

Jesus and Child Abuse

By Frank Zimmerman

SOME people think that because the New Testament record of the early life of Jesus is not recorded in great detail, that therefore we know very little about that part of His life. This is shallow reasoning.

The whole Old Testament speaks of Christ, and the experiences that His faithful people went through in those 4000 years before His appearance on earth, were a foreshadowing of how He would be treated when He came. Therefore we can study the lives of men like Abraham, Moses, and Daniel, or the early lives of young men like Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, and David, and know that the conflicts they went through were similar to the ones He met as a child. These Old Testament saints had the life of Christ in them, and that life was in conflict with the powers of darkness. It was the same two powers meeting, and therefore the conflicts were similar.

The *Psalms* also reveal the inner conflicts of a true believer, and so these also speak of the life of Christ, both as a child and youth, and later as a man.

Psalm 40

⁷ Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me.

Not only does the Old Testament reveal Christ through the patriarchs and prophets, but it was the Old Testament that Christ studied as a child and youth. It was there that He gathered the strength and power to live a holy life. Then these scriptures would have to deal with the conflicts He would meet, if they were to strengthen Him. The conflicts expressed in the *Psalms* were His conflicts.

With that in mind, I would like to go through a few paragraphs from the chapter “Days of Conflict” from Ellen White’s book on the life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*. In this book she discusses

some details of His early life, which although not written in detail in the New Testament, are implied in the Old Testament, both from the experience of the patriarchs, and from the conflicts expressed in the *Psalms*.

In these paragraphs, I was impressed with the way Jesus handled conflicts and abuse.

The Desire of Ages, p. 84:

Jesus had come to teach the meaning of the worship of God, and He could not sanction the mingling of human requirements with the divine precepts. He did not attack the precepts or practices of the learned teachers; but **when reprov'd for His own simple habits, He presented the word of God in justification of His conduct.**

Here, Jesus was “reprov’d”, or rebuked. But he did not enter into a big argument or loud words of self-defense. Nor did he come down on the rebuker and accuse them of hypocrisy. He simply presented the word of God which supported His conduct.

The Desire of Ages, p. 85:

In every gentle and submissive way, Jesus tried to please those with whom He came in contact. Because He was so gentle and unobtrusive, the scribes and elders supposed that He would be easily influenced by their teaching. **They urged Him** to receive the maxims and traditions that had been handed down from the ancient rabbis, but He asked for their authority in Holy Writ. He would hear every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; but He could not obey the inventions of men. . . . They knew that no authority could be found in Scripture for their traditions. They realized that in spiritual understanding Jesus was far in advance of them. Yet **they were angry** because He did not obey their dictates. Failing to convince Him, they sought Joseph and Mary, and set before them His course of noncompliance. Thus **He suffered rebuke and censure.**

So He suffered “rebuke and censure”. That’s all it says... “he suffered.” There was no lightning from heaven to justify Him and prove Him right. He just had to suffer it. Do you suppose He

cherished the hurt up, until it filled his mind? Do you suppose He was waiting for the day when these rebukers would be exposed as the hypocrites they were? It says nothing of the sort.

The Desire of Ages, p. 86:

At a very early age, Jesus had begun to act for himself in the formation of His character, and not even respect and love for His parents could turn Him from obedience to God's word. "It is written" was His reason for every act that varied from the family customs. But the influence of the rabbis made His life a **bitter** one. Even in His youth He had to learn the **hard lesson of silence and patient endurance**.

So his life was made bitter by these rabbis. What was the lesson he had to learn by this? "silence and patient endurance." It says nothing about wounded pride, desire for revenge, or self-justification. If that kind of treatment was what His heavenly Father allowed Him to experience, then that was what He needed, and He would exercise silence and patient endurance. The temptation to "do something" found no answering chord in His heart.

The Desire of Ages, p. 86:

His brothers, as the sons of Joseph were called, sided with the rabbis. They insisted that the traditions must be heeded, as if they were the requirements of God. They even regarded the precepts of men more highly than the word of God, and they were greatly annoyed at the clear penetration of Jesus in distinguishing between the false and the true. **His strict obedience** to the law of God **they condemned** as stubbornness.

So even among his close family circle, His strict obedience was condemned as "stubbornness." Sometimes He would point to the word of God, sometimes He would just be silent. It depended on whether the words could help the other person or not. Then it goes on to describe in more detail the relationship between Him and His brothers:

The Desire of Ages, p. 87:

...When they spoke harshly to poor, degraded beings, Jesus sought out these very ones, and spoke to them words of encour-

agement. To those who were in need He would give a cup of cold water, and would quietly place His own meal in their hands. As He relieved their sufferings, the truths He taught were associated with His acts of mercy, and were thus riveted in the memory.

All this displeased His brothers. Being older than Jesus, they felt that He should be under their dictation. **They charged Him** with thinking himself superior to them, **and reprovved Him** for setting himself above their teachers and the priests and rulers of the people. **Often they threatened and tried to intimidate Him**; but **He passed on**, making the Scriptures His guide.

So He was “charged” with “thinking himself superior,” “reproved” for “setting himself above their teachers,” and “threatened,” and they “tried to intimidate Him.” Do you suppose his sensitive nature was emotionally scarred? Was he crippled by this verbal abuse? Wouldn’t this kind of treatment damage Him and make Him unfit to be a normal healthy man?

But He passed on, making the Scriptures His guide.

It says nothing about Him even answering them. They weren’t open to answers, answers couldn’t help them, so He just passed on. It rolled off him like water off a duck’s back. He had the approval of His Father, and nothing they could say would shake that, or cause Him to take up His own defense. He wouldn’t have even thought anything like,

“Well I’m right, so I don’t care!”

He *did care* about them, as we will see later. But there was nothing more He could do at that time to help them, so He silently endured their abuses. Here you can see Satan working overtime to get Christ to utter even the slightest word of impatience or self-defense. But not one word came out.

*This is what it means to
“keep the commandments of God.”
(Revelation 14:12)*

But there is more...

The Desire of Ages, p. 87:

Jesus loved His brothers, and treated them with **unfailing kindness**;

That is the effect that their treatment had on Him. It did not in the slightest degree affect His love of them, nor His treatment of them.

The Desire of Ages, p. 88:

Because the life of Jesus condemned evil, **He was opposed**, both at home and abroad. His unselfishness and integrity were commented on with a **sneer**. His forbearance and kindness were termed **cowardice**.

More abuse is heaped on Him: sneers, accusations of cowardice.

The Desire of Ages, p. 88:

There were those who tried to **cast contempt upon Him** because of His birth, and even in His childhood He had to meet their **scornful looks and evil whisperings**.

Yet more abuse: contempt, scornful looks, evil whisperings. And here is the key sentence:

The Desire of Ages, p. 88:

If He had responded by **an impatient word or look**, if He had conceded to His brothers by even **one wrong act**, **He would have failed** of being a perfect example. Thus He would have failed of carrying out the plan for our redemption. Had He even admitted that there could be **an excuse for sin**, Satan would have triumphed, and the world would have been lost. This is why the tempter worked to make His life as trying as possible, that He might be led to sin.

All of this He suffered, and His Father allowed it, to test Him to the full. He had to show that there was no “excuse for sin.” And His experience is to be ours. Do we want it?

“But they treated me so bad, that is why I lost my patience!”

Wouldn't that be a good excuse? No. Actually that is how Satan triumphs, as mentioned above. We support Satan's rebellion when we admit by our own reaction to the hardships we experience, that we can become impatient, or justify ourselves. In essence, we say that our Father in heaven doesn't care enough about us, so we have to take matters into our own hands.

When Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and declared,

"Hear I stand, I can do no other,"

-he was *not* saying,

"I'm right and you're wrong!"

Instead he was making a similar plea as Jesus made. He was saying,

"I'd like to render you all obedience and respect, but I cannot do what you are asking because the word of God commands me to do otherwise."

There was no bitterness or retaliation in it.

Now let's follow a number of experiences Christ went through, and how He reacted to them:

The Desire of Ages, p. 88-89:

But to every temptation He had one answer, "It is written." He rarely rebuked any wrongdoing of His brothers, but He had a word from God to speak to them. Often He was accused of cowardice for refusing to unite with them in some forbidden act; but His answer was, It is written,

Job 28

²⁸ The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

There were some who sought His society, feeling at peace in His presence; but many avoided Him, because they were rebuked by His stainless life. Young companions urged Him to do as they did. He was bright and cheerful; they enjoyed His presence, and

welcomed His ready suggestions; but they were impatient at His scruples, and pronounced Him narrow and strait-laced. Jesus answered, It is written,

Psalm 119

⁹ Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to your word.

¹¹ Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

Often He was asked, “Why are you bent on being so singular, so different from us all?” It is written, He said,

Psalm 119

¹ Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.

² Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart.

³ They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways.

When questioned why He did not join in the frolics of the youth of Nazareth, He said, It is written,

Psalm 119

¹⁴ I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies, as much as in all riches.

¹⁵ I will meditate in your precepts, and have respect unto your ways.

¹⁶ I will delight myself in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

Here He pointed to the word of God as the reason for His behavior. He made no long speech of self-defense, nor did He turn and accuse His accusers, but simply pointed to a pertinent Scripture. Then comes another important statement:

The Desire of Ages, p. 89:

Jesus did not contend for His rights. Often His work was made unnecessarily severe because He was willing and uncomplaining. Yet He did not fail nor become discouraged. He lived above these difficulties, as if in the light of God’s countenance. He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently.

I knew a person once who could not endure this statement. When I was reading it once out loud, they interrupted and exclaimed,

“That’s not in the Bible!”

What do you think, dear Reader? Are these statements in the Bible?

- Did Isaac “contend for his rights” when his wells were stolen by others? *Genesis 26:18-22*.
- Did Jacob “contend for his rights” against Esau when returning to the land of promise? *Genesis 33*.
- Didn’t Joseph treat his brothers with “unfailing kindness” even after they sold him into slavery? *Genesis 45:4-8, Genesis 50:15-21*.
- Did Moses “contend for his right” to be respected when Miriam and Aaron accused him? *Numbers 12:1-3*.
- Was Job’s life made “unnecessarily severe” because he was “willing and uncomplaining”? *Job 1*.
- Did David “retaliate when roughly used” by Shimei? *2 Samuel 16:5-14*.

Is the servant greater than his Master? Then should we retaliate when roughly used? At least, “for the glory of God”?

1 Peter 2

²¹ For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

²² Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth:

²³ Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judges righteously.

And we are reading here about actual abuse. Not just imaginary abuse, which is something we are often afflicted with, when we imagine ourselves mistreated, and it is all in our own minds. Be-

cause we are so used to defending ourselves, we imagine everyone to be against us.

We are attracted to the movies where we identify with the victim, and then rejoice when the hero finally triumphs, crushing down the enemy. Our imagination takes hold of this and we become the hero, finally getting revenge on those who oppress us. This is one main attraction of the movies: by them we can live out our own self-justification. We are proved right, we get revenge, we triumph in the end over our enemies. But it was not so with Jesus.

Many people today expect Jesus to come and “prove them right” by taking them to heaven and sending those whom they don’t like into hell. The Jews expected this kind of Messiah in their day. But they were wrong, and we will also be wrong if we expect this kind of “second coming.”

We are called to suffer with Christ, and to bring down Satan’s kingdom by suffering abuse and mistreatment, but not letting one bit of this change our attitude, or break our faith in God, or cause us to become impatient. Here is the whole struggle. This is why Joseph, David, and Job suffered abuse and mistreatment. This is why we are called to be Christians, to learn this kind of obedience.

The Desire of Ages, p. 89:

Again and again He was asked, **Why do you submit to such spiteful usage, even from your brothers?** It is written, He said,

Proverbs 3

¹ My son, forget not my law; but let your heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to you.

² Let not mercy and truth forsake you: bind them about your neck; write them upon the table of your heart:

³ So shall you find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

When we hear that we are to be like Christ, and then we read these kinds of accounts, the most common human reaction is:

“But if I am like that, then others will treat me like a doormat, and trample all over me!”

Well...perhaps they will do some of those things. If that is what our Father requires to test our patience and the depth of our experience and trust, then let it be.

Matthew 6

¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done.

Is it not for our own good and for the good of His cause, that He allows these things? Does He not suffer us to be tempted in order to bring out a contrast between His character (through us) and the character of Satan?

2 Timothy 2

¹² If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him...

But please also note that Jesus would not sin. He drew a firm line there. He did not allow others to push Him into sin. He did not submit to becoming a tool for sin. He submitted to all manner of accusation, evil whispering, abusive words, and so forth...but He would not allow any of it to sway Him into sin, anger, or revenge.

If His fellow Jews would come to Him and tell Him stories about how evil the Romans were, or how corrupt the Roman leaders were, would He allow this to tempt Him to cherish hatred against them? Not at all. This is clear from His teachings:

Matthew 5

⁴⁴ 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.

So what do we do to those who mistreat us? Love them, bless them, do good to them, and pray for them. That's all. We can also, when it is helpful, offer a verse of scripture that explains our be-

havior. But when this will not help, we must keep silence. That is what it means to keep the commandments. That is the “whole duty” of man: to “fear God and keep His commandments.” *Ecclesiastes* 12:13.

“But,” you might be thinking, “what about the cleansing of the temple?” This was also a manifestation of love, and could only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a warning against the Jews about how God regarded their misrepresentation of His service. It was not accomplished by human anger, impatience, or lashing out. If Jesus had “lost His cool” at that moment, then the Holy Spirit could never have used Him, and actually, Satan would have triumphed. Also, the temple “police” would have just grabbed Jesus and escorted Him out of the door. That is all human power could have done...it would have utterly failed.¹

Also, after the demonstration and warning were given in the power of the Holy Spirit, God suffered the Jews to go back to their evil ways. Their abuse of His service was continued, and He simply suffered it, until it finally destroyed them.

Now ask yourself,

*“Is this the way I respond when I am mistreated,
or imagine myself to be?”*

¹ Read this article for a more thorough consideration of this topic: *How Did Jesus Cleanse the Temple?*