

God's Character: A Key to Understanding Prophecy

God's character, and the revelation of it in contrast to Satan's misrepresentation, is a key to gaining a proper understanding of Bible prophecy. The struggle between Christ and Satan is THE topic of the Bible, and that struggle is primarily a spiritual one. It is over the minds and hearts of men, regarding the justness and rightness of God's character and ways. A misunderstanding of this key point spells disaster when interpreting prophecy.

God's character is expressed in the word love:

1 John 4

⁸ God is love.

But His love is also defined in the principles of His law:

1 John 5

³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.

The two great commandments are love to God and love to man:

Matthew 22

³⁷ Jesus said unto him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

³⁸ This is the first and great commandment.

³⁹ And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.



The law, or love, can be summed up as selfless service, irrespective of the cost to myself. Love-

1 Corinthians 13

⁵ ...seeks not her own.

God's kingdom is one in which the subjects (us) are to be like Him in character. He asks us to keep His law, because that is His very own character:

Leviticus 19

² You shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy.

And how are we to be holy? By keeping His commandments!

Numbers 15

⁴⁰ Do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

Unlike earthly kings, who make laws to keep their subjects in order, and which they are not bound to keep, God keeps His own law. Jesus said:

Psalms 40

⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God, for your law is within my heart.

Satan's rebellion in heaven and on earth, attacks both of these points: God's character, and His law. You can see this very simply at the fall, when the serpent implied that God was holding back something good from man:

Genesis 3

³ God hath said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

⁴ And the serpent said unto the woman, You shall not surely die:

⁵ For God does know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Here Satan (through the serpent) presents the idea that the law is a restriction, imposed to keep us down:

*“God just doesn't want you to be like Him,
He wants to keep all the power and glory to Himself!”*

As well, Satan's charge implies that God was lying to them, hence the attack on His character:

“He can't be trusted, He's selfish!”

Satan offered another way, a supposed improvement to God's government.

How could God answer these charges? If He terminated Satan's life, then everyone would think that maybe God was trying to hide the truth, and anyway, hurting those who disagree with you is not part of a kingdom of love. Therefore, it could not be a contest of mere physical strength.

What God did was to allow Satan time to prove whether he had a better way or not. And this earth is the testing ground. God would demonstrate His ways through His people, and prove His promise that the way of the Lord was the only way of life and blessing; while Satan would try to establish the opposite claim: that he had a better way. We get glimpses into this behind-the-scenes struggle in books such as Job, and in the conflict between Satan and Christ at the temptation in the wilderness.

From Satan's side, he can use certain weapons that the Lord will never use: lies, error, deceit, murder, and so forth. Anything is fair game as long as he wins; the end justifies the means. And he can also win the argument by wiping out God's people, because if there's no godly people left, then the promises of God have failed.

And so he tried to make the promises fail by wiping out the kingly line in Israel. But he failed. He also tried to destroy the saints in the persecutions of the middle ages and reformation, to the extent that Jesus prophesied:

Matthew 24

²² Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.

But this attempt also failed.

From God's side, the weapons are truth and love, or simply stated: righteousness.

Revelation 19

¹¹ In righteousness he judges and makes war.

God does not use compulsion to force people to love and obey Him. It is impossible to force people to love you. Love is won by gratitude for selfless acts. It is the demonstration of God's character of truth and love alone, in contrast to Satan's character of "whatever gives me what I want" that unveils the deception and causes people to leave Satan's kingdom and join with God. Christ said:

John 12

³² If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.

That is how the Lord wins the battle. It is also expressed in the admonition given to the early church:

Romans 12

²¹ Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

That is also why the cross was the greatest victory in the battle, because Satan was exposed as a murderer and liar (at least to heaven and to those men who had spiritual eyesight), while God was revealed as completely unselfish and loving.

In winning this battle with Satan, Christ fought strictly by the principles of God's law: He never lied, killed, stole, cheated, coveted, followed idols, and so forth. Never was there a man on earth who followed God's way so perfectly. Many of the Old Testament saints occasionally tried to do God's work by using Satan's methods:

- Abraham tried to gain the promised son by an adulterous relationship.

- Jacob tried to get the birthright by lying.
- Moses tried to free the people by killing.

But Christ never resorted to those methods. He was ever faithful to the principles of God's law. Righteousness was only to be established by using righteous methods. While it seemed at times that His cause was hopeless and that He would be wiped out, in the end, He won everything:

Revelation 5

¹² Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.

This was the “bruising of the serpent's head” that was foretold in the first prophecy of the Bible (*Genesis* 3:15). Satan bruised the heel (humanity) of Christ, but Christ bruised the head (the mind, teachings, thoughts, and false accusations) of Satan.

However, Paul at the end of Romans speaks of another “bruising,” this time to be done through the church:

Romans 16

²⁰ And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

This is a key to understanding the book of Revelation. The church must give a similar demonstration of God's character as that which Christ gave in His life and death, in contrast to Satan's full development of his character through his supporters. Hence the final struggle in the last half of the book of Revelation.

Since God claims that His way leads to life everlasting, but that the “wages of sin is death” (*Romans* 6:23), and “as you sow, so shall you reap” (*Galatians* 6:7) then it must be clearly demonstrated that the reward or punishment (reaping) comes as a result of following righteousness or following the way of sin. Remember, Satan claims that his way is actually better. These two ways must therefore be openly demonstrated, and

tested to their final result so that the evidence will be clear as to who is telling the truth.

If God were to personally administer the punishment against sin, by the direct use of His almighty power, then it would not be clear that the end result was caused by sin. The question would be raised, “Did sin bring death, or did God bring death?” Satan would simply claim that he was about to succeed and the Lord stepped in and squashed it before it had a chance. “That is cheating!” he would say.

It would be much like the boy who was playing a board game with his friends, and when it became clear that he was going to lose, he flipped the board over, scattering the pieces everywhere. Nobody would call the action of the little boy “righteous.” And so if God were also to follow a similar course, it would leave the charges against God's government unanswered.

Likewise, the reward and protection given to the righteous must be in accord with their faithfulness and obedience. God has no “back-door” entrance into heaven. Even the work of the gospel, which brings forgiveness and new life to sinners, is granted in accord with the principles of God's law:

Romans 3

²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.

It is “witnessed by the law.” The law requires the death of the sinner, and the gospel provides a way for the old life to die, and then the person be spiritually resurrected to a new life. The law demands death for sin, and death it will have. The gospel does not nullify this, but allows us to die with Christ, and then be resurrected to a new life. This new life is a life of obedience:

Romans 3

³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

The law is perfectly satisfied with this justice. There is no need to blindfold it, put it aside, cover it up. It serves its role as the revealer of sin, the condemner of unrighteousness, and then it witnesses that the new life is indeed a righteous life.

But how does the law and God's character relate to the final events? The Bible speaks of the time of the end as “the harvest”:

Matthew 13

³⁹ ...the harvest is the end of the world.

The harvest is a time when the crops are at full ripeness. There is to be a harvest of the “vine of the earth” (*Revelation* 14:18) which are the wicked (since they are cast into the “winepress of the wrath of God”), and a “harvest of the earth” or of the vine that Christ planted (*Revelation* 7 & 14:4).

The ripened harvest represents completeness of character development. Christ's character will be fully developed in His people, and Satan's “modified improvement” of God's way will be fully developed in his followers. These two will meet head-on, with the result that the kingdoms of the earth will fall apart and destroy each other (*Revelation* 17:16), and God's people will be delivered.

The details of this conflict are covered in the book *The Seven Angels*. But just to summarize, the righteous will win the battle the same way Christ won the battle in Gethsemane and on the Cross. It must be so, for there is no other way to conquer sin and Satan than the way that Jesus marked out.

1 Corinthians 15

⁵⁷ Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember that the battle is over God's character and law, and therefore must be won by the revelation of that character. There are two “marks” mentioned in the book of Revelation:

- The seal of God (*Revelation* 7:2,3) which is placed in the

forehead of the servants of God. This seal is also described as the “Father's name written in the forehead” (*Revelation* 14:1). And the Father's name represents His character. This shows a work of character perfection. God's army in the final battle have this seal of His character.

- The mark of the beast. This is the other mark, which is mentioned seven times in the book of *Revelation*, from chapter 13 to chapter 20. In chapter 13, it is described as being put in “the right hand or in the forehead” (*Revelation* 13:16). This mark is given to those who indulge in false worship, and oppose the work God is doing through His people. It is therefore, a contrary character: the character of Satan, who opposes the truth of God, and wants to establish himself and his devious ways over the whole world.

Whereas the mark of the beast can be in either hand or head, the seal of God is only in the head. The reason is that in God's kingdom, his subjects must serve Him out of love, and therefore from a firm belief that He is wise and just.

But in Satan's kingdom, service is obtained by any means: fear, flattery, admiration, compulsion; it matters not, so long as obedience is extracted. Therefore, some serve him because they actually believe in his distortions of truth, and others serve him, not because they agree, but because it is just convenient to go along with the majority. This kind of service is represented by the mark in the hand.

The symbolism of a mark in the head or hand goes back to a statement God gave in Deuteronomy, just after pronouncing the law to His people:

Deuteronomy 6

⁸ And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

This confirms the fact that the seal or mark of Revelation represents a relationship to the law and character of God:

- Those who have God's seal or mark, have His law written in their hearts, which are the attributes of His character.
- Those who have the “mark of the beast,” have a character that is determined to set aside the law of God, and misrepresent His character.

And so these two “harvests”: the final developed characters from either following the work of God, or rejecting it, will meet on the battleground. One group will use force, persecution, and killing. The other will hold to firm obedience and unshakable faith. Those who hold to God will have His protection. Those who oppose Him will suffer the full consequences of their sins: plagues, natural disasters, and wars. It is these things that will decimate them, but note that it is simply the end result of the course they have chosen. They have, by their disobedience and opposition to God, turned the powers of nature against themselves.

After this battle is finished, there will be one thousand years of rest. After this period, the unrighteous dead will be raised, and receive judgment. Then comes the final cleansing of the earth, called the “lake of fire.”

The fact that the “wages of sin is death” also means that the “lake of fire” (*Revelation* 19, 20, 21), mentioned as the final end of the wicked, must be the *natural consequence of departing from the Lord* and not a divinely-appointed auto-da-fe designed to strike fear into the watchers. It will be the final proof that all those who hate the Lord “love death” (*Proverbs* 8:36). It will finally prove that only “in Christ” do all things “consist” (*Colossians* 1:17), or hold together). Without Him there to constantly uphold all things, the very elements break apart and dissolve.



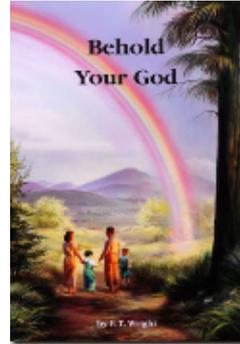
This final destruction takes place just after the final judgment, when the books are opened (*Revelation 20:12-15*): all the wicked see where God has only and ever tried to save them; they see that their end is what they themselves have chosen...a consequence of their own rejection of His love. They sowed to the wind and reaped the whirlwind (*Hosea 8:7*).

When they see this evidence, they realize that they are without excuse. And all bow down and confess that Christ is Lord (*Isaiah 45:23, Revelation 5:13, Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10*)...that the way of Christ, which was faith and obedience to God's eternal laws and character, is the only way of life.

This will be the final evidence in the battle between Satan and Christ. All will admit that Christ is the victor—not because they are frightened or compelled to, but because they see the evidence, and can only admit that it is so.

This is an entirely different view of hell than the traditional one. But it makes sense, and increases admiration of God. Jesus Christ, and His way, is “lifted up” (*John 12:32*) and the beauty of that revelation draws us to Him.

Naturally, there are many questions to be answered concerning God's apparent behavior, especially in the Old Testament, where it appears that He did use violence to overcome or punish the wicked. But there are some very impressive answers to these difficulties which shed much light on God's character. I will not give them now, but simply point you to a book that gives a more full treatment of the subject: *Behold Your God*.



We should never forget that when Jesus Christ came as a man, He came to represent the Father, yet very few recognized that revelation, even though they were students of the Old Testament. It is very easy to misread God's actions. Christ

did not, so we do not have to either.