurned. They remain outside because they won't go in (Luke 15:28)—like the prodigal's brother, like the people outside the ark, like those invited to the wedding feast (Matthew 23:13).

As scene after scene unfolds before them, they see the true nature of Satan and God, and the real issues in the rebellion. They see clearly that God's law was provided as a life-preserver; that their disregard of the divine precepts didn't release them from bondage, but exposed them to untold misery. They see that every trouble they experienced in life was the result of their own choices. They recognize with shocking reality that they have been deceived.



Their rebellion against God is quenched, they have no cause, no case, no argument against their Creator. Instead of rushing to attack the city, they fall and “worship the Prince of life.” *Great Controversy*, p. 669.

“Satan sees that his voluntary rebellion has unfitted him for heaven. He has trained his powers to war against God; the purity, peace, and harmony of heaven would be to him supreme torture. His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced. The reproach which he has endeavored to cast upon Jehovah rests wholly upon himself. And now Satan bows down, and confesses the justice of his sentence.” *ibid*, p. 670.

“Satan's own works have condemned him. God's wisdom, His justice, and His goodness stand fully vindicated. It is seen that all His dealings in the great controversy have been conducted with respect to the eternal good of His people, and the good of all the worlds that He has created... With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare, ‘Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.’” *ibid*, p. 671.

“As Satan looks upon the fruit of his toil he sees only failure and ruin. He has led the multitudes to believe that the city of God would be an easy prey; but he knows that this is false. Then the spirit of rebellion, like a mighty torrent again bursts forth. Filled with frenzy, he rushes into the midst of his subjects to inspire them with his own fury for a last desperate struggle against the King of Heaven. But there are now none to acknowledge his supremacy. His power is at an end.” *ibid*, p. 672.

The stage is now set for the final act in the drama—the purification of heaven and earth from the slain and presence of sin by fire.

“ ‘Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.’ ‘The indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and His fury upon all the armies: He has utterly destroyed them, He has delivered them to the slaughter.’ ‘Upon the wicked He shall rain quick burning coals, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.’ Isaiah 9:5; 34:2; Psalm 11:6 (margin). Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth. Devouring flames burst from every yawning chasm. The very rocks are on fire. The day has come that shall burn as an oven. The elements melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein are burned up. (Malachi 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10).” *Great Controversy* p. 672.



Like all the other pictures of Divine judgment in Scripture, these statements give the initial impression that God personally pours down fire upon the wicked. This is considered to be very natural to the average person; God has every right to do it, and, besides, how else can God get rid of the wicked?

We have already recounted many other examples of how the judgments of God are different from the judgments of men. We are reminded again that God's ways are different from man's ways. There is no reason to suppose that these verses in Revelation are to be understood any differently.

At the end of the millennium God will act the same way He always has. He will simply say to the lost, "I respect your choice to live without Me. I set you free from My presence and control. All the earth and the mighty powers surrounding it are now in your hands. The rod of powers is out of My hands and control."

When the realization of the truth about God falls upon the wicked and they confess His justice by bowing before Him, they rise from their knees in a frenzy of rage fueled by their great sense of loss and turn on Satan, the one who has robbed them of everything.

"The wicked are filled with the same hatred of God that inspires Satan; but they see that their case is hopeless. Their rage is kindled against Satan and those who have been his agents in deception, and with the fury of demons they turn upon them. And there follows a scene of universal strife." *The Story of Redemption*, p. 428.

The weapons intended for the city will be directed against each other. When they hurl their atomic, nuclear, and cosmic weapons at the devil, they will certainly start a mighty conflagration. When people burn with hate and anger, as they did when they rushed upon Stephen to stone him, they "gnash their teeth" (Acts 7:54). There will also be gnashing of teeth when those outside the city turn on each other with burning hatred and anger.

Then "wickedness burns as the fire... and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire; no man shall spare his brother." Isaiah 9:18, 19. "Everyman's sword shall be against his brother" Ezekiel 38:21. "A great disturbance from the Lord shall be among them and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbor, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbor and they shall fight against each other in hand-to-hand combat" Zechariah 14:13.

"The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made:  
in the net which they hid is their own foot taken.  
The Lord is known by the judgment which He executes:  
the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands."  
Psalm 9:15, 16

The prodigal son responded to His father with renewed admiration and gratitude; his older brother with anger and hatred. This will be the very same response to God's last effort to reveal His love to a dying world. Satan taught them how to hate, to kill, to destroy. Now he has dug his own grave. "Because you have set your heart as the heart of God... I will bring strangers upon you, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom, and they shall defile your brightness. They shall bring you down to the pit." Ezekiel 28:6-8.

Who dug the bottomless pit? And who will fall into it?

# Scam Backfires

Babylon: A surprised team of CIA undercover agents got their turn to face the music today. Their carefully planned scam to trap cabinet director, Daniel Schaser,<sup>1</sup> made late breaking headlines yesterday.

Schaser had taken them over six months to nail. Background investigations were unable to turn up a shred of moral, financial, or political impropriety<sup>2</sup> but the team finally was able to obtain incriminating photographs of Schaser confirming his role in serious anti-government activities.<sup>3</sup>

The bubble burst, however, early this morning when Schaser emerged unscathed from a vicious 12-hour trial.<sup>4</sup> Scam leader, Ivan Green,<sup>5</sup> protested the unexpected repeal. “We’re being thrown to the lions,” he complained before a crowd of reporters.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Daniel 1:7. Belteshazzar.

<sup>4</sup>Verses 16:22

<sup>2</sup>Daniel 6:4.

<sup>5</sup>Green with envy

<sup>3</sup>Verses 5, 11, 13.

<sup>6</sup>Daniel 6:24



**Government agents walk the plank as secret plan to frame high level official turns sour**

The Lord is famous for His kind of judgment—He simply let’s His enemies hang themselves. It’s the same every time. When the Ammonites ganged up with the Moabites and the Edomites and marched on Judah to wipe them out, King Jehoshaphat didn’t bite his nails. He turned to the Lord who told him, “You won’t need to fight. Just stand still and watch Me save you.” 2 Chronicles 20:22.

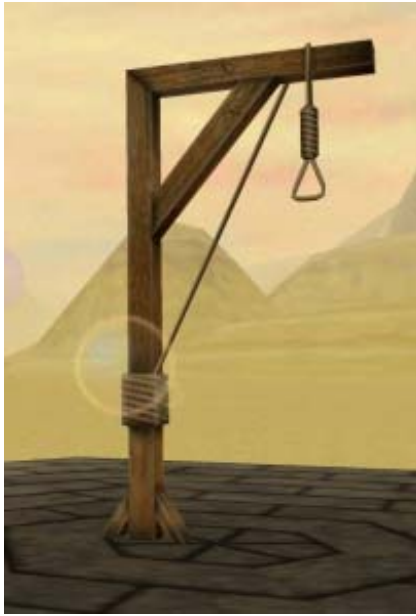
So Jehoshaphat jumped up and lead the church choir in a hymn of thanks right out to the battle field. But by the time they got there “the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, utterly to destroy them: and when they made an end of them, *every one helped destroy another...*and none escaped.” Verse 24.

This tactic is repeated over and over throughout scripture. God promises to “overthrow the throne of kingdoms... the horses and their riders shall come down.” And how does He do it? “Every one by the sword of his brother.” Haggai 2:22.

## Hanging Hamaan

There was a man by the name of Hamaan, who lived in the land of Persia. He had a very high position in the King’s court, but there was a certain peon who irked him to death. Literally. This, of course, was Mordecai, a lowly Jew, who happened to be the uncle of a very lovely, beautiful, knock-out gorgeous young lady by the name of Esther.

Well, through the providence of God, Esther won the Miss Persia Pageant to become Queen of the land. Meanwhile, Mordecai saved the king from a covert operation that had assassination written all over it. His majesty was so grateful he honored Mordecai with a tickertape parade right down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, lead by his very own royal representative, Hamaan himself!



Hamaan was furious, jealous, resentful, insulted, and down-right mad. He finally got so hot under the tunic that he rigged up a clever scheme to exterminate every last Jew in Persia. He tricked the king into signing what appeared to be a harmless little bill that was worded in such a way that it appeared to be a matter of national security. But down there in the small print, though disguised, was Hamaan's true intentions.

Guess what? The law got signed, and Hamaan's master plan was ready for execution. He ran home to tell Mrs. Hamaan the good news. "And I know just what I'll do with Mordecai! I'm gonna make a custom-built, super-sized gallows 90 feet high just for him. Everyone will see him swinging way up there by his miserable little neck!"

Well, Hamaan was a real dummy to have done that, 'cause the whole plan backfired. Somehow, Mordecai was informed about Hamaan's plot. He leaked the news to Esther, who told the king, who was so infuriated that he had Hamaan hung on his own gallows.

"Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein:  
and he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon him."  
Proverbs 26:27

"His mischief shall return upon his own head,  
and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate."  
Psalm 7:16

It's a law, a principle of life. "What goes around, comes around" "What you sow, that's what you reap." Or, as Obediah put it, "As thou has done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head." Verse 15.

As the flood destroyed the world of Noah with water from below and from above, so the final flood of fire will come from below and from above. Likewise, as the sun and moon were affected at the time of Noah's flood, they will also become unstable again at the end when all the powers of nature are turned over to the lost. When God's presence is again withdrawn at the end of the millennium, no one else will be able to control these powers. Our sun could well erupt in great solar flares and end in a super nova explosion that shows streams of fire deep into the solar system and beyond. The fire from above would mingle with the fire from below. The whole earth is enveloped in a sea of flame on which the Holy City rides as did the ark.



Solomon said that the loving wrath of God is "as strong as death;" His jealousy for us is as unrelenting as the grave; it is like "coals of fire with a most vehement flame"...so hot that "many waters cannot quench His love, neither can the floods drown it." Song of Solomon 8:6.

Jesus said, "I am come to send fire on the earth and what will I, if it be already kindled?" Luke 12:49.  
Cleopas said the same thing after his trip to Emmaus, "Did not our hearts burn within us?"

Behold Your God Wright 1979 / Hullquist 2005

Why did their hearts burn? Because they had been exposed to the burning love of Jesus.

Jeremiah said it this way: “His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones.” Jeremiah 20:9.

We are told by our friends that eternal fire is going to be the lot of the wicked. But in Isaiah 33:14 the question is asked, “Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” Of course, the answer from people is that it will be those that end up in—the bad place. But who will *really* dwell there? Verse 15 tells us. “He that walks righteously, and is upright...” It’s the saints who are going to dwell with everlasting burnings. And what is that? It’s God Himself. He is a consuming fire—consuming to sin. But those who receive His goodness into their lives, become just like Him. They become like the fire. And they can’t be hurt by it. (Hebrews 12:29; 1 John 3:2; Isaiah 43:2; Daniel 3:25).



Daniel’s three friends were thrown into the fire and it didn’t hurt them. Why? Because Jesus, the real fire was in there with them, and they couldn’t be hurt. They had become fire also. And when Jesus comes again we won’t be hurt by the fire either, because we will be just like the fire. That’s what Jesus calls His angels. In the book of Hebrews chapter 1:7, which is actually quoting Psalm 104:4, “He calls His ministers a flame of fire.”

But the fire of Jesus’ love works in two different ways. It will either melt your heart or bake it hard; it will either burn in your heart to give you life, or it will burn in your life to bring you death. It is either a “savor of life unto life” or “the savor of death unto death.” 2 Corinthians 2:15, 16.

Jesus said, “Whosoever shall fall upon that stone—upon Me—will be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” Luke 20:19. It is His intent that we will be melted by His love; it is not His intent that we destroy ourselves as we try to escape from it. But that is the unavoidable result. Because men will reject His burning love for them, they will reap their own burning hate for themselves.

The deadly experiment will be ended and it will be eternally demonstrated that through it all, God did not change. Though Satan and evil angels did their utmost to provoke Him to anger, to destroy the rebellious of earth, God would not be angered, insulted or hurt. It has been shown that the way of the cross—the power of self-sacrificing love, which serves, no matter what the cost—is stronger than all the ways of force combined.

Again, Graham Maxwell:

“Our heavenly Father is about to witness the loss of vast numbers of His children. For one last time He raises His voice. He—the Gracious One, the One who would much rather speak to us gently of the truth—raises His voice in one last awesome warning and appeal: ‘If you are determined to leave Me, I will have to let you go. But when I give you up, you will be destroyed!.. The devil would have us misunderstand this message as the words of an angry God. But they are the heart-breaking words of a maligned, benevolent Creator who is being rejected.

“There are explanations of the death of Christ and of His intercession in our behalf that put God in a most unfavorable light, less gracious and understanding than His Son. Such subjects as sin, the law, and the destruction of the wicked are sometimes presented in such a way—including the voice and manner of preaching—as to leave people with precisely the picture of God that Satan has been perpetrating since the very beginning.



“No greater privilege and honor can come to us than to be entrusted with the thrilling truth that God is love, totally, forever, and in all that He does or allows. Surely the time has come that God’s friends everywhere who share a jealousy for God’s reputation should speak up with pride and conviction as to what the love of God is all about.” (Graham A. Maxwell, *Can God Be Trusted?* Southern Publishing, Nashville, Tennessee, 1977).

### **In Conclusion**

The world is plunging into the fiercest crisis of all time. Tragic loss and wholesale destruction will wring from every human lip the desperate question, “Why?” Billions are still groping in the darkness of misapprehension. Nearly without exception every human mind has been deceived. The God of all creation is blamed for the devil’s crimes. His true character is not known. He has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. As Satan nears his final hours, he struggles feverishly “with all power and signs and lying wonders.” Knowing that his time is short he works with “great wrath,” constantly trying to create in our minds a false conception of our Creator—to regard our Saviour with fear and even hate.

Satan has cleverly sold mankind a slanderous hoax. He tells of a Divine Tyrant who satisfies His thirst for justice by throwing sinners to the flames of hell, who pours out His cruel wrath on all who do not please Him. Such lies aptly describe the great deceiver *himself*. Sadly, many believe them. While the devil continues his mad spree of ruin and destruction, our heavenly Father is unfairly framed.

In a very real way, the Good News is about the kind of God Who rules the heavens. Fully displayed in the life of Jesus, our God is full of love and compassion, the Author of life, the world’s Redeemer. He is “not willing that any should perish.” He is able to “save to the uttermost.” Not to be feared, He is our only safety, our sanctuary, our security.

This does not mean that sin and disregard of God’s laws for our well-being will go unpunished. No one can live a life of crime, immorality, or spiritual indifference with impunity. Carelessness will always bring its own consequences. But God doesn’t have to change His policy of love and mercy to deal with sin. He doesn’t have to punish sinners with His own bare hands. He never changes. His disposition will always be the same. He only needs to leave the rebellious ones to themselves. Sin will consume itself.

God does not force the will or choice of any. He takes no pleasure in a mousy doormat kind of obedience, nor in rigid legalistic compliance. He desires that the creatures of His hands shall love Him because He is worthy of their love. He would have us obey Him because we respect His wisdom, we appreciate His benevolence, and we admire His justice. All who truly understand these qualities will love Him because they are drawn to Him.

“It is at this very time, when the world is steeped in darkness about God, that this message is being proclaimed. It is a message of illuminating influence and saving power. The true character of God is being revealed. Into the darkness of this world is being shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness. This is the last ray of merciful light, the last message of hope and mercy to the world. It is a revelation of God’s character—a character of love.”

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