

Behold Your God

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are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

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Heinrich Halmen
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The rainbow is God's special sign of His mercy to us. It tells us how the wonderful love of God illuminates the darkness.

Through Isaiah the prophet, God has advised us that darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness the people. This, we are further informed, is the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of God's character. But the Lord promises that light will shine into the darkness; dispelling it, and wonderfully illuminating the dark rain clouds so that all can behold them in their true beauty.

The rain clouds symbolize the Old Testament, and even some New Testament scriptures which have only been dark and ominous to many. But the revelation of God's character illuminates these texts so that they begin to shine in a new and unexpected beauty.

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1. An All-Important Theme

IT IS SAFE to say that three facts are common to us all:

1. We have, either consciously or subconsciously, a definite opinion about the character of God. Even though little direct thought or specific expression may have been given to the subject, it is true nonetheless.
2. Our attitude toward God, our treatment of others, and our receptivity of truth are determined by these opinions.
3. All of us were born predisposed to possess a false concept of God which in turn has been confirmed and extended by environmental and educational influences. Unless delivered from this and initiated into a true knowledge of God, it will be impossible to enter into a full and perfect Christian experience, and the prospects of eternal life will be endangered.

If this seems to be saying too much, consider the proof of these words as provided in the history of the Jews of Christ's day.

When Christ first appeared working amazing miracles, proclaiming the kingdom, and proving that He came at exactly the time specified in *Daniel* 9, He quickly became a very popular figure. Thousands followed Him, confident that He would re-establish the lost glory of Israel. The Jewish leaders studied the movement with increasing apprehension, seeing in it the threat to their prestige and power.

However, Christ's following continued to swell until the feeding of the five thousand with the loaves and fishes. Then, when the enthusiasm of the people had reached its height and they were determined to crown Him king, He refused to accept their plans and the tide suddenly turned, the enthusiasm died away, and the crowds walked with Him no more. From that time every step led to the cross where those who had so ardently called for His crowning, screamed for His crucifixion.

What was the factor which caused this astonishing reversal? The answer is not difficult to find. They had a very definite but false concept of God's character, shaped by the educational processes in their environment. This false concept was so fixed and powerful that it caused them to reject the Saviour because He did not act according to their expectations and desires. Thus the question of God's character became the most critical element in the mission of Jesus and the fate of the Jews. Had they correctly understood this issue, the history of His work on earth would have been very different. Any careful study of the mounting conflict between Christ and the people leaves no doubt of the veracity of these assertions.

A great and significant event in His early ministry was the sermon on the mount. Everyone who attended came anticipating important announcements about the coming kingdom.

The Desire of Ages, p. 299:

[The Pharisees]...looked forward to the day when they should have dominion over the hated Romans, and possess the riches and splendor of the world's great empire. The poor peasants and fishermen hoped to hear the assurance that their wretched hovels, the scanty food, the life of toil, and fear of want were to be exchanged for mansions of plenty and days of ease. In place of the one coarse garment which was their covering by day, and their blanket by night, they hoped that Christ would give them the rich and costly robes of their conquerors. All hearts thrilled with the proud hope that Israel was soon to be honored before the nations as the chosen of the Lord, and Jerusalem exalted as the head of a universal kingdom.

Because the devil had done his work well, the people believed that not only would the Messiah exalt them in this way but that He would do it by the use of the sword. They saw God as the vengeful, destroying One of the Old Testament. Their concept of the God of the Old Testament led them to believe that the God of the New would behave in the same way. But because their under-

standing of God's character was wrong, their expectations were to be disappointed.

The Desire of Ages, p. 299:

Christ disappointed the hope of worldly greatness. In the Sermon on the Mount He sought to undo the work that had been wrought by false education, and to give His hearers a right conception of His kingdom and of His own character.

The people did not hear what they had come to hear in the sermon on the mount, but they did not reject the Saviour just then. He did not directly attack their errors, and they were left with the vague hope that somehow He would yet assert His power and use it according to their ideas.

Their servitude to the Romans had placed that proud people in a desperate plight. They needed a lot of help, and they knew it. Their understanding of the prophecies had led them to pin their entire hopes on the Messiah as the answer to this predicament. If He should fail them, they would have nowhere else to turn.

Christ had not come to fail them. He knew exactly what their true needs were, and He had fully purposed to supply those needs. But the answer did not lie in the use of the weapons of force. It lay in the changing of their characters into the likeness of His own. But so intent were they on their long cherished ambitions that there was no room to consider the alternative He offered.

The climax came at the feeding of the five thousand. Throughout the long day, He had thrilled their hearts with the wonder of His teachings. The sick had been healed and the multitude fed. As the day wore on...

The Desire of Ages, p. 377-378:

...they said one to another,

John 6

¹⁴ This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world.

All day the conviction had strengthened. That crowning act is assurance that the long-looked-for Deliverer is among them. The hopes of the people rise higher and higher. This is He who will make Judea an earthly paradise, a land flowing with milk and honey. He can satisfy every desire. He can break the power of the hated Romans. He can deliver Judah and Jerusalem. He can heal the soldiers who are wounded in battle. He can supply whole armies with food. He can conquer the nations, and give to Israel the long-sought dominion.

In their enthusiasm the people are ready at once to crown Him king. They see that He makes no effort to attract attention or secure honor to himself. In this He is essentially different from the priests and rulers, and they fear that He will never urge His claim to David's throne. Consulting together, they agree to take Him by force, and proclaim Him the king of Israel. The disciples unite with the multitude in declaring the throne of David the rightful inheritance of their Master. It is the modesty of Christ, they say, that causes Him to refuse such honor. Let the people exalt their Deliverer. Let the arrogant priests and rulers be forced to honor Him who comes clothed with the authority of God.

They could see that Jesus loved them and that He had all the power necessary to give them all that they could desire. But the only kind of character they knew and understood was the kind which used the possession of mighty power to achieve their selfish ambitions. They could not see and were unwilling to be taught that Christ did not have this kind of character. He loved the Romans as much as He loved the Jews, neither was it His way to use force to accomplish any desired objective.

Therefore, in harmony with His character, He would not permit himself to be made king by them, nor would He use His mighty powers to advantage one class of those whom He loved, above another whom He also loved. With an authority which none could disobey, He dismissed disciples and multitude alike. The bitter complaint of the apostles against Him was,

The Desire of Ages, p. 380:

Why did not He who possessed such power reveal himself in His true character, and make their way less painful?

The truth is that Christ was living out His character to perfection. It was because of what He was, that He did what He did. In their failure to understand His real character, they expected an altogether different line of behavior. When He did not do what they believed that He should do, they felt cheated and betrayed.

So it was with the multitude. The next day, after closely questioning Him, they came to see that He would never use His power as they expected Him to. For this reason they left Him forever.

The Desire of Ages, p. 391:

If He would not devote His power and influence to obtaining their freedom from the Romans, they would have nothing to do with Him.

Thus it was that their misunderstanding of the character of God led them to expect that Christ would completely deliver them from the Romans and exalt them to the heights of material grandeur. He was a Jew like they were. He was sent as the Messiah to the chosen and favored people. He had the power. Therefore, they reasoned, it was His duty to use that power to favor them. If He refused to do it, then He was nothing short of a traitor to His own. They found Him guilty of treason and determined to be revenged.

Because they possessed the character which they believed He had, they did to Him with the power at their command, what they believed He should have done to the Romans. To accomplish this, they accused Him before the Romans of seeking to make himself to be what they had actually tried to make Him—the king of the world. This was a totally false accusation which, though it enabled them to wreak vengeance on Him whom they believed had betrayed them, opened the floodgates of woe on the nation. Few people, if any, have suffered like the Jews since that terrible time. Theirs is a fate which none would care to share.

If only they had understood the character of God as it was so perfectly revealed in Christ, or at least been willing to be taught it, they would not have expected of Him what they did, nor would they have rejected and vengefully crucified Him. Thus it is clear that the question of the character of God and His Son was the most critical element in Christ's mission and in the fate of the Jews.

Contained in their history is a sober warning which none can treat lightly. The character of God is still the most critical issue in the mission of Christ. As were the Jews, so too have all of us been subjected to an erroneous education in respect to God's character. But God will not leave us in this darkness without the opportunity to escape from it. When the light is presented to us, there is the terrible danger that we will repeat their history by rejecting the message because it does not conform to our present ideas and does not suit our personal ambitions.

Let none repeat the fearful history of the Jews by rejecting God's truth for these reasons. The outworking of such decisions is too terrible, final, and eternal to even contemplate. Rather let there be an earnest, prayerful pleading with the Lord to open the eyes of our spiritual understanding to see God as He really is.

May the message of this book be a mighty aid in knowing God, whom to know is life eternal.

John 17

³ And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

2. This is Eternal Life

THE study pursued throughout this book is not merely one of great importance. It is of the highest consequence involving issues of eternal life and death. It is very much the author's burden that this be realized from the outset and perceived increasingly as the theme is developed. Jesus said,

John 17

³ And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

The full, forceful significance of this Scripture cannot be grasped by reading it in isolation. Other inspired statements must be read along with it so that the meaning becomes clear. When such comparisons are extensively and carefully made, it will be seen that the truth expressed in this verse is an equation. It is saying that life eternal is the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, and the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ is life eternal. The converse of this is also true, that is, a lack of the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ is death eternal, and death eternal is a lack of the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ.

The *Amplified Bible* presents a clearer rendition of this verse:

John 17 [Amplified Bible]

³ And this is eternal life: [it means] to know (to perceive, recognize, become acquainted with and understand) You, the only true and real God, and [likewise] to know Him, Jesus [as the] Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, Whom You have sent.

The relationship between eternal life and a knowledge of God and His Son is further confirmed by the following statement.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 289:

The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have. It is the knowledge that works transformation of character. 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.

This statement does not merely say that all who are saved would be well advised to have the knowledge of God. It says that they must have it; it is essential and indispensable. Yet, the statement does more than emphasize the truth of this. It proceeds to reveal the reasons for its being so. In order to attain to eternal life, the character must be transformed and re-created into the image of God, while a divine power must be imparted to the whole being. Knowing that to come into possession of eternal life necessitates the acquisition of these blessings, it becomes the seeker's prime interest to know by what means these can be received.

The answer is not hidden. It is "the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ..." Therefore, it is truly spoken that the knowledge of God is life eternal, and life eternal is the knowledge of God. The apostle Peter understood and taught this same truth:

2 Peter 1

² Grace and peace be multiplied to you in *the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,*

³ As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, *through the knowledge of Him* who called us by glory and virtue,

⁴ By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

In the first verse quoted above, the apostle Peter is saying that grace and peace do not just happen by themselves. Their existence in a person is inseparably connected with that person's knowledge of God and His Son. In fact, they are really the result of this knowledge. But the full force of this thought will not be appreciated unless there is a correct understanding of what the grace and peace of God are. So let us now consider each of these in turn.

God's grace is not merely an attitude maintained on His part toward the undeserving sinner. In *The Great Controversy*, it is called:

The Great Controversy, p. 394:

...the regenerating, enlightening power of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the grace of God is God's power working to regenerate and enlighten the willing learner of truth. Defining the grace of God as being the power of God, sets it apart as the supreme force in the universe. It is the one element emanating from a creating and re-creating God which lifts the lost from damnation to glorification, and without which there would be no hope.

Understandably then, through the inspired Peter the Holy Spirit is speaking His desire that such grace be multiplied to the believers. Assuredly, those who receive such multiplied supplies of grace will be blessed with eternal life. And observe the media through which it comes to them. It is theirs through the knowledge of God.

Likewise, the peace of God is much more than merely a mental persuasion that God maintains a kindly or even indulgent attitude toward those who believe in Him. A careful comparison of *Romans* 8:7 and *Romans* 5:1, considerably expands the concept of what the peace of God is:

Romans 8

⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

Romans 5

¹ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The former tells us that the carnal mind is enmity against God, while the latter confirms that to be justified is to have peace with God. Therefore, both enmity against God and peace with God are states of being. In other words, the presence of the carnal mind does not merely produce enmity, but rather it is enmity. By contrast, it is the actual presence of the very power of God within the person which does not merely *give* peace, but rather *is* the peace of God.

Furthermore, these two cannot coexist in one person. The former must be removed in order to make room for the latter. Only the mighty power of God can accomplish such splendid results.

From *2 Peter* 1:2-4 we understand that the Holy Spirit was and is concerned that the believer be filled with this peace, for its presence in him is really the presence of eternal life. As with grace or the power of God, peace also comes through the knowledge of God. How earnestly and lovingly the Lord seeks to impress upon the human mind that it is through the revelation of the character of God that eternal life is made available to the needy.

To know what God will do for us is very important. But it will still not bring to us eternal life unless we understand how we can receive these blessings. Let us consider the following statement which stresses this question and supplies the answer.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 743:

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 cooperate 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.

Let careful note be taken of the question raised in this statement.

How can we come into harmony with God, how shall we receive His likeness, unless we obtain a knowledge of Him?

The answer is implied in the question. First we must have a knowledge of God. This in turn will produce the desired results of peace, power, harmony with Him, and His likeness in the soul. To come into harmony with God and to receive His likeness is to be justified, because:

Romans 5

¹ Having been justified by faith, we have peace [harmony] with God.

To be justified is to have life eternal. But to achieve this is impossible without a knowledge of God. He must be known as He really is. And the more fully, intimately, and accurately He is known, the richer and more glorious will be the transformation into His likeness. Consider these thoughts as expressed in the following statement:

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 744:

Brethren and sisters, 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.

The contemplation of this theme could be greatly extended by gathering more evidences than have been presented so far, but what has been given is enough to make the point that to know God is life eternal, and life eternal is to know God.

From this we must rightly conclude that there is a direct relationship between the extent of our knowledge of God, and the level, warmth, and power of our personal, Christian experience. The better we know God, the more vital and effective our lives will be, while the more poorly and inaccurately we know Him, the feebler we will be.

In *Romans* 1 Paul makes this point clear. He states plainly that the incredible depth of iniquity to which the unbelieving world had sunk could be traced back to the rejection of the knowledge of God. To those people, adequate revelations of God had been provided, but they did not want to retain such knowledge. Let us follow his thoughts:

Romans 1

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

¹⁹ Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

In the face of such a revelation of truth, what did these people do?

²¹ Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful; but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Professing to be wise, they became fools.

For men to glorify God as God, His character must be in them and be reflected from them. Men think that they glorify God today when they sing hymns and thank Him for the blessings which they have received from Him. But they glorify God as if He were a man like themselves, not as God.

There was a time when original man was blessed with a knowledge of the character of God, but he elected not to glorify God according to what He was. He substituted another view of God, a view according to his own vain imagination. That constituted a downward step toward ultimate ruin. Inevitably, worse was to follow:

²² Professing to be wise, they became fools.

Next, they...

²³ ...changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things.

To think of God as being like the creatures of the earth is certainly not a true knowledge of God. And when the true knowl-

edge was replaced by a false one, the resultant deterioration in morality became most pronounced.

Romans 1

²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

²⁵ Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

²⁷ Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

²⁹ Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,

³⁰ Backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

³¹ Undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful:

³² Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Human beings cannot enter into a worse state of wickedness than that described here. Let it be remembered that Paul by inspiration declares that all this is the outworking of the rejection of the knowledge of God. That rejection was the root. The unbelievable wickedness was the sure and certain fruit. And thus it will ever be. The level of morality is directly determined by the knowledge of God's character. Effect follows cause with predictable certainty.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 743:

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. Personal religion among us as a people is at a low ebb. There is much form, much machinery, much tongue religion; but something deeper and more solid must be brought into our religious experience. With all our facilities, our publishing houses, our schools, our sanitariums, and many, many other advantages, we ought to be far in advance of our present position.

The narrowed religious experience and seriously retarded progress in the divine life which was the sad lot of the Advent believers in the nineteenth century, was directly attributable to:

The meager views which so many...had of the exalted character and office of Christ.

Problems are only solved by firstly determining the cause and then correcting that. Therefore, the adherents to the Advent faith of the last century could not possibly come into a rich and fulfilling religious experience without greatly enlarged and corrected views of the character and office of Christ.

Such a relating of cause and effect should instantly command the interested attention of all today who are aware that their experience is far from what it should be and who long for spiritual enrichment. At present, apart from those self-satisfied Laodiceans who are poor and do not know it, are there any true Christians who are truly satisfied with their character attainment and fellowship with God? While on the one hand there is a deep thankfulness for what God has done, on the other there is a consciousness that much is yet to be achieved. The Christian's continual quest is for that character excellence which will bring him into communion with God and present his life as a telling witness for the divine.

But how can this be obtained? It can only be obtained by coming into a much clearer and deeper understanding of the charac-

ter of God and Christ. Such a knowledge is not acquired in a moment or by feeble, intermittent efforts. Nor is it only a matter of learning but also of unlearning; of tearing down as well as building.

Not only have the concepts of God's character been meager, dim, and uncertain, but in many respects they have been quite inaccurate as well. The inaccuracies have been so serious as to be exactly the opposite of what God really is. More than we realize, the devil has clouded our minds with his false representations. Never was he more successful in this than just before the first coming of Christ, and again during the Dark Ages. We have not yet fully escaped the effect of those midnight periods. We have not yet come all the way out of Babylon.

So serious were the misrepresentations of God's character which dominated the minds of men during Christ's time on earth, that His revelation of God was exactly the opposite of their understanding of it.

Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 177:

He presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God.

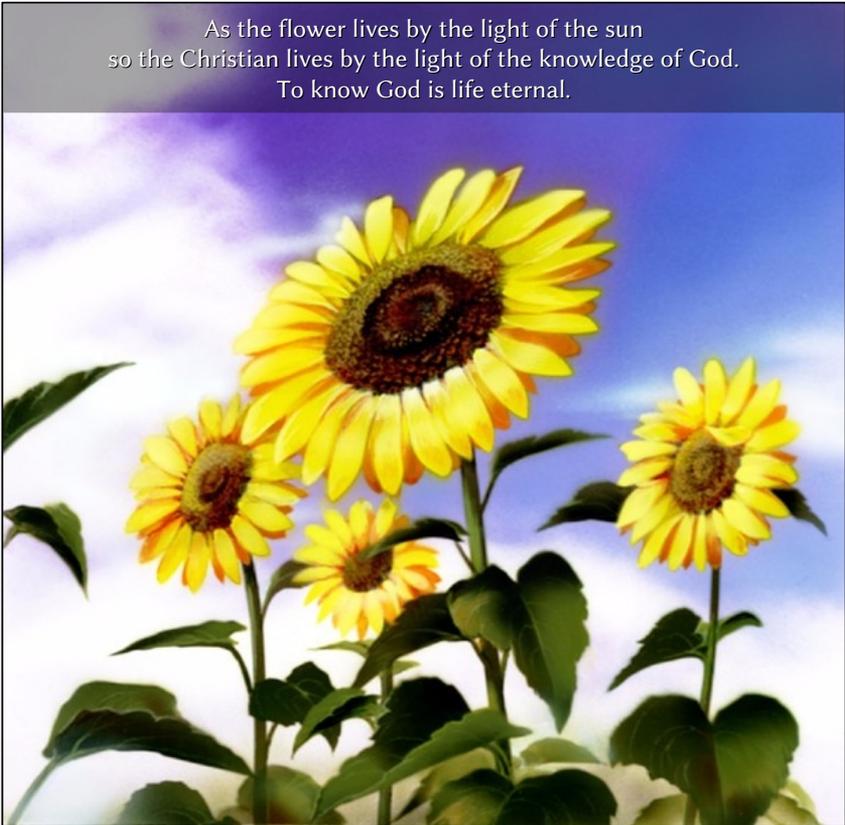
As we approach the midnight darkness of the last days, the same misrepresentations of God are held by mankind throughout the world. Tragically, they are shared to some extent even by God's people. What is needed, and must be given again for the final time, is a presentation to men which will be...

...exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God.

Therefore, there is much unlearning to be done as well as learning. This book is designed to assist in both directions. Old concepts will be challenged. Many things will be presented about God which will be exactly opposite from what has been believed in the past. For some there will be severe struggles. Old concepts will strive for the mastery.

But for those who patiently and prayerfully examine the evidences, there will come such a revelation of God's character as will clear away the fog of the past, re-create the soul in the image of God, transform the believer into His likeness, and provide the fitness for a place in eternity. All such will know that to know God is life eternal, and life eternal is to know God.

As we have seen, a clear, accurate, and comprehensive knowledge of the character of God is essential to those who would be saved. Never was this more needful than at this time when darkness is covering the earth and great darkness the people. So, let this great theme of God's character become the chief and all-absorbing subject of our attention, our meditation, our conversation, and our witness, for this is life eternal.



3. Avoid Speculative Theories

IN THE study of God's character there is danger as well as blessing. It is the same danger present in all searching for heavenly wisdom and understanding. The danger is in seeking a knowledge outside of what God has revealed.

In this area, all that men can do is conjecture, imagine, and speculate, and this is the very thing that men in fact do. However, in doing so, they strive to understand the unrevealed things of God by the powers within themselves. Nothing could be more dangerous; nothing more certain to produce the greatest ignorance about God as He really is; and, nothing better designed to inflate human pride to the destruction of any semblance of God's character within themselves.

Therefore, any attempt to explore into the unrevealed areas of divine knowledge will be strictly avoided in this book. It will be concerned only with the evidences which God has seen fit to give, and nothing else but that. God, in His great love, has set down safe working limits for our study.

Deuteronomy 29

²⁹ The secret things belong to the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

This Scripture clearly divides all knowledge into two parts—the things which are still God's secrets, and those which He reveals to us. It is not to be supposed that God is deliberately withholding these things from either men or angels. Rather, He is revealing them just as fully and quickly as they can be received. Paul testifies to this in the following words:

Ephesians 3

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—

² If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

³ How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,

⁴ By which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),

⁵ Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:

⁶ That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,

⁷ Of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

⁹ And to make all people see what is the fellowship of the mystery, [secret] which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;

¹⁰ To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,

¹¹ According to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thus, there was a time for both angels and men when certain things were secrets still. To have attempted to search out those secrets at that time would have been dangerous, presumptuous, and speculative. But not so in Paul's day, for those things had then passed from the category of the secret to that of the revealed.

God is infinite. We are finite. Therefore, the time will never come, even in eternity, when there will be no secret things remaining. There will always be an infinity beyond our comprehension, despite the fact that:

The Great Controversy, p. 678:

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.

Thus it will be eternally true that:

Deuteronomy 29

²⁹ The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever.

This will be so because of the absolute infinity of God, and because we, no matter how extensive our knowledge of God becomes, will still be short of infinite. Because of the continual transfer of knowledge from the secret list to the open, that which once belonged to God alone, will come to belong to us and our children forever. This is true of eternity. It is also true of this life, although the progress is slower here than it will be there.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 127:

In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation.

Proverbs 4

¹⁸ But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

There have been periods when these secrets were revealed much more quickly than at other times. This is not due to any capricious decisions on God's part, but to the delinquency of His people. God is willing and anxious to fully open to view the saving vistas of eternal truth, but He is frustrated in this by human blindness and selfishness as the following statement reveals:

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 105:

God does not conceal His truth from men. By their own course of action they make it obscure to themselves.

Paul complained to the Hebrew Christians that they were but milk babies when they should have been capable of taking strong meat. For example, there was much he desired to teach them in regard to Melchizedek,

Hebrews 5

¹¹ Of whom [he said] we have much to say, and things hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 134:

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.

No one will be content with poverty when great riches are within his reach, provided he knows it. This statement opens to view the mighty possibilities of advancement in divine illumination. It is an encouragement and invitation to enter into the revelations which the Lord delights to give His people.

At the same time it is not to be understood as an invitation to delve 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. The concentration of study must be in those areas where the Lord has revealed light. At all costs there must be the avoidance of any speculative theorizing.

Deuteronomy 29

²⁹ Those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever; [but] the secret things belong to the Lord our God.

No one can find truth in the mists of human speculation.
Go into the area where the light of God's revelation is shining,
and behold and know God.



The revelation of himself that God has given in His word is for our study. This we may seek to understand. But beyond this we are not to penetrate. The highest intellect may tax itself until it is wearied out in conjectures regarding the nature of God; but the effort will be fruitless. This problem has not been given us to solve. No human mind can comprehend God. Let not finite man attempt to interpret Him. Let none indulge in speculation regarding His nature. Here silence is eloquence. The Omniscient One is above discussion.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 279-280:

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. Far better might they, while mercy's voice is still heard, humble themselves in the dust and plead with God to teach them His ways.

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:

Psalm 46

¹⁰ Be still, and know that I am God.

Job 11

⁷ Can you by searching find out God?

Can you find out the Almighty unto perfection?

⁸ It is as high as heaven; what can you do?

Deeper than hell; what can you know?

⁹ The measure thereof is longer than the earth,
And broader than the sea.

Job 28

¹² Where shall wisdom be found?

And where is the place of understanding?

¹³ Man knows not the price thereof;
Neither is it found in the land of the living.

¹⁴ The depth says, It is not in me:
And the sea says, It is not with me.

¹⁵ It cannot be gotten for gold,
Neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.

¹⁶ It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir,
With the precious onyx, or the sapphire.

¹⁷ The gold and the crystal cannot equal it:
And the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold.

¹⁸ No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls:
For the price of wisdom is above rubies.

¹⁹ The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it,
Neither shall it be valued with pure gold.

²⁰ Whence then comes wisdom?
And where is the place of understanding?

²² Destruction and death say,
We have heard the fame thereof with our ears.

²³ God understands the way thereof,

- And He knows the place thereof.
²⁴ For He looks to the ends of the earth,
And sees under the whole heaven;
²⁶ When He made a decree for the rain,
And a way for the lightning of the thunder:
²⁷ Then did He see it, and declare it;
He prepared it, yea, and searched it out.
²⁸ And unto man He said,
Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
And to depart from evil is understanding.

Neither by searching the recesses of the earth nor in vain endeavors to penetrate the mysteries of God's being is wisdom found. It is found, rather, in humbly receiving the revelation that He has been pleased to give, and in conforming the life to His will.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 427-428:

One of the greatest evils that attends the quest for knowledge, the investigations of science, is the disposition to exalt human reasoning above its true value and its proper sphere. Many attempt to judge of the Creator and His works by their own imperfect knowledge of science. They endeavor to determine the nature and attributes and prerogatives of God, and indulge in speculative theories concerning the Infinite One. Those who engage in this line of study are treading upon forbidden ground. Their research will yield no valuable results and can be pursued only at the peril of the soul.

Our first parents were led into sin through indulging a desire for knowledge that God had withheld from them. In seeking to gain this knowledge, they lost all that was worth possessing. If Adam and Eve had never touched the forbidden tree, God would have imparted to them knowledge—knowledge upon which rested no curse of sin, knowledge that would have brought them everlasting joy. All that they gained by listening to the tempter was an acquaintance with sin and its results. By their disobedience, humanity was estranged from God and the earth was separated from heaven.

The lesson is for us. The field into which Satan led our first parents is the same to which he is alluring men today. He is

flooding the world with pleasing fables. By every device at his command he tempts men to speculate in regard to God. Thus he seeks to prevent them from obtaining that knowledge of God which is salvation.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 438:

Man cannot by searching find out God. Let none seek with presumptuous hand to lift the veil that conceals His glory.

Romans 11

³³ Unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out.

It is a proof of His mercy that there is the hiding of His power; for to lift the veil that conceals the divine presence is death. No mortal mind can penetrate the secrecy in which the Mighty One dwells and works. Only that which He sees fit to reveal can we comprehend of Him. Reason must acknowledge an authority superior to itself. Heart and intellect must bow to the great I AM.

With such clear warnings as these before us, there can be no excuse for any indulgence in speculation about the character of God. Let that which is unrevealed be respected as the secret things which belong only to God. The sad experience of Adam and Eve, who sought a knowledge of God apart from His revelations to them, is a lesson to be thoroughly absorbed and obeyed. Therefore, this book will not in any sense deviate from the strict lessons and principles contained in these warnings and instructions. It will be concerned only with that which the Lord has revealed. These are the things which belong unto us and our children forever.

As surely as we fully receive that which has been revealed, so will the Lord transfer further secrets into the area of the known. Therefore, this book can never be complete. It can only deal with what has been revealed at the time of its writing. Beyond its publication still more light will come through. The records of that must be the subjects of other books and, no doubt, other authors.

At this point it would be good to consider another danger. While on the one hand there are those who would venture onto

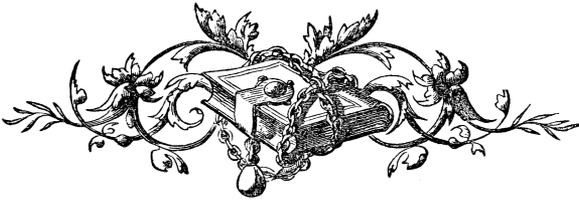
the fragile, thin, and treacherous ice of human speculation, on the other hand there are those who tend to the opposite extreme. Because God is so infinite and unsearchable, they take the stand that they should not study His character at all. This is a mistake of equal gravity, completely fulfilling Satan's desire that they know not God.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 740:

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.

We are to keep a careful balance in our relation to this theme. On the one hand we are to avoid the dangerous extreme of seeking knowledge by speculation, and on the other, the equally fatal mistake of neglecting the subject altogether.

The urgent counsels of God's Word, some of which have been presented in the first chapter and will be further developed in the next, stress the absolute necessity of obtaining a clearer and yet clearer knowledge of God and Christ. Let it always be remembered that there is a direct relationship between the knowledge of God and our level of righteous or unrighteous living. To know God is life eternal. To be ignorant of Him is death eternal.



4. In Relation to the Great Controversy

IT IS NOT possible to savingly understand the character of God if it is studied independently of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. There is a very good reason for this. The character of God is not merely a theme related to the great controversy—it is the very subject of the great controversy. Lucifer’s actual commitment to rebellion commenced at that point where he, with pride-blinded eyes, could no longer see God as He is. He believed that he saw a very different character in God and therefore committed himself to war against Him.

He did not arrive at this decision in a moment. For a period of time pride had been steadily developing in Lucifer. This in turn resulted in doubts about God’s character. However, not until these doubts hardened into a fixed conception did he enter into active warfare against God. Not willing to remain alone in his opposition to God, He set out to obtain support from the inhabitants of the universe. He worked at convincing them of his new ideas about God. To achieve this aim, He misrepresented the character of God. Every angel who believed him joined his ranks.

The same tactic resulted in the overthrow of man. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, millions upon millions have continued to hold mistaken views about God. The direct result of this has been the multiplication of iniquity and the deepening of the great controversy.

Just as a misconception of God’s character resulted in rebellion in heaven, likewise, wherever those misconceptions have spread from that day till the present time, rebellion has been the result. Therefore, only when those misconceptions have been completely cleared away, will the rebellion end and permanent, universal peace return.

This does not mean that God is seeking a personal vindication of himself. That is the last thing He would do. He is seeking the vindication of that which will ensure the eternal life and happi-

ness of every one of His creatures throughout the entire universe. God well knows, and almost six thousand years of demonstration should have proved to us, that Satan's lying representations of God's character and government bring only misery and death. It is from these that God is seeking to save. He knows, and we must come to know, that salvation is only possible when His character is revealed for what it really is. Therefore, it is to save us and not himself that God seeks the vindication of His own character.

God's Law and Character

This truth will be better appreciated when it is understood that God's law and government are an exact expression of His character. God does not establish a code of behavior that applies only to His people and not to himself. This is so with earthly rulers, but not with God.

This is made clear by comparing the testimonies given of God's character with those in regard to His government. As these texts are presented, bear in mind that they are statements of what God is. He is righteousness. It is a principle that one does what he does because of what he firstly is. God then, being firstly and only righteousness, does only righteousness.

Psalm 119

¹³⁷ Righteous are You, O Lord, and upright are your judgments.

¹³⁸ Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are righteous and very faithful.

¹⁴² Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your law is truth.

Psalm 129

⁴ The Lord is righteous...

Psalm 145

¹⁷ The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious [KJV: holy] in all His works.

These are statements of what God is. They are declarations of His state of being; of the very essence of His nature. In Him is the

sum of all righteousness, and there is nothing in Him apart from righteousness. Therefore, nothing but righteousness proceeds from Him. It is for this reason that Daniel could testify:

Daniel 9

⁷ O Lord, righteousness belongs to You.

In the same way, the words of God are righteousness.

Isaiah 45

¹⁹ I declare things that are right.

This being so, all the laws and commandments of God are also the expression of His righteous character. Because He is the righteous God that He is, He makes the laws He has made.

Psalms 119

¹³⁸ Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are righteous and very faithful.

¹⁴² Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your law is truth.

Psalms 97

² Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

Psalms 89

¹⁴ Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; mercy and truth go before your face.

Therefore,

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 315:

[The] law is a transcript of His [God's] own character.

How Rebellion Developed

There came the time when Lucifer could no longer see this. Instead, he saw the law as one thing and the character of God as something else. It was at this point that he committed himself to rebellion, and the great controversy began. How did he come to this point? He was the brightest and highest of all the angels. He was the covering cherub, perfect in all his ways. Nevertheless, the

time came when God had to say that iniquity had been found in him.

Ezekiel 28

¹⁴ You were the anointed cherub who covers...

¹⁵ You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

¹⁷ Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of [NIV: because of] your splendor.

Let us carefully peruse the facts which Inspiration has revealed about the development of pride in Lucifer. While we do not know how long he existed from the day of his creation until his fall, we do know that during that time, he had been constantly developing all his talents and skills by the combination of the grace of God and his own diligent effort.

To some it may come as a strange thought that Lucifer grew in knowledge, wisdom, and skills during the entire period of his existence. But it is not to be imagined that God created him without opportunity for advancement, rather, he was created with the potential for limitless development.

Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 167:

Satan himself was educated and disciplined in the heavenly courts.

From this statement we see that education and discipline are not confined to this earth but are a part of heaven itself.

The Great Controversy, p. 425:

Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort,

—all may have this limitless development of their abilities. So it was with Lucifer, and marvelous was the progress made. He became very rich, and these riches should have elicited only perpetual gratitude and loving service. Instead they served to undo him. The Scriptures describe this wealth as the abundance of his trading (KJV: “merchandise”) by which his soul was filled with violence.

Ezekiel 28

¹⁶ By the abundance of your trading [KJV: merchandise] you became filled with violence within, and you sinned.

The process by which the covering cherub needlessly corrupted himself has repeatedly destroyed men. And in each case the history of the fall of Satan is repeated.

Let us look, in general terms, at a practical example of this. When the Lord begins a new movement, its members are small in number and poor in material wealth. Their sense of need is proportionately great. They realize their total dependence upon God and are keenly aware that these needs can be satisfied only through faith.

God's liberal responses evoke gratitude and praise from them. This enrichment of spiritual and material wealth relieves them of the pressure of immediate necessity but introduces a danger against which a watchful guard must be established. That peril resides in the imperceptible but certain fading away of a positive sense of dependence on God. History verifies that most fail this test.

As this sense of dependence upon God wanes, material possessions come to be looked upon as the basis and guarantee of security. Thus it is an error to say that men lose faith. Instead, they transfer it from the God who gave the gifts, to the gifts themselves. These dependent receivers of God's gifts become increasingly preoccupied with the accumulation of more of these material treasures until they are totally absorbed therein.

As they successfully add house to house and land to land, they develop a strong sense of self-sufficiency. They see themselves as being the sole arbiter of their fate. They make themselves god in the place of God, and pride becomes the most distinguished aspect of their characters.

Every time a human being descends this path, he is but traveling the same way the original sinner trod. Lucifer moved from

the sincere, trusting, loving, and grateful child of God to the self-sufficient, proud devil. His life ceased to be centered on God and revolved instead around himself. Thus he, and not God, became the standard by which he judged all things.

Worse still, whereas in the days of his humility he had been neither interested nor concerned about judging other individuals, now even the Son of God came under his critical measurement. So inflated had his view of himself become that he thought he was actually superior to the Divine One. Such a serious misjudgment was possible to that powerfully clear mind only because he had destroyed the power to think correctly by allowing pride to separate him from the source of all wisdom, as it is written,

Ezekiel 28

¹⁷ You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.

During the time when Lucifer allowed pride to develop in him, he had no doubts about God. For one thing, he had been far too preoccupied with admiring his own beautiful self to have thought about his Creator. He had known God all his life as being totally just, impartial, and omniscient. Therefore, he “knew” without question that God was “as aware” as he was of his “splendid greatness” and that, accordingly, God would elevate him to a position befitting his shining glory. So he glowed with pride in his confident expectation of forthcoming honors.

Even though dangerous pride was already filling Lucifer’s life, no question regarding God’s character and government had yet been raised. That was still to come. Neither had Lucifer entered into active rebellion against God. The great controversy had not yet begun as an actual confrontation between Satan and God though the foundation for this was being laid.

A careful study of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35-36, will reveal these developments. On page 35 the progression of evil in Lucifer’s character is described thus:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35:

Little by little, Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation....Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself.

Up to this point there is no description of any contest taking place between Lucifer and either Christ or God. However, a little further on we read:

...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.

So here we see the next step in the progression of Satan's sinfulness. He began to covet Christ's position. Let us observe what happened next:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35-36:

Now the perfect harmony of heaven was broken. Lucifer's disposition to serve himself instead of his Creator, aroused a feeling of apprehension when observed by those who considered that the glory of God should be supreme. 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. Lucifer allowed his jealousy of Christ to prevail, and became the more determined.

These attempts on the part of the angels and Christ to save Lucifer only aroused a spirit of resistance which strengthened to the point where:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 36:

To dispute the supremacy of the Son of God, thus impeaching the wisdom and love of the Creator, had become the purpose of this prince of angels. To this object he was about to bend the energies of that master mind, which, next to Christ's, was first among the hosts of God.

The Assembly in Heaven

Now God, foreseeing that which none of His creatures could, stepped in to give all a clear warning of what would be the outworking of this rebellion. He did not wait until the battle began, but He did it before the great contest should open.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 36:

But 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.

To give this warning, God convened a great assembly at which He presented the true position of His Son and the reasons for Christ's occupying His exalted place in heaven. Lucifer almost yielded but did not. At this point the great battle began. It is described as follows:

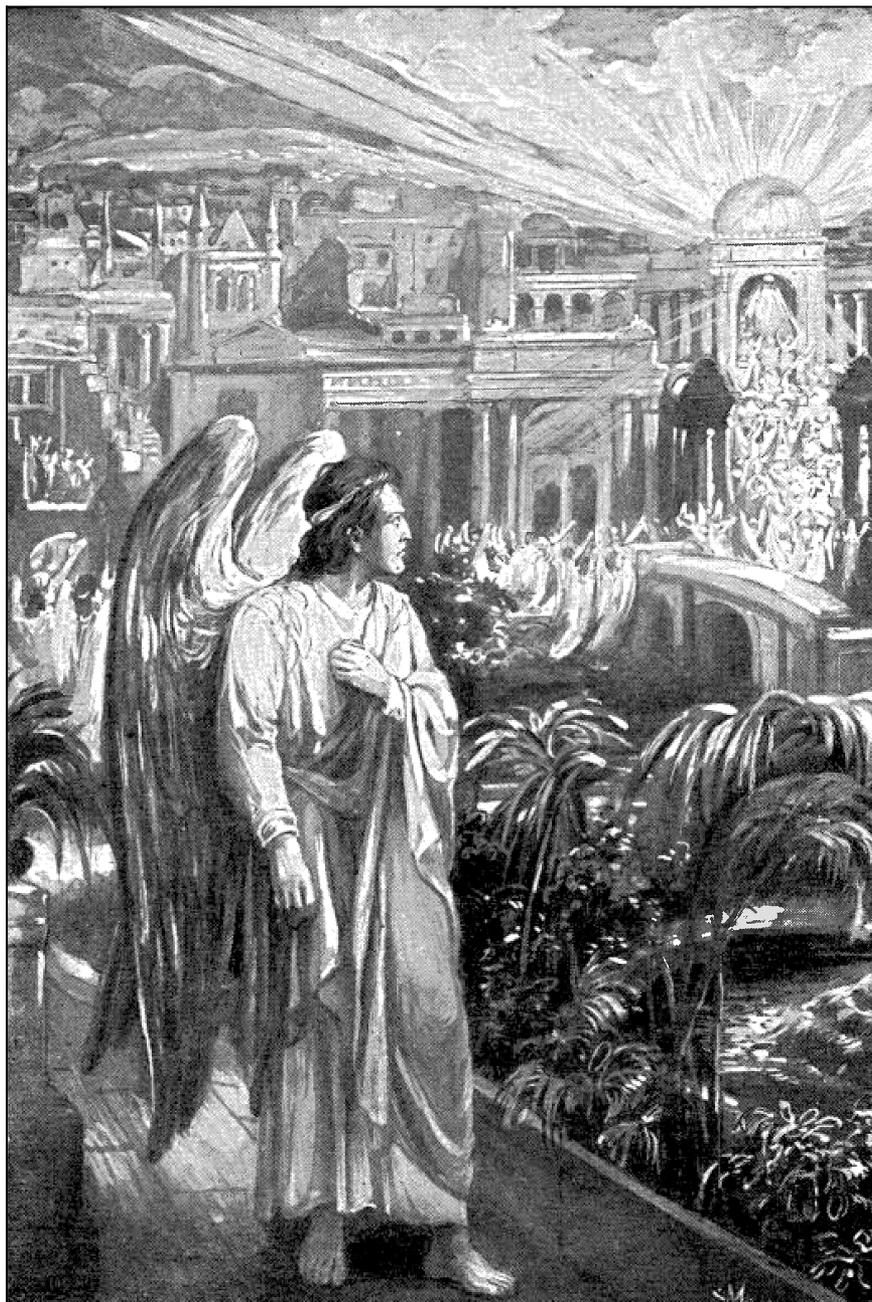
Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 37:

Leaving his place in the immediate presence of the Father, Lucifer went forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels.

The evidences presented so far show that a great deal happened within Lucifer before he took a positive and serious stand against God. He took this stand when he lost the true knowledge of God and replaced it with a false one, but not before that point of time. The substitution in Lucifer's mind of the false for the true concept of God's character came as the result of his incorrect evaluation of God's behavior. He attributed to God a motive which in reality was nonexistent.

The Development of Lucifer's Thinking

Let us look further at how Lucifer's thinking developed. During the time which elapsed between the first presence of pride in him and his commitment to rebellion, Lucifer waited expectantly for God to elevate him to the position which, in his own mind, he judged as being rightly his. He could neither see nor understand



Lucifer plotting against the Government of God

that God had no plans to promote him. It was not that God would not. He could not because Lucifer could never occupy Christ's place unless he was God as Christ was. He was not qualified and never would be.

When passing time did not bring Lucifer the fruition of his fond expectations, a stain of anxiety began to color the brightness of his hopes. He began an anxious surveillance of God in an endeavor to detect any indications of preparation for his grand elevation.

But, study as he might, he could find nothing to even suggest it. The longer he searched and waited, the more deeply compounded his problem became. He correctly concluded that something was decidedly wrong but utterly failed to comprehend where the error lay. The whole of the fault lay with himself. God had not changed, but Lucifer had. He who had been the humble servant of God and his fellow creatures had become a proud self-server.

The understanding of Lucifer's disposition to blame someone else rather than himself is simplified by observing this same tendency in the lives of men. How often one will blame others for his problems when the real cause lies within himself. Everybody and everything else is at fault but never he. However, the last thing he is inclined to do is recognize this fact. So it was with Lucifer. He summarily rejected as unworthy of consideration any thought that his view of the whole matter was wrong. This left him with only one possible conclusion. The fault must lay wholly and solely with God.

A Radical New Concept of God's Character

Having arrived at this awful point, a radically new concept of God's character thrived in Lucifer's mind. This was intensified by the acute disappointment stemming from his realization that he would not be given the position which he thought would alone satisfy his craving for power.

Heretofore, he had correctly understood God to be perfectly just and impartial. He rightly knew that God assigned positions in direct relationship to each individual's fitness to fulfill the responsibility. It was in harmony with those convictions that Lucifer had expected God to exalt him. If he had really been what he thought he was, then those hopes would have been realized. But, when denied the position, he erroneously concluded that God was with great partiality favoring His Son. Lucifer was incensed.

God declares that:

Acts 10

³⁴ [He] shows no partiality.

Romans 2 [KVJ]

¹¹ For there is no respect of persons with God.

Yet, to Lucifer's mind, God was showing great respect for one person. This could only mean that God was a liar, for He had represented himself as following out one principle while in fact He practiced another.

Partiality is serious enough, but partiality combined with deception is even worse. Partiality is hard to bear because it is impossible to show favor to one person except it be at the expense of another. In this situation, Lucifer felt keenly that he was being called upon to pay a very large price in order that Christ might exclusively enjoy the special favors of God.

But Lucifer felt deceived as well. If God had stated that all other members of heaven were to be elevated according to merit, but Christ was in a class by himself, then that would have been one thing. But to declare that Christ was not specially favored and then, as it appeared to Lucifer, to arbitrarily accord Him the special position of favored Son, was indeed to make himself a liar. If Lucifer's evaluation had been correct, then he would have been justified in calling upon God to reform His ways into consistency with His stated principles. But the fact that Lucifer was entirely

wrong in his conclusions removes the justification for his rebellion.

Lucifer fully believed that he had experienced a great awakening. He felt that he had thrown off the shackles of a terrible bondage. Strangely enough, he had not even known he was in such bondage till this point, but looking back, he imagined that he could see wherein it had been true all along. He became hostile toward God and especially toward Christ for having, as he supposed, held the heavenly hosts in deception for so long a time. He therefore determined to assert his rights and have the government of God reformed.

Darkening of God's Character on Earth

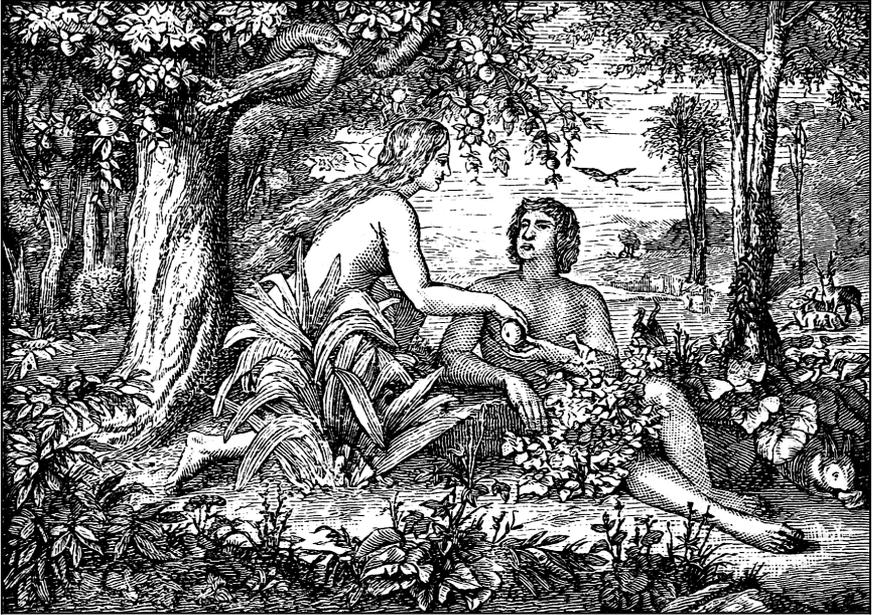
It was by these progressions that, for the first time ever, a misconception of the character of God came into existence, and this in turn led him to misrepresent God. At first these new ideas were entirely and only in Lucifer's mind, but soon, through his misrepresentations, they spread to others. First the mutiny extended to a section of the angels and then to men as each in turn came to share the erroneous concepts of God's character. This is clearly stated in the following extracts:

The Desire of Ages, p. 21-22:

Sin originated in self-seeking. 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. 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.

The Great Controversy, p. 500:

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.



Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 346:

Adam believed the falsehood of Satan, and through his misrepresentation of the character of God, Adam's life was changed and marred. He disobeyed the commandment of God, and did the very thing the Lord told him not to do. Through disobedience Adam fell; but had he endured the test, and been loyal to God, the floodgates of woe would not have been opened upon our world.

Through belief 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.

By these statements the truth is confirmed that Satan's objective of enlisting others in rebellion was achieved through the use of a certain very successful method. That method was to persuade

angels and men that God's character was that of a deceiver and an oppressor. This was the method used and wherever it was successful, rebellion followed.

A tracing of the fall of man certifies this. Satan's first recorded words to Eve were:

Genesis 3 [NIV]

¹ Did God really say, You must not eat from any tree in the garden?

With that question Satan began the development of his purpose firstly to fill Eve's mind with a false understanding of the character of God and then to lead her into revolt. His success depended upon his first sentence to her. There had to be injected into it enough to make it effective as the opening sally of the contact. A. T. Jones outlines something of what Satan was actually saying in those words:

But note the expression with which he opens the conversation. It is an expression which insinuates into her mind a whole world of suspicion. The common version translates it, "Yea, has God said," etc. The *Revised Version* gives it the same. The Jews' English version translates it, "Has God indeed said," etc. But no translation can give it exactly. It cannot be exactly expressed in letters so as to form a word that would give it truly. Yet everybody in the world is familiar with the expression. It is that sneering grunt (expressed only through the nose)—c-ugh!—which conveys query, doubt, suspicion, and contempt, all at once. "C-ugh! has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" And everybody knows that to this day among men there is nothing equal to this sneering grunt, to create doubt and suspicion; and no other expression is used so much by mankind for that purpose. And this is the origin of it.¹

Thus Satan's first words to Eve were designed to create suspicion and doubt of God. It was an idea which not only had never before been presented to Eve, but which under no circumstances

¹ A. T. Jones, *Ecclesiastical Empires*, p. 590-591.

had occurred to her. She had thought of God as being just and loving, but now it was strongly suggested to her that He was not what He had appeared to be.

The idea was startling, though she had nothing in her own experienced knowledge of God to give it the slightest support. All that she knew of God positively denied it. Yet, like so many of her children since that time, she allowed the suspicion to lodge in her thinking, even though there was no visible foundation for it.

That she allowed doubt of God's character to settle in her mind is evidenced by the way in which she misstated to Satan the words of God to them. Whereas God had said that if they ate of the tree they would *surely* die, Eve reported Him as saying that they were not to eat of it *lest* they die.

There is a decided difference between the two statements. The first declares the certainty of death. The second indicates only a possibility of it. What Eve really stated God as having said was that they were not to eat of the tree because of the possibility that they might die. Thus Satan was immediately successful in having her turn the truth into a lie.

Now he could boldly take the next step which was to present the living God in a different character from that which is truly His. Satan said,

Genesis 3

⁴ You will not surely die.

⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, [margin: as gods] knowing good and evil.

Satan here presents his arguments as to why God had placed those restrictions upon them. His assertions were that while God had assured them that they were to have unlimited development, the real fact was that God was afraid that they would ascend to an equality with Him. Once this occurred, He would have to

share with them all the riches He now had reserved for His own pleasure.

Satan declared that God wished to prevent this at any cost. To guard himself he tried to prevent them from partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil whereby their exaltation would be immediately effected. Therefore, the devil stated that God was forced to lie to them in order to protect His own position.

Thus the evil one impugned the motives of God and falsified His character. This was, is, and ever will be his method. The tragedy is that it works only too well.

There was no truth in Satan's charges. God had not denied them the free use of that tree from the motive of self-protection. Neither had He made any of His laws for this purpose. Those principles of life were a love gift from God to protect them, not himself. God needs no protection from anyone, nor is it His character to restrict anyone else to His own advantage.

From a heart which overflowed with boundless love, He had given them the whole of the world in which they lived. Nothing had been withheld. Even the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a gift to them, for it was a school designed to teach respect for the property of another. This education would be a perpetual protection against sin.

That they did not learn the lesson is well known, and the present awful situation in the world is a clear fulfillment of the prediction that if they partook of the tree, they would surely die. Every death taking place today is the direct outworking of the violation of God's counsels to them. They did not learn the lesson that the presence of the tree was designed to teach, and thus cast off the very protection which the Lord had desired to give them.

But this was not all. In believing Satan's lie, Adam and Eve transferred their allegiance from God to Satan. They put another god in the place of the true God. To do that was also to bring eter-

nal death upon themselves, and this they would have finally suffered had not Christ stepped in.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1085:

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. I will stand in man's place. He shall have another chance."

God as Creator and Sustainer

It is most important to understand why the setting of another god in place of the true God would bring swift and certain death. This will be far more fully developed later in this study, so reference to it will be brief at this point. Yet sufficient must be said so that it can be seen that Satan was misstating the character of God to Adam and Eve in the Garden.

In the beginning the Lord made the heavens and the earth. To every Christian this truth is well known. But not so fully known is the fact that the Lord, moment by moment, sustains these worlds in space and keeps them on their ordered way. He did not set the universe in motion to be left forever independent of His sustenance and guidance. Not only did He make all of it, but He maintains it all.

This dual activity of God as Creator and Sustainer is revealed clearly in the written word.

Hebrews 1

¹ God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,

² Has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

³ Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Education, p. 132:

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.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 416:

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.

Psalm 119

⁸⁹ Forever, O Lord,

Your word is settled in heaven.

⁹⁰ Your faithfulness is unto all generations:

You have established the earth, and it abides.

⁹¹ They continue this day according to your ordinances:

For all are your servants.

Psalm 135

⁶ Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He

In heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

Psalm 148

⁵ He commanded, and they were created.

⁶ He has also established them for ever and ever:

He has made a decree which shall not pass.

It is not by inherent power that year by year the earth yields its bounties and continues its march around the sun. 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.

Psalm 147

¹⁶ He gives snow like wool:

He scatters the hoarfrost like ashes.

Jeremiah 10

¹³ 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.

It is by His power that vegetation is caused to flourish, that every leaf appears, every flower blooms, every fruit develops.

Not only has God created the universe, but moment by moment
He sustains the worlds and keeps them in their orbit.



Unquestionably, God is the only being with the power to make the world and its inhabitants in the first case. Likewise, He is the only One who can sustain them. Therefore, if any one replaces the only God who can sustain life with one who cannot, then the only possible result is death. Death must occur because of separation from the Source of life but not because God strikes the per-

son down. The only reason that Adam and Eve did not die is because of the merciful interposition of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, God's prohibition concerning the tree was given to protect them from destruction. In no sense was it given by God to protect himself or His own position. There was no trace of self-interest in the work of God. Rightly understood, the "restriction" placed upon the first couple was a true revelation of the perfectly righteous character of God. It was an act of kindness and mercy. It was the work of a Saviour, not that of a despot.

Misrepresentation Leads to Rebellion

But this is not the way in which the devil represented God. Instead:

- He craftily insinuated that God had a completely selfish motive in refusing them permission to touch the tree.
- He represented God as protecting His own position; reserving to himself alone the high honor of being supreme ruler.
- He claimed that the special tree was a threat to God since its magical powers could elevate those who ate of it into a position of equality with Him.
- He maintained that God feared this possibility and therefore had misrepresented the real facts of the case.

Thus Satan represented the God of love and selfless devotion to the good of His creatures, as being a self-seeking despot who sought only His own good at the expense of His subjects. He represented the God of truth as a liar.

Eve believed that misrepresentation of God's character. When she believed it, she rebelled against God and threw in her lot with the arch rebel. She accepted another god in place of the real One and would have suffered the eternal penalty but for the fact that Jesus stepped in and said,

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1085:

Let the punishment fall on me. I will stand in man's place. He shall have another chance.

The study of the appearance of sin in heaven and on this earth establishes the very close connection between the misrepresentation of the character of God and the appearance of rebellion.

When Lucifer became settled in an incorrect concept of the character of God, he hardened his heart in rebellion. It was after this that he sought to foment rebellion among the angels, and many of them adopted his new views of God and joined him in his mutiny. Likewise Adam and Eve threw in their lot with him when they too accepted these false views of the character of God.

This is the way it began, and this is the way in which it has been maintained throughout the sorrow-filled ages ever since.

The Great Controversy, p. 569:

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. 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 Great Controversy, p. x:

Satan's efforts to misrepresent the character of God, to cause men to cherish a false conception of the Creator, and thus to regard Him with fear and hate rather than love; his endeavors to set aside the divine law, leading the people to think themselves free from its requirements; and his persecution of those who dare to resist his deceptions, have been steadfastly pursued in all ages.

Therefore, the subject of the character of God is not something apart from the great controversy. It is right at the very heart of it. It is impossible to understand the real issues being contested unless the characters of God and Satan are understood.

Inasmuch as the destiny of every soul hangs upon the position he occupies in the great controversy, it follows that the better one understands God's true character, then the more successfully will he enter into the battle against evil and at last find eternal life.

The truth of this becomes even clearer when it is recognized that the particular weapon the devil uses to lead souls into rebellion against God is the misrepresentation of His character. The more he is able to convince men of these deceptions, the more they enter into unrighteousness and rebellion. This is the witness of the Word of God and of history.

In the light of these facts, what study could be more important than the one here being pursued?



5. The Ending of the Great Controversy

THE evidences presented in the Scriptures confirm the truth that the great controversy began with the misrepresentation of the character of God.

Furthermore, Satan's continuation and extension of the struggle has been by the same means. Thus is revealed the cause and the effect—the cause being the establishment of an erroneous view of God, and the effect, the proliferation of iniquitous rebellion.

Therefore, as certainly as the dissemination of false concepts of God's character is the cause for sinful revolt, then as surely will the presentation of the truth in regard to God provide the remedy. In this way men are brought back from sin to righteousness; from rebellion to loyalty.

Naturally, any sincere child of God desires above all else to see the termination of the long, dark misery of sin; the end of revolt and alienation from God. He also wishes to help others walk in the same direction. The work of Satan and his followers is to wrongly represent God's character and intensify the revolt against Him. The work of God and His children is to correctly reveal God's righteousness and terminate the insurgence.

Preeminent in this work of divine restoration is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. When He came to the earth, it was not merely to save man from the penalty of sin by sacrificing himself, but to save him by revealing the character of God in contrast to Satan's representations.

This is not to say that Christ's death upon the cross is unessential to our salvation. Without His death no one could be saved. However, Christ's role as the Revealer of the true character of God was as necessary to saving man and ending the great controversy as was His supreme sacrifice on the cross. Jesus came expressly to reveal the truth about God to angels and men.

He came to do this work at a time when...

The Desire of Ages, p. 22:

...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. 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. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise,

Malachi 4

² ...with healing in His wings.

Counsels to Teachers, p. 28:

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.

It is also written that,

1 John 3

⁸ For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

From these statements we can see that Jesus came to this earth to reveal the character of God and thereby destroy the works of the devil. It is immediately apparent that these are not two separate works. They are the same work. The devil's work to lead men into rebellion depends firstly on his deceiving them in respect to the nature of God. Therefore, to reveal God's true nature so that the devil is no longer able to deceive angels and men, is to destroy the devil's works. It makes it impossible for him to operate.

Christ's accomplishment of this was no easy task. Satan's deceptions have penetrated far more deeply and extensively than most suppose. Because we have failed to understand how serious the problem is, we have likewise failed to appreciate the enormity

of the task imposed upon God and Christ. Had it simply been a contest of force versus force, it would have been over in an instant. God is all-powerful and Satan is almost nothing by comparison. But the question to be settled in the great controversy is not whether God is physically stronger than Satan. The question is about God's character and government, and Satan's alternative offers.

It is natural to suppose that a declaration from God would be the last and final authority in any dispute. How many times have people wished that the Lord would speak directly and audibly to settle a disagreement. Many believe that this would settle the issue right then and there. But the witness of the ages reveals that God's declaration alone is not sufficient to settle an issue. If it were, then there never would have been a great controversy.

At one time there was no question or dispute over God's ways. Then a change came when Lucifer challenged Him. As this dissension was developing, God called together the whole of the heavenly host and gave a clear statement in response to Satan's contentions.² The declarations of Satan were met by the declarations of God, but this did not finally settle the question. This is proved by Satan's increased antagonism thereafter and the fact that others joined him.

After this development, demonstration had to be added to declaration. Therefore, Satan had to be given time to demonstrate the true nature of his claims while God and Christ revealed the real character of their position. It is for this purpose that the Lord has permitted the great conflict to develop, and until that purpose has been fulfilled, the controversy will go on.

That means that Christ will not return, sin will not be ended, 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's. When that point has been reached; when every question of truth and error is forever settled; then and only

² See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 36.

then will the end come. The great controversy will not continue beyond that point.

Who Was Affected?

Let us now consider an aspect of the great controversy which is often overlooked. It is understood by many that the number of the angels whom Satan deceived was one third of the heavenly host. This is not what the Bible says. Rather, it states that it was this proportion which followed him into rebellion. Carefully note what the Scriptures say:

Revelation 12

⁴ His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 115:

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 for the Church, vol. 5, p. 291:

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.

In these statements no reference is made to the effect, if any, that Satan's deceptions had upon the rest of the angels. These statements do make it clear that two thirds of the angels remained loyal to God, and it is assumed that they therefore were not influenced by the devil's sophistries. The real truth is that every one of the angels was affected by the delusions of the great enemy.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 72:

Satan is a deceiver. When he sinned in heaven, even the loyal angels did not fully discern his character.

To appreciate what developed in heaven, we need to understand the relationship that existed between Lucifer and the angels. The angels had known Lucifer for a long time and had developed quite a love and trust for him.

The Great Controversy, p. 497:

Lucifer, as the anointed cherub, had been highly exalted; he was greatly loved by the heavenly beings, and his influence over them was strong.

After Lucifer made his decision to rebel against God, he took advantage of this bond of sympathy between him and the other heavenly beings.

The Great Controversy, p. 497:

He had artfully presented his side of the question, employing sophistry and fraud to secure his objects. His power to deceive was very great, and by disguising himself in a cloak of falsehood he had gained an advantage. Even the loyal angels could not fully discern his character or see to what his work was leading.

One third of the angelic host joined Lucifer in his rebellion. Their sympathy with him grew into a sympathy with sin. But although the other two thirds did not cast aside their allegiance to God, they did not lose all of their sympathy with Lucifer either. Throughout the long centuries that elapsed between the fall of Lucifer and the cross of Calvary, that state of affairs continued. It lasted at least four thousand years.

The Revelation at the Cross

The Desire of Ages, p. 758-759:

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 arch-apostate 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. It was a being of wonderful power and glory that had set himself against God. Of Lucifer the Lord says,

Ezekiel 28

¹² You seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.

Lucifer had been the covering cherub. He had stood in the light of God's presence. He had been the highest of all created beings, and had been foremost in revealing God's purposes to the universe. After he had sinned, his power to deceive was the more deceptive, and the unveiling of his character was the more difficult, because of the exalted position he had held with the Father.

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. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power.

It was God's purpose to place things on an eternal basis of security, and 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.

Consider carefully certain salient points in this quotation.

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds.

They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion.

...the unveiling of his character was the more difficult, because of the exalted position he had held with the Father.

Time was given for the working of Satan's principles, that they might be seen by the heavenly universe.

Here we find confirmed that even the loyal angels and the inhabitants throughout the whole of the universe were deceived in

part by the sophistries of the great deceiver, and their deliverance came at the cross.

The Desire of Ages, p. 761:

Could one sin have been found in Christ, had He in one particular yielded to Satan to escape the terrible torture, the enemy of God and man would have triumphed. Christ bowed His head and died, but He held fast His faith and His submission to God.

Revelation 12

¹⁰ 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.

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. Henceforth his work was restricted. Whatever attitude he might assume, he could no longer await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts, and before them accuse Christ's brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.

This kind of sympathy which existed between Satan and the angels before the cross meant more than just feeling sorry for him in his inescapable misery. They actually gave thought to his arguments but did not accept them.

The Great Controversy, p. 497:

[They had]...no conception of its [sin's] nature and malignity. They could not discern the terrible consequences that would result from setting aside the divine law, [yet they remained loyal to God].

It would be impossible to give unlimited allegiance to God while such a sympathy existed. It is to believe, even though unconsciously, that Satan ought not to be treated as sternly as he is being dealt with. So it was with the loyal angels right down to the cross of Calvary. It was then, and not before, that the last link of

sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken. They then saw and understood the character of God much better than ever before. Christ had destroyed the works of the devil in them and, for them, a major purpose of the great controversy had been achieved.

Man Still Deceived

However, what has been done for angels must also be done for man. While angels saw the real nature of the characters of God and of Satan at the cross, man certainly did not and still has not. What had been done for angels had also to be done for men. Even those who walk with God still have a measure of sympathy with Satan and his ways although they might not realize it. In fact, it will not be until the time of Jacob's trouble that even the righteous people of God will lose their last link of sympathy with the devil.

The Review and Herald, August 12, 1884:

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. For to love and cherish sin, is to love and cherish its author, that deadly foe of Christ. When they excuse sin and cling to perversity of character, they give Satan a place in their affections, and pay him homage.

One reason the great controversy continues beyond the cross is for the sake of man. What was accomplished for the angels will yet be accomplished for him. There is also more that the angels must learn.

The Desire of Ages, p. 761:

Yet Satan was not then [at the time of the cross] 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 be-

tween the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.

The Saviour took the work of ending the great controversy one giant step toward its completion when He revealed to the angels the character of God as it really is and thus exposed Satan for what he is. The progressive development of the great controversy is clearly portrayed in *Revelation* 12. The original confrontation in heaven and the resulting termination of Satan's presence is described in:

Revelation 12

⁷ And war broke out in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought,

⁸ But they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.

⁹ So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

Note that when Satan and his angels lost the battle in heaven, they were cast out of heaven and onto the earth. While continuing his work on the earth, he still had opportunity to speak to the holy angels.

The Desire of Ages, p. 761:

[He could]...await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts, and before them accuse Christ's brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin.

But that activity was terminated when at the cross he was cast down. Firstly he had been cast out, and then he was cast down.

The Desire of Ages, p. 761:

Christ bowed His head and died, but He held fast His faith and His submission to God.

Revelation 12

¹⁰ 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.

This reference confirms that the devil lost tremendous ground through the victory accomplished by Christ during His life and by His death. The angels were set free from Satan's power. His delusions no longer had any claim upon their thinking. Their loyalty to God became stronger and more intense. For these reasons there was indeed great gladness throughout the entire universe for the salvation which they had gained through the revelation of God's character as given by Christ. So it is written:

Revelation 12

¹² Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them!

It is to be noted that this call goes forth subsequent to the casting down of the old dragon at the cross of Calvary. But the declaration was made:

¹² ...Woe to the inhabitants of the earth...

And this is for very good reasons:

1. Before the cross, the energies of Satan and his angels had been divided between his attacks on the loyal angels and on man. But after the cross he was left to devote all his power to those on earth. They now have his undivided attention.
2. His fearful losses sustained at the cross do not discourage but only madden him into a frenzy of desperate and determined activity. He knows that his time has been shortened and that he must work with feverish madness to stave off

the day of his final obliteration. All of that fury is directed to mankind.

Therefore it is written to those who live upon this earth after the crucifixion,

Revelation 12

¹² Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.

The crushing defeat suffered by our great adversary at Golgotha was a resounding victory for the cause of righteousness. However, while great gains were made, full recovery was not then achieved. Another great battle must be fought wherein will be accomplished for man that which has been accomplished for the unfallen universe. The victory will be gained exactly as it was gained by Christ, for we are to overcome as He overcame.

Revelation 3

²¹ To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.

How the Battle is Fought and Won

To understand how that last battle is to be fought and won, we have but to understand how Jesus gained His victory over the devil. Firstly, we must recognize that the most difficult person to expose is one who is a deceiver and an accuser. Counter-accusation is totally ineffective. At best, it only serves to further confuse the issue, while at the worst it multiplies support for the initial accuser. The use of force is likewise counterproductive. It generates a desire to help the one in rebellion because of the natural tendency to take up the cause of the underdog.

There is only one way to reveal evil at its worst and that is for it to be exposed by righteousness at its best. God is righteousness. His very character is that. Therefore, the exposure of sin by the

revelation of righteousness is the exposure of sin by the revelation of the character of God.

Throughout His lifetime upon this earth, Jesus revealed precisely that. To look at Christ was to see the Father. He exemplified what the Father is. He demonstrated how the Father relates himself to the sin problem, to the sinful, and to those who are His worst enemies. He spelled it out both in His life and in His teaching. So perfect and complete was the revelation of the Father as given by Christ that, to Philip's inquiry,

John 14

⁸ Lord, show us the Father,

He could reply,

⁹ Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, Show us the Father?

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 286:

All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son.

Extensive study will be given later to the work of Christ as the Revealer of God's character. What is being established now is the fact that by revealing God's character, Christ was able to signally defeat Satan and break the last link of sympathy between him and the unfallen beings of the universe.

Throughout His lifetime, Jesus revealed the character of God. As He did so, Satan mustered his forces to break that perfect revelation. But steadily and faithfully Jesus continued on His way. Satan therefore had to draw even more heavily on his armament in a desperate effort to break the witness of God in Christ.

At last, a 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. The cross is the high point of the great controversy.

Such an unfolding of righteousness at its very best forced the devil to reveal his own sinful character at its worst. He had no choice. If, for fear of exposure, he had not attacked Christ, he would have lost anyway. His only hope was to bring out everything in his onslaught and hope that he could break the witness of the Son of God and man. But he failed.

Divine light manifested itself in contrast to Satanic darkness. The revelation was so clear that the unfallen beings who witnessed the entire conflict were convinced. Satan's cause among them was lost, so now he works desperately to retain what he still has—the minds of men. They did not see what the angels and the unfallen beings of the universe saw. For man the purpose of the great controversy has not yet been fulfilled. Until it is, the struggle must and will go on.

There must again be exhibited a complete revelation of the righteous character of God. At that time Satan will again be forced to display the fullness of his iniquitous character. When this happens, even fallen men who have rejected God's truth will see what the unfallen beings saw, and will reject all allegiance to his satanic majesty.

So how will this demonstration of God's character be given? Christ will not return to this earth to repeat what He has already done. In other words, He will not return to this earth to be crucified again. He will employ a further solution to the problem. This full and final display of the merciful and just character of God will be given instead through His people. Christ will reveal through them exactly what He personally revealed through himself while upon the earth. Only as He is able to do this will the purpose of the controversy be finally achieved for men as it was for angels. Then the Saviour can and will return.

Inspiration is very clear in stating that it will be the children of God who will give that final revelation of His character. This is a

fact which every Christian must understand if he is to effectively occupy his appointed place in the concluding events of the long-standing war. Failure to comprehend this will result in an inadequate and misdirected preparation and thus fail of qualifying for a place in that last army of the Lord. For this reason the following words of warning have been written:

The Great Controversy, p. 593:

In order to endure the trial before them, they [the people of God who will live through the 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.

This counsel does not say that those who live through the final test will merely be in a better position if they have a right concept of God's character, government, and purposes. It does not say this. If it did, then it would be an optional matter whether we did or did not understand these things. Either way we could come through.

The statement warns that we do not have these options. Either we understand correctly the true nature of God's character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them, or we will not be able to endure the trial before us. To fail at this time and under these circumstances means the loss of eternal life.

In the light of these considerations, the importance of having an accurate and thorough knowledge of God's character, government, and purposes cannot be over stressed.

The Prophetic Foretelling

The final movement of people who will provide the Lord with the means to make that ultimate manifestation of His character is prophetically described in:

Revelation 18

¹ And after these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.

It needs to be established that this verse refers to the final message to be given to the world. Before it, God will have sent many warnings, instructions, and entreaties, but beyond the dispatch of this message, there will be no other. This is plainly attested to in the following quotations.

The Great Controversy, p. 390:

Revelation 18 points to the time when, as the result of rejecting the threefold warning of *Revelation* 14:6-12, 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 from her communion. This message is the last that will ever be given to the world; and it will accomplish its work.

A complete chapter in *The Great Controversy*, beginning on page 603, is devoted to describing the giving of the message of *Revelation* 18:1-4. The title of the chapter is “The Final Warning.” In reference to these verses we read:

The Great Controversy, p. 604:

These announcements uniting with the third angel’s message, constitute the final warning to be given to the inhabitants of the earth.

Another point to establish is that the angel is a symbol. The angels themselves do not personally deliver the message. This we understand clearly from the way in which the first three angels’ messages were given. They were given by movements of people on this earth. So it will be with the last message as foretold in *Revelation* 18:1. This message will be given by a movement of people. This is further certified by these words:

The Great Controversy, p. 604:

Hence 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.

Next the question must be raised,

“With whose glory will the earth be lightened?”

It is usual to receive the answer that it will be the glory of God, but this is not what the verse says. It says,

Revelation 18

¹ ...another *angel* came down from heaven,...and the earth was lightened with *his* glory.

It is the glory of the angel which lightens the whole earth. It is true that this is the glory of God, for it comes from Him. However, it is infused into the angel so that it becomes a part of him. Therefore it can be described as being his glory.

What Is the Glory?

What is this glory that God and the angel have? As used in Scripture the word “glory,” especially in reference to God, has two meanings. To the human mind it is mostly associated with a dazzling display of physical splendor, and without question, such an outshining of glory does surround the person and throne of God. Such a glory as this was witnessed by both Daniel and Isaiah. Daniel described what he saw in these words:

Daniel 7

⁹ I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool, His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire.

¹⁰ A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

Here is Isaiah's description of the heavenly glory of the God of heaven:

Isaiah 6

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.

² Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

³ And one cried to another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!

⁴ And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

But there is also a different meaning to the word "glory." When Moses asked the Lord to show him His glory, the Lord revealed to Moses His character. Here is God's response to his request:

Exodus 33

¹⁹ Then He said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

At the appointed time the Lord did this, as it is written:

Exodus 34

⁵ Then the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

⁶ And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

⁷ Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

Moses specifically asked God to reveal His glory. The Lord did not refuse this request. However, in response, He did not show him the outshining radiance and physical splendor of His person,

but the wonder of His great and lovely character. From this we deduce that:

The glory of God is His character.

The more the Word of God is studied, the more clearly this will be seen. When Jesus came to this earth, He left behind all the glory which was of a physical nature. Physically speaking, He was a very plain person as the prophecy describes:

Isaiah 53

² For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

Yet, despite the plainness of His outward appearance, He revealed the glory of God to those with the spiritual vision to see it.

John 1

¹⁴ And the Word became 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 testifies that he, along with others, saw the glory of the Father in Jesus Christ as He walked as a man among men. It is certain that the glory seen day by day was not a radiant outshining of dazzling light. What they saw was that other and more important glory, the character of God.

In *Christ's Object Lessons*, the word "glory" is directly equated with character in this way,

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 414:

The light of His glory—His character—is to shine forth in His followers.

These references clearly define the other meaning of the word glory as being the character of God. This is the glory He wants His children to have and give to the world. He wants man to accept truth because it is truth, not because of any spectacular displays.

Therefore it will be the glory of His character which will lighten the earth at the end of time. Without this understanding we cannot appreciate the meaning of *Revelation* 18:1. If we do not understand the nature of that glory, we will be disappointed when that time comes because our false expectations will not be realized, and we will be unprepared to give the final warning.

The whole earth will be lightened
with the knowledge of God's character.



So the message of *Revelation* 18:1 can be summarized in four points as follows:

1. It is the final message to be given to the world;
2. The angel symbolizes a divinely-called movement of people;

3. The glory of the angel is the glory of the character of God;
4. Therefore, it is the character of God within the people of the movement that shall lighten the whole earth.

It is of value to take a text in which symbolic language is used and put the meanings in the place of the symbols. This makes the text much clearer. By doing this, *Revelation* 18:1 would read:

“And after these things I saw another movement of people arise by divine calling, having great power, and the earth was lightened with the glory of the character of those people.”

For some, real difficulty is experienced in believing that the character of God is actually reproduced within the believer. Yet this is the plain teaching of the Word of God. It is the teaching of *Revelation* 18:1 and is further expressed in these beautiful words:

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 69:

When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.

A reproduction is a duplicate of the original. If it is perfect, it is so good that it is impossible to tell the difference between it and the original. When Christ was upon this earth, it was necessary to so reveal God’s character as to enable the unfallen worlds to see how great a lie Satan’s description of God was. That manifestation of God’s character in Christ had to be so complete and perfect that to see Christ’s character was to see God’s. If Christ’s revelation of God’s character had been defective or incomplete in the least degree, then He could never have succeeded in delivering the unfallen universe from the grip of Satan’s deceptions.

It is not difficult to believe that Christ’s character was a perfect reproduction of the Father’s, but it is much more difficult to believe that we, with all our defectiveness, can do the same. Yet, this is how it must be. Since it required a faultless manifestation of God’s character to deliver the angels and the unfallen worlds from Satan’s deceptions, it will require nothing less than the same faultless and complete manifestation of God’s character to deliver

The Revelation of God's Character Ends the Great Controversy

Satan Defects

Two thirds of the angels and the unfallen worlds faithfully follow God for over 4000 years, yet they have some sympathy with Satan.

One third of the angels follow him in rebellion

Calvary

Fallen men remain deceived.
The great controversy continues

Satan and God revealed just as they are. Angels and unfallen worlds fully convinced.

The Last Revelation

Satan and God again revealed just as they are. Even evil men are fully convinced.

It was the misrepresentation of God's character which started the great rebellion. Not until this cause is removed by declaration and demonstration will the controversy be ended.

mankind. Nothing less than this will bring the great controversy to a close. For this reason:

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.

So it is that:

Testimonies to Ministers, p. 18:

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.

In order to have a true appreciation of the purpose of the great controversy and the means of finishing it, we must believe that God's character can be perfectly reproduced in the Christian. Such an appreciation is essential to stimulate earnest searching into this great theme. As we do, we will be enlivened as the wonderful beauty of God's character opens before our astonished gaze, and we find our lives being changed into the same image from glory to glory.

The closing scenes of the great controversy are right upon us. Soon its purpose will have been fulfilled for fallen man as it was for the angels and the unfallen worlds. In that final and finishing work the true understanding and manifestation of the character of God will play a vital role. Indeed, without these there would be no possibility of the work being finished.

Let every true child of God give this topic the place of importance it deserves in order to develop his character accordingly.

6. Isaiah's Wonderful Prophecy

REVELATION 18 clearly foretells the time when the glory of God's character shall be revealed through His people as the final and finishing message to lost mankind. Considering that:

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 585:

In the *Revelation* all the books of the Bible meet and end,

—it must be true that the prophecy of *Revelation* 18 is to be found in the Old Testament as well. One such place is *Isaiah* 60. The entire chapter is worthy of the closest study, but here we will concentrate on the first three verses:

Isaiah 60

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

² For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.

³ The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

It is true that these verses do have an initial application to the ministry of Christ. Some therefore limit the application to Him, but when it is understood that the people of the last Church on earth have to reveal the character of God exactly as Christ did, then it will be seen that these verses also apply to God's last movement on earth.

God sent Jesus Christ to reveal His character and set men and angels free. He gave Him the light of truth and the full glory of His character. In precisely the same way, God is preparing a people for their work 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.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 415:

To His people He says,

Isaiah 60

¹ Arise, shine; for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

The picture given in *Isaiah* 60:1-3 is one of great contrast. On the one hand is deep darkness, and on the other is glorious illumination. Darkness covers the earth and deep darkness the people. In answer to this the Lord rises upon His people, and His glory—character—is seen upon them.

It would be impossible for God's character to be seen upon them if it were not already in them. Therefore, this verse is actually a confirmation of what has already been understood from *Revelation* 18:1. The character of God, which is His righteousness, is not something which is simply credited to a person but is infused into him. It becomes his own character, so that when others look at him, they will see the glory of God's character just as if they were looking at the great original. There they will see the same love, justice, righteousness, peace, goodness, honesty; the same disposition to save and never to destroy.

In the chapter in *Christ's Object Lessons* which explains the prophetic parable of the ten virgins, a parallel is drawn between *Isaiah* 60:1-2, and the experience of the five wise virgins. The parallel is immediately apparent.

- Both prophecies relate to the closing events of this world's history, telling how things will be just before the coming of the Son of man.
- The same picture of darkness broken by clear light is presented, for the virgins are represented as sleeping until the midnight hour, which is the very darkest hour of the night.
- Then they arise with their lamps and the five wise virgins light the way for the Bridegroom's coming. Without the lighting of the path, the Bridegroom could not make His

way. He is dependent upon that light to make His arrival possible.



“Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” *Isaiah 60:1-3.*

In these studies on God's character, emphasis has been placed on the concept that the righteousness of God must be formed within the human agent as it was in Christ. Nothing less than this will suffice to finish the work. Note how this thought is further confirmed in these comments on the parable of the ten virgins:

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 414:

In the parable the wise virgins had oil in their vessels with their lamps. Their light burned with undimmed flame through the night of watching. It 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, to the marriage feast.

So the followers of Christ are to shed light into the darkness of the world. Through the Holy Spirit, God's word is a light as it becomes a transforming power in the life of the receiver. 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, to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

There can be no mistaking the message contained in these lines. It shows how the Word of God becomes a light in the believer. It is not a weak light, but one capable of dispelling the darkness around it. To possess such light means much more than merely understanding the theory of the truth and then preaching it to others. God's Word is a light as it becomes a transforming power in the life of the receiver. By the agency of the Holy Spirit the person's inward nature becomes changed into the likeness of God. This is not a false interpretation of the words quoted above as the next sentence clearly shows:

By implanting in their hearts the principles of His Word, the Holy Spirit develops in men the attributes of God.

The fact that God's children are changed into His likeness does not make them God. The likeness is in traits of character and disposition. In this sense the believer becomes like God. Pursuing

this thought, the pen of inspiration leaves no room for misunderstanding this important truth. That is the message of the next sentence:

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 414:

The light of His glory—His character—is to shine forth in His followers.

First it must be within. Then it shines forth. Compare the following expressions to see how they all speak the same message in the clearest terms:

Revelation 18

¹ I saw another angel [movement of people]...and the earth was illuminated with his glory.

Isaiah 60

² But the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 414:

The light of His glory—His character—is to shine forth in His followers.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 69:

When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.

The thought being developed and emphasized here and in the last chapter is that it will be by the manifestation of God's character through human instruments that the great controversy will be brought to its close.

The purpose of the great controversy cannot be fulfilled unless that demonstration of God's character is given. Any delay in this revelation of God will likewise delay the return of Jesus. The paragraph under consideration from *Christ's Object Lessons*, develops this same concept. Let the development of the argument in this paragraph be briefly traced again.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 414:

Through the Holy Spirit, God's word is a light as it becomes a transforming power in the life of the receiver. 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, to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Could any teaching be plainer than this? Do you desire to know the way in which 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? It is *not* by:

- merely becoming acquainted with the theory of the truth,
- attempting to wrap around yourself the cloak of Christ's covering righteousness,
- ceremonies or forms,
- mere loyalty to a code of religion.

It is by having the Holy Spirit form the very character of God within. Then the outward religious actions will be the expression of the truth and power of God within. By this means God will prepare the way for the coming of the Bridegroom, and hasten the ending of the great controversy. In the final conflict the followers of Christ will fulfill their mission in the same way that the Saviour accomplished His mission.

How Jesus Did His Work

Let us take a further look at how Jesus did His work. It was not the possession of mere theory that gave His work and teaching power. His life had power because He was the living embodiment of the truth.

Education, p. 78-79:

What He taught, He lived.

John 13

¹⁵ I have given you an example, [He said to His disciples;] that you should do as I have done.

John 15

¹⁰ I have kept my Father's commandments.

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.

In the same way will our teaching have power:

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 334:

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.

True and necessary as these principles have been in past history, they will be even more so in the coming darkest hour of all.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 414:

The coming of the bridegroom was at midnight—the darkest hour. So the coming of Christ will take place in the darkest period of this earth's history.

What is the Darkness?

Though it may seem an unnecessary question, it is well worth the time to ask what the nature of this last-day darkness will be. On the one hand it will be a moral darkness of the worst kind wherein men and women will practice every iniquity imaginable. This is confirmed by the next sentence in:

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 414:

The days of Noah and Lot pictured the condition of the world just before the coming of the Son of man.

However, this is not the complete picture. What men do is only the result of what they are. Therefore, this iniquity is the outworking of deeper causes. As we read on in the paragraph just quoted, it is revealed that these causes are the darkness of Satan's delusions, heresies, and false teachings. Through the ages these

have been developing until, at the end of this world's history, they produce the deepest darkness possible.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 414:

The Scriptures pointing forward to this time declare that Satan will work with all power and...

2 Thessalonians 2

¹⁰ ...with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.

His working is plainly revealed by the rapidly increasing darkness, the multitudinous errors, heresies, and delusions of these last days. Not only is Satan leading the world captive, but his deceptions are leavening the professed churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. The great apostasy will develop into darkness deep as midnight, impenetrable as sackcloth of hair.

Iniquity will abound because of the proliferation of Satan's multitudinous errors and their acceptance by the vast majority. The darkness of deception is the root cause of the darkness of behavior. Great as that darkness will be, it will not extinguish the light.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 414-415:

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.

These false teachings are not merely mentioned in general terms, instead we are told specifically what they are so that we will not be ignorant of the true cause of the moral darkness in the last days.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 415:

Isaiah 60

² Behold, [says the Scripture,] the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon you, and His glory shall be seen upon you.

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.

So this is the darkness which shall cover the entire world in the last days. It is the misunderstanding of God's character. Satan will still be using the same means in the end that he has used right through past history. He knows that rebellion against God is begun, developed, and sustained by ignorance of God's character, while the dispelling of that error will return men to allegiance to God. He knows that the great conflict can never be terminated until men are set free from erroneous ideas in respect to what God really is, therefore he puts forth unbelievable efforts to lock man in the gross darkness of misapprehension of God.

There is no such thing as the great *controversies*, but rather only the one great *controversy*. The nature of the battle does not change from age to age. Satan uses the same methods at all times, and God's answer to it is likewise ever the same. He reveals the truth about His character which is His righteousness.

We are now living in the very time when these prophecies of *Isaiah 60*, *Revelation 18*, and the parable of the ten virgins are to be fulfilled. Around us, darkness does cover the earth and gross darkness the people. The earth is filled with the most terrible ignorance of the true nature of God's character, and men are behaving in harmony with those misconceptions.

As surely, then, as we are living in this time of human history, so surely can we expect to see the Lord providing His answer to Satan's deceptions. Through the revelation of the true character of God every misconception will be cleared away so that the Lord can be seen as He really is. It is not in idle expectation that we anticipate this, for:

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 415-416:

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. This is the work outlined by the prophet Isaiah in the words,

Isaiah 40

⁹ O Jerusalem, that brings good tidings, lift up your voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.

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.

Could we but comprehend the magnitude and glory of the promise here given, our hearts would burst with praise to God for His unspeakable provisions, given when they are most needed. "At this time," the very time when the darkness of satanic delusion is overspreading the world, a message from God is to come. Let us be so grateful that the message does not come from man or from the devil, but from God himself. Because it comes from God, it can only be the truth—saving and uplifting truth.

Nor is it a message to be argued or debated. It is a message to be proclaimed, not only verbally but by the witness of the life itself; a witness made effective by the forming of the very character of God within. Thus when men look upon the messenger, they see the character of God revealed. Then they come to know God as God is. They see His character reflected in the transformed hearts and lives of the believers.

This message is the very last ever to be given to mortals. The proclamation "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.

It is prayerfully hoped that by now the reader will have gained some idea of the importance of this theme and has been inspired to earnestly search for and possess God's wonderful character.

7. Approaching the Study of God

CHARACTER is revealed by the way in which one acts. This is a simple principle which is always true. When applied to sinful human beings, it appears sometimes to be unreliable because some are very adept at making themselves appear to be what they are not. Nevertheless, the time comes when the mask is rent and the real character of the person is seen.

However, with God there is never any deception, for He is the truth. What He does, when rightly understood, is a true and accurate revelation of what He is.

The works of God, though always based upon the same principles, have been revealed under two different sets of circumstances. The first set occurred before the appearance of sin, and the second occurred after. One can be sure that the revelation manifested during the great rebellion is the more comprehensive one because it is under the pressure of test and trial that the depth of one's character and capabilities is revealed. Therefore, the fullest and clearest revelation of God's character is afforded us because of the entrance of sin.

Because of this fact, there are some who say that God deliberately introduced sin so that He would be provided with a theater in which to display such depths of himself as would otherwise be impossible. The enemy of God and man is the originator of this belief which the true child of God will reject as error.

So there are two different situations involving two eras in which the behavior of God can be studied. The conditions prevailing in these two eras are as different as they possibly could be, but God's character is the same in both cases. Sin's appearance and its attendant pressure changed angels, men, and nature, but not God.

Hebrews 13

⁸ [He is]...the same yesterday, today, and forever.

While this Scripture directly relates to Jesus Christ, it is equally true of the Father. What can be said of the One, can be said of the Other, for Jesus himself said:

John 5

¹⁹ Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

God is unchanged and unchangeable. He declares,

Malachi 3

⁶ I am the Lord, I do not change.

James 1

¹⁷ [He is]...the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Romans 1

²³ [He is]...the uncorruptible God.

These evidences confirm that God did not follow a certain line of behavior before the entrance of sin and another after. Rather, the emergency of sin brought forth from God only more of the same things He had always done.

While it is true that the fullest revelation of God's character is given after sin's entrance, there is value in studying God's behavior before sin entered. Such a study will reveal much about God's ways.

To begin, it is obvious enough that, before sin, there was no need for God to punish anyone. Subsequent to that sad development, however, an entirely different set of conditions demanded of God, as the responsible Ruler of all, a satisfactory and permanent solution. Because most people understand only the use of force as such a solution, they cannot see God doing other than bearing down with terrible punishments upon the guilty. This is the only way they know, resulting in their quickly interpreting all the reported actions of God in the Old Testament as being of this character.

To such, the declaration that God did absolutely nothing after sin appeared that He did not do before, will certainly be a startling statement and hard to accept. But it has to be true nonetheless. Otherwise we would be compelled to accept the thought that sin's appearance did make changes in God by forcing Him to do things He had never done before. But this means that He would not remain the unchangeable, incorruptible God.

Some may counter that this argument breaks down when it is considered that God did do something different in giving His Son as a sacrifice for the lost. However, the incarnation of Christ into the human family was not the result of a change in God. On the contrary, this act was a wonderful extension of the work that Christ had eternally done. When Christ's role before sin entered is rightly understood, it will be seen that God practiced the principle of self-sacrificing love from all eternity. Christ has ever been God's gift to His creatures. Of this, more will be revealed as the study progresses.

Based upon the premise that God does not change, it is a certainty that God did nothing new during the period when sin emerged and established its pernicious corruption. Therefore, by studying what God did in the unmarred ages, we will actually be studying what He did after. His behavior before will only find confirmation in the vastly more difficult arena which followed.

By studying what God did in the sunny days of universal innocence and harmony, we are actually investigating the constitution of the kingdom which He formed in such wondrous perfection. How God organized that government, what He provided for His subjects, and how He ruled them is a very clear and wonderful revelation of His character. He is a perfect God. He always has been and always will be. Therefore the government which He formed is likewise perfect.

Before we begin the study of God's government, a necessary note of warning must be given. We tend to form concepts of God's government according to our understanding of human

leadership. We are very familiar with the latter. It is all that we have ever really known, and so we tend to use it as the standard for God and His kingdom.

But the word of God warns us against likening the divine unto the human and directs us to approach this study from a different standpoint. God states very clearly,

Isaiah 55

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

In His efforts to reveal to men the principles of God's kingdom, Christ could find nothing on this earth to use as an example. Everything with which man was familiar served to give a wrong concept of God's government. Thus Christ said:

Mark 4

³⁰ Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

The Review and Herald, March 19, 1908:

The government of the kingdom of Christ is like no earthly government. It is a representation of the characters of those who compose the kingdom.

Mark 4

³⁰ Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? [Christ asked,] or with what comparison shall we compare it?

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.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 12:

Mark 4

³⁰ Whereunto, [asked Christ,] shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

He could not employ the kingdoms of the world as a similitude. 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. God's church is the court of holy life, filled with varied gifts, and endowed with the Holy Spirit. The members are to find their happiness in the happiness of those whom they help and bless.

There was always the danger that the apostles might lose sight of the principles of the kingdom of righteousness. Therefore Jesus sought to teach them the great differences between that kingdom and the kingdom of men, as it is written:

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 396-397:

Lest the disciples should lose sight of the principles of the gospel, Christ related to them a parable illustrating the manner in which God deals with His servants, and the spirit in which He desires them to labor for Him.

Matthew 20

¹ The kingdom of heaven, [He said,] is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard.

It was the custom for men seeking employment to wait in the market places, and thither the employers went to find servants. 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.

⁸ So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard said unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

⁹ And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

¹⁰ But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

The householder's dealing 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. The Lord says,

Isaiah 55

⁸ My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Thus, in His Word, the Lord has warned us not to think of the kingdom of God in terms of earthly kingdoms. In fact it is impossible to learn of the heavenly kingdom from the earthly kingdoms. It cannot be done. Anyone who attempts to do so will certainly be led into an incorrect understanding of the nature of God's kingdom.

Few, if any, consciously set out to learn of God's government in this way. It is automatic. Because we have only known of earthly kingdoms, we come to the study of the heavenly with definite ideas already established in our minds about what a kingdom has to be. The Scriptures are read in the light of these understandings, and the result is a view of God which is incorrect.

Christ's disciples had to overcome this problem. From their earliest days they had heard their elders talk of the Messianic kingdom. No question was ever raised as to the constitution of that kingdom. It was taken for granted that it would be just like the kingdoms round about them. As the Old Testament was read, every verse describing that kingdom was misread in the light of those misconceptions.

This misunderstanding of the true nature of God's kingdom and character was the greatest hindrance to the disciples' coming into full harmony with Christ in His divine mission. It caused Him many unnecessary burdens and sorrows. Despite His continual efforts on their behalf, they were not delivered from this false understanding until after the resurrection.

The lesson from the experience of these men should be learned with the greatest care. We are to fear greatly lest we retain our preconceived ideas of God's kingdom. If we do, then we will certainly emerge from our study of God's government with an erroneous view. This in turn will make it impossible to endure the trial which is before us, for of that last successful people it is written,

The Great Controversy, p. 593:

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.

Therefore, the study of the constitution of God's government must begin with the realization that the kingdom of God is different from everything that we have ever known. It is unique. There is nothing in this world that can be likened to it. If earthly kingdoms have any value in our study, it is in the fact that they can be contrasted with God's kingdom.

Once this understanding is gained, we can approach the study with minds fresh and clean to receive a correct knowledge of God's character and government.

8. The Constitution of the Government of God

AS WE PROCEED with our study of God's government, we should continually keep in mind...

The Great Controversy, p. 492:

...that 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.

The author of every one of these traditions and misinterpretations is Satan. This explains why the representation of God which Christ gave was totally opposite from that which the people expected. While He was on earth,

Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 177:

He presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God.

Therefore, we should expect that our search for the truth about God's character will result in an understanding which is exactly contrary to what is generally believed. This means that we will enter into a set of wholly revised and reversed concepts of God's government and character.

At the same time, during our search, there will be the continual pressure of traditionally held ideas seeking to drag our minds back to the old ways again—a pressure which must be consciously resisted in order to arrive at the pure truth.

God's government is perfection. It cannot be improved, and supposed alternatives only give the appearance of success. God's way is not just the best way—it is the only way. While other ways have been proposed and have even existed for a time, they cannot be counted as a way of life, and sooner or later they die by their own imperfections.

The Role of the Law

When considering God's government, we soon discover that the law plays an essential role in it. Laws are necessary to control the mighty forces of nature. On the one hand these forces make life possible and desirable. On the other hand they are capable of causing great destruction.

God's law, as we shall better learn in the progress of this study, is a love gift from Him to His created beings, perfectly designed to save them from being destroyed. That law is perfect as it is written:

Psalm 19

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

⁸ The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;

⁹ The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover by them your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.

Romans 7

¹² Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

That perfect, holy, just, and righteous law is the very foundation of God's government. A. T. Jones writes:

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:

Psalm 99 [RV]

¹ The Lord reigns, let the people tremble,
He sits upon [above] the cherubim, let the earth be moved.

Psalm 97 [RV]

² Clouds and darkness are round about Him:
Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.

Psalm 89 [RV]

¹⁴ Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of your throne:
Mercy and truth go before your face.³

The law of God is the very foundation of His throne. The nature of that law and God's relationship to it are very important aspects of God's government. As we consider the sublime perfection of the law, we will find striking differences between the character of that law and the laws of men.

A Transcript of His Character

In the statement above, A. T. Jones declared that the law of God is “the expression in writing, a transcript,” of the character of God. With those words he does not merely express his personal opinion, but an eternal truth.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 315:

His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 52:

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.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 63:

He has given in His holy law a transcript of His character.

³ A. T. Jones, *Ecclesiastical Empire*, p. 571-572.

Here is a truth of the greatest importance. A transcription is the rewriting of something in another place. It does not matter whether you read the original or the copy. The message will be the same. Therefore in reading the holy law as the transcript of God's character, the character of God itself is being read.

Inasmuch as God will do nothing which is not in His character, the law is also the guide to His behavior. Therefore, He will do nothing that is contrary to the law. As surely as an understanding of the law will lead to a clearer understanding of God's character, so in turn, the better His character is understood, the greater will be the comprehension of the perfection of that law. It is impossible to separate one from the other and still remain in the truth.

Yet there is a most serious tendency to do this. It is so natural and easy to think of the law as something that God decreed to direct our behavior, but which has little or no bearing upon His own conduct. We tend to think this way because of our familiarity with human law-makers.

The most obvious example of this can be found in monarchies or dictatorships. In these cases the rulers have been notorious for making laws that suppress the people while they themselves live sumptuously. The more absolute the rulership is, the more open and obvious is this practice of making double standards.

In modern democracies it is not hard to find many examples of leaders who seek to enrich themselves as much as they can. Were it not for the constant exercise of restraint by one section of the government upon the other, things would be worse than they are.

But this is not so in God's government. His law is the expression of His very own character. As such it is the revelation of the way in which He will act under all circumstances. Then He simply calls upon us to behave as He does. He is righteous in all His works. He asks us to be and do the same. The same law is for God as well as for His people. Therefore He says to us,

Leviticus 11

⁴⁴ For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.

1 Peter 1

¹⁵ But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

¹⁶ Because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy.

Matthew 5

⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 77-78:

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount He [Christ] describes its fruits, and now in one sentence He points out its source and its nature: Be perfect as God is perfect. The law is but a transcript of the character of God. Behold in your heavenly Father a perfect manifestation of the principles which are the foundation of His government.

...He tells us to be perfect as He is, in the same manner...

Jesus said, Be perfect as your Father is perfect. 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...

Colossians 2

⁹ ...all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;
–and the life of Jesus is made manifest...

2 Corinthians 4

¹¹ ...in our mortal flesh.

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; for:

Psalm 19 [margin]

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.

Through love,

Romans 8

⁴ The righteousness of the law [will be] fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Consider carefully the message of these words and its implications. The law is the transcript of God's character. So He keeps that law, not because He has to, but because it is the natural expression of His own heart. It is not possible for Him to behave in any other way.

A character which gives expression to a holy law is a holy character. God calls upon us to be holy as He is holy so that our behavior will be as His behavior is. To do this we are to receive His life, and "that life in you will produce the same character and manifest the same works as it did in Him."

In other words, to have His life in us means to have His law written in our hearts. Thus the characters of the Sovereign Father of the universe and those He created are the same in nature but not in degree. Whatever His creatures have to a limited degree, He has to infinitude.

Our receiving God's life is in no sense of the word bringing God down to us, but it is bringing us up to Him. He is the Father. We are the children. As such He provides us with the perfect example of how we are to live, asking of us nothing which He does not firstly do himself.

As we view God's behavior before sin, we have no difficulty in seeing that He never once behaved out of harmony with His sacred law. With some of the commandments that would be unthinkable anyway. For example, it is inconceivable to think of God putting another god in His own place or setting up graven images for himself to worship. The areas of dispute regarding God's behavior are in respect to the commandments,

"You shall not kill,"

"You shall not steal," and

"You shall not bear false witness."

During all the eternity of the past we know that death never made its appearance until sin entered and brought death with it. Therefore we can be sure that God never once raised His powerful arm to take the life of even the minutest organism in His vast realm. Nor did He ever act deceitfully, retrieve something by force, or steal back that which He had given to any one of His creatures.

Many believe that before sin, there simply was no necessity for God to break His own law, but when sin entered, a completely new situation arose, and this required the Lord to take decisive action to cut the sedition short and preserve the entire universe from corruption. After the fall, it is supposed that God was left with no choice but to kill the insurgents.

Such an argument declares that God is changeable and inconsistent whereas the truth is,

Malachi 3

⁶ I am the Lord, I do not change.

Hebrews 13

⁸ ...the same yesterday, today, and forever.

James 1

¹⁷ ...with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Link with those words the truth that the law is the very expression of His character. Since the transcript of that character says,

“You shall not kill,”

–then how could we possibly justify the belief that the unchanging God takes life under any circumstances? Certainly at this point there will run through the reader’s mind many statements, especially from the Old Testament. There it appears that God did personally, and cruelly, destroy many thousands of people. It is understandable that the incidents referred to in these statements seem inconsistent with what has been said so far, but we will take another look at them later. They will be dealt with

after we have done some further study of the constitution of God's government.

The Scriptures make it plain that the Lord has never changed. Therefore, He has done nothing this side of the fall of angels and men that He did not do before and vice versa. Nor will He surprise us with a change in the eternity to come. Therefore, it is impossible to believe the Scriptural truth that God changes not and, concurrently, hold the belief that He takes the lives of the disobedient. That would be inconsistent.

To recognize that God never destroyed before there was sin, and to accept the idea that He does destroy after its emergence, is to believe that He has changed. It is to admit that with Him there is variableness and shadow of turning. It is to believe that God respected the law before iniquity arose, and not thereafter. It is to believe that when sin is finally ended, He will change back to the original pattern of behavior.

Just now the reader may feel disposed to discontinue pursuing the arguments presented so far because they are so contrary to what he has formerly believed. It is agreed that they are not usual, for they are Christ's teachings, and He came to present...

Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 177:

...to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God.

If in the days of Christ men had a correct knowledge of God's character, then there would have been no need for a witness so contrary to their understanding. If in the intervening time men had retained the picture of God as given by Christ, then there would have been no need for producing this volume as an effort to turn the minds of all back to the divine pattern.

That which has so far been presented is only the beginning of the evidence to be offered. It is important that all the evidence be considered before the conclusions drawn so far are rejected.

How Does God Keep His Law?

Consideration must now be given to the way in which God keeps the law. He does not do it by reigning himself up to a code of behavior which is foreign to His nature. He obeys it as a natural outworking of that which He himself is. It is His pleasure to do righteousness, and He has interest in no other course of action.

This is the only kind of obedience God wishes to receive from His creatures, an obedience that springs from a personal conviction that His way is the only way. He wants their behavior to spring from hearts created anew in the image of God, hearts wherein is written His holy law.

The Great Controversy, p. 498:

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.

The Great Controversy, p. 493

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. 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 He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.⁴

God recognizes that if obedience to His law has to be compelled, then He would have a form of government which was short of perfection. But He will have nothing less than the ideal. He will only be content with providing the ultimate in happiness and prosperity for all His subjects. Therefore, in His kingdom, no force is ever employed to bring about allegiance to Him or to put down rebellion. We can be certain of this, for it is plainly written that it is so:

⁴ See also *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

The Desire of Ages, p. 759:

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. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power.

The Desire of Ages, p. 22:

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.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 12:

Earthly kingdoms rule by the ascendancy of physical power; but from Christ's kingdom every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion, is banished.

The Desire of Ages, p. 466:

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.

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 77:

God does not employ compulsory measures; love is the agent which He uses to expel sin from the heart.

The message of these statements is very clear.

Compelling power is found only under Satan's government.

If compelling power or force is exclusive to Satan and his government, then it is never found under God's government. It is foreign to Him.

The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government.



As the seed carries within itself the information that determines the nature and type of plant that will grow from it, so the law of God lays the foundation for the character of the government of heaven.

If there is one thing of which there is absolute certainty, it is that God does nothing that is contrary to His principles. Men might repeatedly do so, but God never will. Therefore, since the exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God and His government, then under no circumstances will He use force to solve any problem. Certainly He never did in the eternity of the past before sin entered, for clearly no situation arose to necessitate it. Perfect harmony pervaded the entire universe and not one being stepped out of line until Lucifer's defection.

Since the fall, men and devils have continually exercised force in their efforts to solve their problems. This is their way. They are fully convinced that the circumstances in which they are placed

make it impossible not to use force. They believe that force is essential both for survival and for achieving their ambitions.

The quotations listed above are God's positive assurances to us that He never resorts to the use of compelling power. What God says is the truth, and His every action is consistent with that truth. Unlike sinful men and devils, He does not say one thing and then do another. Therefore, confidence should fill every child of God that the use of force is never to be found with God. God affirms this to be so. Accordingly, let us simply and implicitly believe it.

It is a principle of God's kingdom that belief in His word needs to be maintained in the face of apparent evidence to the contrary. In the Old Testament God's actions seem to say that He did use compelling power to achieve His righteous 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 that were often fatal. The choice of belief in either the declarations of God or appearances is before every person. The greater proportion choose to believe what they think they see rather than what God has said. Therefore, the almost universal belief is that God does use force, that He exterminates whole nations who have utterly rejected Him, and that He relies on compelling power to put down rebellion.

But the true child of God will believe what God says despite any apparent evidence to the contrary. The believer will simply admit to the challenger of his faith that he does not yet understand just what God did, nor does he have to. He has the plain utterances of the Word of God, and can afford to wait until God explains them himself. This is the way faith works. It is based on the Word of God, not on appearances. In due time such a faith will be rewarded, and many questions will be answered. Such a Christian will find that God did not once act contrary to His principles but only in perfect harmony with them.

Thus each person today falls into one or the other of two categories. Either he is a believer in the Word of God or he builds his belief on the witness of sight and circumstances. It is a simple matter for each one to determine in which category he is. To believe God's declaration that compelling power is found only under Satan's government, that He never turns to the use of force, and never crushes to destruction those who do not serve Him, means to be a child of faith. On the other hand, to believe that God did find it necessary to use force to destroy His opponents, makes a person an unbeliever, because he has allowed the witness of appearances to take precedence over the witness of God's Word.

Without question, the witness of sight and circumstances is very powerful. When the Old Testament stories are read wherein it is reported that God rained fire and brimstone on the Sodomites and destroyed the world with a flood, it is easy and natural to believe that God was personally resorting to the weapons of force.

But that pure faith, the faith of Jesus, which clings unwaveringly to the spoken word of God, recognizes that if this is so, then God is truly inconsistent. He has spoken one thing but does another. This is the charge which Satan laid against God in heaven and which the great controversy is designed to remove. If the Lord were to act contrary to His stated principles, then He would quickly and effectively give Satan the very evidence he needed to prove the point he had sought to make in heaven. It would have been much better for the Lord to have admitted inconsistency to Satan in the first case than to blatantly continue until it could be openly seen by all.

But the very nature of the great controversy and the issues involved demand that if the Lord is to triumph, then He must be utterly consistent with himself. He cannot say one thing and then do another. To do so, even in a single instance, would be to lose everything and give the victory to Satan and his angels.

It has been Satan's false interpretation of God's behavior which has made it appear that the Lord has been inconsistent. In reality there has been no inconsistency whatsoever. God has been impeccably faithful to His word. Furthermore, when God's actions are correctly evaluated, it will be confirmed that His ways are so perfect and infallible that He does not need to use force.

People tend to conclude that there is only one possible interpretation of the Old Testament incidents. What is needed is a second investigation of those occurrences. This research, conducted along the lines of correct principles of Scriptural interpretation, will bring the student to conclusions which will dismiss ideas formed on the basis of what God seemed to do. It will be found that there are vital differences between what the Lord appeared to do and what He really did. This will be undertaken later when time is given to studying the manifestation of God's character in His dealing with the sin problem. For the present the study of His government as it was constituted before sin appeared will be continued.

Non-Violence and Freedom

We now need to consider a most important aspect of God's relationship to His subjects. It is a matter closely linked to and consistent with the fact that any use of force is contrary to the principles of God's government, and also contrary to the purpose and nature of God's law. Therefore, it must be studied in connection with these themes.

This vital aspect is freedom, one of the most precious gifts ever given by God to His subjects. A little thought will show that as surely as God has no intention of using compelling power to enforce the observance of His law, then as certainly has He made the subjects of His kingdom absolutely free to serve Him or not to serve Him. The two aspects, non-violence on God's part and freedom for His subjects, are consistent with and inseparable from each other.

A person who is free from all compelling power can choose not to serve if that is his wish and desire.

Prophets and Kings, p. 511:

God never compels the obedience of man. He leaves all free to choose whom they will serve.

The Story of Redemption, p. 30:

They [the angels] told Adam and Eve that God would not compel them to obey—that He had not removed from them the power to go contrary to His will; that they were moral agents, free to obey or disobey.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 48:

Our first parents, though created innocent and holy, were not placed beyond the possibility of wrongdoing. 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.

The Great Controversy, p. 493:

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. 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 He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.⁵

This is not to be understood as stating that the Lord gave His creatures freedom to sin without consequences. There is a teaching abroad which pictures God as being so sweetly loving, that He will excuse all sin and protect all sinners rather than see anyone perish. That doctrine is not to be confused with the position taken here. The sinner will die. The heavens and earth will be destroyed, and the entire universe will be rendered clean from the stain of sin.

⁵ See also *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

But God himself will not do all this. He will not personally wield the scourge of destruction. Rather, He will firstly warn every created being of the terrible consequences attending the path of disobedience. Then, when they do make the wrong choice, He will expend every effort to save them from it. Only when they reject His saving effort, will He finally leave them to the ruin they have chosen.

Observe the relationship between rendering to God a service of love based upon an intelligent conviction of His justice and goodness, and the granting to each of perfect and complete freedom to obey or to disobey as the individual himself shall choose. This connection is made particularly in the last statement quoted.

Interestingly, the exercise of that freedom in the wrong direction immediately deprives a person of liberty, for sin is a cruel taskmaster which forces its subjects into service. It is not God who deprives the transgressor of this freedom. This is the work of sin and Satan.

But on the positive side, only where there is complete freedom of choice is it possible for an intelligent service of love to be rendered. Just so soon as any element of compulsion, such as the threat of punishment, is introduced, then to that extent will there be a service motivated by fear. God's subjects would then obey Him because they were afraid not to. This, God can never accept. He knows that such a kingdom cannot be blessed with flawless happiness and fullness of joy.

God desires His subjects to be so aware of the perfection of His ways that it awakens an admiration and love for Him which springs spontaneously, naturally, and joyously in devoted allegiance. Thus, when God's ways are established in a person's heart, his service is unquestionably genuine. It can only be so.

In eternity's coming perfection, God will have what every earthly monarch through all time has craved—the total and loving loyalty of every one of His people. Such indeed will be a blessed kingdom in which perfect love and confidence will forever reign.

Any ruler who had this, could and would walk among his people without fear. Of him it could never be said,

“Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.”⁶

No kingdom has ever been like this, though some have approached it. Earthly rulerships always tend to dominate their subjects in one form or another and seek to hold the loyalty of their citizens with the threat of punishment. No crime is considered worse than treason—disloyalty to the state. But Jesus came to deliver men from being dominated, testifying of this mission in these words:

John 8

³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

³⁶ Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

Jesus Christ does not come to transfer the sinner from one form of bondage to another. God’s object in Christ is to restore the kingdom to its original perfection, the perfection of complete freedom to serve God. Accordingly, Jesus said that those whom the Son set free would be free indeed. Here Christ envisaged a total freedom for His children. That is the nature of God’s kingdom, the revelation of His purpose of beneficence and love toward every created being. A. T. Jones has clearly set forth these principles:

It may be further asked: Could not God have prevented it all, by making Lucifer and all others so that they could not sin? It is right and perfectly safe to answer, He could not! To have made creatures so that they could not sin, would have been really to make them so that they could not choose. To have no power of choice is not only to be not free to think, but to be unable to think. It is to be not intelligent, but only a mere machine. Such could not possibly be of any use to themselves or their kind, nor be of any honor, praise, or glory to Him who made them.

⁶ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, Part II, 1597.

Freedom of choice is essential to intelligence. Freedom of thought is essential to freedom of choice. God has made angels and men intelligent. He has made them free to choose, and has left them perfectly free to choose. He made them free to think as they choose. God is the author of intelligence, of freedom of choice, and of freedom of thought. And He will forever respect that of which He is the author. He will never invade to a hair's breadth the freedom of angel or man to choose for himself, nor to think as he chooses. And God is infinitely more honored in making intelligences free to choose such a course, and to think in such a way as to make themselves devils, than He could possibly be in making them so that they could not think nor choose, so that they would be not intelligent, but mere machines.

It may be yet further queried: As God made angels and men free to sin if they should choose, did He not then have to provide against this possible choice before they were made—did He not have to provide for the possibility of sin, before ever a single creature was made? Assuredly He had to make such provision. And He did so. And this provision is an essential part of that eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, which we are now studying.

Let us go back to the time when there was no created thing; back to the eternal counsels of the Father and the Son. The existence of God is not a self-satisfied existence. His love is not self-love. His joy is not fulfilled in wrapping himself within himself, and sitting solitary and self-centered. His love is satisfied only in flowing out to those who will receive and enjoy it to the full. His joy is fulfilled only in carrying to an infinite universe full of blessed intelligences, the very fullness of eternal joy.

Standing then, in thought, with Him before there was a single intelligent creature created, He desires that the universe shall be full of joyful intelligences enjoying His love to the full. In order to do this they must be free to choose not to serve Him, to choose not to enjoy His love. They must be free to choose Him or themselves, life or death. But this involves the possibility of the entrance of sin, the possibility that some will choose not to serve Him, will choose the way of sin. Shall He then refuse to create because, if He does, it must be with the possibility that sin may

enter? This would be but eternally to remain self-centered and solitary. More than this, such a shrinking would in itself cause Him to cease to be God. For what is a god, or what is he worth, who can not do what he desires? who can not fulfill his own will? Such a god would be worthless.

Thank the Lord, such is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He made all intelligences free to choose, and to think as they choose; and therefore free to sin if they choose. And at the same time, in His infinite love and eternal righteousness, He purposed to give himself a sacrifice to redeem all who should sin; and give them even a second freedom to choose Him or themselves, to choose life or death. And those who the second time would choose death, let them have what they have chosen. And those who would choose life,—the universe full of them,—let them enjoy to the full that which they have chosen,—even eternal life, the fullness of perfect love, and the dear delights of unalloyed joy forever.

This is God, the living God, the God of love, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is fully able to do whatsoever He will, and yet leave all His creatures free. This is He who from the days of eternity “works all things after the counsel of His own will.” *Ephesians* 1:11. And this is “the mystery of His will,...which He has purposed in himself; 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; even in Him.” *Ephesians* 1:9-10. This is “the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” *Ephesians* 3:11.

The choice of self is sin, bondage, and death. The choice of Christ is righteousness, freedom, and life eternal in the realm and purpose of the eternal God.⁷

Let careful contemplation be given to the thoughts expressed in this statement and the implications thereof.

“Freedom of choice is essential to intelligence.”

⁷ A. T. Jones, *Ecclesiastical Empire*, p. 586-588,

The proving ground of history provides evidence enough of the truth of this. It is the work of the gospel to set men free. Never was the gospel more gloriously and effectively preached than in the days between Pentecost and the decline in the Christian Church. As liberating truth waned, the world was carried down into the Middle Ages. Freedom of choice was unknown as the papal hierarchy ruled the world with an absolute despotism. The state of ignorance and corruption was so bad that the period was named the Dark Ages.

The only fair explanation for this development is that the world was deprived of freedom. In support of this conclusion can be marshaled evidence upon evidence to show that wherever men are despoiled of their liberty, they sink into a state of ignorance and darkness. Conversely, wherever the living gospel of Jesus Christ sets men free, there is an advance in knowledge and intellectual development.

It was the gospel preached during the Reformation which set men free. That work had far greater impact in some areas than in others. There were those cities and countries where the dominant influence was Protestant while others remained bastions of the Papacy. Those areas today where the influence of the Reformation was the strongest are the places where the greatest advances have been made in intellectual development. In fact, the great wave of increased knowledge came directly upon the heels of the Reformation. A. T. Jones is wholly correct in his assertion that freedom of choice is essential to intelligence.

God could never be honored or blessed by filling His kingdom with unintelligent beings. His is a kingdom of light—not darkness. Therefore He made angels and men intelligent. He filled them with light. In order to give that light the fullest scope for increase, He gave them an essential element—freedom of choice. Therefore,

“God is the author of intelligence, of freedom of choice, and of freedom of thought.”

These are God's gifts to everyone and are inseparably and eternally associated with His dominion. They cannot be taken away from Him and His creatures without changing the whole nature of His character, government, and law. This God will not do, for it would make perfection impossible. It would destroy the happiness and contentment of His creatures. Therefore,

“He will ever respect that of which He is the author. He will never invade to a hair's breadth the freedom of angel or man to choose for himself, nor to think as he chooses.”

This is eternally true of God. He has given freedom and will never infringe upon that right to the slightest degree. This is the only way God can govern. It is the only way which any enlightened child of God would be governed. Anything less than or other than this is not perfection and therefore not the way of happiness.

However, the granting of freedom, as an element essential to fullness of development and happiness, involves a terrible danger. It is the danger that some, or even all, of God's subjects would choose to go their own way, making themselves into demons of horror and destruction. But, even though God thoroughly understood this possibility, He would not and did not institute any safeguards involving the element of force. He would have nothing less for his subjects than the possibility of infinite development. And that could not be if there were not the total freedom to serve God or themselves as they themselves should choose.

What are the implications of these points in the heavenly constitution? To what extent did this determine how God would react to any of His subjects if they turned away from Him and chose another way? Put these two principles together again—the principle of no coercive force and the principle of granting absolute freedom to choose. As surely as these two things are combined in the constitution of God's kingdom, then just so surely does God place himself where He cannot punish those who do

what He said they could do, namely, choose another master if they wished.

This is a most difficult principle for man to understand because it is so foreign to his way of thinking. In human government there exists law-making and law-enforcement. This is all that man knows in the framework of human justice. Because it is so hard to divorce the mind from law-enforcement, it is difficult to conceive of God placing himself where He cannot personally inflict penalties upon the evildoer.

Civil rulers do not grant to anyone freedom of choice. Their mandate is:

“Obey, or suffer at our hands.”

Those who make the laws are the ones who punish the law-breaker, but it is not so in God’s kingdom. He has spelled out the law as the expression of His own character, but it is sin and death which punish the transgressor.

To totally reject the use of force and at the same time grant to all the freedom of choice, is to set up a situation where it is not possible to administer punishment in order to solve problems. It does not matter how it might appear in the Old Testament that the Lord administered punishment as earthly rulers do. The fact still remains that a government based on total rejection of force and total freedom of choice simply cannot punish those who do make choices contrary to the wishes of the government. God gave all the right to make that choice, and He cannot punish them for making the decision He himself gave them the liberty to make.

All that He can do before they make the wrong choice, is to try and save them from making it by revealing the certain results. It is the same work a mother does when she warns her child of the painful consequences of touching a hot stove.

Even when God’s subjects entered into a course of sin, He did all He could to save them. He even went so far as to give His own

life in the Person of His Son, so that men might have a second opportunity to choose life instead of death. Before man sinned, when he was on the side of righteousness and freedom, he made the choice to disobey God which brought him only bondage and death. His second choice is made from the side of death. He must decide either to remain in bondage and under the sentence of death, or to come back to the side of purity and eternal life. But man is just as free to make the second choice as he was the first.

If for the second time men choose to reject God, then He has no option but to leave them to that which they have chosen. Note again the way this truth is expressed in the words of A. T. Jones:

He made all intelligences free to choose, and to think as they choose; and therefore free to sin if they choose. And at the same time, in His infinite love and eternal righteousness, He purposed to give himself a sacrifice to redeem all who should sin; and give them even a second freedom to choose Him or themselves, to choose life or death. And those who the second time would choose death, let them have what they have chosen. And those who would choose life,—the universe full of them,—let them enjoy to the full that which they have chosen,—even eternal life, the fullness of perfect love, and the dear delights of unalloyed joy forever.⁸

Therefore,

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

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.

Before Lucifer arose, the sincerity of God's gift of freedom to every creature remained untested. In those days when no one chose anything but faithful service to Him, it was a simple matter for God's methods to work. No one even thought about alternatives.

⁸ A. T. Jones, *Ecclesiastical Empire*, p. 588.

It was when those powerful beings stood up under Lucifer's leadership and determined to set up a rival dominion, that the first challenge to God's ways was raised. Satan and his followers have pressed that challenge to the utmost limits, exploring, probing, and searching for some weakness whereby they might gain a foothold and topple the divine organization.

God had declared that His ways were perfect under all circumstances either easy or hard.

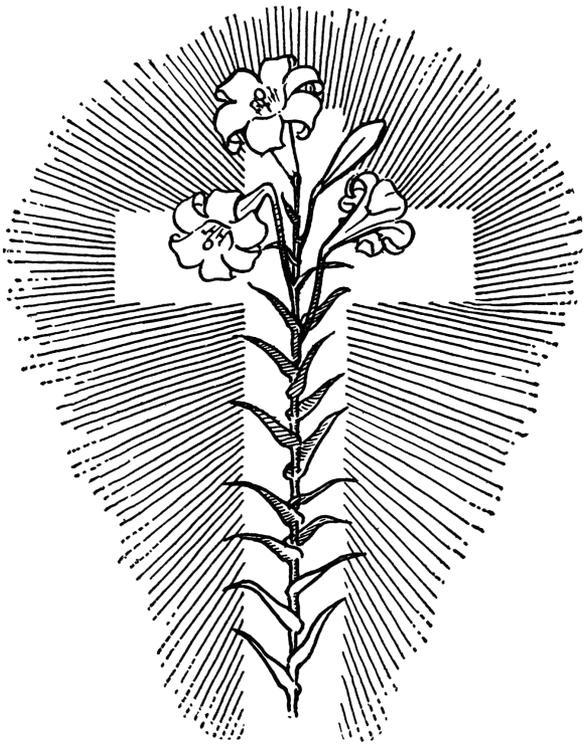
- Would God's principles stand against Satan's searching inquisition or would they prove to be faulty? That was the question to be decided in the great controversy.
- Would it be found that God had to make modifications and concessions?
- Would He after all be forced to acknowledge that He had gone too far in granting such complete freedom?
- Was it really necessary to inflict punishments on the wrongdoer?

Satan has tried to make God's actions appear very bad. He contends that God and His ways did not survive the test, that He had to resort to force to punish those who exercised the freedom He gave them not to serve Him. He claims that God was not able to tolerate the exercise of the freedom of choice which enabled angels and men to establish their own version of the kingdom. The devil asserts that he has already won the debate, which claim would be entirely true if God had done what Satan charges Him with doing.

All too readily men in general have subscribed to Satan's lies. This gives support to his cause. The time has come when a revised understanding of God's actions is imperative. Such will be offered as this study progresses, but first consideration must be given to another factor—the workings of the law of God.

As already stated, the rejection of force, the granting of perfect freedom of choice to all, and the nature and purpose of God's law,

are three things so closely related that they must be studied in conjunction with each other in order to be adequately understood. Study has been given to the former two, so it is time now to consider the last.



9. A Perfect Law

THE perfection of God's law stands in marked contrast to the imperfection of the laws framed by earthly legislators. The faultiness and inadequacy of men's laws are marked in two ways at least:

1. Men are obliged to constantly enact new laws and to modify or repeal old ones. Things which the law forbids today, it will permit in the near future. Behavior which is allowed in one country is strictly banned in another.
2. After making these laws, the legislators formulate a list of punishments and design a means of administering them in order to ensure that the people respect the government and obey the laws.

But these things are not true of God's law. When we consider God's law in respect to the first point mentioned above, we see that it is so perfect and complete that it has never needed any modifications, additions, or deletions. Its principles are all-embracing and it outlines the flawless pattern of behavior for both God and His creatures in all possible situations.

The life of Christ amply demonstrated the truth of this, for He kept His Father's commandments in a time of such wickedness that it was described as the time...

Daniel 8

²³ ...when the transgressors [had] reached their fullness.

This was the time when...

The Desire of Ages, p. 36-37:

...the deception of sin had reached its height. All the agencies for depraving the souls of men had been put in operation. The Son of God, looking upon the world, beheld suffering and misery. With pity He saw how men had become victims of satanic cruelty. He looked with compassion upon those who were being corrupted, murdered, and lost. They had chosen a ruler who

chained them to his car as captives. Bewildered and deceived, they were moving on in gloomy procession toward eternal ruin,—to death in which is no hope of life, toward night to which comes no morning.

Satanic agencies were incorporated with men. 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. The very stamp of demons was impressed upon the countenances of men. Human faces reflected the expression of the legions of evil with which they were possessed. Such was the prospect upon which the world's Redeemer looked. What a spectacle for Infinite Purity to behold!

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. It was demonstrated before the universe that, apart from God, humanity could not be uplifted. A new element of life and power must be imparted by Him who made the world.

This was the condition of things when Christ came to this earth. Under those circumstances He kept His Father's law to perfection thus proving that Satan lied when he declared that the law of God was imperfect.

Let us now consider the second difference between the law of God and that of man. While men have to attach their own formulated penalties to their laws and personally apply those punishments, this is not necessary with God's law. In His system, the breaking of the law causes its own punishments of sorrow and finally destruction. From this point it is not to be concluded that God deliberately organized it this way. When it is understood why He formed and gave the law, it will be seen that this is the only way it can be.

Let us see why this is so. Power is essential to activity and accomplishment. It was designed for blessing and benefit only, but unavoidably, power also has the potential for destruction and this is why law is indispensable. While power is handled in strict ac-

cordance with law, there is no problem. But let the law be disregarded, and every kind of problem arises.

God did not formulate a law with a deliberately built-in system of punishments. Instead, He gave man law as a perfect protection from self-destruction. If man chooses to set aside that protection, then there is nothing to prevent trouble from coming.

It has already been shown that compelling power has no place in God's work. It is never found in His government but only in Satan's. Likewise, it has been seen that God is interested only in voluntary obedience, therefore He gave to every one of His creatures...

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 48:

...full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience.

It would be impossible to give full liberty to withhold obedience and then punish a person for exercising the very freedom given to him. To punish under those conditions is to deny that full liberty had been given.

There are two ways in which God could administer punishments upon those who choose to withhold obedience:

1. The first method would be to decree what the punishment should be and then to execute it by His own direct action. This is what the majority believe God does.
2. The second method would be to skillfully and deliberately build punishments into the law which would automatically fall upon the transgressor. This is called booby-trapping. This is the principle the Lord could have adopted to avoid exercising His own personal power in a direct act of punishment.

Whether God punishes directly by His own action or indirectly by building destruction into the law, He would still be denying His subjects "full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience." In the case of booby trapping, He could well be charged with having

adopted underhanded means. Even though He could claim that He has not directly denied anyone their freedom, indirectly He has.

God is not deceitful or underhanded. He is the God of truth. Therefore it needs to be clearly understood that He did not design a law with built-in punishments. He gave the liberty, therefore He will not punish any who exercise what He has given them.

Every one who is to have a part in the final presentation of the character of God must come to understand the real character of God's law. The awful punishments which do fall upon those who disregard God's great principles are what the law was devised to protect man from, not what it was designed to bring upon him.

What must be understood with great clarity is that the law is in no sense God's effort to protect His own position and authority. God is so completely outgoing, so utterly devoid of self-interest, self-justification or self-protectionism in any form, that He could never have formulated the law to save himself. It is not something which He has thought up as His wish or pleasure whereby the people could be identified as His subjects, doing His will and obeying His commands. Far from it!

That law is a masterpiece of protection for the people themselves. It is so wonderfully designed, that he who obeys it can be assured that he will not be destroyed by his own actions. On the other hand, disregarding its principles guarantees the introduction of suffering and even death.

Wages of Sin and Righteousness

God did not invent punishment in order to inflict it upon the transgressor.

Romans 6

²³ The wages of sin is death.

It is a sound principle, universally practiced, that the employee is always paid by his employer. If a worker, having given a month

of industrious labor to Mr. Jones, then went to Mr. Brown to receive his wages, he would be met with an indignant refusal.

“I am not responsible for the wages owed to you by Mr. Jones,” he would emphatically say. “I do not pay you to work for someone else. If you work for me, then I will pay you but not otherwise.”

This reply is reasonable. It is equally reasonable that the same principles apply in the spiritual realm. Therein are two masters, God and Satan, or more correctly, righteousness and sin. Neither of these masters pays the wages of the other. The wages of sin is death and the gift of righteousness is life.

No one needs to be convinced that Satan has nothing to do with the gifts of God. All those who live the life of righteousness know that they cannot look to the devil to contribute even the smallest portion of these. God alone gives the gift of life. Satan has no part in this whatsoever.

If it is so easily seen that the devil plays no part in the giving of God’s gifts to the righteous, then it should be equally clear that the Lord never pays the wages owed by sin to its subjects. Sin and Satan alone pay those. God does not traffic in death for He is the purveyor of life. That is His merchandise, and He dispenses no other. He does not pay wages in the currency of death.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 113:

Sickness, suffering, and death are work of an antagonistic power. Satan is the destroyer; God is the restorer.

As the Restorer,

The Ministry of Healing, p. 112:

God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive, to build up and restore us.

So then, the law has not been formed as an instrument of destruction but of salvation. The unfortunate attitude of hostility toward the law will be swept away entirely when its true purpose

and role are understood. Then, with the Psalmist, the exclamation of praise will go forth,

Psalm 119

⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

The Holy Spirit certainly imparted to the writer of these words a very different view of the law from that generally possessed by man. He revealed that the law was not designed for God's exaltation and protection but for the protection and blessing of mankind. This we also need to see.

The Law as a Gift

To better appreciate this fact, we will spend some time considering how God's law is in fact a precious gift to man.

Difficult as it may be at first to understand, the truth is that it was not possible for God to create man without a very definite element of danger being involved. Yet, once careful consideration is given to all that was necessary in bringing the earth and its inhabitants into existence, it will be seen that it was not possible to do this without that threat being there.

In the beginning God purposed to create man and give him the precious love gift of life. There was no obligation upon God to do this, and humanity can be deeply grateful to God that He elected to do this. But to give life only would not have been sufficient. A home must be provided first in which those who received this matchless gift could enjoy it to the fullest.

So God created the earth as a home where man could live. To enable His creatures to live their lives to the fullest potential, both the individuals and the world in which they lived must be equipped with suitable and sufficient powers. The infinitely wise and loving God saw this and without hesitation installed all those mighty powers in their proper places and in balance with each other. These powers may be grouped into two divisions:

1. The powers within man, and

2. The powers outside of him in the marvelous world of nature.

The powers in man may be listed generally as intellectual, emotional, and physical. Some of the powers in the world are fire, gravity, weather, and electricity. Some powers exist both in man and outside of him, such as electricity and chemical reaction. Everything that was needed for every creature's happiness and joy was provided. After all, what more could man desire or need?

But indeed another element was necessary, namely the law. The law was a vital gift to man to make the work of creation complete and secure. The powers provided by God for only one purpose, namely the blessing and prosperity of all His creatures, inevitably possess the potential for destruction. Therefore, at the same moment that these powers came into existence, there needed to be law to govern their activity. Enquiry may be made as to why the Lord did not provide powers that could not be subverted. It is simply because this is impossible without restricting freedom. Any power which is intended to do only good can be turned to an evil purpose.

To demonstrate the vital role of the law, we will now look into it in more detail. A closer look will show that the law can be divided into two parts:

1. The relationship of man to God, and
2. The relationship of man to man.

The Law in Man-to-God Relations

To start with, let us look at the first part to see that the law was not made for God but for man. The first commandment in the Decalogue says the following:

Exodus 20

³ You shall have no other gods before me.

To the average person this suggests a picture of God concerned about His receiving the homage, respect, and service which He feels is due Him. It is as if He were saying,

“I am God and I do not intend that you shall forget that. I will tolerate no other god in my place, for I will share my honor, position, and glory with none. I want, and I demand, exclusive recognition of my sole authority from each of you. I will be watching every one intently moment by moment with a vigilance which never slumbers or sleeps. If I find anyone drifting away from me, anyone rendering homage or love to another, I will get very angry and will punish you without mercy.”

This is the view held by this earth’s majority. They see God this way because if they were in the same position with the same power, that is how they would treat their subjects. But, in fact, a more erroneous view of God’s motives could not be entertained. God did not think of His honor and security when He formed this commandment. He was only interested in His subjects and their needs. He knew the danger which they were in, and to make them secure, He gave them this and the other commandments.

To illustrate this point let us consider the sun, though any other of the powers in nature could equally well be chosen. Initially, the sun came into existence in response to the spoken, creative word of God. This is the only way possible, for there is no other power in existence which can create anything let alone something of the magnitude and power of that flaming orb. Satan could not do this, nor any other created being. After creating the sun, God’s work was not finished. The sun cannot fulfill its mission unaided. It, like all other powers, is totally unintelligent. It possesses no capacity to direct its ways. This must be done by a power outside of and greater than itself and under the guidance of a suitable intelligence. The only power which can do this is the power which made it. That is God’s power directed by His intelligence. That creative power is in turn exercised through His Son, Christ, who not only...

Hebrews 1

² ...made the worlds,

–but is constantly...

³ ...upholding all things by the word of His power.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 416:

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.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p.114-115:

Many teach that matter possesses vital power—that certain properties are imparted to matter, and it is then left to act through its own inherent energy; and that the operations of nature are conducted in harmony with fixed laws, with which God himself cannot interfere. This is false science, and is not sustained by the word of God. 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,

John 5

¹⁷ My Father works hitherto, and I work.

The Levites, in their hymn recorded by Nehemiah, sang:

Nehemiah 9

⁶ 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.

As regards this world, God's work of creation is completed. For,

Hebrews 4

³ The works were finished from the foundation of the world.

But His energy is still exerted in upholding the objects of His creation.

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...

Acts 17

²⁸ ...we live, and move, and have our being.

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.

Isaiah 40

²⁶ [He] brings out their host by number; He calls them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one fails.

It is through His power that vegetation flourishes, that the leaves appear and the flowers bloom.

Psalms 147

⁸ [He] makes grass to grow upon the mountains,
—and by Him the valleys are made fruitful.

Psalms 104

²⁰ All the beasts of the forest...
²¹ ...seek their meat from God,
—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,

²⁷ These wait all upon You...

²⁸ That You give them they gather: You open your hand, they are filled with good.

His word controls the elements; He covers the heavens with clouds and prepares rain for the earth.

Psalms 147

¹⁶ He gives snow like wool: He scatters the hoar frost like ashes.

Jeremiah 10

¹³ 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.

These statements teach the active presence of God as the Controller of all the powers He has installed in the universe. But, why is it necessary for God to do this? Is it because He is determined to keep personal control over all things? Or is it because it must be so? Why could God not have set the whole complex machinery in motion and then left it to run of its own accord from the very beginning? Or why does He not delegate the work to other hands and leave himself free from such things?

God does what He is doing because that is the only way it can be done and certainly not because He reserves a special position for himself. It was not possible for God to leave all these tremendous powers to themselves because it is the very nature of power to be unintelligent. The sun is a power of gigantic proportions, but it has no power to think or to direct its ways, and even if it did, it would still need God to keep it supplied with energy.

Think of all the various powers in existence—fire, wind, gravity, the tides, and so on. It can be seen that not one of them has intelligence nor could have. Because of this, intelligence is necessary to control and guide them. Another example of unintelligent powers are those in the human body. They depend upon the intelligence centered in the brain for control and guidance.

Therefore, the mighty sun must have a controller and guide to keep it exactly on its course and, at the same time, it needs a source of energy to keep it fueled and burning at a constant level. Should there be no such controlling power, then think of the possibilities. It might burn too dimly or too brightly or even explode. It might change its course and move away from or closer to the earth. Far more than we do, we need to appreciate how dependent we are upon God's ability and willingness to guide and sustain that sun. This concept applies to all the mighty powers of heaven and earth as well.

Why does it have to be God himself who controls everything and from whom all energy flows? A Creator's power was required to establish the earth and life on it, and the same Creator's

power is required to maintain it all. Only He can do this. God gladly delegates to His creatures whatever He can, but the keeping of the universe is one thing He cannot delegate, for there is no creature, angel or man, who has the ability of a creator.

Therefore, it is essential that no other god be placed in God's position as the Controller, Guide, and Sustainer of these mighty powers. To do so would be to install a being who would have no hope of keeping those things under control, in which case they would swiftly break out of their course in a holocaust of destruction.

To help in understanding this extremely important point, consider the following illustration. One of the biggest commercial passenger aircraft is the Boeing 747. In order to control and direct that tremendous power, a man must have, through long practice and training, highly developed skills. The law says that no unqualified person can occupy the pilot's place.

Suppose that during a flight of one of those jets, a passenger who has never flown a plane before, goes onto the flight deck, overpowers the crew, binds them up securely, and then attempts to fly to a destination of his own choice. What will be the inevitable result? That man has no hope of bringing the plane in successfully. He can neither fly it nor navigate it, and he will crash, killing every person on board.

This fact will be appreciated even more by anyone who has ever had his untrained hands on the controls of even a simple light aircraft and tried to bring it in to land. A 747 is a complex of unintelligent but enormous powers which must have a central intelligence to direct them. Should such a trained and skilled person be taken from the controls and an untrained one take his place, then certain disaster will be the result.

This is exactly the situation with all the powers God has set in motion. He alone has ability to guide them accurately and safely on their courses. Should that guiding hand be removed and an-

other attempt to fill its place, then inevitable destruction will follow. There is no way to prevent it.

The mighty powers of nature are kept under control
and in harmony with the law by an intelligent Being.
In this way they are a blessing for mankind.



Some may object that God could prevent it. Certainly He has the physical power to do so, but, in order for that power to be exercised to prevent that destruction, it has to be in the very place from which it has been dismissed. Once another god has been put in the place of the true God, then God can only save the situation by forcing himself back into the place from which He has been sent away, and this He will never do. This would violate the freedom of choice which He himself gave to His creatures and which He will never invade even to a hair's breadth.

But how is it possible for God to vacate the position of control? How can this be brought about? Surely, it may be argued, no one can take God's position away from Him! On the contrary, it can be done quite simply and in some cases very quickly. What is more, it has been done.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were the rulers and owners of this world in a kingdom which they held under God and for God.

Genesis 1

²⁶ Then God said, Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

While they retained that dominion, God could and did maintain perfect control over the sun, the moon, and all the other mighty powers set in their places for the blessing and benefit of the human family. There was no problem, and the Edenic pair enjoyed perfect security, comfort, and prosperity. But the time came when they passed the kingdom into the devil's hands and he became...

John 14

³⁰ ...the ruler of this world.

In succumbing to temptation, Adam and Eve not only gave their dominion to Satan, but allowed him to occupy the position that God had formerly occupied in their lives. They accepted him as their ruler. They directly broke the first commandment and thus removed from themselves the protection it was designed to give. Another god was in the place of the real God and this new god could not control the mighty powers of nature. Sudden and terrible destruction immediately threatened them.

It may be objected here that the whole argument is disproved by the fact that the threatened destruction did not fall upon them that day as God had said it would. But while it is true that they did not die physically, they did die spiritually. On that day the

presence of the Holy Spirit died out of them and was replaced by another spirit, that of the devil.

Not only that, they would also have died physically that day, had not the Lord interposed to introduce a delaying factor, designed in love, to give them a limited probationary period in which to reconsider their decision. In unquenchable love for the doomed, Christ stepped in to divert the punishment to himself. He would take upon himself, not that which God would administer to the sinner, but that which the sinner had brought upon himself. Christ had to move swiftly, for the Lord had warned:

Genesis 2

¹⁷ ...in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

So it is written,

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1085:

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. I will stand in man's place. He shall have another chance."

Right then all nature would have swung wildly out of its course with increasing ferocity had not Christ stepped in to give the world a period of probation in which to make a second choice. They could choose to return to God or to continue with another god—the god of death and destruction.

When at last the time of probation is ended, and every man, woman, and child has made their choice for eternity, this is just what will happen. Christ will step out from His place as Mediator, and all nature will collapse in a cataclysm of destruction. Of this final destruction we shall study more later.

For now, let a review be made of the facts just considered with particular emphasis being laid on the truth that the suffering and death which certainly follow disobedience, are not administered by God directly, nor are they carefully built into the law. The pun-

ishments are caused when disobedience removes the protection of the law and exposes the sinner to uncontrolled power.

It would have been most unsatisfactory for the Lord to have made us without providing the supporting powers necessary to give us comfortable living and the opportunity to develop all the gifts within us. Should we ponder upon a life without the many gracious provisions of God for our welfare and pleasure, we would be far more grateful to the Lord for what He has done.

But, it is impossible for power to exist without its being at the same time a potential for destruction. That is the very nature of power, and it can be no other way. The greater the power, the greater the danger. Therefore, as surely as heaven is a place filled with the greatest of wonderful powers, it is therefore a potentially dangerous place.

God has no fear of introducing such peril, for He knows that it is completely contained if the laws are faithfully obeyed. Under the control of laws obeyed, power can only be a blessing, but let the laws be disobeyed, and it is nothing but a danger. The destruction which then falls however, is not directed by God's hands. It is the natural and unpreventable consequence of violating God's law.

So it is with the violation of the first commandment, and what is true of the results of its violation is true of all the rest.

For instance, the second precept warns against worshipping an image made of material things. There should be no difficulty in seeing that such an act of worship can only result in death to the worshiper on the following grounds. The worship of an image is based on the belief that from or through the idol, one can and will obtain all that is needed for life. But God knows that an idol cannot be the source of life. He also knows that He will not channel His life through the idol to the worshiper.

What is the only possible outcome of such an act? God is the only source of life. To turn aside from that source and seek life

where it does not exist, is to sever oneself from life. God will not kill such a person. Such kill themselves. There is no fault with God, for He plainly warned them that they were not to place another god in His place. He is the only life-giver and life-sustainer.

To illustrate the point, think of an aviator who has ascended to altitudes where the oxygen is too rare to support life. To keep breathing, he has to plug his breathing apparatus into the outlet connected with the oxygen supply. He has received specific instructions as to which is the correct outlet, but he deliberately chooses to plug into another socket with no connection to the supply. What is going to happen to this foolish man? He will quickly die for want of the essential oxygen. He will die because he has failed to observe the law. His death will be the direct result of that, and not in any sense an act of God.

In precisely the same manner, the man who bows before an idol to seek life has pronounced his own death sentence. He cannot live, for, by his own choice, he cuts himself off from the channel of life. There is no fault with God. He provided the channel for life and warned that if man should discard that and seek life through an idol, he would find none there and death would overtake him. Thus we can see that the second commandment is also a love gift designed to bless man, not selfishly exalt the Law Maker.

To take God's name in vain means to bear His name, which means to call one's self a Christian, and yet at the same time live out of harmony with His principles. To do this is to separate from the Christian family and the blessings which can only be obtained while in the family. Again this is but to bring death upon one's self.

The breaking of the fourth commandment likewise removes the protection God has provided to sustain life. The subject of the Sabbath is a large one, but in brief,

Mark 2

²⁷ The Sabbath was made for man,

—as Jesus said. This means that God has put treasure in the Sabbath that He has not put in any other day. To break this commandment is to separate oneself from that treasure, thus causing personal loss. Therefore, far from being for himself, God has given the Sabbath as a gift to man for his personal benefit and protection.

The Law in Man-to-Man Relations

Let us now turn to the second side of the Decalogue and study the control of the powers which God has invested in man himself. We will choose the command,

Exodus 20

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

This is an excellent place to begin for the commands,

“You shall not kill,”

“You shall not bear false witness,” and

“You shall not commit adultery,”

—are all contained in this commandment. To kill is to steal the life of another, even though such theft does not give the thief the life thus stolen. Committing adultery robs a person of his or her life partner, and bearing false witness robs a person of his reputation and credibility.

Now we will see how violation of the command, “You shall not steal,” opens upon man the floodgates of woe. Consider the perfect society wherein stealing has never previously been known. The dwellers in this society have perfect trust in each other and without fear they leave their homes open at all times. Locks and bars are not needed.

Then comes the day when one person decides to steal the property of someone else. In the depths of the night the householder is awakened by the stealthy movements of an intruder, who, perceiving that his presence has been noted, flees, bearing a family treasure with him. When the family realizes the extent of their

loss and the way in which it was taken, they are surprised, horrified, and fearful that if this can happen once, it can happen again.

The news swiftly spreads through the village and instantly a change comes over the whole place. Peace and happiness die beneath a cloud of suspicion and fear. No one knows who has done it, so many come under suspicion. Steps are soon taken to bar the openings and lock the doors so that protection may be obtained against a further visit from the thief.

In this, the innocent suffer with the guilty. A simple illustration from the travel world of today will serve to show this. There was a time before anyone thought of hijacking an aircraft. In those days the passengers simply walked aboard and took their places. It was convenient and pleasant.

But then came the new era and everything changed. The wrongdoers in this connection are few in number, yet virtually every passenger who seeks to board an aircraft is now suspect. He must, even though innocent, undergo a thorough searching both of his hand baggage and his person. He suffers inconvenience and delay and longs for the return of the days of trust and good will. He is suffering punishment for the sins of another. But the punishment is not something which is being meted out by God. It is the direct result of the crime.

Now let us return to our illustration of the village. Should more and more people follow the path of the lawbreaker and become thieves, then the problem will escalate into destructive proportions. Once the law has been cast aside and its protection removed, it is then only a matter of taking one step after another. The thieves will not stop at taking merely property. They will take life and worsen the situation.

In order to defend themselves, the other people will resort to violence. All this is precisely what has happened to bring the world to its present state of misery and woe. How far this is from the perfect plan God formulated for the well-being and happiness of man.

Let it be emphasized that none of this woe and trouble comes upon man by any act of God. It is all the result of breaking the law. God designed and gave the law as a perfect protection from all this, but man has chosen to cast aside that protection. Before us, we see the result. It is only because the Lord is still able to exercise some restraint over mankind that man survives at all. Should the law be totally cast aside and anarchy reign, the extermination of the race by its own hand would be the swift result.

Consider the situation as it would be today if every man and woman never stole, never lied, never killed, and in fact, kept all the ten commandments. What a wonderfully happy and secure place the world would be, not because God had arbitrarily made it so, but because that is the way keeping the law would make it. This does not mean that God's presence is unnecessary for such happiness. It is necessary, for it is by His power that the law is kept.

Consider what the world would be like and how long mankind would survive if all law was done away with and every person was a thief, a murderer, an adulterer, a liar, and so on. It is impossible to think of a worse situation. Every man would live in a state of perpetual terror. There would be no stability and no security, and the race would soon become extinct.

As this grim, totally undesirable picture develops before the mind, ponder and see that the terrible conditions would not in any sense be the inflictions of God, but the result of removing the protection afforded by law. Here is the revelation of the cause and effect, and no charge can be laid to God for any of it.

The Law in Man's Relationship to Himself

The final consideration to be made in this study of the outworking of violated law, is man's relation to himself. The human body is a wonderfully designed and constructed mechanism. David, as he came to realize this, praised God in these words.

Psalm 139

¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are your works, and that my soul knows very well.

With David we should have a rich appreciation of God's blessings in giving us a body and mind of such efficiency. Even after almost six thousand years of sin's degradation, the human body and mind are still marvels. What must it have been like in the beginning when the electrical energy of man was twenty times as great as it is now?

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 138-139:

God endowed man with so great vital force that he has withstood the accumulation of disease brought upon the race in consequence of perverted habits, and has continued for six thousand years. This fact of itself is enough to evidence to us the strength and electrical energy that God gave to man at his creation. It took more than two thousand years of crime and indulgence of base passions to bring bodily disease upon the race to any great extent. If Adam, at his creation, had not been endowed with twenty times as much vital force as men now have, the race, with their present habits of living in violation of natural law, would have become extinct.

It is impossible for a human being to operate efficiently unless all the parts are well balanced through obedience to law. The laws which govern the care of the human mechanism are referred to above as being natural laws. This is the truth, but this does not mean that there is nothing in the moral law which applies. He who abuses his body, thus lowering its efficiency, is robbing both God and others of the service which he could render.

Consider the enormous loss to the community through absenteeism from work because of sickness occasioned by careless disregard of the laws of health. More than this, the one who does not observe the laws of health is destroying himself thereby breaking the commandment, "You shall not kill."

Much study could be devoted to the relation of health and longevity to obedience to natural and moral law. Such a study

would be both interesting and profitable, but we desire only to make the point that it is not God, but disobedience, whether witting or unwitting, that brings a sure retribution.

It is convincingly self-evident that the man who, for instance, smokes tobacco products and drinks alcohol, steadily reduces his physical capacities and brings upon himself destructive diseases. So clear is this evidence that even people who have long disregarded the moral law, recognize the direct connection between prolonged cigarette smoking and the incidence of lung cancer and early heart failure. More than ever, men can see that to pursue a certain course of unhealthful living will certainly bring a harvest of suffering and untimely death.

It is not God who afflicts poor sufferers with these diseases. They are the unpreventable result of the sin itself. God cannot and will not, in justice, work a miracle to counteract these evil effects so long as disobedience continues, but because of this He is not to be named as the One who has deliberately sent these punishments upon the people. He has done all that He can to save them from such trouble.

In the first place He gave man the best body mechanism it was possible to give. Then, recognizing that man could not get the best out of this gift except by giving it proper care, the Lord gave him laws to protect it from the effects of wrong living. Also, God gave man the freedom to choose whether he would cherish and care for the gift, or treat it with disdain and destroy it.

So whatever suffering comes upon man in consequence of his disobedience to law is not the responsibility or work of God. It is the direct effect of man's works. He has only to look to himself for the cause. No charge can ever be laid to God's account for this.

Summary

Such then is the nature of God's law. It is a marvelously perfect provision to meet our need, not His. He has not formulated it to

assert His authority, nor is it an instrument whereby He is given the right to punish those who do not obey Him.

Furthermore, He does not need to punish or use force in order to solve the sin problem. The removal of sin is guaranteed by the mere fact that it is, in its own nature, a way of death and destruction. It will destroy itself and sinners. There is only one path of life, and that is the one God has mapped out.

When the character and ways of God are genuinely comprehended and appreciated, something of the infinite love and kindness of God the eternal Father, will be perceived, generating sincere praise and gratitude for His love and wisdom. It will be realized that the law was made for the children of God, that perfect obedience to it would prevent death and destruction. The truth will be intelligently grasped that when Adam and Eve cast aside that protection, then Christ gave himself to be the Saviour to bring back the lost and perishing to the safe side of the law.

It will then be recognized that when men cast aside firstly the law and then Christ, then they exhaust all that heaven has and can do to save them. Beyond that limit, God can go no further, for that is the limit of His resources. This leaves Him with no choice but to grant to each apostate the total separation and its attendant annihilation which he has chosen.

It will then be discerned with wonder and admiration that the only role filled by God is that of a Saviour, so that men perish, not because He has reached out to destroy them, but because they have refused His saving efforts.

So then, in summary, it is right to say that the law of God is the transcript of His character. God's righteousness and the righteousness of the law are identical so that God's behavior is expressed in the precepts of that law. Therefore, His behavior is not something to which He has reined himself as a strict discipline contrary to His nature. It is the natural expression of His heart wherein are written the tenets of the Decalogue.

Because this is the only kind of obedience in which He is interested, He made Adam and Eve in His own image,

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 45:

...both in outward resemblance and in character.

He wrote that same law in their hearts so that it was also the transcript of their characters. Sin destroyed that work. In the process of restoring men from sin, God works to re-write that law in their hearts. Then they obey the law as God obeys it—as a natural outworking of an inward nature. Thus they are enabled to give the only kind of obedience the Lord can accept—an obedience that is based upon a personal...

The Great Controversy, p. 498:

...conviction of His justice and benevolence.

Because the Lord can accept only a willing obedience given because of our love for Him, He will never use force to secure our allegiance. In perfect consistency with these principles, He gives to all the...

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 48:

...full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience.

As surely as He gives full liberty to withhold obedience, then He will never punish any one of His creatures for exercising the liberty which He himself has given. This means that the punishments which do come as a result of turning from God's way are the fruit or result of our own course of action, not something administered by the hand of God.

Obedience keeps the powers God has created, under control. Disobedience removes the restraints, and power, out of control, destroys the sinner.

10. God's Principles Under Test

WE HAVE now looked at God's government as it was in heaven before the entrance of sin. It was perfect. It provided for the absolute happiness, security, and fulfillment of the created ones both in heaven and throughout the universe. It placed at their disposal every needed power together with full protection from the risk of destruction by those powers.

This system worked to perfection under the conditions which existed before rebellion began. Every one of God's subjects served Him with undivided devotion because this was the natural expression of what was in their hearts. All was peace and happiness without the slightest feelings of bondage or restraint.

Thus, no situation ever arose for which the use of force needed to be considered. No killing ever took place. No destruction was undertaken. Nothing arose to mar the perfect happiness of every created being. It should not be difficult to see that God's principles of government did work perfectly under those conditions.

Now our attention must be focused on the drastically changed conditions which developed after angels and men exercised their God-given liberty to choose not to serve Him. With intense interest the entire universe looked on to see whether these principles could still operate without modification, addition, or any other changes.

- Would God find it necessary, after all, to personally execute punishments on those who had rebelled?
- Would He be compelled to solve the sin problem by exercising His infinite physical power to destroy the wrongdoers who had refused every overture of mercy?

As people view history, they are convinced that the entrance of sin imposed on God the necessity of taking actions He never needed to take before. They look at:

- the flood,

- the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah,
- the plagues of Egypt,
- the destruction of the rebels who worshiped the golden calf,
- the death of Korah, Dathan and Abiram,
- the liquidation of Sennacherib's army,
- the stoning of the Sabbath breaker, the adulterer, and Achan,
- and many other such instances.

They read the words used to describe God's responses and conclude from this that God did exercise force to put down rebellion, that He did punish by His own decision and decree, that He did destroy those who had rejected His last offers of mercy, and that He does not therefore give all men full liberty to yield or withhold obedience.

We recognize that it strongly appears that this is true, but, at the same time, we know that there is another way of understanding what happened. When this alternative view is considered, it will be seen that God did not behave as most have thought. It will be discerned that He neither introduced nor resorted to any measures after the fall, which He did not use before it.

The point was developed in the last chapter that God designed His law as a protection to His creatures, not as the means of safeguarding His own position and authority. Therefore, it was emphasized that punishments were not administered by God but were the natural outworking of casting aside the law's protection through disobedience.

The Origin of a False View of God

Yet, despite the inspired teachings as to the true nature of the law, there prevails in the world today the concept that the law was made for God's personal exaltation, His invention to produce and maintain His position of undisputed authority. It is seen as a device calculated to exalt One at the expense of the rest.

What is the origin of this teaching in the world? Who was the first to introduce it to mankind? How and where was it successfully introduced? In this chapter we want to answer these questions and add them to the foundation we have been laying so far. Upon this foundation we will later build our revised understanding of what God actually did in reaction to the development of sin. Furthermore, the origin and the effect of such a teaching will be an infallible guide as to whether it is true or not.

The misrepresentation of the character and purpose of God's law was first taught to man by Satan in the Garden of Eden. He presented his ideas to the original couple with the specific purpose of enlisting them in his rebellion against God, and he succeeded. The result was a flood of every kind of sin which can be named. In order to understand better what actually happened, let us look at the situation in which God placed Adam and Eve before Satan tempted them.

God made the earth and equipped it with all the necessary and powerful life-support systems as a love gift to Adam and Eve. Because He was interested only in receiving from them a service motivated by love, He did not place them...

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 48:

...beyond the possibility of wrongdoing. 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.

There is no point in saying that one has full liberty to withhold obedience if there is no opportunity to do so. Therefore, God did not remove all opportunities for disobedience. He placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the Garden and there permitted Satan to be present. That was the only area the Lord did not give to men. All He asked of them was to respect this area as not being theirs. If they would always do this and teach their children the same, then there could never be unhappiness in the world. There could be only perfect trust and security.

This is what the law is all about—respect for that which belongs to another. The first part of the law describes the area of respect for that which is God’s, and the second, for that which is man’s. If Adam and Eve would not learn the lesson this tree was designed to teach, then there could only be murders, thefts, adulteries, and every bad result imaginable in the lives of men and women upon this earth. They were given the clearest warning of this in the words,

Genesis 2

¹⁷ But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die.

It is just as important to see what the text does not say as well as what it does say. It does not say that in the day they ate of it, the Lord would destroy them. It says that they would die. Granted, the text does not spell out the way they would die. From this it could be interpreted to mean that they would die at God’s hands.

But Adam and Eve did not understand it that way, and Satan knew this. He knew that they understood God’s words to mean that the destruction would be the result of their disobedience and not the act of God. Therefore, He worked to destroy their confidence in that interpretation of God’s Word and to substitute it with one of his own.

The certainty that Adam and Eve did understand that the broken law would cause their deaths, is confirmed by Satan himself. This is deduced in the following way. Satan came, not to endorse God’s Word, but to overthrow it. To do this he injected a false interpretation of that Word. There were only two possible ways of understanding God’s word:

1. Either it meant that God would personally kill them for disobeying Him;
2. Or they would die as a consequence of their wrong deeds.

It is only necessary to ask which of the two Satan denied in order to perceive which is the truth.

An Attack on the Law

Throughout that conversation with Eve, Satan built up the idea that there was no danger in eating of the tree. In other words, breaking God's law would not result in death. He insinuated that there was another reason for God's stipulations, a reason entirely motivated by self-protection and self-interest. Therefore, he implied without directly saying it, that if there were any death at all, it would be God's directly administered act, not the outworking of broken law.

He was too cunning to confront Eve with this false interpretation in the first moments of their contact. Firstly, he must inject just enough doubt into her mind to get her thoughts working in the desired direction. So he asked in an incredulous tone if it was really true that the Lord had denied to a creature so beautiful, intelligent, and worthy as herself, the right to partake of the fruit of the tree. To give more power to the suggestion,

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 54:

...the serpent continued, in a musical voice, with subtle praise of her surpassing loveliness; and his words were not displeasing.

In her reply, Eve misquoted God's words, thus showing that doubt had begun to form. Whereas God had said,

Genesis 2

¹⁷ You shall *surely* die,

—she quoted Him as saying,

Genesis 3

³ You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, *lest* you die.

The word "lest" denies certainty and admits only a possibility. Her use of it told the serpent that her trust in God's law was weakening. Thus he was emboldened to make a direct attack on

the law and the character of the One who had made it. So he said to the woman,

Genesis 3

⁴ You will not surely die.

That was the attack on the law. God had said that disobedience to the law would bring death, but Satan said that the law could be broken with impunity. He was arguing that there is nothing in the law which affords a protection from death.

Such a claim is opposite from the truth expressed by God to Adam and Eve wherein He had said that breaking the law would bring death upon the transgressor. It is the very opposite of the truths expressed elsewhere in the Word of God and outlined in the last chapter.

Eve had the choice of whether she would believe the truth as God told it, or Satan's proposition. That choice is still ours today. We can either believe that the law is God's loving provision to enable us to safely enjoy the wondrous blessings contained in the mighty powers He has given us, or we can believe Satan's lie that the law itself is no protection from death.

An Attack on God's Character

Having made the assault on the law, Satan followed it with an attack on God's character. In order to sustain his statement that breaking the law would not bring death, he said that there was another purpose for God's saying it would. Here are his words:

Genesis 3

⁴ You will not surely die.

⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

He offered an altogether different reason for the framing of the law. He represented God as One who was deeply concerned lest any of His creatures should ascend to a position of equality with himself and thus have a part in the glory, honor, and power which He had previously enjoyed as His own special privilege.

Satan insinuated that God did not want them to know that the tree contained certain magical properties which would project them into a gloriously superior position in God's kingdom. While God had not revealed this to them, He certainly knew about it and was desperately afraid that they would partake of the tree and thus become equal with himself. In order to secure himself from such a terrible possibility, He tried to create in them a fear of eating of the tree.

This was the base from which Satan would later develop the teaching that it is God who destroys. However, there was no need to develop this teaching then, for he could accomplish the objective of the moment without doing so. After Satan convinced Adam and Eve that God was protecting His own position by inventing the teaching that disobedience to the law would bring death, it was one more logical step to believe that God destroys. In fact, it is illogical to think otherwise.

If God was the kind of being who would stoop to inventing a lie in order to safeguard His own position, and should that lie be discovered and the people do the very thing He had commanded them not to do, then He would not quietly acquiesce to sharing His throne with them. He would naturally resort to other measures to protect himself. Such a being could do nothing else. Deception having failed, He would be driven to use the only other weapon available—force. He would enter into direct physical conflict with those who sought to climb into His place and in the end, if that failed, He would annihilate them.

A moment's reflection though will reveal how ridiculous Satan's statement was. If God were so concerned about protecting His position, why would He even give someone else the opportunity to take that position?

In the Garden of Eden, Satan assumed the role of interpreter of God's words. Adam and Eve accepted that interpretation and partook of the forbidden fruit. By this means they sought to make themselves equal with God. Instead, they ushered the human race

into a long and fearful history of suffering and death. Throughout that dark period, God has been working constantly to restore what was lost. And through it all, Satan has continued to offer himself as the interpreter of God's actions and words.

Satan argues that the law can be broken with impunity. This argument is refuted when one sees how the environment is destroyed by the transgression of of natural law.



The result of Satan's efforts is that men have come to see God as One who is constantly seeking to preserve His position and power by physically going to war with man and destroying him if he will not yield. In this, Satan has been extremely successful, for

the vast majority of mankind both in and out of the churches, firmly believe that the destructions which have wasted this world are the work of God. They believe He is determined to assert His authority and preserve His position.

Conclusion

It is from these errors that the truth of God is to deliver us. Before us lies the choice as to which we shall believe—the truth of God which reveals that God’s law is His wonderful provision for the blessing of every one of His children, or Satan’s lie that it is a cunning device to serve the interests of God at the expense of His creatures.

So then, from the evidence presented, we can see that it was in the Garden of Eden where Satan for the first time presented to man false ideas about God and His law. Furthermore, the sad outworking of the acceptance of those ideas has been witnessed with terrible clarity throughout human history. All the suffering and death mankind has experienced are directly traceable to Satan’s teaching.

What more evidence than this is needed to reject such philosophies entirely and eternally? This is more than enough. We can see God and His law in an altogether different light from that which the devil would have us view Him.

While we are now aware of who authored these rebellious ideas, we realize that this does not explain how God worked these principles out in every one of the difficult complications introduced by the sin problem. But a foundation has been laid, upon which such understandings can be built. We can now continue our study with the assurance that there is another way in which to understand God’s behavior from that which Satan has proposed.

11. A Summary

CONDENSED into summary form, our study of the constitution of God's government reveals the following principles:

1. The laws of God's kingdom are the transcript of His character.
2. Inasmuch as God is a Saviour, His laws are also designed to be a protector and deliverer from the perils contained in power.
3. Since the character of the law and of God are one, the righteousness of God is purely and entirely a voluntary, spontaneous obedience. He does not force himself to obey His own law, neither is He forced by circumstances to be obedient.
4. In turn, He can accept only that obedience from His creatures which springs from an intelligent conviction of His goodness, impartial justice, and love. Therefore, He created them to be like himself in character. In this way they would be able to appreciate the wonderful nature of His law and the constitution of His government.
5. Because He could accept only this kind of service, God could not introduce any form of compulsion such as the threat of punishment. To do this would cause His children to obey because they were afraid not to. No kingdom can be truly happy when the subjects obey from fear no matter how slight that fear might be. Therefore, God gave every one of His created beings the full liberty to either give or withhold obedience and did not remove the opportunity to exercise either choice.
6. When He created this earth, He demonstrated His perfect love and justice by giving man a marvelous home to live in, and then outlining to him the dangers inherent in the mighty powers given for his blessing and service, the protective qualities in the law, and the sure effects of disre-

garding that law. He did everything possible to make life in His kingdom a pleasant experience for them.

7. Having done all that He could, He left them free to go whichever way they chose.

Under these conditions of government, so different from those practiced by sinful man, there can be no place for the raining of punishments and destructions upon those who do not see things God's way. This system of freedom had been fully operational from all eternity until some exercised their God-given choice to go another way.

Before that decision was made, there was certainly no need to punish or destroy anyone, for nobody had ever disobeyed God's law. During that period the perfect system of government never came under any real test or challenge. Therefore, if there were any weaknesses in the system, then there was nothing to develop them to the point where they would be clearly visible.

But with the advent of rebellion, such a challenge was raised against God's constitution. Before us, in the Word of God and in the annals of human history, is the record of the testing of that constitution so far as that test has gone. The final pressure is yet to be brought upon it in earth's closing days.

God claims that every principle of His government is eternally perfect, requires no adjustment or modification, and is equally applicable in situations of sinfulness as well as sinlessness. He presents His law as the only standard of righteousness for the dwellers in the purity of heaven and for those who must dwell in the midst of a sin-cursed people.

This is His stand, and He will never introduce any actions to deal with the sin problem which are different to that which He did before it appeared. Therefore, as surely as He gave His creatures full liberty to withhold obedience before they fell, then so surely must He still give them the same liberty thereafter. The

granting of that liberty places God where He can neither punish nor destroy those who exercise it.

Before the fall, motivated by a heart of wondrous love, God made all things to perfection for His children. When He gave them a law to save them from suffering and death, He was fulfilling the role of a Saviour. If His claims in regard to His kingdom and its rulership are correct, then He must still occupy the role of a Saviour after the fall.

Before the fall, the law which among other things lays down the maxim, “You shall not kill,” was the direct expression of His character. Accordingly it was not in Him to kill. Since the fall, that law still declares, “You shall not kill,” and continues to be the expression of His character. This being so, it is still not in His nature to kill, and for this reason He still cannot do this. It is God’s declaration that...

Malachi 3

⁶ I am the Lord, I change not;

–that He is...

Hebrews 13

⁸ ...the same yesterday, today, and forever,

–that He is the...

Romans 1

²³ ...incorruptible God,

–and that with Him there...

James 1

¹⁷ ...is no variation or shadow of turning.

God does what He does because of what He is at heart. Before the fall, God, in faithfully acting out His character, destroyed no one. Therefore, if after the fall, He did resort to destroying, then His character must have changed in order to make this possible. But God has truthfully declared that He has not changed.

Pitted against God's testimonies are the devil's charges. Satan accuses God of having changed His character. As so-called proof he argues that before the rebellion God never destroyed, but that after the appearance of sin He did destroy. If Satan were correct, then God would be a liar, for He had declared that He knows all things and does not need to change.

If on the other hand God had admitted in the beginning that His system of government would only operate successfully under perfect conditions, then Satan would have had no case to argue. In fact, he would not have been there to argue, for, as a defector, he would have been eliminated.

Satan is as desperately anxious to win our allegiance today as he was in the Garden of Eden. Before us then is the task of deciding who is correct in this great controversy. While it is incorrect to wait until all questions are answered before we believe, it is also wrong to be satisfied with a superficial understanding of God's Word. Some even feel that it is wrong to contemplate and search into the character of God. But our faith must be intelligent and well grounded in order to be effective.

The area in which it must be truly intelligent is in this very field of the principles of God's government. Let the seriousness of the message in the following statement be fully realized by all.

The Great Controversy, p. 593:

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.

God's character as well as the nature of His government have existed unchanged from eternity and have been clearly laid out in the Holy Scriptures. The task before us is to search out the operation of the divine principles during the test imposed by sin. It is now time to turn our thoughts in this direction.

12. Contrasting Statements

UNQUESTIONABLY God's infinite love was manifested for ages before sin marred the unblemished happiness of all creation. But the manifestation of that love is even more wonderfully revealed since sin's entry.

Yet, while no one who has any understanding of God's Word would even consider that He punished or destroyed before the appearance of iniquity, the vast majority are strongly convinced that necessity has demanded such actions from God since the rebellion began.

There are at least two reasons for this thinking:

1. The human mind has long been educated to believe that the only way to overcome rebellion is by force. Therefore, unless educated otherwise, it is unlikely that the thought of an alternative would even occur. But there is another way. Incidents in Bible history will later be examined to show that God's actions can be viewed in a different light altogether.
2. The mind has been trained to read Scripture references according to a certain method of interpretation. When read according to that system, there are many Scriptures which will be understood as saying that God punishes and destroys.

Consider the following examples:

Genesis 6

⁵ Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

⁶ And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

⁷ So the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.

¹⁷ And behold, I myself am bringing the flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; and everything that is on the earth shall die.

Genesis 19

²⁴ Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens.

²⁵ So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

²⁹ And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt.

Exodus 4

²¹ And the Lord said to Moses, When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.

Exodus 7

³ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.

¹³ And He hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.

Exodus 32

²⁷ And he said to them, Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1117:

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 do You thus? There is no injus-

tice 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.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 491:

It was to be impressed upon Israel that in the conquest of Canaan they were not to fight for themselves, but simply as instruments to execute the will of God; not to seek for riches or self-exaltation, but the glory of Jehovah their king.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 492:

Like the men before the Flood, 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.

Joshua 10

¹¹ And it happened, as they fled before Israel and were on the descent of Beth-horon, that the Lord cast down large hailstones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the children of Israel killed with the sword.

Revelation 20

⁹ They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

Matthew 22

⁷ But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

A careful reading of the whole parable of *Matthew 22* and the commentary on it in *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 307-309, will show that the king is God, the armies were those of the Romans, the murderers were the Jews, and the city was Jerusalem. The parable was prophetic and was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Therefore, the parable is really saying,

“And when God heard about it, He was furious. And God sent out His armies, the Romans, and destroyed the Jews, and burned up Jerusalem.”

This is by no means a comprehensive list of statements of this nature. There is no special point in assembling every such quotation. These are more than sufficient to make the point. It appears as if we have no option but to believe that God does use force to destroy those who have rebelled against Him. There are many people who read these texts and interpret them according to long-standing methods. Thus, they are quite satisfied to believe that God does behave as an executioner of those who refuse to obey His laws. But in doing so they have to ignore several things:

1. There are quite a number of statements which say the opposite from what these statements are interpreted to mean.
2. There are the great principles which are embodied in the constitution of God’s government.
3. There are the terrible implications of holding such beliefs about God.

These will be considered in turn as we proceed, but firstly let a list be made of what some would call counter-statements. In reality they are not and cannot be counter-statements for there is no such thing as a contradiction in God’s Word. Here are some examples of such statements:

Psalm 119

¹³⁸ Your testimonies [commandments or laws] which You have commanded, are righteous and very faithful.

Psalm 145

¹⁷ The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious [KJV: holy] in all His works.

The Lord is righteous and the law is righteous. Therefore God is what the law is. It is the...

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 315:

...transcript of His own character,

—and that law declares,

Exodus 20

¹³ You shall not kill.

Therefore, if it is not a part of the law to kill, then it is not in the character of God to kill. So,

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 84:

God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 120:

God destroys no one.

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

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.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 388-389:

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. The world has disregarded the word of God. They live as though there were no God. Like the inhabitants of the Noachic world, they refuse to have any thought of God. Wickedness prevails to an alarming extent, and the earth is ripe for the harvest.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 141:

This earth has almost reached the place where God will permit the destroyer to work his will upon it.

The Review and Herald, September 17, 1901:

God keeps a reckoning with the nations. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice. Those who work evil toward their fellow men, saying, How does God know? will one day be called upon to meet long-deferred vengeance. In this age a more than common contempt is shown to God. Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. 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. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work."

When Jesus was asked to destroy the Samaritans who had rejected Him, He replied to His disciples,

Luke 9

⁵⁵ You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.

⁵⁶ For the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them. And they went to another village.

The Desire of Ages, p. 487:

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.

The Desire of Ages, p. 759:

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; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power.

The Desire of Ages, p. 22:

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.

We know that God does nothing that is contrary to the principles of His government. Therefore, He does not use force.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 113:

Sickness, suffering, and death are work of an antagonistic power. Satan is the destroyer; God is the restorer.

Here is a compilation of statements, emphatic and clear, asserting that God does not punish, neither does He destroy. When these and the first set are viewed side by side, there appears no possibility of reconciliation. It would not help to search out and copy every statement which exists for one side or the other because any further quotations would only say the same things.

These apparent contradictions present the Bible student with a problem. For some, it is "solved" by simply discarding faith in the Word of God and charging it and its Author with inconsistency. Others simply ignore the words which they are unable to understand or do not really desire to accept, while they carefully collect the opposite set, building their faith accordingly.

This second option was the course the Jews were following when Christ was born. In the Old Testament there were many prophetic statements about the first and second advent of Christ. One set spoke of His advent in obscurity, shame, and final crucifixion. The other set described an advent of indescribable power, glory, and triumph in which all His enemies would be totally annihilated.

To the Jewish mind, especially as it lost the Spirit's illumination, it was impossible to reconcile these seeming contradictions. Their solution was to ignore every statement which spoke of humility and obscurity and to dwell only on those which spoke of power and glory. Thus Satan trained their minds to reject the

Saviour when He came. So clever was he, that he used the Scriptures themselves to accomplish this.

Once they had embarked on that wrong principle of interpretation, the more they studied their Bibles, the more conditioned they became to reject the Saviour when He appeared. He came exactly as the Scriptures said He would, but not as they had read the prophecies. Therefore, because He did not fulfill the set of prophecies they had gathered, they rejected Him and thus lost their eternal lives.

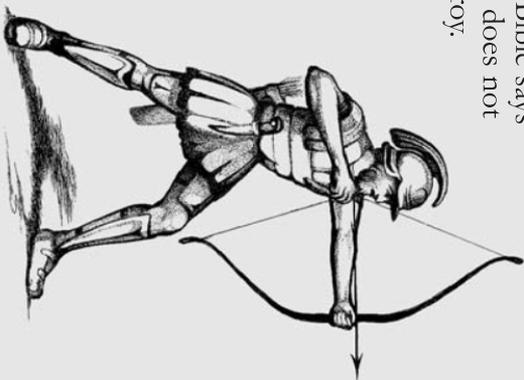
The story of their experience contains a lesson of the most solemn warning. While we understand the differences between the advents of Christ, we find ourselves confronted with other subjects about which two different sets of statements are written.

The subject of God's character has one set which states that He does not destroy and another which says He does. We can do what the Jews did by selecting the set which we prefer to believe, carefully gathering all the quotations supporting that view and discarding or ignoring the others. Should we do this, we would emerge with a view of the subject as erroneous as that of the Jews in regard to Christ's advent. The consequences for us would be the same as for them—the loss of eternal life.

The true student of God's Word will not make this mistake. He will ignore no statements regardless of how they might seem to contradict others. He will candidly acknowledge that so far as his understanding has developed, these statements remain a mystery for him. However, by faith he knows that in God's Word there are no real contradictions.

Consequently, he will rest in the conviction that the problem is only apparent. Confessing his weakness and inability, he will recognize that the difficulty lies in an inadequate depth of spiritual perception on his part. Undisturbed by the clamor of voices around, he will move forward in quiet faith and will patiently study God's Word. He knows that, under God's tutelage, such

The Bible says
God does not
destroy.



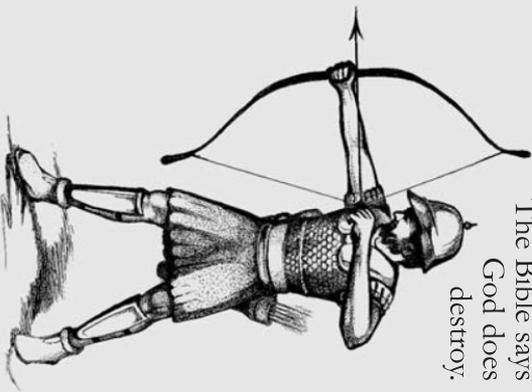
Seeming contradictions lead some
to fight each other with
the word of God.

This is no way to
arrive at scriptural
truth.

One part
of God's word
must not be used
to deny another.

Study under God's Spirit
till all contradictions become perfect harmonies.

The Bible says
God does
destroy.



revelations will come to him as will remove all contradictions and establish a perfect harmony.

As the student of God's Word follows this system of gaining truth, he will find himself invariably coming into disagreement with those who follow the alternative system of carefully collecting only those statements supporting their own preferred view. When such encounters occur, it is important that both sides candidly recognize that there is a problem which cannot be solved by simply quoting statements and counter statements to one another. It is also vital to recognize that the problem cannot be resolved by twisting or changing the statements to conform to our preferred ideas.

As we proceed with this study, great care will be taken not to offer private, unfounded interpretations. We ask each reader to carefully check to see if in any way the Word of God is being twisted to suit a personal view. We believe it will be found that the only interpretations given to the Inspired Word will be those which Inspiration itself offers. Only thus can all disharmony between the two sets of statements disappear.

We have carefully and frankly quoted the two different and seemingly contradictory sets of statements, in order to demonstrate that there is a problem which needs to be solved. We strongly recommend that each reader face the fact that such a problem exists. At the same time we encourage each one to realize that there are no real contradictions in God's Word, that the Bible is written for man's understanding, that these problems are therefore solvable, and that simple, trusting faith in God will bring a clear understanding.

How can these apparent contradictions be resolved so as to bring the thoughtful, responsible student to an accurate knowledge of what the Word of God is teaching? That is the important question which we want to answer.

13. Statements and Principles

THE problem before us is obviously one of interpretation, of determining just what the words used in Scripture are intended to say. Today, there are multiplied versions of what the Scriptures are supposed to mean, but we want to know what the Bible really says. Only one interpretation can be correct.

We depend for our understanding of God's character on the revelation of it as given in His Word. That Word represents the effort to reveal in the limited framework of human language, the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of the infinite. As such, it is a masterpiece of simplification, perfectly designed for the human mind to understand.

But, if we are to arrive at a correct and therefore lifesaving knowledge of God's character, we must firstly understand what the correct principles of Bible interpretation are. This is obviously important. To begin studying the Word of God with an incorrect principle of interpretation, is to end up far removed from the truth. In fact, the more the study is pursued, the further removed from truth one will be. When people study in this way for many years, the long length of time gives them a feeling of correctness and authority. They then make great claims based upon the length of time they have studied.

To many, these claims are impressive, but to others they are no proof at all. Their minds probe deeper with the question,

“Has the person making this claim spent those years studying according to the correct principles of Bible interpretation or not?”

If not, then they know that those years of study have removed that man just that much farther from the truth. It would have been better for him not to have studied at all.

In the early 1960's a man arose in the United States who began to proclaim that the second advent of Christ would take place in

October, 1964. When challenged by Scripture evidences that this would not be so, he protested with great solemnity and authority that he had studied this matter for the past thirty years, and therefore knew with certainty that what he said was the truth and nothing but the truth.

Instead of learning from his mistake, the same man simply set another date when time proved his prophecy a delusion. When the second date failed, he set a third and a fourth. Finally he disappeared into obscurity. How much wiser he would have been to have gone back and carefully checked his principles of Bible interpretation.

The fact is that few people do approach the study of God's Word with any real system of interpretation clearly laid out. Most people search through the Word and form their own opinions of what they think the passages mean. This is a haphazard and dangerous practice.

It is vital that we not do this. We have before us a very real problem in the existence of two sets of statements which can be and have been understood to say quite the opposite from each other. The only safe way to approach this difficulty is according to correct principles of Scriptural interpretation.

To use these principles, they must firstly be understood. Our task is to set them forth and adhere to them strictly. Every conclusion presented here will be in accordance with these principles of interpretation. If the principles are correct and if they are faithfully applied in every case under question, then the conclusions must also be correct. Everything depends upon correct principles of interpretation.

No Private Interpretation

It is from the Bible itself that we obtain the guidelines for its interpretation. Not only does the Bible give us messages of truth, but it also informs us how to find out what those messages are. Our standing in this respect is the truth laid down in:

2 Peter 1

²⁰ Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.

Let the message of this verse be forever impressed upon the mind of every person approaching the study of God's Word. It provides no room for private interpretations of any Scripture.

Some might tend to limit the application of this verse to those areas of the Bible presenting foretellings of future events because this is the most generally accepted definition of the word "prophecy." In a limited sense this is what the word "prophecy" means, but in its fuller and broader sense, "prophecy" means any revelation which comes from the prophet.

Every word in the Bible is prophecy. The prophets were not only foretellers, they were forth tellers, speaking forth whatever words God gave them. These include counsels, admonitions, revelations of the gospel, or predictions of the future. Therefore, this verse plainly lays down the rule that no prophecy—no word of the entire Scriptures—is to be of any private interpretation.

We can now ask the question,

"What is private interpretation as distinct from Scriptural interpretation?"

Private interpretation is that which emanates from the mind of man as his considered opinion of what the divine revelations are intended to say. He arrives at these conclusions according to the definitions already formed in his mind. His mind is a dictionary to which he makes reference whenever he reads a word. When he encounters an unfamiliar word, he then turns to a dictionary such as Oxford or Webster. Having obtained the meaning from there, he applies this meaning to the Scripture in question and develops an understanding of what the Scripture is supposed to be saying. This is one way of studying the Bible, and it will definitely lead a person to hold certain views.

For instance, when men read in the Scriptures that God sent the flood upon the earth or rained fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, they will without thought or question take the definitions of the key words, “sent,” “destroyed,” and “rained,” as those words are already defined in their minds. These definitions come from the dictionary as well as their own understanding and can only give a picture of God personally and directly using His mighty power to lash out and annihilate His enemies.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that while this method of interpretation is used, no conclusion other than this can be drawn. Inevitably, all who use this method must believe that God is a grim executioner and that He is doing things after the fall that He never did before.

The limited, erroneous nature of this method is exposed when it is seen that it leaves inexplicable contradictions. It gives no explanation for the other set of statements and the great principles which undergird God’s character. To ignore one set of statements as a means of solving the problem, or to warp their meanings would be to apply incorrect principles of interpretation. Another incorrect principle is to claim to have a large amount of evidence for a particular view, as if the truths of God’s Word are determined by the weight of numbers.

Those who learn and adopt the Scriptural method of interpretation do not have these problems. They find that the whole of God’s Word becomes one harmonious pattern of saving truth. They find that they can take those statements of Scripture which at first appear to be contradictory, and discover in them only perfect consistency.

Why then is the dictionary method of defining words describing the character and behavior of God, so certain to lead to erroneous views of Scripture? Surely, it may be argued, the very purpose of the dictionary is to make clear what words mean. If we do not use the dictionary to define our terms, then to what shall we turn? How will we ever know the meaning of anything?

Within the dictionary are contained the definitions of words as those words describe human behavior. This is the key point. In this field, the dictionary is the undisputed authority and is to be heeded. But the dictionary is designed to explain words as men understand and apply them.

God's Ways Different than Man's Ways

If divine and human behavior were the same, then the dictionary would serve in both realms, but they are not the same. They are very different indeed. The Lord has unmistakably warned us of this. God says,

Isaiah 55

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God's ways are not our ways. They are different. They are as much higher than man's ways as the heavens are above the earth. Anyone who would arrive at a correct concept of God's character must engrave this statement on his mind and continually refer to it as a guideline in his study. He should program himself to test every assertion, every concept, and every idea forming in his mind, by the words of this statement.

Whenever he reads the words of God and forms a picture of divine behavior as being the same as human behavior, then, in the light of this Scripture, he can be assured that the concept formed is erroneous. However, it would be incorrect to say that if we were to find a principle of operation that is not part of man's ways, then it must be a part of God's ways. We must consider the possibility that there are procedures common neither to God nor man.

Since God's ways and man's are different, it is necessary to have two different sets of definitions for the same key words. One set is already well known to us, that of the dictionary and everyday usage which describe human behavior. What needs to be de-

veloped is that other definition which defines the words as they are used by God to describe His own behavior. Reference is made here to such key words as “destroy,” “wrath,” “justice,” “judgment,” “punish,” and others.

Man destroys. We know that. We also know what man’s way of destroying is. We know how he goes about it and have no difficulty in defining this word as it applies to human behavior.

The Bible says, “God destroys.” Therefore, it is the truth that God does destroy and no attempt will be made to deny that. But the Bible also says that God’s ways are not man’s ways. From this we can only conclude that God’s way of destroying is altogether different from man’s way. Between them, there is no similarity. It can also be said that God’s way of not destroying is different from man’s way of not destroying.

Isaiah 55:8-9 offers us the first step in resolving the problem of apparent contradictions. The next step is to redefine the particular words that cause the problem. This is the key to harmonizing the apparent contradiction. Therefore, while the dictionary must be retained for determining the meaning of words used to describe human activity, it is to be discarded when the knowledge of God’s behavior is being sought.

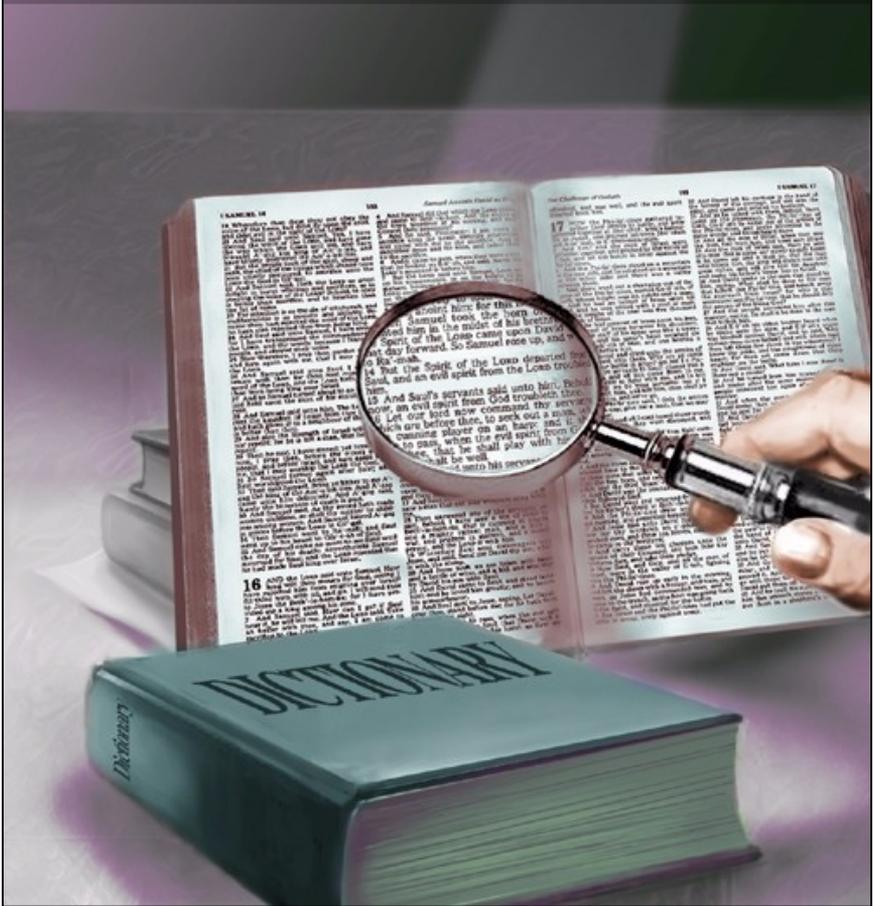
The Bible Its Own Dictionary

Having determined that these alternate definitions are not written in the dictionary, the question arises as to where they can be found. The answer is that the Bible is to be used as its own dictionary. Only when we have learned to use it in this way, can a correct understanding of its messages be obtained.

God not only wants man to understand the Bible, He also realizes the problems facing man as he seeks for truth. Therefore, God has incorporated into the Bible all the definitions necessary to arrive at a correct understanding of His behavior. Thus there is no excuse for not obtaining these Scriptural definitions. They are

there. God has provided them, and it is our duty to search for them until we find them.

The Bible is its own dictionary. Webster and Oxford can define words only as they apply to human behavior. The Bible uses and defines them as they apply to God's behavior.



The Example of William Miller

An example of using the Bible as its own dictionary can be found in the great second Advent Movement which was the mightiest spiritual undertaking this side of Pentecost. It was brought into existence by the revelation of truth, and it was built upon a foun-

dation of truth. That truth was obtained by correct principles of Bible interpretation, giving us a tremendous endorsement of the system laid out in the above paragraphs.

When the founding father of the Advent Movement first began the systematic study of the Bible, he did so, not according to dictionary definitions of words, but according to Bible definitions. We turn now to the account of that man's method of Bible study.

The Great Controversy, p. 319-320:

Miller publicly professed his faith in the religion which he had despised. But his infidel associates were not slow to bring forward all those arguments which he himself had often urged against the divine authority of the Scriptures. He was not then prepared to answer them; but 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. He determined to study the Scriptures for himself, and ascertain if every apparent contradiction could not be harmonized.

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. He pursued his study in a regular and methodical manner; beginning with Genesis, and reading verse by verse, he proceeded no faster than the meaning of the several passages so unfolded as to leave him free from all embarrassment.

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, and if his view of it harmonized with every collateral passage, it ceased to be a difficulty. Thus whenever he met with a passage hard to be understood he found an explanation in some other portion of the Scriptures.

As he studied with earnest prayer for divine enlightenment, that which had before appeared dark to his understanding was made clear. He experienced the truth of the psalmist's words:

Psalm 119

¹³⁰ The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding unto the simple.

Let notice now be taken of the main points in this method of Bible study. Firstly there is the mental aspect. Miller reasoned that the Bible, being a revelation from God, must be consistent with itself. The necessity on the student's part of recognizing that there is no such thing as a contradiction in the Word of God cannot be overemphasized.

When this conviction is firmly established, no effort will be made to twist Scriptures to fit in with other Scripture. Rather, the student will study with care, patience, and perseverance until the principles are so well understood that the statements are naturally brought into perfect harmony with each other.

In addition to this Miller recognized that inasmuch as the Bible is expressly written for man's instruction, it must be adapted to his understanding. In other words, he was convinced that the Bible was not beyond the reach of man's intellectual grasp. It was written for man, therefore it could be understood by man. Again, when a student has this conviction, he will not dismiss as impossible to comprehend, those aspects of Scripture which do not fit in with his initial concepts.

Next Miller endeavored 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.

There can hardly be a more serious barrier to arriving at saving truth than that provided by preconceived opinions and ideas. There is no person alive today who is not to a larger or lesser degree, afflicted with this problem. During the entire span of our past lives, we have been absorbing concepts, ideas, and information. We have come to think along certain lines and these thought processes have mostly been erroneous so far as our concept of God's kingdom is concerned.

An outstanding example of this is found in the experience of Christ's disciples. They were born into a Jewish world where the coming Messiah was expected as an all-conquering king. As those boys grew, they heard this conversation around them. It was preached to them in church and taught to them in school. The result was the building up of strong, preconceived notions of the Messiah's work and ministry. When the real Saviour appeared, those ideas formed a fearful barrier to understanding Him and His mission. Only as the truth opened to their understanding were those ideas removed.

So with us today. Every one of us should humbly recognize that we are not possessed of accurate wisdom and that erroneous thought patterns are indeed a great problem.

Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 20:

The stamps of minds are different. All do not understand expressions and statements alike. Some understand the statements of the 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.⁹

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 112:

The Scriptures are not to be adapted to meet the prejudice and jealousy of men. They can be understood only by those who are humbly seeking for a knowledge of the truth that they may obey it.

Some may feel that earnestness and sincerity compensate for accuracy. But Jesus plainly said,

John 8

³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

It is the truth and not good intentions which saves us. For this reason, God is continually seeking to send us clearer and more advanced revelations of His truth so we may correspondingly as-

⁹ See also pages 19-22.

cent into greater heights of religious experience. Many a person will fail to enter the kingdom of heaven because prejudice has barred the door to receiving the truth.

Notice carefully the solemn warnings laid out in this next quotation which begins with the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" The answer provided is an unexpected and solemn one.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 112:

Do you ask, What shall I do to be saved? 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.

There are a number of answers which could have been given to the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" Elsewhere those answers are given, but here the point is made that our salvation does depend upon laying aside preconceived opinions, hereditary and cultivated ideas. William Miller did this, and because he did, he arrived at saving truth. If we will do the same, we likewise will arrive at saving truth.

In the field of knowledge dealing with the character of God, wrong concepts are prolific. Any emergence into the truth about God must be from a background of dark error and misconception. The world is ignorant of God as He really is, and we who have lived in that world have been unconsciously influenced by this atmosphere.

We come now to a key point in William Miller's approach to Bible study. As he proceeded from verse to verse, he would inevitably come upon a Scripture which baffled his understanding and which in turn, appeared to contradict what he had already learned in other parts of the Word. How did he solve this prob-

lem? Discarding commentaries and dictionaries, he used the Bible as its own dictionary.

The Great Controversy, p. 320:

Thus whenever he met with a passage hard to be understood he found an explanation in some other portion of the Scriptures.

The Great Controversy, p. 324:

[He followed]...his rule of making Scripture its own interpreter.

By doing this, he avoided the perilous pitfall of private or human interpretations of God's revelations. Such interpretations can only lead astray. It would be far better not to study the Bible at all, than to search it using the wrong method. Make the Scriptures their own dictionary, their own interpreter. Do this under the blessing and guidance of the Holy Spirit and you are guaranteed a harmonious knowledge of saving truth.

This will take time. Do not expect every error to be immediately swept away. While Miller arrived at tremendous concepts of saving truth, he did not live long enough to find deliverance from every preconceived error of the past. This does not deny for an instant the validity of his method of study. It only underlines the truth that it takes time, even with correct methods of study, to come to an accurate grasp of divine revelations. After all, God's truth is the expression of the mind of the Infinite. Eternity will never exhaust it. Miller made tremendous progress in breaking away from the erroneous teachings of his day.

A Second Witness from Adventism

The sound and solid foundations laid down by William Miller were continued and developed by later Adventist expositors. To establish this point we could bring as evidence, the development of such truths as the two laws, the Sabbath, and others. But let us consider the subject of the final punishment of the wicked.

It is a common understanding in most religious circles that the fires of final destruction will unceasingly burn the unrepentant wicked. It is believed by many that they will suffer unending tor-

ture and torment within those unquenchable flames. The advent message denies this concept, teaching rather a short consumption of the lost to render them as though they had never been.

In the early days of Adventism, the truth on this subject had not been developed. It was not developed by William Miller but by the people who came after him. As the new idea was advanced, it met with serious objection and opposition. It appears to be a difficult subject to present because there are certain Scriptures which make it appear that the wicked do burn forever and ever. As with other subjects, this one has its own set of apparent contradictions.

It hardly seems necessary to quote the many texts from Scripture which tell us that the wicked will be as though they had not been, that we shall tread down their ashes, and that they shall burn leaving neither root nor branch. We know the Scriptures tell us that the dead know nothing, that their very thoughts are gone.

This is one side of the question, but, on the other side are statements which clearly say that the wicked will burn forever. The most noteworthy reference of this nature is in:

Revelation 20

¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night *for ever and ever*.

Let this verse be taken and interpreted according to dictionary definitions of the key words to show us the wrong way of Bible interpretation. The key words in this particular verse are “for ever and ever.” In our minds there already exists a clear definition of these words which is in harmony with the written definition in the dictionary which reads as follows:

“Forever means for a limitless time or endless ages, everlastingly, eternally, at all times, always, continually, incessantly.”

If this dictionary definition of the word “forever” is taken and *Revelation 20:10* understood according to it, then the only possible

understanding of this verse would be that the wicked suffer eternally and that there never would come a time when their agonies would end. It is hoped that no one will miss the point that a certain method of interpretation will yield its corresponding conclusions.

Serious doubt of the validity of this method is caused when it is seen that it brings this text into sharp contradiction with other Scriptures. Here are two examples.

Obadiah

¹⁶ For as you drank on my holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually; yes, they shall drink, and swallow, and they shall be as though they had never been.

Malachi 4

¹ For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch.

It is obviously impossible for the wicked to exist eternally and at the same time to be as though they had not been, and to be burned up leaving neither root nor branch. That is a contradiction which will exist in our minds and will continue to exist until the understanding of these verses is changed. Let it be strongly emphasized that the Scriptures themselves must not be changed. It is the understanding of the Scriptures which must be changed until there is perfect harmony.

This is a very different approach to the problem from that which uses the dictionary. But the only safety lies in discarding dictionary definitions of words when the apparent contradiction remains unsolved and seeking for a revised understanding of the meaning of the statements. The only way to discover that other meaning is by making the Bible and the Bible only, its own dictionary and therefore its own interpreter.

The Advent people, in determining the message of *Revelation* 20:10, found it necessary to discover the Bible meaning of those

words “forever and ever.” They learned that, in Bible usage, these words have a different meaning from what they have in everyday usage. We quote now from the book *Answers to Objections*, by F. D. Nichol, p. 360-361:

We read of “Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them...suffering the vengeance of eternal [*aionios*] fire.” *Jude* 7. Are those cities, set ablaze long ago as 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. Now the fate of these cities is declared to be a warning to all wicked men of the fate that impends for them. Therefore if the “*aionios* fire” of that long ago judgment turned into ashes those upon whom it preyed, and then died down of itself, we may properly conclude that the “*aionios* fire” of the last day will do likewise.

When we turn to the Old Testament we discover that “everlasting” and “for ever” sometimes signify a very limited time. We shall quote texts in which these two terms are translated from the Hebrew word *olam*, because *olam* is the equivalent of the Greek *aion*.

The Passover was to be kept “for ever [*olam*].” *Exodus* 12:24. But it ended with the cross. See *Hebrews* 9:24-26.

Aaron and his sons were to offer incense “for ever [*olam*].” (*1 Chronicles* 23:13), and to have an “everlasting [*olam*] priesthood.” *Exodus* 40:15. But this priesthood, with its offerings of incense, ended at the cross. See *Hebrews* 7:11-14.

A servant who desired to stay with his master, was to serve him “for ever [*olam*].” See *Exodus* 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 [*olam*].” *Jonah* 2:6. Yet this “for ever” was only “three days and three nights” long. *Jonah* 1:17. Rather a short “for ever.”

Because Gehazi practiced deceit, Elisha declared, “The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto you [*Gehazi*], and unto your seed for ever [*olam*].” *2 Kings* 5:27. Should we conclude,

therefore, that Gehazi's family would never end, and that thus leprosy would be perpetuated for all time to come?

Thus by the acid test of actual usage we discover that in a number of cases *aion*, *aionios*, and *olam* have a very limited time value.

Now that we have read the above statement from F. D. Nichol, it would be helpful to answer the following questions.

1. How much reference did F. D. Nichol make to standard dictionaries when seeking the definition of "everlasting" and "for ever" as those words are used in the Scriptures?

The answer is: No reference at all.

2. What then did he use as his dictionary when seeking the definition of those words as used in Scripture?

The answer is: The Word of God and that alone.

3. Did he find the words meant the same in Scripture usage as they do in everyday usage?

The answer is: No! The meanings are very different indeed. That means that "everlasting" and "forever" have one meaning when used in our everyday speech but a different meaning when used in the Scriptures.

4. What is the meaning of "everlasting" and "for ever" in everyday speech and as found in the dictionary?

The answer is: These words mean eternally; without ever ceasing at all.

5. What is the meaning when the same words are used in Scripture?

Answer: It signifies time in unbroken duration so long as the nature of the subject allows. Thus 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. But be assured that the fire will go on for ever, that is, in unbroken duration, until they are consumed. On the other hand the nature of God and of the redeemed

is that they go on forever as long as their immortal natures allow and that will be eternally without ever ceasing at all.

It should now be clear that when the words “for ever and ever” are interpreted according to dictionary definitions, a certain understanding will emerge. But if the Bible is used to uncover its usage of the words, then a very different understanding will result.

In other words, the conclusions we draw will depend on the system of interpretation used. If we use the right method, then the desired objective of knowing the truth will be the natural result.

The Scriptural Method of Interpretation

A sound test of the true method is that it removes apparent contradictions and replaces them with harmony and cohesion. There will be no need to ignore statements which otherwise do not fit, and no need to force a harmony.

Once the correct method has been found, it is to be applied with unflinching consistency throughout the entire study of the Bible. One system cannot be used to understand one subject and a different system for another subject. What works in understanding the death of the wicked, also works in understanding God’s character. It is always safe to let the Bible be its own dictionary whenever apparent contradictions are encountered.

Using the Bible as its own dictionary does not mean that every word in the Bible will have other than a dictionary definition. Most will have a dictionary meaning, but there will always be key words which do not. They are readily recognized. Whenever the common understanding of a word creates a serious problem, then it is time to search out its Scriptural meaning as against its common one.

Throughout this book we will adhere to the Scriptural method of interpretation. When we find ourselves confronted with apparently contradictory statements, we shall apply the following procedures.

1. Faith will retain firm hold of the truth that there is no contradiction in the Word of God.
2. Every endeavor will be made to lay aside old preconceived ideas and opinions.
3. No reference will be made to the dictionary to solve the problem.
4. Inspiration alone will be consulted for the answer as to what these words mean.

This approach will be continued until every disharmony of thought disappears and every statement tells the same message.



14. God Does Destroy: But How?

THE principles of interpretation laid out in the previous chapter can now be applied to the problem of reconciling otherwise contradicting statements. In this case the concern is over the declarations that God does not destroy versus those which say He does. When correct principles of interpretation are applied, they guarantee the establishment of perfect harmony where confusion previously reigned.

This application is a practical exercise. Let us begin by selecting a Scripture which has frequently been offered as proof that God steps forth in almighty power and cuts down the rejecters of His mercy.

Genesis 19

²⁴ Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens.

²⁵ So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

Ponder those words. Just what picture do they suggest to you? Ask the question,

“What do these words tell me that God did?”

The normal understanding is that God, after working with great love and patience to bring those rebels to repentance, finally laid aside the garments of mercy, took hold of the mighty power of fire, and personally poured it out on their shelterless heads. The result was such total obliteration that no trace of those cities can be found today.

Certainly, if we were reading another book in which the actions of a powerful monarch were being described in the same words, this is how they would be correctly understood. In the old days of warfare when an enemy invested a walled city, the defenders did pour fire on them from above. It was a purposeful act designed to burn those below. The amount of fire was minimal compared to

God's capabilities. Whereas they could only burn one or two individuals at a time, God could engulf whole cities.

If the same interpretation is given to God's actions as to man's, then the only possible picture which could be formed is one of God pouring down fire as did the defenders on the wall, except that He would do this on a greater scale.

But the Word of God expressly says that God's ways are entirely different from man's. This difference is not in one point or another but is completely so in every area. Because of this, when Christ came to earth,

Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 177:

He presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God...

Satan achieves his misrepresentation of God's character by convincing people that God's actions are identical to man's. The more he can make God appear to be just like men, the better pleased he is. But Christ works in the opposite direction. The more He can show that the ways of God and sinful man are different, the more successful He is in saving them from Satan's deadly lies. His revelations of God when He was on earth were exactly contrary to those offered by the devil. As a result of Christ's effective ministry, we can know that God's ways and man's are not merely different in many respects, but in all respects.

That these vital truths are not generally understood and accepted is evidenced by the usual interpretation of the incident at Sodom and Gomorrah. God's behavior is believed to be the same as that of any earthly potentate. However, since God's ways are different from man's, there must another explanation. This explanation is not found by casting around in the human mind for other possibilities. The Bible must be its own interpreter. When its explanation is found, the correct concept of God will be gained.

Throughout the Word of God the same expressions are used consistently when describing God's actions of destruction. But at the point where these expressions are used, we usually do not find the explanation of what He means by these words. We must look elsewhere in Inspiration for that, and there is more than one place, where we find the light to guide us because every truth is established...

Matthew 18

¹⁶ ...in the mouth of two or three witnesses.

Reference will now be made to three clarifying witnesses. The method used in the Scriptures to clarify the meaning of an expression is to state the same truth in two different places in two different ways. In one of the two references, what God did will be stated in language that requires no interpretation. The words can be understood according to their ordinary usage. In the second reference the same incident will be described in a different way not according to the ordinary usage of the words. By putting these two together, it will be clearly seen what God means when He says that He destroys.

Remember that it is not important what we think the Lord means when He uses certain expressions. Our task is to be sure of what the Lord means.

The Death of Saul

The first reference we will consider is about the death of Saul, the first king of Israel.

1 Chronicles 10

³ The battle became intense against Saul; and the archers hit him, and he was wounded by the archers.

⁴ Then Saul said to his armorbearer, Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and abuse me. But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it.

⁵ And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died.

⁶ So Saul and his three sons died, and all his house died together.

This is a simple and therefore easily understood account of Saul's death. There is a background to this event which is but the climax of previous decisions and events. After a certain critical point in the king's life, he persistently rejected the appeals of mercy. By this means he took himself further and further outside the circle of God's protection until it was impossible for the Lord to help him. This was not because the Lord would not, but only because He could not. For the details of Saul's life and God's dealings with him, see:

- *1 Samuel* 9-31,
- *2 Samuel* 1,
- *1 Chronicles* 10 and
- *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapters 59-67.

Thus when Saul went forth to the final battle, he went without the Lord's protection and he knew it. It was for this reason that he sought guidance from the witch at Endor. Without God's presence there was nothing to save him from the dreadful power of the Philistines. His destruction was therefore a predetermined outcome.

As Saul's life is considered, it will be seen that he took himself away from God, placing himself where there was no defense from Satan's power, and thus, in fact, destroyed himself.

Nowhere in Saul's entire history is there anything to give us the idea that God raised His mighty hand and struck him down. The only actions we see on God's part were those of love. He made every possible effort to save Saul, and then, when he would not be saved but only resisted the outreach of the Holy Spirit with greater and greater vigor, God had no choice but to withdraw from him. If God had tried to maintain a connection with Saul against his will, that would have meant forcing His presence where it was not wanted, and this the Lord cannot and will not do.

After seeing God's behavior toward Saul and how Saul died, we are now ready to consider the text which is so often misunderstood.

1 Chronicles 10

¹³ So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance.

¹⁴ But he did not inquire of the Lord; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

God exerted all the influence of love and truth to save Saul, and when he would not be saved, then the Lord went away and left him to what he wanted—his own way. God did not raise His hand to slay Saul. He killed himself. But the Scriptures, which are the very expression of God's thought, describe that event in these words,

“Therefore He [the Lord God of Heaven] killed him.”

This is certainly not the way we would use the words, “He killed him,” to describe human behavior. If they were used to describe human behavior, then we would know that the executioner came to the victim, not moved away from him; that he carried the sword in his own hand and was not empty handed; and that he brought the sword down upon the head of the guilty person.

So foreign is this form of expression to what we are accustomed to, that it is difficult initially to think in this new terminology. Yet, in order to truthfully understand God's thought as expressed in His word, the mind must be re-educated to think this way when reading about God's ways as distinct from man's ways. There certainly will be no difficulty in seeing that the way in which God uses words, and the way in which we use them, are contrary to each other.

The Fall of Jerusalem

The presentation of one witness is never sufficient to establish a Biblical truth. A second must be added.

As with Saul, so it was with the entire nation of Israel. Centuries of loving appeals had been spurned, the prophets had been persecuted and in some cases martyred. Eventually the Son of God himself came with a personal message from the Father. But they rejected Him even more emphatically, underscoring the intensity of their feelings by killing Him in a most torturous and humiliating manner.

When Christ recognized that the Jews had passed the point of no return, what did He say and do? He declared that Jerusalem was beyond hope, and then, instead of launching fiery balls of destruction upon the city, He quietly left them to their fate. Again, He did not do this because He wanted to, but because there was nothing else He could do that was consistent with His character of love. Here are His sad words.

Matthew 23

³⁷ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!

³⁸ How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

³⁹ See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

For the same reasons and in harmony with the same principles, God left Israel exactly as He left Saul. Thus was removed from them the only effective defense against their many enemies. For centuries the devil had thirsted for the blood of the entire nation. Knowing that he could not touch them so long as the protection of God was around them, and knowing that while they were obedient it would always be there, he labored with terrible success to lead them into disobedience.

So the time came when the Jews had caused God's protection to be withdrawn from them, and there was nothing to shield them from disaster. It came with ferocious savagery upon their unpro-

tected heads. The full truth of this is clearly expressed in the following record.

The Great Controversy, p. 35-36:

The Jews had forged their own fetters; they had filled for themselves the cup of vengeance. In the utter destruction that befell them as a nation, and in all the woes that followed them in their dispersion, they were but reaping the harvest which their own hands had sown. Says the prophet,

Hosea 13

⁹ O Israel; you have destroyed yourself;

Hosea 14

¹ ...for you have fallen by your iniquity.

Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. 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. The horrible cruelties enacted in the destruction of Jerusalem are a demonstration of Satan's vindictive power over those who yield to his control.

We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan. The disobedient and unthankful have great reason for gratitude for God's mercy and long-suffering in holding in check the cruel, malignant power of the evil one. But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed.

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.

The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace, and resist-

ing 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.

God's actions in the destruction of Jerusalem are identical to His dealings with King Saul. The only difference in the two accounts is that in the fall of Jerusalem, we have a much more detailed description of what the Lord did. It is made transparently clear that they did not fall by God's hand but by their own iniquity. Of particular value is the reference made to the common interpretation of what was done there.

Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God.

This view of God's actions can be described in the following way:

“With loving appeals the Lord seeks to woo and to win until the time comes when His patience is exhausted. Then, having passed judgment upon them, He personally decides what form of punishment He will send. Will it be a fearful earthquake, fire, volcanic eruption, pestilence, or shall He send their enemies among them? In the case of Jerusalem, God decided that He would send the Romans. Having made this decree, He called them to the terrible office of being the personal executioners of His vengeance on the Jews.”

That is the view most people have of the judgments on the Jews in 70 AD. This is the interpretation which comes from thinking that God's behavior is the same as man's, and from defining Bible words according to dictionary meanings. While these methods are employed, it is impossible to come to any other conclusion. After the sentence,

Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God,

–the next sentence says,

It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work.

So, not only is this concept the result of wrong principles of Bible interpretation, it is also the very means employed by the devil to conceal the true nature of his own work. He attributes his work to God, while to himself he credits the work and character of God. Therefore, it is to be rejected for what it is—a dangerous philosophy of Satan. While his view is entertained, it is impossible to form correct concepts of God’s character.

Furthermore, we are informed that the Lord did not leave of His own choice. It was the Jews who “had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them,” thus permitting Satan to finally work his evil designs upon them. Then there is laid down forever the precious truth that:

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.

What befell the Jews was the natural outworking of their own course of action. It was not something brought upon them by God. They had sown the seed; now they must reap the certain harvest.

In the death of Israel’s first king and the destruction of the nation in 70 AD, God consistently followed the same course. In both cases He worked with infinite love and patience to win them to the ways of righteousness and safety, but they utterly rejected it, forcing Him to withdraw and leave them to the fate which lay nearest. For Saul it was the invasion of the Philistines, for Jerusalem, the Roman onslaught.

We have before us a revelation of the course God pursued toward the Israelites which is the same as He did with Saul. It is now necessary to find out how God himself described what He

did. God described what He did to Saul in words very different from the ones we would use to describe the same act. God said,

“I destroyed him.”

We would say,

“He destroyed himself.”

Because God is consistent, we expect Him to use the same language to describe the destruction of Jerusalem. We anticipate Him to say,

“I destroyed Jerusalem and killed those murderers.”

And in *Matthew 22* this is just how He does describe that terrible destruction. In this chapter is given a parable which sets out the two final calls given to the Jewish people and the rejection of both those calls. When the second call was rejected, the king’s reaction is described in these words:

Matthew 22

⁷ But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

This verse is couched in symbolic language:

1. The king represented God, the Father;
2. The armies were the Romans under Titus;
3. The murderers were the Jews who crucified Christ; and
4. The city was Jerusalem

The fulfillment of this fearful prophecy came in 70 AD as verified in *Christ’s Object Lessons*, where this verse is quoted followed by the words:

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 309:

The judgment pronounced came upon the Jews in the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the nation.

If we put the symbols themselves in the place of the symbolic words, the verse will read as follows:

“But when God heard about it, He was furious. And He sent out His armies, the Romans, and destroyed the Jews and burned up Jerusalem.”

If these words are interpreted according to normal dictionary definitions, the only possible picture of God would be identical to that of earthly despots. But *The Great Controversy* confirms that an altogether different understanding is given in these verses. Therefore, the position adopted depends directly on the way in which the words are understood. The choice lies between accepting a meaning according to either human or inspired language. The former is acquired by reference to a standard dictionary, the latter by Inspiration itself.



As in the case of King Saul, so it is with this second witness. The same behavior is described in the same way. God is said to destroy the sinner when He accepts the sinner’s demands that he be left to himself. The fate which befalls him is not the result of

either God's election or administration. It is the inevitable out-working of the transgressor's course.

The Fiery Serpents

The two witnesses already given are in perfect harmony. They support each other and go a long way toward confirming the truth of God's Word. However, we will not rest with only two. A third witness will also be drawn from Israel's history.

There was an occasion when the Israelites were traveling through the wilderness and once again murmured against God and Moses. Unknown to them, they were in an area infested with deadly serpents. Because of God's protecting care, they went unharmed until that time when they drove away His protection through their own ingratitude and sinfulness. The shield removed, there was nothing to hold back the invasion of those reptiles, and many of the people died a terrible death.

Here is the description of what happened and of what God did. It needs but little comment after the two examples already studied. Once again it will be seen that the Lord simply left them to what they wanted. He did not decree the particular punishment. It was lurking there all the time only awaiting the opportunity to destroy them. Notice the consistent way in which God related himself to the sinner in each case. In all three illustrations given, God is revealed as One with whom there is no variation nor shadow of turning.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 428-429:

As the Israelites indulged the spirit of discontent, they were disposed to find fault even with their blessings.

Numbers 21

⁵ And the people spoke against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loathes this light bread.

Moses faithfully set before the people their great sin. It was God's power alone that had preserved them in...

Deuteronomy 8

¹⁵ ...that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water.

Every day of their travels they had been kept by a miracle of divine mercy. In all the way of God's leading they had found water to refresh the thirsty, bread from heaven to satisfy their hunger, and peace and safety under the shadowy cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Angels had ministered to them as they climbed the rocky heights or threaded the rugged paths of the wilderness.

Notwithstanding the hardships they had endured, there was not a feeble one in all their ranks. Their feet had not swollen in their long journeys, neither had their clothes grown old. God had subdued before them the fierce beasts of prey and the venomous reptiles of the forest and the desert. If with all these tokens of His love the people still continued to complain, the Lord would withdraw His protection until they should be led to appreciate His merciful care, and return to Him with repentance and humiliation.

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. The poisonous serpents that infested the wilderness were called fiery serpents, on account of the terrible effects produced by their sting, it causing violent inflammation and speedy death. As the protecting hand of God was removed from Israel, great numbers of the people were attacked by these venomous creatures.

As in the previous illustrations, a comparison will be made between what the Lord is described as doing, and His own statement of what He did. If God is consistent, and we know He is, then He will describe this in the same way as He did the previous two. Again the consistency of God stands forth without variation or shadow of turning.

Numbers 21

⁶ And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

The Experience of Job

There is still further confirmation of the truth that the Bible is its own dictionary. Let us look at Job's experience. 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 Satan's hands, not God's. The picture of God's behavior is the same as previously shown except for this difference. In each of the other cases, the sinfulness of the rejecters of God's mercy drove Him and His protection away. But Job was...

Job 1

⁸ ...a blameless [KV]: perfect] and upright man.

Therefore, God's withdrawal from Job was not the result of his sinfulness. On what grounds then could the Lord leave Job to suffer at the devil's hands? This is a good question which finds its answer in the following principle. Every true child of God has given his life into God's hands to be sacrificed unto suffering or even death if thereby God's cause will be advanced. This is a privilege, and the Lord will never deny that privilege to any one of His children when the hour comes. That hour did come for Job, and the Lord did not stand in the way of his offering.

Thus there are two reasons for which the Lord will withdraw from a person and leave him to the destroyer:

1. His sinfulness driving off the Spirit of God, and
2. His offering himself as a sacrifice for the cause of truth.

When the Lord came down to personally describe what He had done to Job, He again used the same language as previously noted.

Job 2

³ Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him without cause.

Once again this is not the way we would use those words. Our use of them would convey a meaning quite the opposite from what God intended. It is impossible to obtain God's meaning when He uses these words without the guidance of the Word of God. His Word is the only dictionary which gives the correct definition.

A Comparison

Here is a comparison of the two:

When man destroys...	When God destroys...
He moves toward the victim with deliberate intention to kill.	He moves away from the subject with no intention of killing.
He carries the weapons of death in his hands.	He carries no weapons but lays down control of the destructive powers.
He guides the sword to its target.	There is no personal administration of punishment. Whatever comes upon the sinner is the outworking of the forces of death which the sinner himself has set in motion.

It may take some time to train our minds to carry these double definitions for the same words. Conscious effort must be made until it is just as natural to think of the new definition as of the old. It must become second nature to ascribe one meaning to the words when they describe divine conduct and another when they deal with the human.

Does God Destroy by Abandoning Us?

At this point two questions are apt to arise. The first is as follows:

“What is the essential difference between the direct act of destroying or that of departing to leave the person to die? In both cases it is God’s action which brings about the destruction and therefore, in each case, He is a destroyer.”

This would be true if God’s withdrawal was His own act, but it is not. The fact is that He is driven away. Think of the way in which Christ went to Calvary. He was taken there forcibly. This shows in its clearest terms man’s reaction toward the loving appeals of God. Man drives God away, depriving Him of any possibility of remaining unless He forces His presence, which He will never do.

To answer this question the following illustration is given. It will show the distinct difference between merely withdrawing and being forced to withdraw. It will show that even in His withdrawing, it is not God who is responsible for the disaster which follows.

Let us suppose that there is an atomic power plant located in the midst of a small township of two thousand people. The nature of this power plant is such that an operator must continually be in the control room to monitor everything. Should this post be left unattended for several hours or more, the nuclear fission will run out of control and blossom into a holocaust of destruction.

The situation arises where every technician but one is taken away and the full responsibility rests upon this man. No one else in the whole area has the training, knowledge, or skill to operate this volatile equipment. However, this creates no special problem, for the man is healthy, very conscientious, and does his work with great faithfulness day and night. He is able to take sufficient rest between check times to enable him to carry on for quite a long time.

But into the community enters an archenemy of the technician who determines to run him out of town. To accomplish this he circulates lying reports until a hate complex is generated among the villagers. They begin to persecute the technician with increas-

ing intensity. For a very long time he patiently endures their attacks in the hope that these will subside and the people will realize that if he does forsake his post, it will be disastrous for the village. Finally his patience runs out. He cries out,

“I have had enough of this. I have gone the second and the third mile. These people have shown that they do not deserve to live. I am leaving.”

Whereupon he walks out of the control room and drives far away. Several hours elapse, and he is safe beyond the reach of the explosion. When it occurs, the village and all in it are utterly destroyed.

While it is true that in a certain sense the villagers destroyed themselves, it is equally true that this technician destroyed them for he vindictively left them knowing and desiring that his departure would bring those sure and certain results. This is the picture which many have of God.

The situation faced by this man is the same as that faced by God. 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 exploding in a horror of destruction. He also has an enemy who has generated a hate complex against Him.

While many correctly believe that God destroys by withdrawing, they still make the mistake of believing that He comes to the end of His patience and vindictively withdraws to leave men to perish in the cataclysm of destruction which He desires to happen. If this were the true picture of God, then unquestionably we would have to agree that He is, after all, a destroyer.

But it is not the truth. God is very different from this. Let us retell the story to provide a true picture of His character.

Here is the same technician, the same control room, the same village, and the same enemy stirring up trouble. This time the technician never thinks of leaving. No matter what they do to

him, all he can see is their situation. He knows that if he leaves them, they will all die, so he stays on. His patience is not in question, for he is not thinking of himself at all.

But the persecution becomes more and more intense until the people begin to demand that he go. He protests that if he does, they will perish, and for their sakes, not his own, he desires to stay. But they are blinded by hatred. They are ignorant of their real danger and overconfident of their own ability to handle the station. So they laugh derisively at him and shout for his departure.

With the deepest concern for them he holds on and fulfills his work as faithfully as ever. Every time he thinks of them, a pang of fear and pain sweeps through him, and he considers most earnestly how he can win their love and confidence so that he might preserve them alive. Not one thought is for himself—every thought is for them and their need.

But every day they become more hateful and violent until they invade the control room and angrily shout at him to leave. They jostle him out through the door and down to his car. They put him into it and direct him to drive away. There is no choice left. Slowly he drives out of the village and mounts the first hill beyond. He stops the car, climbs out, and looks back toward the angry group gathered to make sure that he really leaves. He spreads his hands in one last loving appeal. The instant response is agitated signals conveying to him their unchanged demand that he go.

What more can he do? Nothing! Every possible source open to him to save those people is exhausted, and with the heaviest of hearts he turns his car into the distance and is gone forever. Several hours pass, and then the atomic fireball blasts the village and the villagers out of existence.

No one can say that this man is a destroyer. He acted out the character of a saviour only. He could not and did not save them because they would not let him.

This is the true picture of the character of God.

The truth of this is stated in the following:

Prophets and Kings, p. 176:

Christ will never abandon those for whom He has died. We may leave Him and be overwhelmed with temptation, but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life.

In view of the fact that Christ died for all men, this statement is saying that it is impossible for Christ to turn away from anyone. Men turn away from God. God cannot turn away from men. That is impossible.

Why Does God Say That He Destroys?

The second question is this:

“If God does not in fact destroy, then why does He use this word to describe His actions? Does this not tend to make the Scriptures confusing?”

In answer to this it must be said that this is the right word to use in describing God’s actions, for there is a deep and important sense in which it is true that He does destroy. As the evidences gathered here unfold, it will be seen that God comes to man in one role only, that of a Saviour. But the effect of that effort 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. Thus,

God destroys by trying to save.

The more He exerts His saving power, the more men are driven by their rejection of it to destruction. It is in this sense that He destroys.

We want to use an illustration from nature. The sun has two effects on this earth: it will melt the ice and snow and harden the clay. So it is with God’s love. It softens the heart of the repentant

but hardens the hearts of those who resist that love. This principle of truth is spelled out with great clarity in the statement:

The Desire of Ages, p. 322-323:

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.

Often the process is gradual, and almost imperceptible. Light comes to the soul through God's word, through His servants, or by the direct agency of His Spirit; but when one ray of light is disregarded, there is a partial benumbing of the spiritual perceptions, and the second revealing of light is less clearly discerned. So the darkness increases, until it is night in the soul.

Thus it had been with these Jewish leaders. They were convinced that a divine power attended Christ, but in order to resist the truth, they attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. In doing this they deliberately chose deception; they yielded themselves to Satan, and henceforth they were controlled by his power.

Review and Herald, October 21, 1890:

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.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 105:

God does not conceal His truth from men. By their own course of action they make it obscure to themselves.

Hardening Pharaoh's Heart

The outstanding example of this outworking is the history of Pharaoh of Egypt. The Scriptures say,

Exodus 7

³ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.

To harden is to destroy. It is not physical destruction but spiritual. This spiritual destruction is the prelude to the physical which must inevitably follow. The Scriptures plainly say that it was God who did it, and He did, but every reference which throws light on what God did, shows that His action was to send spiritual light and loving appeals to Pharaoh. These were designed to soften and save, not to harden him, but that which was sent to save, destroyed him instead, because he rejected it. Note carefully that it was not the light, but his rejection of it, that hardened and destroyed him.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1099-1100:

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 inquired,

Exodus 5

² Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?

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. The providence of God was revealing His power, and these manifestations, unacknowledged, were the means of hardening Pharaoh's heart against greater light.

Those who exalt their own ideas above the plainly specified will of God, are saying as did Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" 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.

Review and Herald, July 27, 1897:

...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.

Galatians 6

⁷ Whatsoever a man sows, 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,—self.

Review and Herald, August 14, 1900:

The patience and long-suffering of God, which should soften and subdue the soul, has an altogether different influence upon the careless and sinful. It leads them to cast off restraint, and strengthens them in resistance.

The truth laid out in these statements is a very important one. When it is truly appreciated:

- There will be no careless attitude toward the revelations which are brought to us.
- There will be a conscious fear that a terrible mistake could be made by rejecting light which, because it touches our flesh or some preconceived idea and opinion, we desire to reject.
- There will be the dread of having the heart hardened and the spiritual sense benumbed.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 134:

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.

We must clearly understand that the only effort God puts forth is to save. That effort can and does produce two opposite effects. In the hearts and lives of those who accept God's work, it achieves its intended result. It softens, changes, cleanses, and restores. It is unto life eternal.

But in the lives of those who reject that saving ministry, there is a terrible work of destruction going forward. It is a destroying work which breaks down every spiritual response within, hardens the heart in rebellion, intensifies sinful traits, and compels the

Spirit of God to withdraw His presence and His protection. This leaves the individual to the choice he has made; to a position where there is no protection whatsoever from the destructive malice of Satan and sin.

God destroys, but not as man destroys. Every effort on God's part is to save, but it has an altogether different result in the lives of those who reject that saving power. Therefore we can know that, in fact, God is a Saviour and a Saviour only. He destroys by trying to save.

This principle will be further revealed as we study the cases of:

- The Flood,
- Sodom and Gomorrah,
- The Plagues of Egypt,
- The Crucifixion of Christ,
- The Seven Last Plagues, and
- The Final Judgment.

For now it is sufficient to establish the principle that the way in which the Lord destroys is by seeking to save. Thus His way of destroying is entirely different from man's way. Once this is clearly comprehended, it will be possible to view all of God's actions in a new and enlightened way. As a result, the whole of the Scriptures will emerge as one great, harmonious truth.

15. The Supreme Revelation

- There are no contradictions in the Word of God unless it is interpreted according to private or human methods.
- The Bible is its own dictionary and therefore its own interpreter.
- God's ways and man's way are entirely different from each other, and the only way in which God destroys is by trying to save.
- Any destruction is due to man's rejection of God's protection and not the direct action of God.

THE groundwork has now been prepared for studying God's part in various incidents in history. These include the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt, the execution of those who worshiped the golden calf, the stoning of the Sabbath breaker, adulterer, glutton, and Achan, the slaughterer of the Canaanites, the obliteration of Sennacherib's army, and many other such events, right through to the concluding one—the final liquidation in the lake of fire.

The study of these events has left the majority with definite ideas about the character of God. He is viewed as a stern judge who, ruling His kingdom like any earthly potentate, has executed deadly punishments against those who do not obey Him. These concepts are formed because of the human tendency to think of God as being like man.

That such a mistake should be made is quite understandable, for it is natural for men to think in terms of the familiar. The only kind of governments, laws, punishments, and destruction known to men are in the context of this earth. They are familiar with the connection between power and despotism. In their own hearts they long for power so that they can rule over others rather than be ruled by them. They also know that acquired power can only be maintained by the suppression or destruction of those who oppose them.

Thus, when they think of God as being in a position of absolute rulership maintained by infinite power, they cannot conceive of His using this in any other way than they would if they were in the same situation. So natural to men is this way of thinking, that the standard view of God's conduct in the Old Testament is accepted without question. Not even a second thought is given to the matter. To them, God is simply acting in the accepted and expected way for someone situated as He is. How often as I have spoken to people about this, have I heard the response,

“Well, I just never had any occasion to question whether God does or does not destroy. I have read that He does, and that is as far as I have gone into it. After all, He is the Creator, He does have absolute power, and therefore He has the right to destroy us if we do not please Him. It seems as simple as that to me.”

But to others, the Old Testament has presented serious problems. They shudder as they read the stories of Israel's conquests wherein men, women, little girls and boys, together with infants in arms, were ruthlessly put to the sword. That God should command such atrocities projects a frightening rather than attractive picture of Him. It brings but scant comfort to the soul and tends to produce a service of fear rather than love.

In her hospital bed, a woman, sick and despairing, turned to reading the Bible to find rest and comfort. She naturally began at the beginning and soon found herself wading through grim accounts of bloody slaughters. The picture was revolting and disturbing, causing her very shortly to lay the Book aside forever.

Her reaction is understandable when it is considered that her study was without an understanding of what God actually did in these situations. Had she seen God's real character as it was truly revealed in those instances, then love for Him would have developed, and her soul would have been comforted with joy and hope. But tragically it was not so.

Evidence will now be presented to show that the Old Testament is not the place to begin searching out the character of God. Even

the holy angels received a clearer understanding through the life and death of Jesus Christ. Through the demonstration of infinite love and justice given on Calvary, they were able to see God as He really is. In addition, at the cross Satan was revealed in his true light.

The Desire of Ages, p. 758:

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The arch-apostate 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.

The Desire of Ages, p. 761:

[At the cross] 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.

Henceforth his work was restricted. Whatever attitude he might assume, he could no longer await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts, and before them accuse Christ's brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.

When the revelations of God as given by Christ at the cross swept away the haze with which Satan had obscured God's character, the angels were able to go back and review the past in a new light. In the glory streaming from Christ and Calvary, they found the mysteries solved and the dark spots illuminated. Perfect peace filled their souls as they rejoiced in eternal deliverance from the misconceptions of the past.

What was necessary for them is even more so for earthbound travelers seeking the knowledge of God which is life eternal. This search must start with the finest and fullest revelation of Him which is found in the life of Christ and particularly in the marvel at Calvary. Entering the study at this point will quickly impress

the searcher's mind with the necessity of penetrating beyond the commonly held view of the Old Testament God.

For too long the Old Testament revelation of God has appeared to be altogether contradictory to Christ's unfolding of the Father's character in the New Testament. God is seen as a stern, exacting lawmaker who will not permit His will to be thwarted, while Christ is viewed as a tender, benign, loving forgiver of all sins. To God is ascribed one character and to Christ another. This destroys the precious truth that Christ and the Father are one in character, spirit, and work.

The belief is that Christ is the Appeaser of the Father's fury, influencing Him to act contrary to His real character. He supposedly shows mercy when it is not in His heart or nature to do so. The further men are steeped in the darkness of Satan's misrepresentations of the Father and the Son, the more exaggerated this appeasement doctrine becomes. In its worst form it is found among those religionists who offer human sacrifices to the deities to placate their wrath. Consider how such a concept of God is really a result of the human spirit itself.

Strange as it may seem, there is a belief that says the Father and Son are one in character and spirit, and at the same time says that the Father, as revealed in the Old Testament in particular, has a different character from the Son as manifested in the New. Let these two different ideas be brought together, and the honest, thoughtful student will realize that one or the other has to go. Either Christ and the Father are one, or they are not.

Solving this problem is not difficult, for the Scriptures are emphatic that the Father and Son are one in every particular. Jesus testified to this repeatedly.

John 10

³⁰ I and my Father are one.

³⁷ If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me;

³⁸ But if I do, though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in Him.

John 14

⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.

⁸ Philip said to Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.

⁹ Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, Show us the Father?

¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does the works.

¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves.

John 5

¹⁹ Then Jesus answered and said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

By these words, Christ, on His Father's behalf, denied that there was any difference whatsoever between Them in character and work. Both are joined in the most intimate way in dedicated purpose to save the perishing. Christ does not have to appease the Father, for He does exactly what the Father commissions Him to do. Division is Satan's objective, but God's great purpose is to bring all things in heaven and earth into unity, as it is written:

Ephesians 1

⁹ Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in himself,

¹⁰ That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

Evidence was presented earlier that the specific method employed by Satan to drive wedges between God and His creatures was the false presentation of God's character.

The Desire of Ages, p. 21-22:

Sin originated in self-seeking. 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. 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.

The Great Controversy, p. 500:

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.

Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 345-346:

Adam believed the falsehood of Satan, and through his misrepresentation of the character of God, Adam's life was changed and marred. He disobeyed the commandment of God, and did the very thing the Lord told him not to do. Through disobedience Adam fell; but had he endured the test, and been loyal to God, the floodgates of woe would not have been opened upon our world.

Through belief 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.

Satan's method of destroying the unity of the universe can only be countered by the restoration of the truth about God. That character was manifested in all God's dealings with both loyal and rebellious individuals and nations between the fall and the first ad-

vent, but men, influenced and blinded by Satan, were not able to see the verities offered there.

Therefore, an incontrovertible revelation of God's character had to be supplied to counteract Satan's lies and make clear the real message of the Old Testament. There was only one Being who could give such a demonstration, and that was Christ.

Hebrews 1

³ [He is] the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person.

The Desire of Ages, p. 664:

The Saviour was deeply anxious for His disciples to understand for what purpose His divinity was united to humanity. He came to the world to display the glory [character] of God, that man might be uplifted by its restoring power.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 469:

Christ came to the earth to reveal to men the character of His Father, and His life was filled with deeds of divine tenderness and compassion.

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 49:

...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 representation of the character of the law of God. In His life it is made manifest that heaven-born love, Christlike principles, underlie the laws of eternal rectitude.

So total is the revelation of God's character as given by Christ that:

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 286:

All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son.

There is not a single reason for doubting the veracity of this statement. Jesus confirmed the truth of it in His words to Philip,

John 14

⁹ Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, Show us the Father?

Jesus is the Word of God. This is a most important and significant title whereby we are informed of Christ's special mission to mankind. It is a serious mistake to limit Christ's role to that of a sacrifice by which the penalty of sin was paid. He certainly came to pay that ransom, and this aspect of His work must never be minimized or disparaged.

Another important aspect is that He came to prove that anyone who will permit Him to take away the old nature and put the divine nature in its place, can by living faith keep all the commandments to perfection.

But, great and essential as those works are, they are not sufficient to end the great controversy without the revelation of God's righteous character to the point where Satan's lies are shown for what they are.

As a description of this work, the title, "The Word of God," is most appropriate. Falling from the lips of one who is entirely honest and truthful, words are an exact expression of the thinking and character of the speaker. Upon this earth, Jesus Christ was the Word of God, that is, the Father revealed His character in Christ, and everything Christ spoke gave a perfect representation of the Father.

The Desire of Ages, p. 19:

He was the Word of God,—God's thought made audible.

Therefore, He declared of His mission,

John 14

¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does the works.

John 8

²⁸ Then Jesus said to them, When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father taught me, I speak these things.

Therefore, great care should be taken to understand this aspect of Christ's mission. The truth that Jesus was the very expression of the thought and character of God should hold so firm a place in the mind, that no matter what contradictory pictures of God may be presented, the only acceptable ones are those in harmony with Christ's representations of God.

Already mentioned is the apparent difference between the image of God as seen through the history of the Old Testament, and Christ's revelation of Him. Many are convinced that they are faced with a choice of which picture of God they will accept, but, if the principle laid down above is grasped and followed, it will be seen that the contradictory view of God as gained from the incorrect understanding of the Old Testament, must be rejected. This is because it does not agree with the revelation of God as given by Jesus Christ. His presentation of God's character is the clearest, the most convincing, and the most easily understood.

In other words, those who wish to know what God is like, how He relates himself to the sinner and to the righteous, have only to look at God in the face of Jesus Christ. Any ideas about God which find no reflection in Christ's life and teachings must be unhesitatingly rejected as error. This can only mean that belief cannot be retained in both the popular view of God and Christ's presentation of Him. One or the other has to go.

God is utterly consistent and, therefore, His Word is consistent with itself. It cannot and certainly does not present a concept in one place and the opposite in another. This cannot be. Every searcher for truth must be convinced of this as a provision motivating him to reject any tendency to accept contradictory views of Scripture, while he searches with earnest perseverance for biblical solutions which will bring everything into perfect harmony.

In the New Testament Christ gave us the true picture of God. Let that truth be forever and without question established in the mind. As surely as the Lord is consistent, then the Old Testament presentation of Him must coincide with the New. The student must not rest until the two are harmonized.

In working to achieve that harmony, begin where the truth is clearest. This means that the starting point must be the life of Christ—not the history of the Old Testament. For four thousand years, both human and angelic minds failed to see the revelation of himself which the Lord had sought to transmit throughout all His dealings, therefore He sent Christ as a perfect, living demonstration.

This does not mean that God's work in the Old Testament was deficient. Christ's demonstration became necessary because of the blindness and prejudice of men's darkened minds and the sheer subtlety of Satan. It is much easier to spread a lie than to establish the truth. Raising a doubt or insinuating an evil motive is a simple thing compared to the vindication of a righteous character.

Christ came, then, to settle forever the question of God's character. He did it by bringing that which had been distant and obscure into the closest contact with the human race. So intimate is the proximity of that spotless life, that it is impossible to successfully deny it. Christ possessed nothing else than impeccable righteousness in which is embodied all that is most precious and desirable for any of His created beings. It would be impossible to give a more convincing argument than that. What Christ came to accomplish, He was pre-eminently successful in doing. The question of what God is in character, is forever settled.

To appreciate the full value of Christ's matchless presentation of God's character, it is necessary to recognize how all-encompassing it was.

- Did Christ come to present a partial view of God?

- Was it simply a shifting of emphasis?
- Did God, feeling that He had most satisfactorily convinced men in the Old Testament of the sterner and uncompromising side of His nature, leave Christ to emphasize the qualities of love, forgiveness, and mercy?

Such a view is adopted by many as a solution to what they feel would otherwise be a contradiction between the messages of the Old and New Testaments, but it is not the message of the Scriptures themselves. Therein it is asserted that Christ's manifestation of the Father was complete. It leaves nothing more to be shown.

This is not saying that everything about God's character can be understood in one contact with the Saviour, for it will take eternity to see all that Christ came to tell. What must be recognized and accepted as truth is that the revelation of God in the face of Christ is complete. Therefore it is written:

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 826:

All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son.

This statement is specific, comprehensive, and accurate. It leaves no space for the supposition that Christ revealed only a certain aspect of God's character or even the larger part of it. It does not admit to the notion that Christ's ministry provided a further stage in this revelation with final unfoldings to be given in the future.

Rather, it confirms in language so simple that no doubt is left as to its meaning. Christ came to give a manifestation of God so complete that there is nothing more which can be shown. Nothing was overlooked or omitted. There is no inquiry about God which can be raised except it be answered in the life and teachings of the Saviour. The work is complete. It has all been unfolded.

All that remains is for the eager, spiritual child of God through earnest study and prayer to come into possession of this richest

of all treasures. Some may counter that eternal life is the richest of treasures. This is true and in its truth it establishes this point, for the knowledge of God is eternal life.

John 17

³ And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Christ himself declared the totality of His revelation of His Father.

John 5

¹⁹ Then Jesus answered and said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

This Scripture is a key in understanding Christ's ministry as the Word of the living God. Let the precious truths contained therein be examined with thorough care. Therefore, as certainly as His life, so filled with activity, contained nothing done of himself or from himself, so all that He did was of God and from God. It was the Father who was acting out His life and character through the medium of His beloved Son. Therefore, in Christ's every act, we see God at work and know thereby exactly what the Father does in relation to His subjects, be they sinful or righteous. This is confirmed in Christ's words,

John 5

¹⁹ For whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

The witness of Christ here is not simply in these terms, "what things He does," but "whatever He does." The addition of this word means that everything the Father does is included. This is a word which carries the idea of completeness, of infinitude. Therefore Christ is attesting that everything the Father does, without any exceptions, the Son does likewise.

The student must not fail to observe the insertion of the words, "in like manner." It adds significant meaning to the Saviour's message. It is important that we believe that Christ did upon this

earth, everything the Father did. It is equally essential for us to know that He did these things in like manner as the Father did. Therefore, the revelation of God's character as given by Christ was not only complete, it was a facsimile. If the Father himself had come down, the principles and character of each would have been absolutely identical.

In a further attempt to argue that the revelation of God by Christ was incomplete, it may be claimed that during the earthly interval, Christ did not have a full knowledge of the works of God. Such an argument is stifled in the very next verse where Christ claimed complete knowledge of the ways and works of God.

John 5

²⁰ For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

What Christ says, we believe, for He is the Truth. By His testimony then we know that everything the Father does, the Son did in the same way precisely, and, inasmuch as there was nothing of His ways which the Father did not reveal to the Son, then that revelation is complete.

What a challenge this is to the old ideas about God. Every idea in which God is seen as the destroyer of those who refuse His offers of mercy, can be sustained only if we find Christ doing the same thing. What citadels of error must collapse before the onslaught of this impregnable truth! What an entirely new and glorious structure of living verities about the Father must now arise from the wreckage of those edifices of lies!

Consider the time-honored theories about God. He is viewed as One who initially seeks the salvation of His creatures. From His position of supreme authority He calls upon men to repent of their sins and obey His will. He demonstrates patience while men toy with His appeals, but the time comes when that patience is exhausted. Then He arises to perform:

Isaiah 28

²¹ ...His strange act.

With terrifying power, wielded in His own hands, He wipes the rebellious from the face of the earth, thus demonstrating that He is not a God to be scorned. He thus asserts His will by the naked use of raw power, convincing men that they must obey Him or perish. This is the view of the traditionalist.

Is this what God does? Is this a true picture of His patterns of behavior? It is important to know the answer, for, if it is not correct, then it is a lying representation of God designed by the devil to separate us from Him and to effect our destruction. Certainly it is the time-honored view of God and His ways, so that, if this were the determining factor, it would be the truth. But, the fact that a belief is hoary with the dignity of age and majority acceptance, does not make it correct.

There is another and altogether reliable means of testing these concepts. That proof is offered in the life of Christ. He came to show us exactly how God behaves in any situation. Therefore, if this long-standing and popular concept of God is correct, it is certain that it will be supported by Christ's doing the same thing in the same way.

But where can this pattern of behavior be found in His life upon this earth? It cannot be found. Search as exhaustively as possible. Investigate every word and act.

- Listen to His inspired utterances.
- See Him dealing with those who had rejected His last appeals of mercy.
- Behold Him receiving abuse and mockery in return for love and mercy.

Never once can any suggestion be found of His even entertaining an idea of doing as men have understood God to do. Not even by a thought did He enter into any work whereby He would use the mighty power available to Him to destroy the impenitent.

Men have long seen God as having two faces. One of these is the forgiving, merciful face which He turns toward man during the period of pleading for their repentance, while the other is the face of thunder as He is about to destroy him. Christ exhibited no such duality. Throughout His life only one role was his—that of 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, and to save.

Acts 10

³⁸ ...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him.

Welfare Ministry, p. 53-54:

Christ stood at the head of humanity in the garb of humanity. So full of sympathy and love was His attitude that the poorest was not afraid to come to Him. 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....

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.

Welfare Ministry, p. 56:

Constantly He went about doing good. By the good He accomplished, by His loving words and kindly deeds, He interpreted the gospel to men.

Welfare Ministry, p. 57:

Just as we trace the pathway of a stream of water by the line of living green it produces, so Christ could be seen in the deeds of mercy that marked His pathway at every step. Wherever He went, health sprang up, and happiness followed wherever He passed. The blind and deaf rejoiced in His presence. His words to the ignorant opened to them a fountain of life. He dispensed His blessings abundantly and continuously. They were the garnered treasures of eternity, given in Christ, the Lord's rich gift to man.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 416-417:

Christ, the outshining of the Father's glory, came to the world as its light. He came to represent God to men, and of Him it is written that He was anointed "with the Holy Ghost and with power," and "went about doing good."

This statement is very much to the point declaring that Christ came to this earth to represent God to man and then telling us that in order to do that, He went about doing good. 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, together with Christ, is the great Healer, Restorer, Saviour, and Friend of all mankind. It is not His way to destroy them. They are destroyed only when they take themselves out of His care and beyond the limits of His circle of protection.

Early Writings, p. 160:

The life of Christ was filled with words and acts of benevolence, sympathy, and love.

So it was. It was not partly, but overflowing filled with these things so that there was space for nothing else but them. The truth of the statements just quoted can be verified by studying the inspired records of His life. Such a study will fail to bring to light a single act of destruction or the administration of any punishment.

Some may raise the objection that Christ cursed and destroyed the barren fig tree and that He drove the money changers out of the temple on two occasions by using a whip. Both of these events will be studied in the next chapter. The presentation of Scriptural evidences will show that the wasting of the fig tree was not an act of destruction on Christ's part. It will be shown that He related himself to it exactly as He does to every sinner, by permitting His protection and life to be withdrawn. Likewise, it will

THE LIFE OF CHRIST



OLD TESTAMENT

The Flood
 Plagues on Egypt
 Sodom and Gomorrah
 Korah and Abiram
 Slaughter at the Golden Calf
 Wars of Israel
 Etc.

NEW TESTAMENT

Fall of Jerusalem
 Wars
 Seven Last Plagues
 Earthquakes
 Disasters
 Pestilences
 Final Fire

Only in the light shining from the life of Jesus Christ is it possible to understand what God did in the past, and will do in the future. Every concept about God which is not supported by Christ's life and teaching is false.

be shown that it was not by personal, physical force that He was successful in clearing the temple of the money changers.

These are the only events which could be offered as a possible exception to the rule of Christ's ministry. When it is successfully shown that they are not an exception, then it will be recognized that Christ did only good while upon this earth. He came as a Saviour only.

John 3

¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

This is the great and thrilling message from the life of Christ. It testifies that throughout all the ages before He came, men held to a serious misconception of God's character. Christ had come to dispel that error, and by acting out the ways and works of His Father, He declares,

“Here is the correct view of my Father. This is what you are to believe that He is and does.”

At this point, some will be thinking that if they accept Christ's life as the full and complete picture of what God is, then how will they ever understand God's actions in the Old Testament? Let all such be earnestly encouraged to take hold of Christ's words by faith. Jesus said that He had come to do the works of His Father. He has told us that to see Him is to see the Father. Therefore, faith in those words assures us that the picture of the Father which Christ came to give is the truth.

Faith then comforts us with the happy thought that there is a better and more beautiful interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures than we have had in the past. Thus we are filled with eager anticipation as we return to the study of events prior to the first advent Christ.

In the following chapters of this book many of the great events of that period will be re-examined. To the glad surprise of many

of our readers, it will be seen that God is a Saviour and a Saviour only.



16. Urged to Destroy

GOD provided in Christ's life and teachings the complete and final means whereby every theory about Him can be tested. By this means, every interpretation of God's behavior can be infallibly categorized as true or false. Thus, for instance, the idea that God destroys those who defy Him, is classified as erroneous.

If faith can take firm hold upon the principle that Christ is the perfect and incontrovertible expression of all that God is, then the groundwork has been thoroughly laid for revising the common interpretations of the Old Testament stories. Confidence will be established in the truth that there is a different version showing what God actually did in those terrible situations.

Rejection by the Samaritans

To strengthen that confidence and expectation, further consideration will now be given to the testimony of Jesus. When upon this earth, He showed no disposition to reach out in acts of punishment and destruction. This was not because He had no opportunity or power to do so. There was no lack of occasion for the administration of punishment and destruction, for He was continually confronted with those who despised His offers of salvation. These rejecters of His mercy not only refused to obey Him, but actually worked in open rebellion against Him.

More than this, He was urged to raise His hand and rain fire upon those who had turned against Him.

Luke 9

⁵¹ Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face.

⁵² And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.

⁵³ But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.

⁵⁴ And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?

⁵⁵ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.

⁵⁶ And they went to another village.

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 an obligation. To refuse this indicates rejection of the worst kind. If ever, from the human point of view, a sin needed to be punished to teach a lesson of warning to all others, then this was it.

The Desire of Ages, p. 487:

James and John, Christ's messengers, were greatly annoyed at the insult shown to their Lord. They were filled with indignation because He had been so rudely treated by the Samaritans whom He was honoring by His presence. They had recently been with Him on the mount of transfiguration, and had seen Him glorified by God, and honored by Moses and Elijah. This manifest dishonor on the part of the Samaritans, should not, they thought, be passed over without marked punishment.

Coming to Christ, they reported to Him the words of the people, telling Him that they had even refused to give Him a night's lodging. They thought that a grievous wrong had been done Him, and seeing Mount Carmel in the distance, where Elijah had slain the false prophets, they said,

Luke 9

⁵⁴ Will You that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did?

Those men were familiar with Old Testament history and thought they understood quite well the way in which God had dealt with similar offenses in the past. Therefore they believed that they were asking Christ to do just what they were sure God would have done under the same circumstances. Their misunder-

standing of God's character led them to expect Christ to endorse their suggestion.

Like millions before and since, those men had a concept of God and His kingdom which differed in no way from earthly kings and their kingdoms. For this reason they held to the expectation that Christ would establish a kingdom by using force. So firmly entrenched was this idea, that Christ's efforts to disillusion them proved fruitless. They came to the last Passover making no provision whatsoever for Christ's rejection, a crown of thorns, and a crucifixion.

In order to understand the Samaritan incident, it is important to recognize that the apostles did have a very wrong concept of God's character and that their request to Jesus was made in harmony with that erroneous idea. They looked upon God as a majestic Being of judgment and destruction who would miss no opportunity of asserting His authority by making an example of the impenitent.

They believed that Christ was on the journey to His coronation in Jerusalem so that if there was ever a time when men should have a signal lesson of the peril of withholding homage, then this was that time. Would not many lives be saved later if a few were sacrificed now?

If the disciples had been correct in their assessment of God's character; if they correctly understood that character from the Old Testament, then Christ would have called down fire from heaven then and there since He does only what the Father does. This would have been a splendid opportunity for Christ to show forth the character of God as the executioner of those who rebel against Him, and He would have made the most of the occasion.

But Christ would not even consider such a thing. Instead, He rebuked the disciples.

The Desire of Ages, p. 487:

They were surprised to see that Jesus was pained by their words, and still more surprised as His rebuke fell upon their ears,

Luke 9

⁵⁵ You know not what manner of spirit you are of.

⁵⁶ For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

And He went to another village.

Christ did not use this opportunity to show forth the Father as an executioner because that is not God's character. But this does not mean that He missed the chance to reveal the Father. Far from it. This was a golden opportunity to do so, and He made the most of it. He instructed His followers that the course they proposed sprang from a spirit foreign both to Him and His Father. Such a spirit and its fruit, not being found in the divine nature, could only find its source in Satan's heart. It was his way, not God's, to destroy those who failed to serve him.

Having denied identification with that spirit, Christ reiterated what He had come to do. Close attention should be paid to what He said, with care taken not to read into it what He did not say. Explicitly He declared,

Luke 9

⁵⁶ For the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.

He did *not* say,

“The Son of man is come to save all who will be saved and then to destroy the remainder.”

But this is what the Saviour would have said if the standard view of God's ways is correct. Furthermore, He would have been obliged to demonstrate the veracity of His words by destroying the Samaritans. But He neither spoke such words nor performed such actions. Instead, with great plainness He said,

⁵⁶ The Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives...

Men set out to achieve a noble goal with the best of intentions and good principles, only to find that they did not realize the complications which would arise. Too often they then compromise their principles and modify their plans to meet the unexpected. It is not so with God. At the outset He is fully aware of every difficulty that will develop. In the fullness of that foreknowledge, He outlines the course He will pursue. With infallible consistency thereafter, He adheres to His stated principles. No pressure can be mounted sufficient to cause the least deviation.

When Christ said that He did not come to destroy men's lives, we can be assured of the absolute reliability of those words. Therefore, we can know that He did not destroy when He came. Further, inasmuch as He did only what the Father did, then we can know that the Father does not come to destroy us. Christ came only to save. Likewise, the Father comes to us as a Saviour and a Saviour only.

The Desire of Ages, p. 487:

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. Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederate with evil angels bring suffering upon their fellow men, in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. He can admit no rival in the soul, nor accept of partial service; but He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love.

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.

The Samaritans did not appreciate Christ's work and they certainly acted contrary to His ideas. Had He shown the least disposition to hurt or destroy them, He would have given the strongest evidence that He possessed the spirit of Satan. It was because He did not possess that spirit that He did not show any such disposi-

tion. If we project this principle back to the Father's behavior, the same conclusions must be drawn. Let the popular concept of God's character be thus tested.

It is true that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah did not appreciate the works of God and they certainly acted contrary to His ideas. The longer they lived, the greater the depths of apostasy to which they descended. In the meantime they resisted willfully and stubbornly every outreach of God to bring them back into harmony with His ideas. Consequently, it is believed that God destroyed them with fire. If this is true, then, in the light of the statement quoted above, God has provided convincing evidence that He is actuated by the spirit of the devil. There is no other conclusion which can be drawn.

When the implications of the popular belief stand thus exposed, it is evident that there is the need for another better informed and more spiritual investigation of God's performance in that holocaust. It is certain that God does not possess the spirit of Satan. Therefore, it is equally certain that He does not hurt or destroy those who do not appreciate His work and act contrary to His ideas.

The position Christ took contrary to that of His apostles in the matter of the Samaritans, is a valuable revelation of His utter refusal to be involved in any kind of punitive work of destruction. He made it quite clear that such ways had no place in His life and therefore no place in the life of His Father. The life of Christ utterly denies the idea that God destroys anyone for any reason.

The Cursing of the Fig Tree

It is now time to look at those two instances mentioned in the previous chapter which, on the surface, seem to provide evidence that Christ did use force to destroy. They are the cursing of the fig tree and the expelling of the desecrators from the temple precincts. Let the case of the wasted fig tree be considered first.

This occurred very late in Christ's ministry. A few days before the last Passover He had ridden triumphantly into Jerusalem. This was an act of final appeal to the Jewish leaders, their rejection of which placed them beyond any further hope of deliverance. He retired to Bethany where he spent the entire night in prayer and the next morning returned to the temple.

The Desire of Ages, p. 581-582:

On the way He passed a fig orchard. He was hungry,

Mark 11

¹³ 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; and on the highlands about Jerusalem it might truly be said, "The time of figs was not yet." 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.

¹⁴ No man eat fruit of you 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.

²¹ Master, [said Peter,] behold, the fig tree which You cursed is withered away.

Review and Herald, February 25, 1902:

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. God help His people to make an application of this lesson while there is still time.

The strong words in these statements are:

...uttered against it a withering curse,

–and,

...under the curse of an offended God.

Now, pause and ponder what kind of picture these words call before your mind. Practically anyone will find that this is what they see. The unabated spirit of rejection and apostasy on the part of the children of Israel had brought God to the point where He became personally offended and infuriated. So He cursed the fig tree whose pretentious foliage was a symbol of the Jew's hypocrisy. This act of cursing is seen as a direct sending forth of a stream of death from God to the tree. In other words, God appears as one who specifically decides what the fate of the tree will be and then personally administers this judgment on the tree.

The Scriptures emphasize that God's ways are different from the ways of men. So we need to take a deeper look at what Christ really did there at the fig tree, for we cannot be satisfied with the popular view. The disciples, even though they expected a destroying Messiah, were surprised at Christ behavior.

The Desire of Ages, p. 582:

Christ's act in cursing the fig tree had astonished the disciples. 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,

Luke 9

⁵⁶ The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

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. What was its purpose? they questioned.

They were not then able to see and understand these things. The light on this was to shine through for them later, but we are blessed with words of inspiration beyond that which they had, so

we are without excuse if we do not understand. The truth of what Christ did is spelled out in the following statement.

The Desire of Ages, p. 582-583:

Micah 7

¹⁸ [God] delights in mercy.

Ezekiel 33

¹¹ As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

To Him the work of destruction and denunciation of judgment is a “strange work.” *Isaiah* 28:21. But 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. That 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.

The Jews stood forth distinct from all other nations, professing allegiance to God. They had been specially favored by Him, and they laid claim to righteousness above every other people. But they were corrupted by the love of the world and the greed of gain. They boasted of their knowledge, but they were ignorant of the requirements of God, and were full of hypocrisy. Like the barren tree, they spread their pretentious branches aloft, luxuriant in appearance, and beautiful to the eye, but they yielded “nothing but leaves.” The Jewish religion, with its magnificent temple, its sacred altars, its mitered priests and impressive ceremonies, was indeed fair in outward appearance, but humility, love, and benevolence were lacking.

All the trees in the fig orchard were destitute of fruit; but the leafless trees raised no expectation, and caused no disappointment. By these trees the Gentiles were represented. They were as destitute as were the Jews of godliness; but they had not professed to serve God. They made no boastful pretensions to goodness. They were blind to the works and ways of God. With them the time of figs was not yet. They were still waiting for a day which would bring them light and hope. The Jews, who had re-

ceived greater blessings from God, were held accountable for their abuse of these gifts. The privileges of which they boasted only increased their guilt.

Jesus had come to the fig tree hungry, to find food. So He had come to Israel, hungering to find in them the fruits of righteousness. He had lavished on them His gifts, that they might bear fruit for the blessing of the world. Every opportunity and privilege had been granted them, and in return He sought their sympathy and co-operation in His work of grace. He longed to see in them self-sacrifice and compassion, zeal for God, and a deep yearning of soul for the salvation of their fellow men.

Had they kept the law of God, they would have done the same unselfish work that Christ did. But love to God and man was eclipsed by pride and self-sufficiency. They brought ruin upon themselves by refusing to minister to others. The treasures of truth which God had committed to them, they did not give to the world. In the barren tree they might read both their sin and its punishment. Withered beneath the Saviour's curse, standing forth sere and blasted, dried up by the roots, 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.

Hosea 13

⁹ O Israel, [the Lord says,] you have destroyed yourself.

Christ's act was a prophecy. He was declaring in advance just what was going to happen. Jesus expressed what He foresaw, not that which He personally would do. Christ foresaw that the fig tree would wither. Likewise he foresaw that the Jewish nation with its headquarters Jerusalem would perish. Jesus said in fact,

John 14

²⁹ And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe.¹⁰

What took place in the fulfillment is very clear. As already noted from *The Great Controversy*, p. 35-36, God did not person-

¹⁰ The great prophetic truths may be studied in detail in *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. I-IV, by LeRoy Edwin Froom.

ally decree the nature of the punishment which should and did befall the Israelites. 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. It proved in this case to be the enraged Romans who, freed of any restriction imposed by God's presence, were able to wreak their vengeance upon the shelterless Jews.

Only a fig tree that bears fruit is alive.



In order then for Christ to reveal in the prophecy what God would do in its fulfillment, He must do the same in the prophecy. Therefore, Christ simply withdrew His presence from the tree leaving it exposed to whatever blight or other destructive force was waiting to consume it.

There is the tendency to think that somehow such a destructive force was conveniently and timely placed so as to satisfy Christ's illustrative purposes when He withdrew His protective power from the tree. But we do not sufficiently appreciate the fact that a thousand unseen dangers are lurking over us and all of nature every moment of the day. It does not matter from what point or quarter the Lord withdraws His protection. Destruction would come flooding in, in some form or the other. Were we better aware of this, we would maintain toward God a spirit of gratitude and dependence far in excess of that which we now display.

In this particular case the attack came at the roots of the tree, for the Scriptures expressly say,

Mark 11

²⁰ Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

Thus the evidence is clear for those who will dig a little deeper, that Christ did not strike the tree any more than He struck the Jews in the fall of Jerusalem when the prophecy was fulfilled. Thus is removed any possible reference to this event as an example of Christ using force or engaging in an act of destruction.

Cleansing the Temple

Let an examination now be made of the driving out of the money changers and traffickers in the courtyard of the temple. Once again, the casual and superficial view of this incident is that Jesus drove these men out by force, but a careful study reveals another picture altogether. Here is the Scripture record of it:

John 2

¹³ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,

¹⁴ And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money-changers doing business.

¹⁵ When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned the tables.

¹⁶ And He said to those who sold doves, Take these things away!
Do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise!

¹⁷ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for
your house has eaten me up.

The natural human tendency is to interpret the words, "He drove them out," in the same way as they would be understood if used to describe sinful human behavior. No greater mistake could be made, for the ways of God as revealed in Christ's life are so different from the ways of sinful men. Christ drove them out, it is true, but not as man would by dependence on physical power.

The Desire of Ages, p. 759:

Compelling power is found only under Satan's government.
The Lord's principles are not of this order.

Therefore, compelling power or the use of physical force to achieve obedience is never found under God's government. Inasmuch then as Christ was fully under God's government and was the perfect expression of that government, then no physical force was ever used by Him to achieve obedience. Therefore, Christ did not drive those men out as other men would drive them out. He did not do this by physical force at all.

He was only one man pitted against a considerable number of wily, hardened opponents. How many there were, we are not told, but they were men whose souls were calloused with the sinful traffic of extortion. They were not afraid of resorting to physical violence to preserve their treasured gains. An attempt by Christ to expel them by physical power would have meant to descend to their level of fighting. Then how did He do it?

It was not the people, but sin that Christ wanted to drive out of the temple. This action had the sole purpose to save the people. Those men knew that He was reading the closely guarded secrets of their lives. They were conscious that His eye was seeing beneath the pretentious garments of righteousness with which they had sought to cover the sickness of their sin-diseased souls. Such the sinner cannot stand.

Now he must make a decision: either the sinner separates from sin and casts himself into the arms of Jesus or he flees from the all-searching glance. If he clings to sin, one compelling desire fills him. He flees in abject terror from the presence of the Righteous One. This they did, and sinners will do this again when the Saviour returns in the clouds of heaven. The truth of this is laid out in these words:

The Desire of Ages, p. 162:

And why did the priests flee from the temple? Why did they not stand their ground? He who commanded them to 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?

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. At the word of command they realized, as they had never realized before, their true position as hypocrites and robbers. 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.

It was the awful power of guilt within them that drove those men from the presence of Christ. They could not endure it. No man ever can. They will always flee in terror from the presence of the Almighty Judge of the earth. 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.

On the other hand will those who separate from sin know, that Jesus is only a Savior. They will not flee from His presence. This was the case also in the cleansing of the temple.

The Desire of Ages, p. 163:

When they (rulers, priests, merchants and money-changers) fled, the poor remained behind; and these were now looking to Jesus, whose countenance expressed His love and sympathy. With tears in His eyes, He said to the trembling ones around Him: "Fear not; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me. For this cause came I into the world."

The people pressed into Christ's presence with urgent, pitiful appeals: "Master, bless me." His ear heard every cry...

Thus we need have no misgivings about the perfection of the revelation of God in Christ. Throughout His life Christ made no concessions whatsoever to the principles of Satan's character. Flawlessly He showed that...

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.

He came to reveal God as a Saviour and a Saviour only, and He did this to perfection. There is not a single instance in Christ's life in which any other character but this is shown. That life shows how erroneous is the long-held view that God does destroy the finally impenitent. He does not do this but rather leaves them to their own desires. This means that they stand without protection from the onslaught of the grim reaper.

If every person in the world could see God in Christ and understand that Christ gave a full and undimmed revelation of the Father; if they could know that...

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 286:

All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son,

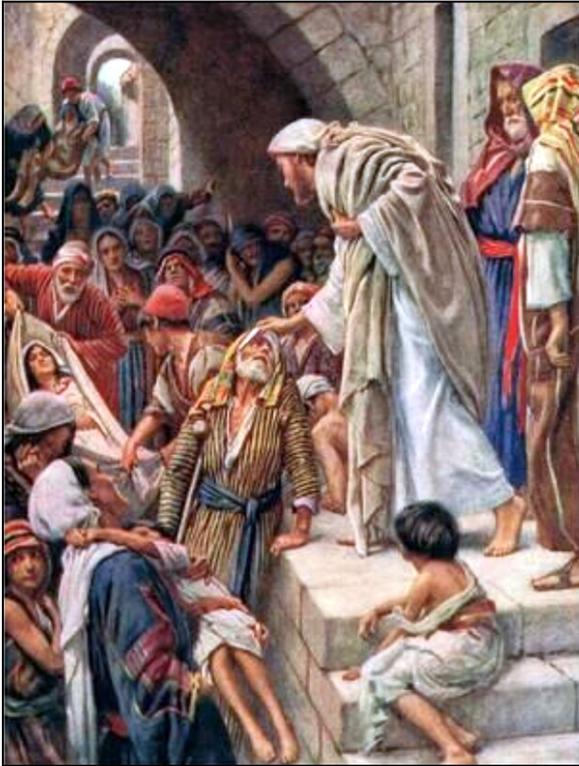
—then they would reject every concept which sees God as One who rises up and destroys those who are disobedient. They would see Him only as a Saviour, who, while not condoning sin, will not

destroy those who cherish it, but will accept their freedom to choose their own way and perish.

May the Lord open the eyes of every reader to see God as He is to be seen in the face of Jesus Christ,

The Desire of Ages, p. 19:

...the Word of God,—God’s thought made audible.



17. Magnifying the Law

THESE is a direct and inseparable connection between Christ's role as the Revelator of the Father's character and His role as the Magnifier of the Father's law. We have already considered Christ's statements that He came to show men the Eternal One as He really is. We now want to consider a text showing Christ's work regarding the law.

Isaiah 42

²¹ The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness sake; He will magnify the law and make it honorable.

God's Law = God's Character

It would be a serious mistake to think of magnifying the law as being a separate and different work from that of the unfolding of God's character.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 315:

His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character.

Thus is made plain the truth that the character of God is directly and accurately expressed in His law. To see one is to see the other. This means that the characters of God, Christ, and the law are identical. Between them there is no difference.

We think of God as a Being of living power with infinite possibilities for exercising His will. But we tend to see the law as being a much lesser thing, merely the spoken will of the supreme ruler and certainly not something which is the expression of himself. We must re-educate our thinking away from such ideas. The law of God is to have its correct place in the thinking of those through whom the Lord will finish His work. They are to understand that the law of God is as infinite and wonderful as himself.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 52:

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. 63:

The broken law of God demanded the life of the sinner. In all the universe there was but One who could, in behalf of man, satisfy its claims. Since the divine law is as sacred as God himself, only One equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven.

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 54:

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.

Therefore, to place God on a level of infinite greatness while relegating the law to a lesser plane, is to hold a position of serious error. They must be thought of as being one in holiness and greatness. Likewise, when we say that Jesus came to reveal the Father, we are actually saying that He came to magnify the law. These are not two separate tasks to be accomplished in turn or even in concert. They are one and the same work.

*The revealing of God's character
is the magnification of the law.*

The Law in the Final Conflict

Great stress has been placed upon the truth that the last conflict will be over the law of God. This emphasis has not been overdone. Despite the stress placed upon this point, there has not yet been conveyed the real significance of the place of the law in that final struggle.

Generally it is thought that the issue will simply be proving that the seventh day is the Sabbath, with the corresponding exposure of Sunday as being the day of the man of sin. But the issues will go vastly deeper than that. It is true that Sabbath versus Sun-

day will be the focal point of the issue, but not at a merely technical level. Furthermore, the whole of the law will be contested, not just one point of it.

The deep spiritual meanings of the law will be explored and presented. Because the law is the very expression of the righteousness or character of God, the issue will involve the question of how God keeps that law. Does He punish and kill or not? The time will have come for the final settlement of the questions about the law and the character of God.

The Great Controversy, p. 582:

From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven, it has been Satan's purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator; 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. He that offends "in one point," manifests contempt for the whole law; his influence and example are on the side of transgression; he becomes "guilty of all."

In seeking to cast contempt upon the divine statutes, Satan has perverted the doctrines of the Bible, and errors have thus become incorporated into the faith of thousands who profess to believe the Scriptures. 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.

If every believer in the Word of God could understand how deep and extensive this controversy over God's character and law will be, he would make a far more thorough and diligent preparation for taking his place in that final and finishing battle.

But why should there be a controversy over the law of God? Surely the declarations of Scripture are clear enough! Surely there is need for nothing more than to prove that the ten commandments mean just what they say! The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, not the first or any other. Such words are clear beyond question. In fact they are so clear that each of the Sunday-keeping churches has admitted that the seventh day is the divinely designated day of worship.

Even though the declarations of the law are clear and plain, and despite the admission of the churches that the seventh day is the Sabbath of God, they still observe the counterfeit day of rest and think they justify themselves in doing so from the Scriptures. In other words, while they admit that the law says the seventh day is the Sabbath, they declare that the words mean other than what they say. First there are the words, then there is their magnification of those words. They live by the latter, not the former.

Exactly as men have provided a distorted magnification of the Sabbath commandment for themselves, so they have for the others. Surprising as it may seem, the simple commandments,

Exodus 20

¹⁵ You shall not steal,

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness,

—and,

¹³ You shall not kill,

—have one meaning in the Bible, and another in the philosophy of man. This erroneous concept has its origin in Satan who has systematically inculcated it into human minds for the express purpose of undermining faith in the law and thereby fostering disobedience to it.

It was to correct this distorted understanding of God's law that Christ came to magnify the law and to make it honorable. To magnify is to enlarge so that details previously obscure and difficult may be seen with unmistakable clarity.

Take a drop of water and gaze at it with the naked eye. There is little to be seen. But place it beneath the lens of a high-powered microscope, and wonders are revealed which were not even imagined previously. Any argument as to what is contained in that particular water droplet is settled by the magnification provided by the instrument.

So, in the Old Testament, there is found the direct word of God which says,

Exodus 20

¹³ You shall not kill,

¹⁵ You shall not steal,

—and,

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness.

Of those words there are two separate and opposing magnifications. There is the one provided by Satan and generally accepted by man. It is a magnification as misshapen as that produced by a distorted lens. No one can possibly understand the real truth of the law and character of God through this medium.

Then there is another magnification as provided by Jesus Christ. This magnification is so powerful that every detail is brought to view leaving no remaining questions. It brings us to the position where:

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 286:

All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son.

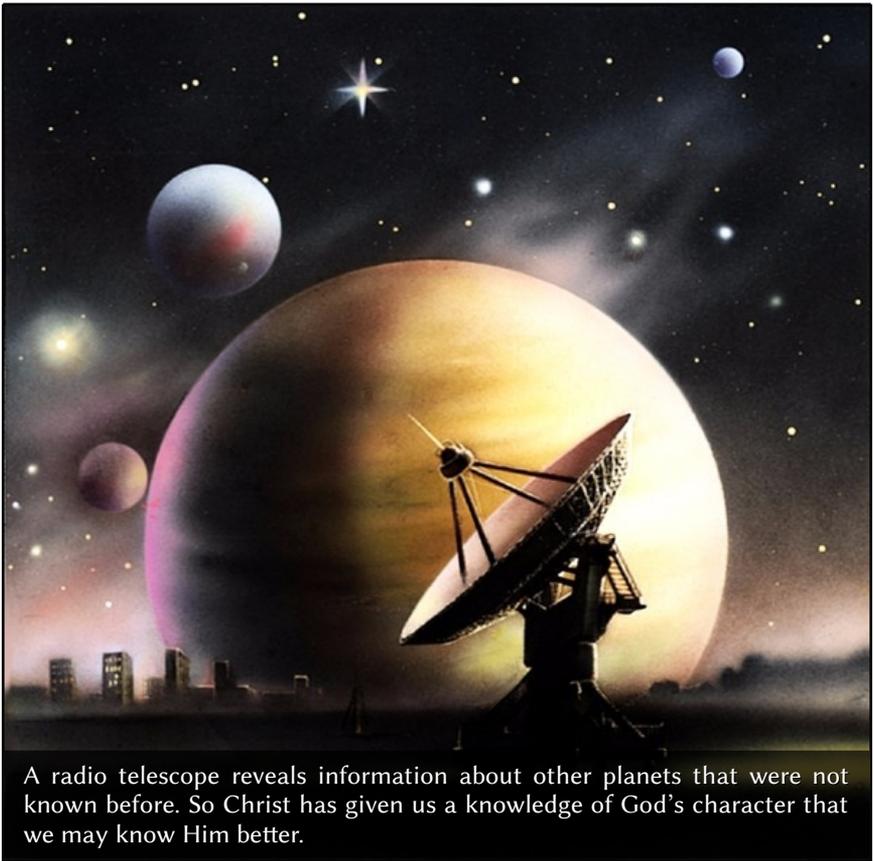
The magnification has been provided. Christ is the microscope. But the instrument must be used. Advantage of the provision must be taken, or we shall be left as much in the darkness of ignorance as if it had never been provided.

It is not enough to read the ten commandments and assume that their meaning is understood. There is no question as to what

the words are, but there does remain the query as to what God meant when He used those words:

1. Men have their version, learned under Satan's tutelage,
2. The Lord has provided His interpretation in the life of Christ to counter this.

It remains with each individual to decide which of those two he will accept as the Word of God to him. Sadly enough, the average person does not even question the version given by Satan. To him it is the logical and the only way to relate to the law.



A radio telescope reveals information about other planets that were not known before. So Christ has given us a knowledge of God's character that we may know Him better.

Let a comparative consideration be given to the magnification of the law as it exists on one hand in the minds and practices of men and on the other in the life of Christ, the Word of God.

“Lawful” Killing

Man actually injects another word into the Scriptures. He says that the law really means that you shall not lie, steal, or kill—*unlawfully*. Or he will express it in these words:

“You shall not commit murder.”

Here a distinction is made between the words *kill* and *murder*. *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, tenth edition, defines “murder” in this way:

“The crime of unlawfully killing a person especially with malice aforethought.”

I once sat in a courtroom in support of a friend who had unintentionally killed a person in a car accident. Because of the circumstances the state was charging him with the death. I was particularly struck with the wording of the indictment in which he was accused of having killed the other person unlawfully. This made it quite clear that in human minds there is a distinction between lawful and unlawful killing.

Let us consider three situations in which men regard it as being lawful to kill another human being.

Human laws will leave a man uncondemned and free if he kills in self-defense or in defense of others. All he has to do is satisfy the court that the only way in which he could preserve his own life or the lives of others was to kill the assailant.

Early in 1976, a man in southern Queensland, Australia, attacked a small group of people and began to kill them one by one. He had taken the lives of the first two or three, when a young woman snatched up a gun and killed the assailant, thus saving her own and the lives of others not yet slaughtered. When the

case came before the judge, he quickly exonerated the woman with warm praise for her courage and resourcefulness. She, according to his judgment, had killed lawfully, and there were none to dispute him.

This is not an isolated case. If at any time a slayer can prove that he was forced to kill his attacker in order to save his own life, he will be judged a killer within the bounds of the law and will be set free.

The second situation in which killing is judged to be lawful is when a person has been tried and found guilty of taking human life. The State then claims every right to take his life in return. This, they say, is lawful killing.

The third is when an alien army invades a country. Men regard it as being perfectly lawful to slaughter as many of the enemy as necessary to prevent the invasion from being successful.

Men of every nation on earth throughout human history accept these as working principles. To man's mind, not only are they right, but they are the only solution to the problems involved in these situations. They firmly believe they can do it this way and still be keepers of the law. In fact, high honors are heaped upon those men in war who destroy the most.

Satan's Magnification of the Law

To ensure that men never weaken in these convictions, Satan takes advantage of their inventions and developments. Never in history has he had more opportunity to systematically, continually, and persistently reiterate his philosophies. The educational system provides him with many avenues of influence. There is a stupendous volume of cheap novels on the market. There is the radio, the movie theater, and today, the most present and insistent of all teachers is the television screen.

As people sit before this media, they think that they are being harmlessly entertained, but in actual fact they are being thoroughly educated in Satan's doctrines. With every appreciative

viewing of the usual television story, the watcher is more firmly entrenched in erroneous ideas about God's character. This is made apparent as soon as a candid analysis of the message of the movie is conducted. It does not matter if the movie is a western, a detective story, a war story, or anything similar, the message is always that the law must be broken in order to uphold it.

A typical beginning is the introduction of the watcher to a segment of society. Maybe it is a ranch family or a small town as in a western, or a town or farmhouse in the case of a war story. Care is taken to show this capsule of humanity as a clean, respectable, law-abiding group of people. There is love, trust, and co-operation between them. A little friction might intrude at times, but that is purely incidental and designed to show that they are not super-humans but everyday people just like the viewers. The onlooking audience has no difficulty in identifying with the people on the screen. A sense of fellowship and brotherhood is established.

Then the lawbreaker is introduced. In the westerns he appears as a dark man clad in dark clothes. With him is a gang of men who look like their leader. They are hard-faced, tough, callous, and ruthless, with a total disregard for human life. Any who stand in their way, great or small, are simply gunned down. They achieve their ends by lying, stealing, and killing. As they direct their attacks against the happy segment of society previously introduced, the audience is apprehensive and indignant, the more so as the victims are powerless to protect themselves from the desperadoes. Every instinct and desire of the audience clamors for the punishment of these outlaws.

Up till this point the universal problem of man has been presented with truthful accuracy. The people of this world, generally speaking, are, on the surface, law-abiding. They are good neighbors, help each other, and are clean living. Just as the people in the film are threatened by a desperado and his gang, so today, the world lies under the threat of Satan and his followers. Man is entirely unable to rescue himself from their power.

Thus Satan has presented the problem of the human family in a truly accurate form. As a problem requires a solution, one is offered in every film presentation. In the western it is the arrival of a lone champion. In contrast to the robber, he is clean looking and has a handsome, open face. He is also stirred to the depths as he realizes the plight of the oppressed. Alone and unassisted, at any sacrifice even if it means his life, he determines to set them free and relieve the earth forever of the scourge of these terrorists. For his services he seeks neither fame nor reward. He does it as a mission, his only motivation being that of dedicated service.

So far in the story there is the continued portrayal of the truth, for just as the solution to the film story is found in the advent of a champion of self-sacrificing spirit and character, so Jesus Christ came in that way to redeem mankind. Like the hero in the story, His soul was stirred with indignation as He beheld the predicament of man and He resolved that He would save him no matter what the cost to himself. He would not do it for price or reward, but only from the motivation of love and mercy.

It has long been an understood device of selling to have the customer agreeing with you as you move forward to the clinch. So Satan has the audience agreeing with him as he spells out that which is the truth at first. Then, when all are moving forward together, he craftily introduces his deviation from the truth. He is gleeful as he sees millions of people go right along with his philosophy to the end.

And what is this deviation? The great hero rides forth to deal with the liars, thieves, and murderers. But see how he does it! In order to outwit the liars, he lies. If he needs a horse, saddle, or rifle to catch the thieves, he steals it by simply helping himself to the possessions of another. And to end the murderous reign of the killers, he kills.

When he is finished, the law-breaking is ended. The law has been upheld. But, the message of the film story is:

“Law keeping is accomplished by law breaking. Only by lying, stealing, and killing could lying, stealing, and killing be brought to an end.”

This is Satan’s message. He does not say that the law is wholly bad and should be entirely done away with. He admits that under certain circumstances it is good and should be obeyed.

“But,” he continues, “that law is not perfect, for there are situations where it must be disobeyed in order to solve problems.”

This is how people consider the behavior of the heroes of this world, both real and fictitious. Even though some people might have reserves about the hero’s behavior, they will usually conclude that there was nothing else that could have been done. It is common thinking that perfect law keeping will not solve problems but will only make them worse. Usually the very worst evaluation of the hero’s behavior is to conclude that what he did was “a necessary evil.”

It should also be pointed out that the hero, whether real or imagined, must not be one who lies, steals, and kills without regard for the feelings of the innocent. He is careful not to destroy the innocent with the guilty. This greatly enhances his heroism and honor, particularly when doing so makes his task of overcoming the enemy that much more difficult.

If he takes command of an innocent man’s possession to help overcome the bandits, this is done on the assumption that permission would have been granted anyhow if requested since it is for the purpose of bringing peace to the community. If the owner later objects to the taking of his possession, he is looked upon as ungrateful, unreasonable, and perhaps a traitor. In reality, this is viewed as borrowing, and if the borrowed item becomes destroyed in the process of use, it must be looked upon as a sacrifice for a good cause or else the owner will fall into serious disrepute.

Both evil men and their master, the devil, want a law. But they want it designed so that it protects them from other men but not

other men from them. It is impossible to have such a law for every man. But it is possible for a privileged class to have it at the expense of the masses.

Consider the despotic king of old time. If he coveted the possessions or even the life of any one of his subjects, he took it, but let any of the subjects take a fish from the king's pool or a brace of quail from his meadows, and he was punished with anything up to death. The law protected the king from the people, but it did not protect the people from the king.

This is the way the devil and man want it, but it is impossible to have it that way and yet provide equal justice and happiness for all.

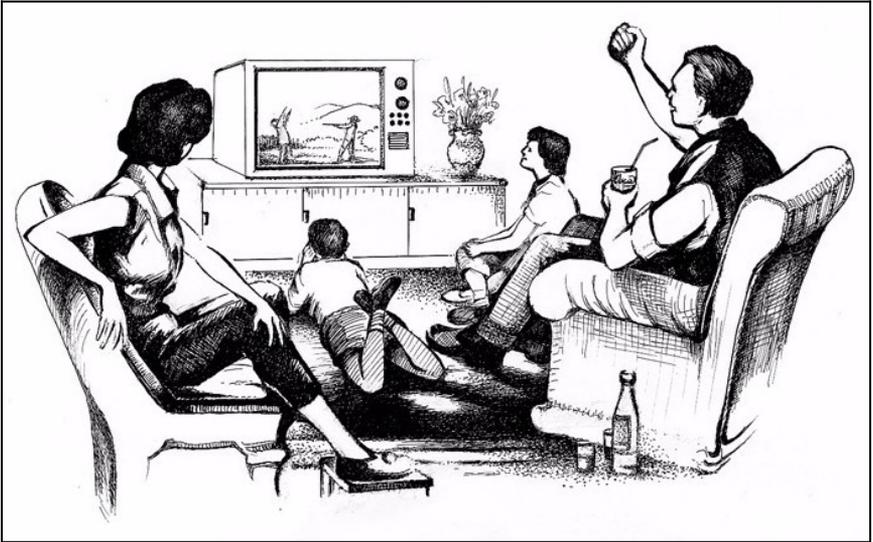
Such then is the message contained in Satan's educational program. In his classrooms there is no dissent. As the villain lies, steals, and murders, the audience is unanimously indignant and longs to see him punished. But, when the hero lies, steals and murders, they applaud. They honor him for what he has done and consider him very smart to use such weapons in his campaign.

After the show, if you were to propose to the viewers that the hero be punished for his lying, stealing, and killing just as the villain was, they might well regard you as being blighted with a questionable mental condition. Their reaction would be ridicule or even hostility. To them the villain was unlawfully lying, stealing, and killing, whereas the hero was doing this lawfully. Therefore, the villain was a criminal, but the hero was not.

Why do men take such an attitude toward this problem? There is a very real reason for this. As noted above, every man consciously or subconsciously longs to be in the position where he is protected by law but does not have to keep it himself. He identifies himself with the victims and in a certain sense with the hero in the film story, and therefore obtains satisfaction from being vicariously in the situation where he is not bound by the law not to lie, steal, and kill. He is happy to have the experience where the villain is not protected by law from him.

This feeling is accentuated by the sense of impotent frustration felt by the average people as they live under the shadow of a massive government machinery which can hit them much harder than they can hit back. They feel that the law protects the government from them but not them from the government. Now they are placed in the world of make believe, in a situation where this is reversed, and they make the most of it. Furthermore, it gives them a sense of security. They are assured as to what they would do if they faced such a situation in real life.

Such is Satan's and man's magnification of the law which states that you shall not kill, lie, or steal. We know that it is of the devil because such a philosophy finds no place in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.



Satan's class in session.
More than mere entertainment, this is education.

Christ's Magnification of the Law

Having examined the magnification of the law as set forth by the devil, the time has come to consider its enlargement as presented by Jesus Christ. Without doubt or question, we know that what-

ever that will be, it will be the truth, for Christ is the very fountain of truth.

Jesus lived His whole life upon this earth devoted to ending all law breaking. Yet, in order to accomplish that, He never once lied, stole, or killed. He showed that there is no such thing as lawful and unlawful lying, stealing, and killing. One can search Christ's life through and through to find one single instance where Jesus ever told a lie, ever stole the property of another, or ever took anyone's life, but it will be impossible to uncover a single such instance. Under every circumstance, every possible pressure, threat, or danger, Jesus told only the truth, respected the property of all, and took the life of no one.

In living this way, He demonstrated forever how we are to keep that law and how, in turn, the Father and He have always kept it. He showed that when God said in a few simple words that "You shall not lie," "You shall not steal," and "You shall not kill," He did not add provisos and exceptions. No matter what the circumstances, pressure, danger, or any other seeming justification for breaking those commands might be, the words were still, "You shall not..." No distinction whatever exists in God's mind between lawful and unlawful killing. With God there is only unlawful killing.

God has spoken in His Word, saying,

Psalm 19

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect.

It could, of course, be none other than this, seeing that it is the transcript of the character of the Eternal. He is perfection in the absolute sense. Therefore, His law is likewise perfect. Such perfection does not mean that it is the perfect answer for certain situations, but needs to be modified or even abrogated to suit other situations. It is always correct.

When any person claims that it is lawful to kill when the commandments so distinctly say, "You shall not kill," he is in that mo-

ment charging the law and the God of that law with imperfection. He is saying that God is less than infinite and therefore less than God. He also denies the whole witness of Christ's ministry. He is declaring the truth of God to be a lie.¹¹

An Old Testament Warning

The point which the devil is bent on making is that the law must be broken in order for it to be maintained. The life and teachings of Christ deny this. So does the message of God in the Old Testament.

There is in the Bible the story of two people who adopted the policy of breaking the law in order to ensure that it be kept. That no man might be mistaken as to God's attitude toward this type of thinking, there is also appended the way in which God related himself to their actions.

It is the story of Jacob and his mother in their quest for the promised birthright. Before the birth of the two children, God, foreseeing with infinite accuracy the character of each, declared that Jacob should have the birthright instead of the elder son, Esau.

Genesis 25

²³ And the Lord said unto her: Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.

Rebekah clearly and correctly understood that the last sentence in this verse was a promise to Jacob that the birthright should be his, not Esau's.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 178:

Rebekah remembered the words of the angel, and she 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

¹¹ *Romans* 1:25.

the father's affections were centered upon the elder son, and he was unshaken in his purpose.

Jacob had learned from his mother of the divine intimation that the birthright should fall to him, and he was filled with an unspeakable desire for the privileges which it would confer.

God's selection of Jacob to inherit the birthright was not an arbitrary one. The directions given by God were done so with the foreknowledge that Esau would disqualify himself for the right to its possession. Without question Isaac should have accepted the decree, especially when Esau's behavior confirmed the rightness of God's decision. The law stipulated that should a young man marry a heathen woman, then he automatically forfeited all right to the birthright. This Esau had done polygamously.

Genesis 26

³⁴ When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite.

³⁵ And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.

When Esau did this, Isaac, in strict obedience to the law, ought to have relinquished his paternal preferences for his elder son and prepared to confer the birthright blessing on Jacob. But he allowed his affections to overrule his conscience so that he chose his own way in preference to the clear will of God.

Rebekah exerted all the influence she could to dissuade him from his fixed determination to confer the birthright blessing on Esau. She:

- pointed out Esau's disinterest in, and disregard for the spiritual responsibilities involved in the birthright.
- reminded him of the prophecy made before the boys were born, and of Esau's marriage to the heathen.
- pointed to the contrasting spirit, attitude, and consecrated life of Jacob.

But all her reasonings and pleadings were of no avail.

As the infirmities of age advanced upon Isaac, he realized that if he did not pronounce the blessing soon, it would be too late. He determined upon a secret session rather than the joyous family affair which was the usual way. He called Esau and instructed him to take his weapons and catch his favorite venison. Rebekah was listening in as the supposedly secret instructions were being given, and she realized the implications of what her husband was about to do.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 180:

Rebekah divined his purpose. She 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.

With great clarity she saw that Isaac was about to act in direct opposition to the stipulations of the law and thereby incur the divine displeasure. She saw that by so doing, Jacob would be deprived of the blessing which was rightfully his. Therefore, she reasoned that she must prevent Isaac from breaking the law both for his own good and for the good of Jacob.

She had tried to reason with Isaac and dissuade him, but that had proved unsuccessful. Now she must use other means. To what method did she turn? In order to save Isaac from being a lawbreaker, she became a lawbreaker herself and induced Jacob to become one with her. Mother and son turned from God's way to man's way. They acted out the same beliefs as portrayed by the heroes of the silver screen. It was an evil sowing which brought them only a bitter reaping.

It is true that they did achieve their objective to a point. Jacob did obtain the spiritual blessing, but the material wealth and power fell into Esau's hands just the same.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 180:

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.

Rebekah bitterly repented the wrong counsel she had given her son; it was the means of separating him from her, and she never saw his face again.

From the hour when he received the birthright, Jacob was weighed down with self-condemnation. He had sinned against his father, his brother, his own soul, and against God. In one short hour he had made work for a lifelong repentance. This scene was vivid before him in after-years, when the wicked course of his own sons oppressed his soul.

Rebekah and Jacob broke the law in order to keep it from being broken. They were wholly wrong in so doing as is proved by the sad punishment they had to bear for their mistake. Let not their mistake and its consequent troubles be of no value to those of us facing the final confrontation over what the law really means. Let us see with great clarity that the law cannot be upheld by breaking it.

Those words, “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not steal,” and “You shall not kill,” set forth the pattern of behavior no matter what the circumstances, pressure, or supposed advantages might be. In God’s kingdom and under His principles the end can 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 church that He can trust to finish the work, and it will then be finished.

18. Go the Second Mile

CHRIST did not confine His revelation of the Father to actions alone. He preached the truth as well. What He taught from day to day was an augmenting and confirming witness to God's character. By His words He magnified the law as effectively as He did by His behavior.

The Sermon on the Mount

His first great sermon was a clear statement of what the law really meant. He alerted the people to the fact that that which “was said to them of old” was not the version He had come to bring them.¹²

But the people who gathered to hear that wonderful sermon on the mount recorded in *Matthew* chapter 5 to 7, came with erroneous concepts of the law and the kingdom of God. They had been taught to think of God as being like man so that their expectation of the Messiah's kingdom was quite different from what it really was.

Jesus knew He was confronting preconceived ideas and opinions to which He could make no concession. He knew what the people expected and wanted to hear, but He told them only what they needed to hear.

Knowing from the outset of His discourse that He was about to tell them something different from what they wished and expected to hear, He knew that He would be judged as casting aside the law. So, before He began to explain the law, He tried to save them from misunderstanding the words He was about to speak. Therefore He began by telling them that He had not come to do away with the law, but to establish it.

He said to them,

¹² *Matthew* 5:21.

Matthew 5

¹⁷ Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

¹⁹ Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The scribes and Pharisees regarded themselves as being the greatest exponents of the law of God in existence. They believed that they taught it and lived it to perfection. They regarded themselves as being models of righteous behavior. Their claim was not wholly untrue, for their lives were as fine an example as can be found of living the law according to man's interpretation of how it should be kept. But it was to deliver men from their concept of law-keeping and replace it with the true one, that Christ came to this earth.

So, as He progressed through His sermon, repeatedly He swept aside the law as they understood it and replaced it with the law as God understood it. The hearers' evaluation of Christ's presentation and position depended on their having a spiritual perception of what He was saying. If they were blinded to the living truth, then they would only see the law as interpreted and magnified by man. This would lead them to regard Christ as a lawbreaker even though He had warned them that He had come to establish the law.

On the other hand, if they could see what He was really trying to say, then they would understand that He had come as the one true Magnifier of the holy law. It would be a whole new field of

thought. Time would be needed to make adjustment, but the beauty of the truth would be thrilling and vitalizing.

Great profit would be gained by studying every statement made by Christ in this sermon, but time and space will not be taken to do this here. We want to consider that passage which reveals, probably better than any of the other, the principles of the law as Christ espoused them. Jesus said,

Matthew 5

³⁸ You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

³⁹ But I tell you...

So Christ segregated the teaching of the past from His own. The old He classified as what they had heard and believed, against which He set forth His way. He made no attempt to compromise with the old teaching or to apologize for what He offered. What He brought was the truth and, as such, had to be accepted.

To many, Christ appears to deny the law as God in the Old Testament had taught it. It was not the writings or teachings of the heathen which Christ was disavowing but, to all appearances, the word of God through Moses.

Exodus 20

¹ And God spoke all these words, saying...

Then follow the ten commandments, after which the people were terrified and plead with Moses to speak with them instead of God.

²² Then the Lord said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel...

Many directions follow until these verses are reached:

Exodus 21

²³ But if any lasting harm follows, then you shall give life for life,

²⁴ Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

²⁵ Burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

God spoke these words to Moses with the direction that they be told to, and obeyed by, the people. After hearing what God had said, the people agreed.

Then, in His sermon on the mount, Jesus came and denied that this was His way, swept it all aside, and gave the people a new code of behavior. On the surface it seemed that Christ was at variance with His Father on what the law was and how it should be kept.

Small wonder then that the Pharisees who subscribed so vigorously to the old Mosaic law, should regard Christ as being the worst kind of lawbreaker. Since He was doing away with the law of God's kingdom, or so they thought, they concluded that He was actually killing that kingdom. To their understanding that law said,

“A life for a life.”¹³

Therefore, they felt perfectly justified in putting Him to death. His crucifixion, in their thinking, was a lawful killing. They made themselves believe that they were obeying the law exactly as it was written.

Another solution to this apparent contradiction is to teach dispensationalism. Such a belief sees one law for the people before the advent of Christ, and another and more beautiful law for the people thereafter. Such a solution must be rejected because the perfect law is as unchangeable as the God who gave it. If the Lord gave one law for the people in a certain age and situation and subsequently changed it for later generations, then He is no better than changeable man who is continually modifying his laws to suit changing circumstances.

Satan would then have the argument he needed to win the controversy. He would point to the changing of the law as clear proof that it was imperfect and needed to be changed. He left heaven contending this, against God's claim that it was not so, and he has

¹³ *Exodus* 21:23.

watched ever since for the slightest opportunity to prove his claims.

But there is yet another explanation which reveals the character of God in wonderful beauty, shows that Christ was not at variance with the Father, and establishes the truth that God has never changed His law in the slightest. This explanation will show that the law and its Author are...

Hebrews 13

⁸ ...the same yesterday, today, and forever.

This explanation will be fully developed when we examine the various incidents of the Old Testament period. It will be seen that God has only one way for himself and His people. But there comes a time when the people reject His way and turn to their own, yet still desire God to be with them. In great mercy He provides directives to help them do things in the best way possible under the circumstances they have chosen. It will be shown that, when this point is reached, God works as a saviour exclusively. Christ's objective was to bring God's people back from their own way to God's original way. When this characteristic of behavior on God's part is seen, the last problems in understanding His character will disappear.

Christ's Amplification of the Law

Having relegated the teaching, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, to the errors of man's ways, Christ then set forth His amplification of the law.

Matthew 5

³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

In the previous chapter reference was made to fictitious books, plays, and films. These are some of Satan's means of promulgating his magnification of the law. Let it now be asked if the principles laid out by Christ in the verses quoted above, are portrayed in fiction? Where is man portrayed as offering the other cheek when he has been smitten violently on one? What film hero is seen meekly going the second mile, or giving his coat to the enemy who took his cloak?

These are not the patterns of behavior advertised as ideal through this media. Rather, it is the very opposite. If the villain steals the coat of the hero or anyone else, he is forced to pay back with compounded interest. The audience is not satisfied unless the desperado is made to suffer more than he has inflicted upon others. During the bad man's day of power, he strikes his victims mercilessly. They endure this because they have no option, but silently pray for the day when the position of power will be reversed. Then, with a vengeance, they will make the enemy regret what he did.

How completely opposite this is from the ways and teachings of Christ. Nothing could be more contrary. To the man of the world there is no sense in Christ's words. If the movie houses were to prepare films depicting these principles, no one would be interested in viewing them. They would be a financial failure.

The average man rejects the principles Christ taught because it appears that he will lose all his defenses. The whole world would take advantage of him to the point where he would be divested of everything he had. To him there is no more frightening prospect. Therefore he has no disposition to surrender the security provided by his defending and protecting his rights and possessions. He prefers to work at being more powerful than his enemy so that he can hit back harder than he can be hit. He finds his safety in this doctrine of deterrence.

There are those who give the following interpretation to Christ's directions to turn the other cheek. They say that Christ

did not say what to do after the second cheek has been struck. That means that we have the liberty to hit back thereafter.

But this is not true. Jesus did spell out what was to be done after the first cheek has been struck, and it certainly was not to retaliate in kind. So that there might be no mistake in this respect, Christ continued His instruction in these words:

Matthew 5

⁴³ You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

⁴⁵ That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

When Jesus said, “Love your enemies,” He placed no time limitation upon this stipulation. He did not say to love them as long as there was any hope of saving them, and then hate them to destruction. He simply said, “Love your enemies.” Therefore they are to be loved—forever. The time must never come when the child of God ceases to love his enemy, bless him, and do him good. He is to know no other way.

The apostles sat nearest to Christ when He spoke these words, but they did not understand this message as is evident from the question Peter asked much later.

Matthew 18

²¹ Then Peter came to Him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?

²² Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Seventy times seven is four hundred and ninety times. Did Christ mean that we are to carefully count till we reach this number and then stop forgiving? No, so it is therefore not the way these words are to be understood. Rather, Christ desired to convey the idea that there is no time when we are to cease forgiving. Anyone who carefully counted each forgiveness till he had reached the limit certainly would not have forgiven at all. Nobody with the true spirit of forgiveness and Godlike love would be concerned with how many times forgiveness had been extended.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 243:

Peter had come to Christ with the question, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" The rabbis limited the exercise of forgiveness to three offenses. Peter, carrying out, as he supposed, the teaching of Jesus, thought to extend it to seven, the number signifying perfection. But Christ taught that we are never to become weary of forgiving. Not "until seven times," He said, "but, until seventy times seven."

According to this statement then, the expression, "Until seventy times seven" when used by Christ in this instance, did not mean a limit of four hundred and ninety. He meant without limit, endlessly, and unchangeably.

It is impossible to strike back at those who strike first, and at the same time manifest a forgiving spirit. As surely then as forgiveness is to be forever, the turning of the other cheek is likewise to be forever. Those who claim that Christ did not extend His instruction beyond what to do after the second cheek is struck, do not understand God's message in the Scriptures.

In this discourse, Christ is magnifying the law. He is explaining the way in which God desired His directives, you shall not kill, steal, and lie, to be understood. Consider the difference between man's philosophy and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Man says that if your enemy strikes you, strike back—harder. If he kills

yours, kill him. If he curses you, curse him in return. If he does you evil, return evil for it.

But Jesus said to return love for hate, blessing for cursing, and goodness for evil. If lies are told about you, do not lie in return. If they steal your goods, do not seek to steal them back again. If they seek your life, do not seek theirs. This is to say that the law is to be kept under all circumstances. There is neither time nor place where the law is to be broken in order to assure that it is kept. That is man's philosophy, but it is not the teaching of Christ or the practice of the Christian.

Having laid out these guidelines for human behavior, Christ confirmed that this was the way in which His Father practiced the law. He told His hearers that by so doing they would...

Matthew 5

⁴⁵ ...be the sons of [their] Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Jesus identified as the children of God those who obey the law in the way He declared it should be obeyed. They were such, He affirmed, because they were doing as the Father did.

The evidence of God's love for the wicked was all around them. He sent the sunshine and the rain upon the most wicked people as well as the righteous, with equal impartiality. Even while the terrible hand of sin was destroying them, God's blessings continued. No one, then, could deny that God blessed those who cursed Him and did good to those who treated Him spitefully.

A distinguishing mark of God's children is that they do turn the other cheek, do go the second mile, do love their enemies, and do bless and do good to those who return them only evil. The individual who returns evil for evil does not turn the other cheek, does not go the second mile, and curses those who spitefully use him, needs to learn what it means to be a child of God.

This identification of the children of God is powerfully meaningful. The relationship is spiritual, for it is in this, and not the physical sense, that we are God's children. It conveys the idea that there must first be the same character in the Christian as in the Father, before there can be the corresponding behavior without. Those who are God's children have the same character as He has. It is a character received by the process of spiritual regeneration.

The Desire of Ages, p. 391:

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. This is what it means to live "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." This is eating the Bread that comes down from heaven.

As surely as they have the same character, they will have the same behavior. They will keep the law exactly as God, the King of Righteousness, keeps it.

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 77-78:

Jesus said, "Be perfect as your Father is perfect." 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; for "the law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul." *Psalms* 19:7, margin. 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.

In the sermon on the mount, Christ taught of a Father who:

- loves His enemies—forever;
- blesses those who curse Him—forever;

- does good to those who hate Him—forever; and
- prays for those who spitefully use and persecute Him—forever.

God “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good.”
Matthew 5:45



The implications of such a teaching are so extensive that it is difficult to believe they are really true. Some would rather believe that they are just some fine pieces of rhetoric with no factual foundation.

But it was Christ, the Truth, who testified that these things are from God. Therefore they are the truth in the strictest sense. God does love His enemies. When consideration is given to whom God’s enemies are, the truth of this becomes the more outstand-

ing and humbling. Passing by all God's lesser enemies, terrible as they be, our attention is focused on the archenemy of all, Satan. Of all the beings who have ever existed, no one has ever hated God more fiercely, cursed Him more savagely, done evil to Him more extensively, or persecuted 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 despitefully uses and persecutes Him?

Christ answers that question, testifying that the Father does all this. The form of His testimony lays out what we are to be and do in order to reproduce the behavior and character of the Father. In doing so, He makes no exception of the devil. He does not counsel us to love our enemies except for Satan. He simply says,

Matthew 5

⁴⁴ Love your enemies.

Therefore, anyone who can be classified as an enemy, is to be loved. Satan certainly comes under this classification, for he is the archenemy. Therefore, if doing this makes us the children of God and thus the reproduction of Him, then God loves His enemies, including Satan. He blesses him as far as it is possible for the blessings to reach him, does him good where He can, and will continue to do so for as long as Satan exists. If He did not, then Christ bore a false witness of His Father.

Love Without Fellowship

To understand the attitude of genuine love which the Father has for His enemies, a distinction must be made between love together with fellowship, and love without it.

There were a trio of Christian sisters who worked in a factory among people of ungodly lives and interests. A spirit of hatred developed toward their worldly associates, and they recognized

this as being unlike the Saviour. They had learned the power of acceptable confession,¹⁴ whereby they asked the Lord to remove their hatred and replace it with love, for they knew that God's children love their enemies. Their faith was rewarded, and they found that all their hateful feelings were gone, but they were troubled because they still did not find a warm bond of love between them and the worldlings. Their problem was that they were not differentiating between love with fellowship and love without it.

It was impossible for them to have a warm bond of communion with people whose interests found no common ground with theirs. They listened to different music, and found their pleasures in the theater, the dance hall, the beer parlors, and the race track. Their conversation was on these things. The principles which guided their lives were in direct conflict with those of the Christians. Therefore fellowship was impossible.

Of course, fellowship with love is beautiful and desirable. This is the ultimate objective while love without fellowship is painful.

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 he is the recipient of God's blessings just as the most wicked person receives the outflow of God's life and love in seedtime and harvest, the sun and the rain, and continued protection from disaster. The devil and the world take all these blessings and use them to war against God, but for this behavior God is not responsible. He gives the blessings for their good, and the perversion of them is the responsibility of those who misuse the gift.

Christ's Witness to His Father

Be assured on the strength of Christ's witness to His Father, that God loves the devil and will therefore only bless and do him

¹⁴ The subject of acceptable confession is covered in an effective and practical way in the publication, *Acceptable Confession*.

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 should destroy Satan. They argue that God's position of custodian of the universe and His possession of omnipotent power make it His responsibility to cut Satan down so that he can hurt and injure no more. To argue this way is to fall into the usual pitfall of making God to be just like man who follows the practice of destroying the lawbreaker to end his iniquity. This is to break the law to ensure that it is kept.

But this is not God's way. He is perfectly righteous. His law is perfect and is never to be broken. Therefore, under no circumstances whatsoever will God lie, steal, or kill. He does not break that law in order to see that it is kept.

When Jesus bore this beautiful and truthful testimony of His Father, He knew all that God had done in the Old Testament. He was also familiar with the view which men took of what God had done. Men saw God pouring good upon the dwellers in Sodom and Gomorrah for a limited time, after which He exchanged the blessings for cursing, and the good for evil as He poured upon them the flood of fire and brimstone. They saw the same picture in the flood, the plagues of Egypt, the obliteration of the Canaanites, the death of Sennacherib's army, and many other instances.

If the view of those things as held by men then and now is correct, then Christ could never truthfully say what He said of His Father on the mount of blessing. In order for Christ to say what He said from personal conviction, He must have held a very different view. Man's view of God and the picture that Christ presented of Him are two altogether conflicting concepts.

One Law for King and Subjects

Christ lived and taught the character of God. He presented God as the perfect law keeper. Christ neither knew nor presented a God who had one law for himself and another for the people. One rea-

son that God's kingdom is superior to all others is because the law is kept with model fidelity by the Omnipotent One and with equal faithfulness by every loyal subject.

It is a situation unknown in earthly systems of government. In all such to a lesser or greater extent, there is one law for the rulers and another for the people. Should any citizen become subject to the government's wrath, he will tremble in his impotence to protect himself. Earthly laws are so framed that they provide protection for the government against the people but not for the people against the government.

But it is not so in God's kingdom. In the first place, He does not need any protection from His own creation, for He is omnipotent and untouchable. He is in a position of power from which He can obliterate any opposition by a single word. Therefore, man might well tremble in dread before such a God if He were indeed altogether such a one as ourselves.

The law therefore was not given by God to protect himself from man. It was God's perfect love gift to man to protect him from himself. It protects him from perverting the powers given to him for life and blessing, into a cataclysm of destruction. This aspect of the law has been studied earlier in chapter nine.

Serving man in these ways, the law is a wonderful thing indeed, but the greatest wonder of all is that it actually protects man from God. In setting out the principles of that law, God has declared what He is and what He will and will not do. He has stated that He will never lie, never steal, and never kill no matter what situation may arise to call for or to justify such things. The enunciation of the law of God is God's own pledge that we are forever secure from His doing any such thing no matter how we may treat Him in return.

When God commits himself to a pledge of that nature, there is absolute assurance that He will never vary from it in the slightest degree. We are familiar with the pledge made by God to man under the signature of the rainbow that the earth would never again

perish beneath a flood of waters. From that day to this, that guarantee has never been violated despite the increasing defiance of man toward heaven. God's word stands true and unchangeable.

We need to be equally anchored to the truth that, when God presents himself as being the righteous God, He is saying that He is a perfect law-keeping God who will not, no matter what the circumstances might be, resort to law-breaking in order to uphold the law. In other words He will not break the command, "You shall not kill," in order to stop men from killing each other or from rebelling against Him.

Because the persuasion of man to Satan's lies about God is so extensive and long-standing, it will be very difficult for the average person to accept that God has made and honored such a commitment. The mind, long trained to see the workings of God in a certain light, will swiftly object that the great rebellion demanded that God arise to cleanse the universe of the curse by actively destroying the offenders. This is considered to be the only available solution to the problem. Men do not understand the wisdom and power of God as it will be employed to end the great rebellion. They do not see that there is another and infinitely better way to deal with rebellion than counter-force.

Christ neither shared nor taught the common view of God. He presented a Father who loved His enemies and who would give them only blessing and goodness. That view He uncompromisingly presented in the very face of the other. As a lone voice, He announced the real truth about the Father even though every other person in the world saw it the other way.

The view of God as held, taught, and lived by Christ is the one to be held. Any contrary view is error formulated for our destruction.

No ruler in human history is like unto our God. Not one of them has ever pledged himself never to lie to, steal from, or kill any one of his subjects no matter how treasonous or murderous that subject might become. Earthly potentates know only one

way to deal with such elements in society, and that is to meet force with force. There is no turning of the other cheek, no going the second mile, no love for their enemies, and no blessing of those who do them evil.

But what no earthly ruler has ever done or ever will do, God has done. Truly, His ways are as much higher than our ways as the heavens are above the earth. When the real nature of God's righteousness is understood and appreciated, it will call forth from the hearts of those who thus see it, a rapture of praise and adoration otherwise impossible. They will then begin to understand and testify with the words of the Bible writers:

Psalm 86

⁸ Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; nor are there any works like your works.

⁹ All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

¹⁰ For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God.

Psalm 48

¹ Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain.

Let it be clearly recognized that while God himself pledged that He would never destroy the violators of His principles, He did not and could not guarantee that sinners would not be destroyed. On the contrary, He warned that sin is the act of separating from God, so that there remains no protection from the destructive forces thus set in motion.

May every reader come to see God as Christ knew Him. Then, with the angels and the inspired writers, there will be the pealing forth of praise and adoration for a god so great as our God. Such understanding and spontaneous praise will, in turn, mold the character into the same form until one great pulse of harmony will beat throughout the entire universe.

19. The Mystery of Iniquity

Satan's Masterpiece of Deception

THE evidences accumulated in this study have now established that the life of Christ was a perfect mirror of the Father's character and that His teachings reiterated and confirmed that revelation.

Therefore, in responding to the divinely inspired directive to know the Father, we must look to the life and teachings of the Saviour. Any view of God not supported by that witness is false and is to be rejected no matter how venerated with age or universally accepted it might be.

Reference has been made to the works of fiction as presented on the stage, in the novel, and on the movie screen, as media through which Satan has been educating an unwitting world in his misrepresentations of God's character and law. These are exceedingly effective means by which the whole world is converted to Satan's sophistries.

But there is yet another medium through which Satan works with great effectiveness to achieve the same ends. This is the mystery of iniquity, otherwise known as Babylon. Some of its other names are Babylon the Great, the man of sin, the son of perdition, and the Antichrist.

The Mystery of Iniquity has appeared in various forms down through the ages. Its earliest champion subsequent to the flood was Nimrod, after which came the builders of the tower of Babel, the worshipers of Baal, the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, and the papacy.

The Mystery of Iniquity will develop further in apostate Protestantism and finally culminate in Babylon the Great in the very last days. It is Satan's masterpiece of deception, the instrument through which more than any other he promulgates his lies about God.

The Great Controversy, p. 569:

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.

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.

The Great Controversy, p. 281:

Rome had misrepresented the character of God, and perverted His requirements.

The Great Controversy, p. 73:

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.

Already it has been shown that the world of fiction is a definite instrument by which the great antagonist portrays the picture of what God is not. But his masterpiece of deception in this work is Babylon, the mystery of iniquity, which predominantly finds its manifestation in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches of today. It is Satan's counter to the revelation of what God is through Jesus Christ.

Thus before everyone is the alternative. The representations of God and His law as given by Babylon can be taken, or the choice can fall on Christ as the revelation of God and His ways. It is impossible for both to represent the same thing, for one is Christ and the other is Antichrist.

There is tremendous value in studying the life and teachings of Christ as the unfolding of what God is. There is also great value in looking at how Babylon presents God as He is not. Let us take some time to consider the ways of Babylon.

It is a mistake to suppose that Babylon uses only the weapons of force. So terrible and extensive has been her use of these weapons to persecute into submission those reluctant to obey her, that this is all that is apt to be seen of her character and activities. The real truth is that the use of oppressive measures is only the very last resort used by her, as it is with every false religion. It is only when every other means has failed that she turns to its use.

Signs of the Times, May 6, 1897:¹⁵

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. The papacy has exercised her power to compel men to obey her, and she will continue to do so. We need the same spirit that was manifested by God's servants in the conflict with paganism.

There was a time when I did not understand this. I thought of Rome as effecting her objectives only by coercion. But the study of history opened a new view showing that firstly the Antichrist comes without a sword. Her first ambassadors are priests and missionaries who seek to win the populace to their theology by teaching, pleas, and argument. If this is successful, they are elated. But if the people will not submit to their religion, then the

¹⁵ See also *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 976.

sword is unsheathed. At first the persecutions are relatively mild, but as time goes by and the desired objective is not achieved, they become increasingly more severe until the death penalty is enforced rigorously.

In the sixth century Pope Gregory determined to convert Great Britain to Catholicism. Accordingly, he sent forty-one missionaries in the summer of 597. They were led by Augustine who settled in Canterbury as the center of his activities in Britain. The true Christian religion had preceded him. It was established among the original Britons but had not yet converted the Anglo-Saxon invaders from northern Europe and Scandinavia. To convert the Britons was the immediate objective. For this purpose Augustine convened a general assembly in 601. But,

“To no purpose did the archbishop lavish his arguments, prayers, censures, and miracles even; the Britons were firm.”¹⁶

After this council failed, Augustine once more tried the peaceful, persuasive approach, but again he failed. Perceiving that he would gain nothing by these means, he rose to his feet and 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.” Having thus spoken, the haughty archbishop withdrew, and occupied his last days in preparing the accomplishment of his ill-omened prophecy. Argument had failed: now for the sword!¹⁷

What took place there in the early history of Britain has been repeated in every place where the papal shoe has rested. To millions, it is a familiar pattern. Rome appears upon the scene acting peacefully and lovingly. She blesses those who will receive her blessings, seeking to win them to her creed.

¹⁶ *The Reformation in England*, Volume 1, p. 38, by J. H. Merle d'Aubigne.

¹⁷ *Idem*, p. 39.

She manifests considerable long-suffering and patience in her work, and her emissaries make great personal sacrifices for their cause. But eventually she judges that any further endeavor along these peaceful lines will be fruitless. She then turns to the use of persecution which increases in severity until those who will not obey under any pressure are put to death.

In all this she is giving an impression of God, which tragically is the one accepted without question by the majority. To be convinced of this, it is only necessary to compare the view of God as held by most people, with the papal representations of Him. Most see God looking down upon the unconverted as Pope Gregory looked upon the Britons. In His great love for the lost and the dying, God is viewed as sending His personal ambassador, the Holy Spirit, who works through self-sacrificing human agents to woo and to win the erring. It is believed that during this period the Lord withholds His judgments and administers blessings as an incentive to the people to follow Him.

But time goes by, and the blessings received are turned into a curse as in the case of the Sodomites, the Egyptians, and the Israelites. What now happens in reality is that the people move away from God, out of the sphere of protection and into the realm where God cannot protect them from threatening destructions ever ready to occur. But men see in these calamities the hand of God trying to enforce allegiance where persuasion has failed. And when even this fails, they see God as one who completely destroys the wicked from the face of the earth.

A comparison has been made in the paragraphs above between the way of Antichrist and the supposed manifestation of the character of God. It is worth asking,

“What difference is there between these two pictures?”

The answer is, none. 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. Therefore, as surely as we know that Baby-

lon's representation of the Deity is a misrepresentation, it must be wholly rejected.

A moment's reflection will show that the representation of God given on the movie screen and that given by the papacy, are identical. In both cases the law is broken in order to bring about the keeping of the law. The papacy kills those who will not obey. By killing, she disobeys God's commands in order to do away with those whom she judges are disobeying God's commands. Therefore, she is of the world, and not of God in any sense. Every principle of her character and behavior is a denial of the revelations of the Deity mirrored in the life of Christ and espoused in His teachings. She fulfills most adequately Satan's objectives in misrepresenting the character of God.

The existence of Babylon and her teachings versus the presence of Christ and His, provides for everyone the choice of which representation of God they will believe. It is impossible to consistently believe both. 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 face changes and He arises to do to them the very things He has commanded them not to do. He firstly treats them cruelly, then finally kills them.

Christ offers 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. He is the God of righteousness. The choice then is Christ or Antichrist, God or the devil, the heavenly Jerusalem or Rome. There can be no difficulty in knowing which of these is the one to choose.

Yet some will hesitate in uncertainty, even confusion. Let such open the history books and examine the outworking of Rome's doctrines. In doing so care must be taken to see beyond the facade of piety and brilliance which Catholicism has erected to camouflage the real picture behind and beneath. Through the pages of God's Word, the Holy Spirit has shown that He has nei-

ther overlooked her real character nor been deceived by her pretentious outward appearance.

Revelation 17

⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.

⁵ And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

⁶ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

Revelation 18

²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.

Both the dazzling outer appearance and the inward corruption are here revealed. Men tend to be impressed with great displays of wealth and power, all too often measuring the success and merit of a person or organization by such appearances. But the real value is the inner worth of character.

The last verse in this extract is worthy of special attention, for God says that the man of sin is responsible for all who have ever been slain on the whole earth. Satan has sought to lay this blood to God's charge. Men have been prepared to believe Satan at least to some extent, for, while it is clear to many that sin and the devil have taken the lives of millions, it is also believed that God has done His share of killing too. But this verse does not subscribe to such a teaching. Here it is stated that all the blood of all the dead is attributable to the man of sin.

This text then is a strong witness to the truth that God does not destroy, for, if the man of sin has killed all who have been killed, then the Lord has killed none.

So let history be studied to see the outworking of Rome's doctrines. See what the fruits of those teachings about God's character have been, if they have:

- been productive of a great, warm, trusting love for God and one's fellow-men;
- brought peace and prosperity to the earth;
- lifted oppression and set men free;
- opened the doors to the advance of knowledge and skills,

—then we can know that they are a truthful presentation of the character of God. It must be so, for God is righteousness and:

Proverbs 14

³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

Proverbs 21

²¹ He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness and honor.

Isaiah 32

¹⁷ The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.

If this is the record of Rome's work, then her representation of the righteousness or character of God is truthful, accurate, and to be followed. But if the results are the opposite, then it is deceitful, inaccurate, and only to be shunned.

The records of history are clear. Wherever Rome has trodden, she has left behind her ignorance, immorality, bloodshed, and finally, hatred and total rejection of God's very existence. The fruitage of her work has been the exact opposite from that outlined in the verses above. It has not led to love and loyalty to God, but to fear and hatred of Him and finally to infidel rejection of His very existence.

The Great Controversy, p. 281-282:

Rome had misrepresented the character of God, and perverted His requirements, and now men rejected both the Bible and its Author. She had required a blind faith in her dogmas, under the pretended sanction of the Scriptures. In the reaction, Voltaire and his associates cast aside God's word altogether and spread everywhere the poison of infidelity. Rome had ground down the people under her iron heel; and now the masses, degraded and brutalized, in their recoil from her tyranny, cast off all restraint. Enraged at the glittering cheat to which they had so long paid homage, they rejected truth and falsehood together; and mistaking license for liberty, the slaves of vice exulted in their imagined freedom.

This paragraph was written as a comment on the French Revolution with direct reference to the cause of it. It was a reaction, a striking back by the oppressed against those who had for so long held them in mental, physical, and spiritual bondage. No better revelation can be found of the effect of Rome's character and practice than this violent reaction. Everything that developed and transpired in that awful time was the direct fruitage of Catholic policies.

The Great Controversy, p. 276-277:

It was popery that had begun the work which atheism was completing. The policy of Rome had wrought out those conditions, social, political, and religious, that were hurrying France on to ruin. Writers, in referring to the horrors of the Revolution, say that these excesses are to be charged upon the throne and the church....In strict justice they are to be charged upon the church. Popery had poisoned the minds of kings against the Reformation, as an enemy to the crown, an element of discord that would be fatal to the peace and harmony of the nation. It was the genius of Rome that by this means inspired the direst cruelty and the most galling oppression which proceeded from the throne.

But, the revolution would never have been so cruel, blood-thirsty, and horrible; men would never have gone so far in their

total rejection and hatred of God, if they had seen the papacy as being a representative of no more than itself. But she presented herself to the world as God's direct agent and representative, and to millions she was the only picture of God that they knew. Therefore, they rejected not only the Roman Catholic Church, but also the God of that Church. Because they believed that the God of heaven was the God represented by that Church, they rejected Him in the most tragic and hateful way.

That rejection found its most vocal and active expression in the French Revolution. Never has history afforded before or since so clear and convincing a picture of the inevitable outworking of the policies and practices of Romanism. The events have long since been enacted and the memories have faded into the shadows of the past, but they are recorded in all their grim reality in the chronicles of history. Every student of God's Word who honestly desires to understand the outworking of the teaching of God's character versus the outworking of Satan's misrepresentations of that character, should study the anguished cry of human outrage in the France of 1789.

It is not a chronicle of love, confidence, and peace. It is anything but that.

The Great Controversy, p. 284:

Then came those days when the most barbarous of all codes was administered by the most barbarous of all tribunals; when no man could greet his neighbors or say his prayers...without danger of committing a capital crime; when spies lurked in every corner; when the guillotine was long and hard at work every morning; when the jails were filled as close as the holds of a slave ship; when the gutters ran foaming with blood into the Seine...

While the daily wagonloads of victims were carried to their doom through the streets of Paris, the proconsuls, whom the sovereign committee had sent forth to the departments, reveled in an extravagance of cruelty unknown even in the capital. The knife of the deadly machine rose and fell too slow for their work

of slaughter. Long rows of captives were mowed down with grapeshot. Holes were made in the bottom of crowded barges. Lyons was turned into a desert.

At Arras even the cruel mercy of a speedy death was denied to the prisoners. All down the Loire, from Saumur to the sea, great flocks of crows and kites feasted on naked corpses, twined together in hideous embraces. No mercy was shown to sex or age. The number of young lads and of girls of seventeen who were murdered by that execrable government, is to be reckoned by hundreds. Babies torn from the breast were tossed from pike to pike along the Jacobin ranks.

None of this happened without a cause, which, if correctly and fully ascertained, provides a lesson of inestimable value. But the whole of the cause must be perceived.

While it is true that the behavior of the papacy was a factor which developed these results, that is not enough. At the root was everyone's belief in her claim that she represented God's character. Her behavior in isolation from God would have only produced a reaction against herself. The masses would merely have rejected that Church. But when they were led to believe that she projected a true picture of God, then their reaction was most violent against both the Church and God.

Nothing could have pleased Satan more, for he has worked through the papacy to achieve these results. With the masses he has been all too successful, yet the very devices he employs and the results he obtains provide proof that his representations of God are incorrect. Trace the papal teachings from their beginnings to their unhappy results. Then will be recognized the connection between the Babylonian philosophies about God and the sure outworking of immorality, bloodshed, and multiplied other horrors.

Nobody desires these troubles to come upon them. And when it is understood that these results come from erroneous views of God, then these views will be rejected, and there will be a turning toward those revelations of God which breed love, joy, and peace.

The papal understanding is that God is a being above law. While God calls upon His people not to kill, lie, or steal, He is not bound by these things in His relation to them. The papists believe that the law is to protect God and the pope from the masses, but not the masses from them. Because the pope believed that he was God upon this earth, he acted out these principles in his dealings with the people.

The terrible anarchy and atheism of the French Revolution is the direct result of papal teachings. Who upon this earth would desire to see the peaceful atmosphere of their society shattered into conditions so awful? No one! Let all such then reject the teaching which is the root of this effect—the teaching that there is one law for God and another for the people. The great truth that the law is the very transcript of God’s character must be grasped instead.

It is a teaching and practice of Rome that God firstly entreats in mercy but in the end turns to destructive force to wipe out those who do not obey Him. Accordingly, she behaved in this way herself, believing and teaching that she was doing the very will of God and manifesting His character and ways. In this, she fulfilled the prophecy of Christ when He said,

John 16

² Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.

But men will not love and serve such a God. As surely as this concept of God’s character is projected, so surely will men reject such a God. The great reaction of the French Revolution proves that. The message which burst from the hearts and minds of the populace then was that if this was God, then they wanted none of Him at all—forever.

It may be countered that there are millions today who do believe that God destroys and yet love and serve Him. It is true that such a relationship will last for a time. Think of the centuries during which the people of the Middle Ages continued to serve God

as the Romanists represented Him to be. But it did not and could not go on forever. There came a time when a reaction set in, and the rejection of that kind of God was total.

Once again, the earth is moving toward another such absolute rejection of God. When that time comes at the point of Christ's return, all the horrors of the French Revolution will be re-enacted, but not within the limited confines of national scale. It will be global. Not then will the rest of the world gaze in awed amazement at the struggles of one nation, for they will be in the same situation themselves. The place where each stands today, the ideas being more deeply formulated in each mind, and the practices followed, are determining where each will stand in that final day unless he revises his position in the meantime.

Have you carefully, prayerfully, and honestly considered the implications of your present understanding of God's character? It would be well for each to do so, for when your thinking about God is realized, it might be seen that a change is imperative.

If you believe:

- God does not concern himself with personal law-keeping;
- He does as He pleases in the sense that men do as they please;
- The law is designed to protect Him from the people but not the people from Him;

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 at first seeks to win by loving entreaty and merciful dealings;
- But in the end uses force to wipe out those who do not serve Him;

Then your position is no different from that of the Roman Catholic Church. You will be the devil's delight, for his purposes in you are being achieved.

On the other hand, if these things have never occurred to you before, then the decision must be made sooner or later to either cling to these views or reject them in exchange for something better. If the right choice is made, then one more step will be taken out of Babylonian darkness.

To believe that God:

- Loves His enemies—for a time;
- Does good to those who do Him evil—for a time;
- Blesses those who curse Him—for a time;

And then:

- Hates His enemies;
- Pours evil on those who do Him evil;
- And curses those who curse Him;

Is to hold concepts which are papal and worldly. To retain such notions when the light on God's character is presented, is to assure continuation in darkness and error. When the last great conflict comes, there will be the certain standing on the side of the great apostate, with no hope of being numbered among that throng which will walk the streets of gold.

Conversely, if it is believed that:

- The law is the perfect transcript of God's character;
- It pleases Him to do only righteousness—perfect law-keeping;
- He has designed the law as a perfect protection not only from ourselves and our fellow-creatures, but also from himself;
- 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; and
- He never administers destruction upon the heads of those who refuse to obey Him;

Then a mighty step has been taken out of Babylonian darkness, the truth has been found about the Father and the Son, and a right stand has been taken in the great conflict.

The Desire of Ages, p. 22:

To know God is to love Him...

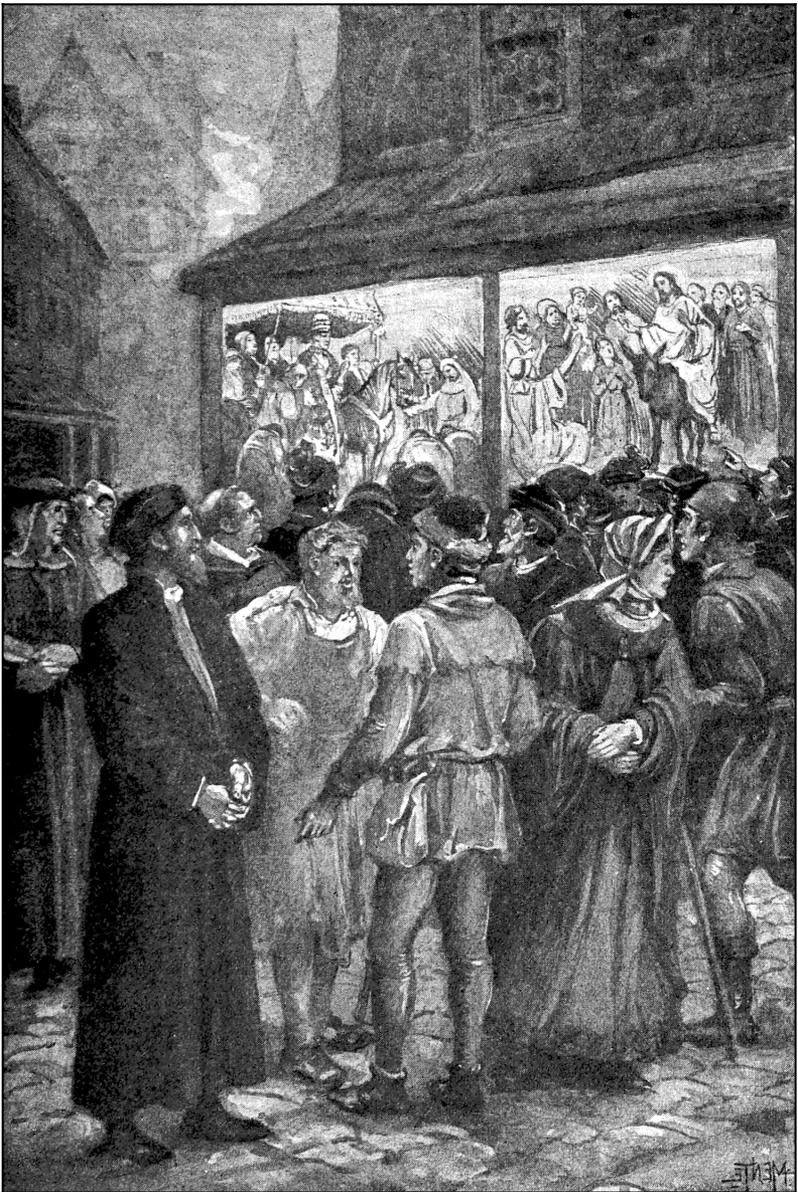
Such a statement can only mean that to know God as God is, is to love Him. Therefore to know God as God is not, is to hate and reject Him as is so clearly proved by the French Revolution. Therefore, to know God as Christ revealed Him both by word and deed is to love Him, while to know Him as the world and the papacy present Him both by teaching and practice is to hate and reject Him. The fruit of the first is faith, and that of the second is infidelity and atheism.

The ultimate happiness, fulfillment, and achievement is to love God as He loves us. Satan is determined to frustrate this. His weapon is the misrepresentation of God's character, in the use of which he is all too successful. No one can say that happiness, fulfillment, and achievement reigned in France in those dreadful days of the revolution. Far from it.

To fill us with supreme joy and happiness, God unmasks Satan's lies and gives to all a true knowledge of His character. As this is understood and then experienced, the believer will love God and his fellow men as he never thought possible. A great bond of unity will draw together every being in heaven above, with every true believer on earth. Eternal life and joy will be the experience of all with never a shadow to mar the life of any.

May such glorious prospects be incentive enough to lead each and all to reject Satan's teachings through the papacy and the

world, and to accept both intellectually and in living, personal experience the truth of God's righteousness.



John Huss viewing the Two Pictures:
Christ on the Donkey and the Pope in Royal Procession.

20. The Mystery-Unfolding Cross

The Great Controversy, p. 652:

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 parental 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."

THE mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries. What a treasure the cross of Christ is to us! Here is a promise so precious, so saving, and so full. When comprehended even to some degree, the heart overflows with gratitude for what God has provided in that revelation. A sense of security is generated by the knowledge that in the cross every puzzling, frustrating mystery is explained.

It is impossible to understand the character of God as it really is until every mystery about it is taken to the light shining from Golgotha. Not even the angels could comprehend God's character in its fullness, until Jesus cried,

John 19

³⁰ It is finished.

We have dealt with this subject already.¹⁸ Therefore, if even the angels needed the light of Golgotha to fully comprehend the character of God, then there is no other way for us to grasp the mysteries that surround God's actions in the Old Testament. In the light of these facts, every Christian should determine that he will draw no final conclusions on God's character until he has assessed all problems in Calvary's light.

¹⁸ See Chapter 5, "The Ending of the Great Controversy," Subheading: "The Revelation at the Cross."

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1137:

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. Those who study the Redeemer's wonderful sacrifice grow in grace and knowledge.

This is quite a statement. It establishes the fact that there is not a single Bible truth which can be rightly understood except in the light which streams from Calvary. 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 the Scripture truths. This means that it is impossible to know God as He is, impossible to rightly understand His character and the nature of His law, unless all this is studied with continual reference to the cross of Calvary.

In the light of these things it comes as no surprise to find that those who insist that God does destroy, reject the cross as having any helpful or significant bearing on the question of God's character. In all their arguments they make no appeal to it and expressly reject any witness from it which counters their ideas of God's behavior. Such an attitude is tragic, for there is no mightier revelation of His character than the cross of Calvary. Before it all other arguments sink into insignificance, and all errors are exposed for what they are.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 209-210:

If those who today are teaching the word of God, would uplift the cross of Christ higher and still higher, their ministry would be far more successful. 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. To remove the cross from the Christian would be like blotting the sun from the sky. The cross brings us near to God, reconciling us to Him. With the relenting compassion of a

father's love, Jehovah looks upon the suffering that His Son endured in order to save the race from eternal death, and accepts us in the Beloved.

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. Kneeling in faith at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which man can attain.

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.

Gospel Workers, p. 315:

The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. 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 that streams from the cross of Calvary. 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.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 333-334:

When we study the divine character in the light of the cross we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice. We see in the midst of the throne One bearing in hands and feet and side the marks of the suffering endured to reconcile man to God. We see a Father, infinite, dwelling in light unapproachable, yet receiving us to himself through the merits of His Son. The cloud of vengeance that threatened only misery and despair, in the light reflected from the cross reveals the writing of God: "Live, sinner, live! you 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!

1 John 4

¹⁰ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 3

¹ 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.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1113:

The cross of Calvary challenges, and will finally vanquish every earthly and hellish power. In the cross all influence centers, and from it all influence goes forth. It is the great center of attraction; for on it Christ gave up His life for the human race. This sacrifice was offered for the purpose of restoring man to his original perfection. Yea, more, it was offered to give him an entire transformation of character, making him more than a conqueror.

Those who in the strength of Christ overcome the great enemy of God and man, will occupy a position in the heavenly courts above angels who have never fallen.

Christ declares, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." If the cross does not find an influence in its favor, it creates an influence. Through generation succeeding generation, the truth for this time is revealed as present truth. Christ on the cross was the medium whereby mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other. This is the means that is to move the world.

It was an awareness of and appreciation for these great truths which caused Paul to testify:

Galatians 6

¹⁴ But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Therefore he said:

1 Corinthians 2

² For I determined not to know any thing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

All these words are inspiring and challenging. They provide the fullest encouragement to proceed into the study of God's character with the assurance that when that theme is brought into the light flooding from the cross, every mystery will be solved.

The particular problem before us concerns the way in which God deals with the unrepentant sinner. The emergence of sin imposed upon God the greatest test of character ever. Because it is the truth that the greater the test the greater the manifestation of the character in the one tested, then the way in which God deals with the sinner reveals more of the wonder of God's character than any other study could.

Previously evidence and argument was assembled to draw a contrast between the way in which God deals with the sinner and the way man does. It has been shown that the Lord does not bless for a time and then turn with cursings and destructions upon the unrepentant. The evidences so far considered are overwhelmingly convincing. Let these be studied now in the light of the cross. They will either be confirmed or denied by that utterly reliable witness to God's character.

The cross is God's personal demonstration of the way in which He deals with those who refuse to give up sin. Christ took the sinner's place and received the punishment which falls upon the unrepentant. God did not relate himself to Christ any differently from the way He relates to the sinner. It is exactly the same. It must be, for if God had done otherwise, then Satan would be very

“FORCE IS THE LAST RESORT OF
EVERY
FALSE RELIGION.”

SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 976

Therefore: True Religion Does Not Resort to
the Use of Force

Therefore: The Use of Force is a Mark of
False Religion

Therefore: The Absence of the Use of Force
is a Mark of True Religion

Therefore: If God Should Use Force as a Last
or Any Resort,

THEN

HIS IS A FALSE RELIGION.

“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.”

“Compelling power is found
ONLY
under Satan’s government.”

The Desire of Ages, p. 487, 759

quick to charge God with partiality, and if God were such, Satan would be right.

Christ wholly took the sinner's place. This was so real and so complete, that it was as if He were the sinner. It was thus that God saw Him in Gethsemane and on the cross, and it was as a lost and condemned sinner that God treated Him. It was no make-believe substitution. Had it not been absolutely real, all would have been lost. If Christ's standing in the place of sinners was not absolutely complete, then to that degree the ransom was not fully paid.

This vital truth is spelled out with great clarity in the foregoing statements. Every encouragement is given to the student to concentrate his attention on the wording of these paragraphs so that the message is not missed. Become immovably confirmed in the truth that Christ in no way received any "preferred son" treatment from His Father resulting in His being punished in a different way from that of the lost and unrepentant sinner. Obtain from the cross of Calvary a clear view of the way God acted there, and you will know exactly how God acts when a sinner has eternally refused the offer of repentance.

Back in the Garden of Eden, despite the warnings given them from God, Adam and Eve chose to go the way of transgression. That way incurs a punishment, the nature of which has already been discussed in an earlier chapter.¹⁹ There it was shown that God has given man life, a home, and mighty powers to enable him to live in full happiness and achievement in that home. But power with its capacity to maintain life on the best of levels also has the potential for destroying it altogether.

To protect man from the latter eventuality, God gave him the law as a love gift from heaven. Obedience to it would perpetuate his eternal and perfect happiness, but disobedience would unleash all those powers in a destructive role. That destruction would in

¹⁹ See Chapter 9 "A Perfect Law", Subheading "Wages of Sin and Righteousness."

no way be the working of God's personal retaliation against the sinner. It would be the inevitable outworking of his own course of action.

When the first pair sinned, they took another god in place of the real God, making it impossible for Him to continue as the Sustainer of all the powers of nature without forcing His presence where it was not desired. Therefore, in the very moment when they turned out of the pathway of righteousness, there were mighty powers poised and ready to strike. Though provided for their blessing, these powers would have destroyed them. Adam and Eve would have died that very day as God had said, had it not been for divine intervention.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1085:

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. I will stand in man's place. He shall have another chance."

The substitution of Christ in man's place was complete. Christ bore the same punishment and stood in the same place to receive it. To determine the nature of the sentence to fall upon man, study need only be given to the way Christ died.

How Did Christ Die?

There are two ways in which it could have happened. One is under the power of an offended God rising to vindicate His authority. The death would then be the result of God's direct act. If this is the way the sinner is to die, then Christ must have died in an identical fashion. God cannot administer one sentence to the sinner and a different one to Christ, for if He did, He would deny the truth that Christ took man's punishment and stood in man's place.

The other possibility was for God to let Christ suffer the penalty of sin. His death would then be the outworking of the broken law. This does not mean that Christ broke the law. It

means that He took upon himself the penalty of man's breaking the law. If this is the way Christ died, then that is the way man is to die.

In short the question is, did God kill Christ or did sin? Whichever it was, the same destroys the sinner. They die in the same way precisely.

The reading of individual statements certainly gives the impression that it is God who personally administers the punishment to the sinner according to His judgment of what it should be. Here is a sample of such a statement.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1166:

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."

For so long we have been accustomed to interpret words like these according to our understanding of human behavior. We have believed that they describe God as One who, with patience exhausted, arises to personally punish those who have offended Him. But the witness of the cross does not support this interpretation.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1166:

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.

Reference is made in this quotation to the working of God's justice. A caution again needs to be sounded that God's ways are not our ways, and therefore God's justice and man's justice are not the same. More will be studied on this later.

This statement recognizes that there is a terrible punishment to fall upon those who have rejected the protection of righteous law. It also states that the same work to be done in destroying the impenitent, was done to Christ when He died. Therefore, His death is a revelation of the work of God in the death of the wicked. By this means we can understand the Bible meaning of how God punishes the sinner.

Before we do look at the cross to see just what the Father did there, let a further statement be studied to strengthen the point that the death of Christ was exactly as the death of the sinner will be.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1103:

It is a fearful thing for the unrepenting 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.

This is the first part of this statement. From what has been read thus far, the impression can easily be formed that God is the destroyer. When we hear a human being speak of his enemy in these words,

“If that man should ever fall into my hands...”

–we know that he purposes to use all his power to personally crush and destroy that man. So we are apt to think of God in the same terms because of our familiarity with the earthly meaning of such an expression. But as the statement continues, it gives us a guideline, the experience of God and Christ at the cross, to enable us to understand the real meaning of those words.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1103:

But never was this [the fearful thing of falling into the hands of the living God] 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.

He who looks firstly and only at what he thinks he sees taking place at the flood and at Sodom and Gomorrah, will arrive at an incorrect view of what it does mean to fall into the hands of the living God. But, if he looks firstly at the death of Christ and understands from the revelation there what it means to fall into the hands of the living God, then he will have the right view of the character and justice of God.

The revelation of this truth is strengthened as we read further in the paragraph.

It was in consequence of sin, the transgression of God's law, that the Garden of Gethsemane has become pre-eminently the place of suffering to a sinful world. No sorrow, no agony, can measure with that which was endured by the Son of God.

Man has not been made a sin-bearer, and he will never know the horror of the curse of sin which the Saviour bore. No sorrow can bear any comparison with the sorrow of Him upon whom the wrath of God fell with overwhelming force. 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 suffering to endure that which resulted from the sins of a lost world. The 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. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ to the repenting, believing sinner.

So Christ said,

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1085:

Let the punishment fall on me. I will stand in man's place.

This is what happened;

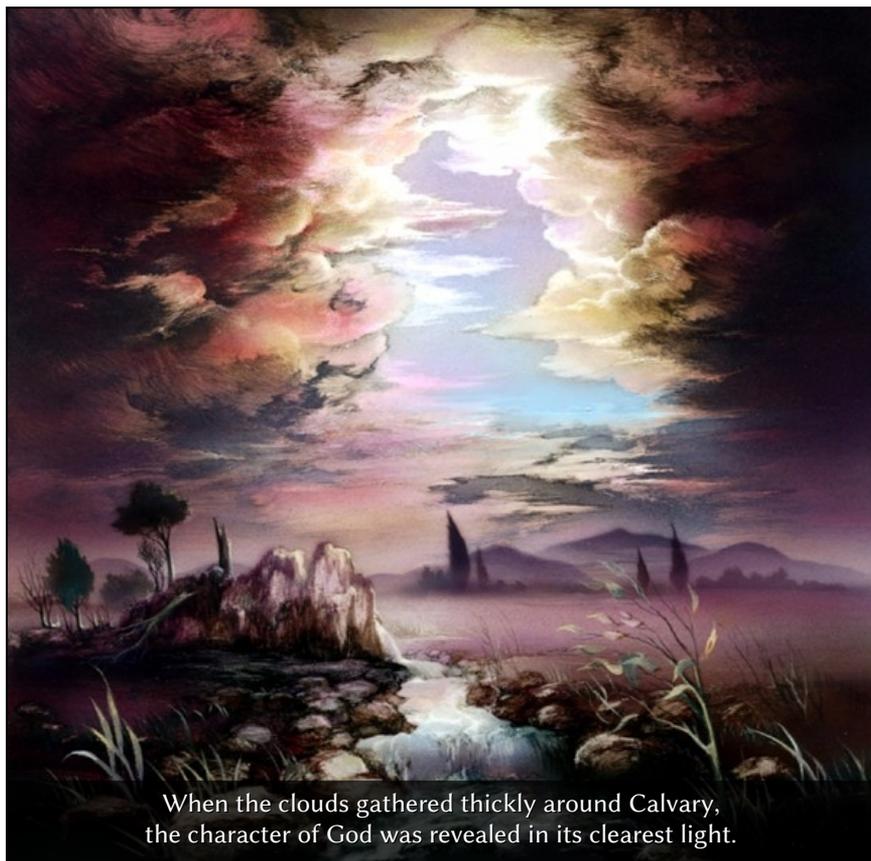
- The punishment did fall on Christ;
- The sword of justice did to Christ exactly what it does to sinful man;
- He received the full outpouring of the wrath of God;
- He fell into the hands of the living God; and
- Thus died as man will die if he remains in sin.

This being so, we only need to study how Jesus died on the cross to understand how God will relate himself to the sinner. Jesus' death gives us an understanding of what the wrath of God is and of what the punishment of sin consists.

On the cross of Calvary Christ died the death of the sinner, but the Father did not slay His Son. It was sin which slew the Son of God. The Father only withdrew from the Son and left Him to perish. Christ stood in the very position of the sinner who wants nothing of God and demands His departure. After the withdrawal of the sustaining, life-protecting, life-giving power of God, there was nothing to save Christ from the awful, destructive power of sin. Its fearful weight crushed His life forces into extinction.

The Desire of Ages, p. 772:

But 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.



When the clouds gathered thickly around Calvary, the character of God was revealed in its clearest light.

How are Unrepentant Men Punished?

There can be no mistaking the way in which Christ died. Accordingly, there is no difficulty in knowing how man will die at the destructive hands of sin. At the cross the full penalty which Christ undertook to bear in man's place was exacted, but Christ did not find the Father waiting for Him there as an executioner to extinguish every ray of hope and element of life. It was sin which awaited Him.

So men will never find God waiting as their executioner. Satan makes it appear that He does, but it is not so. The cross of Calvary proves that. Sin is the destroyer which awaits the condemned sinner. Man places himself under its obliterating power by his total

rejection of God whom he replaces with another god who has no power to sustain and protect him.

With Christ, God's withdrawal from Him was in fulfillment of the covenant made between the Father and the Son that the Saviour would stand in man's place to receive the punishment man had incurred. This was a voluntary sacrifice made by both the Father and the Son. For God to accept that Christ stand in man's place, He must separate himself from Christ as He would from the guilty sinner, thus leaving Him fully exposed to the destructive power of sin.

This is that to which man is left. This is how he perishes. The particular form in which the executioner awaits him varies according to place and circumstances. Thus some meet the grim reaper in the person of enraged enemies; others perish by the inroads of fearful diseases; some are cut down by nature out of control; while others perish in accidents and calamities. All these forces only await the opportunity to wreak havoc and death among the human family.

Nothing can deny the truths presented by Christ on the cross. He took the punishment due to fall on man and shows how man perishes. In this is given to us the most accurate picture of the nature of God's wrath and the punishment of man which could ever be given.

It might be argued that in the end it will be an all-engulfing fire which will obliterate mankind and that this punishment did not fall on Christ. It is true that no literal fire consumed Christ upon the cross, but this creates no problem. The particular weapon used by sin to punish the sinner will vary according to the circumstances. Sometimes it is fire, as at Sodom and Gomorrah and at the end, or it can be an earthquake, tidal wave, volcanic eruption, or disease. The particular means by which the punishment of sin is administered is not important. The important thing is that it comes by the sinner's casting off the protecting and sustaining hand of God.

Those then who would truly understand the way in which the punishment of sin will fall, how the justice of God will strike, and how the wrath of God descends upon the shelterless head of the guilty, must go to the wondrous sacrifice made upon the hill outside Jerusalem. This is the place to begin.

Thereafter let every truth in the Bible from *Genesis* to *Revelation* be studied in the light which streams from that cross. Only then will the truth be comprehended.



21. The Way of the Cross

THE witness of the cross is not limited to proving that God does not destroy the rejecters of His mercy. There is much more light than that streaming from Calvary's cross.

An Infinite Revelation

The revelation of God's character and purposes as given at the cross are infinite in its scope. Therefore they are inexhaustible. In heaven when we will have spent a hundred million years researching this unfolding of God's character, there will still be an infinitude beyond. When one attempts to consider how much knowledge will be accumulated from one hundred million years of concentrated study and yet still leave an infinitude to learn, one quickly realizes how little of the love and character of God has yet been learned by humanity.

To some the thought of never reaching the end of a subject might seem a discouraging prospect, whereas in fact it should be a most reassuring one. If we were ever to come to the place where there was nothing more to learn or achieve, then the joy of heaven would die. Therefore it is a comfort to know that such a point can never be reached by the finite mind. Eternity will never exhaust the beauty, power, and wonder of God's character. Every new revelation of that character will increase the joy and satisfaction of every soul.

The Desire of Ages, p. 19-20:

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 un-fallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 740:

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.

Yet as we study the Bible and meditate upon the life of Christ and the plan of redemption, these great themes will open to our understanding more and more. And it will be ours to realize the blessing which Paul desired for the Ephesian church when he prayed “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.”

The focal point of all that glory is the cross of Christ. The beholding of the glory of that revelation will change us into the same image from glory to glory as it is written:

2 Corinthians 3

¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

This is the way to become like Christ. It is not by the threat of punishment or the offers of eternal riches that one is motivated to develop a fitness for heaven. It is by devoting the life to the intensive study of God’s wonderful character in response to the drawing power of infinite love.

The Desire of Ages, p. 480:

It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour's matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice, and they follow Him.

If the full implications of this truth could be grasped as they should be, there would be such an intensive study of the sacrifice of Christ as this world has never seen. Paul appreciated this so that he...

1 Corinthians 2

² ...determined not to know any thing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Paul did not deny that he had preached doctrine, prophecy, or the law. Research through his epistles proves that he did present those subjects. However his declarations on these themes were always and only as they stood in the light which streams from the cross. He rightly saw that every word of Scripture was the revelation of Jesus Christ whose finest manifestation centers in the cross. So it was that when he preached doctrine, prophecy, and law, he was still preaching nothing among them,

² ...except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

In this he set the example for every preacher for all time. The only truly effective gospel work is that which makes the cross the center of all discourses. The commission given to Paul is the same as that given to every child of God. We are not sent to debate or to deliver dissertations on this and that Bible subject. We are to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ with its great central point, the cross. Paul affirmed the truth of this for himself and us in the words:

1 Corinthians 1

¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

From this verse we can see that after the Lord arrested Paul's mad course of destruction and sent him forth as a missionary to the Gentiles, He gave him the specific commission to go preach the gospel of the cross. But this was really only a reiteration of the great commission given just before Pentecost. Before He left this earth, Christ gathered His beloved followers around Him and solemnly outlined their mission. He instructed them,

Mark 16

¹⁵ Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Paul was, in the most exacting sense, faithful to his calling. When the time drew near for his execution, he said with conviction under the inspiration of the Spirit of Truth,

2 Timothy 4

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.

For the faithful fulfillment of his commission, Paul had to know just what the preaching of the gospel really was. The master counterfeiter was as wide awake then as he is today. In this concluding era of human history, Satan has his spurious version of the cross just as he had in Paul's time. Enlightened by the ministry of the Spirit, the inspired apostle was well able to detect the deception while comprehending the wisdom and power resident in the true gospel of the genuine cross. Thus he was competent to present the saving cross as distinct from the false version. Paul wrote that:

1 Corinthians 1

¹⁸ The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Two Antagonistic Crosses

When he made this statement, he was not speaking of the cross as known by the world, but as presented in the life and death of Christ. The principles of these two crosses are opposite and antagonistic to each other. Never shall the two come into any kind of harmony or cooperation. Where one is upheld, the other is rejected.

- On God's side it is the symbol of the very spirit of self-sacrificing love. It is the ultimate declaration that God will never use the limitless powers at His command to compel any to follow and serve Him.
- On Satan's side the cross is the revelation of the spirit of selfishness at its fully matured worst. It is the declaration that those who will not submit to the one in power, will be subjected to the cruelest torture and death.

So despised was the true cross by the unbelieving world that to them it was either foolishness or a stumbling-block. They saw in it not the slightest power or attraction.

1 Corinthians 1

²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

²³ But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness,

²⁴ But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Times have not changed since Paul's day, but many would argue that they have. They would ridicule any suggestion that to them the cross was either foolishness or a stumbling-block. To support this, they would point to the dominant place it holds in their literature, preaching, and worship, and its prolific use in the

adornment of their religious houses and persons. They would then inquire if this was not sufficient evidence to prove that, far from being foolishness to them, the cross is the very heart and life of their religion.

This argument does seem to conclusively prove that the cross is not foolishness today but was only so in Paul's time. But in God's Word we will find that there is a deeper and more beautiful understanding to be gained. From this we can see that there has been no change, that the true cross of Christ is just as much foolishness today as it ever was in Paul's day. We will come to see that the modern cross of today is another cross altogether.

This means that there are two crosses—the cross of Christ and the Babylonian cross, usually referred to as the Christian cross. As already stated, the former is the revelation of God's character, while the latter symbolizes the spirit which actuates the devil and his followers.

The enemy did not institute his cross when he took Christ to the hill of sacrifice. Neither the Jew nor the Greek beheld it then for the first time. That evil cross dated back to the setting up of the counterfeit kingdom shortly after the flood. At that time there was a "mighty hunter before the Lord" whose name was Nimrod and whose brief mention in Scripture appears in *Genesis* 10:8-11. The description of him as being before the Lord is to be understood in the sense that he placed himself before God or in the place of God for whom he had neither respect nor regard.

His life ended in a violent and untimely death which his wife, Semiramis, and others upheld as a voluntary sacrifice on his part.²⁰ It was taught that, provided the Babylonians revered this noble offering, they would be preserved forever. As a fitting reward, Nimrod was given deification as the sun god and the first day of the week was set aside as his day.

²⁰ See *The Two Babylons*, p. 61-62, by Alexander Hislop, published by S. W. Partridge and Co., 4-6, Soho Square, London; 1957 Edition.

Once the dead hero had been deified, then the secret mysteries of the Babylonian religion were set up. In due course, the licentious Semiramis bore an illegitimate son. She and the upholders of the secret mysteries taught that this child was the reincarnation of the dead hero. Thus Nimrod was represented as being both the father and the son while the child was also declared to be both her husband and her son.

The name Tammuz was given to the child, the significance being that this had been Nimrod's name too. But, whereas a son is simply named after his father without in fact being the father himself, in this case the name was given because it was believed that the father had actually reappeared. It was not purported to be a birth in the normal sense. It was regarded as an incarnation.

It is immediately apparent that in all this, the mystery of God is remarkably counterfeited. Christ was to come and die a sacrificial death, the acceptance and recognition of which would restore eternal life. Christ was both God and man. Thus He had the nature of the Father and man. In a spiritual sense He was also Mary's husband as He is the husband of every believer. This unique role of being both the Father and the Son was the subject of a difficult and, for them, unanswerable question put to the Pharisees by Christ.

Matthew 22

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

⁴² Saying, What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He? They said to Him, The Son of David.

⁴³ He said to them, How then does David in the Spirit call Him Lord, saying:

⁴⁴ The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool?

⁴⁵ If David then calls Him Lord, how is He his son? And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him any more.

The incontrovertible witness of the Scriptures was that the Messiah was the Lord or spiritual father of King David, yet at the

same time, the Word testified that He would be David's son. It is the mystery of God that the same being can be both the father and the son, and it is the mystery of iniquity to pretend that it is so in a created being apart from the only One who could be such.

Tammuz then, as the supposedly reincarnated Nimrod, was exalted to the place of highest honor in the ancient mysteries and appeared under different names in various religious orders. The whole system was designed by Satan to assist him in more effectively warring against God. While its structure held the appearance of being a reproduction of the divine mysteries, its every spirit and principle of operation was hostile to divine principles. There is no real similarity between them. The deceptive appearance was skillfully crafted to ensnare and destroy the bodies, minds, and souls of men.

It is characteristic of every system of human devising to erect a visible symbol as a means of identification. Thus nations have their flags, armies their uniforms, organizations their badges, special groups their insignias, and so on. God too has His identifying signs, but they are not material things made of cloth, bronze, silver, or gold. They are spiritual in nature and cannot be discerned except with the enlightened eye.

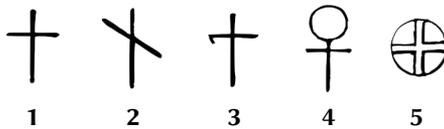
The secret mysteries also needed a symbol to give them a distinguishing identification. Such a sign must center in the being who, it was believed, had come back from the dead. Accordingly, the first letter of Tammuz' name, which in its ancient form was in the shape of a cross, became the insignia of that vast apostate and rebellious religious system. It was as fully important and sacred in that ancient system as it is in the papal orders today. Alexander Hislop has made this point very strongly in the following extract.

In the Papal system, as is well known, the sign of the cross and the image of the cross are all in all. No prayer can be said, no worship engaged in, no step almost can be taken, without the frequent use of the sign of the cross. The cross is looked upon as the grand charm, as the great refuge in every season of danger, in ev-

ery hour of temptation as the infallible preservative from all the powers of darkness. The cross is adored with all the homage due only to the Most High; and for any one to call it, in the hearing of a genuine Romanist, by the Scriptural term, “the accursed tree,” is a mortal offense.

To say that such superstitious feeling for the sign of the cross, such worship as Rome pays to a wooden or a metal cross, ever grew out of the saying of Paul, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”—that is, in the doctrine of Christ crucified—is a mere absurdity, a shallow subterfuge and pretense. The magic virtues attributed to the so-called sign of the cross, the worship bestowed on it, never came from such a source.

The same sign of the cross that Rome now worships was used in the Babylonian Mysteries, was applied by Paganism to the same magic purposes, was honored with the same honors. That which is now called the Christian cross was originally no Christian emblem at all, but was the mystic Tau of the Chaldeans and Egyptians—the true original form of the letter T—the initial of the name of Tammuz—which, in Hebrew, radically the same as ancient Chaldee, as found on coins, was formed as in No. 1 of the accompanying woodcut; and in Etrurian and Coptic, as in Nos. 2 and 3. That mystic Tau was marked in baptism on the foreheads of those initiated in the Mysteries, and was used in every variety of way as a most sacred symbol. To identify Tammuz with the sun it was joined sometimes to the circle of the sun, as in No. 4; sometimes it was inserted in the circle, as in No. 5.



Whether the Maltese cross, which the Romish bishops append to their names as a symbol of their episcopal dignity, is the letter T, may be doubtful; but there seems no reason to doubt that that Maltese cross is an express symbol of the sun; for Layard found it as a sacred symbol in Nineveh in such a connection as led him to identify it with the sun.

The mystic Tau, as the symbol of the great divinity, was called “the sign of life;” it was used as an amulet over the heart; it was marked on the official garments of the priests, as on the official garments of the priests of Rome; it was borne by kings in their hand, as a token of their dignity or divinely-conferred authority. The Vestal virgins of Pagan Rome wore it suspended from their necklaces, as the nuns do now.

The Egyptians did the same, and many of the barbarous nations with whom they had intercourse, as the Egyptian monuments bear witness. In reference to the adorning of some of these tribes, Wilkinson thus writes: “The girdle was sometimes highly ornamented; men as well as women wore earrings; and they frequently had a small cross suspended to a necklace, or to the collar of their dress. The adoption of this last was not peculiar to them; it was also appended to, or figured upon, the robes of the Rot-n-no; and traces of it may be seen in the fancy ornaments of the Rebo, showing that it was already in use *as early as the fifteenth century before the Christian era.*” There is hardly a Pagan tribe where the cross has not been found.²¹



PAGAN CROSSES

Paul’s statement that the cross was foolishness to the Greek cannot be rightly understood except it be known that the cross was as much an integral and important part of Greek and Roman religion then, as it is of papal and Protestant religion today. Consequently, if Paul’s words had been reported to the Greeks or Romans of that time, they would have ridiculed the idea as being utterly false, exactly as modern religionists would, if it was suggested that the cross was foolishness to them. They would point to the dominant role of the cross in their religious rites and ceremonies, to its multiplied appearances in every church function,

²¹ Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 197-199.

and on every person and building, offering these things as evidence that the cross is anything but foolishness. To them it is an object receiving the deepest reverence and continual adoration in their worship. They would have contended that Paul's assertion, not the cross, was the foolish thing.

Thus there existed the testimony of God's Word through the inspired apostle, versus the counterclaim by the Greek and Roman. It must be conceded that the Greek would be entirely sincere in what he said, believing that he, and not Paul, spoke the truth. The problem lay in the fact that they were speaking about two different crosses. The cross as Paul knew and taught it was utterly foolish to the Greek, while the cross as the Greek knew it was anything but that.

Nothing has changed since that day. The cross of Christ with all it stands for is still foolishness to the world including the modern religionist, while the cross known and understood by the world is the epitome of human wisdom and ways.

The cross, be it that of Christ or of Babylon, is nothing in itself. It is merely two pieces of inanimate wood crossed and joined together. But it is highly symbolic. It is representative of the culture, learning, beliefs, and ways of the two great opposing powers. When that is comprehended, it will be seen just how the cross of Christ is foolishness to the Greek, the Roman, and to everyone except he who is vitally connected in spirit and principle to Christ.

A Revelation of Character

Consider then the symbolism of the cross as it was known in the religious world of the past and today. It represents the principles of the religion, and these principles become part of the thinking and behavior of the members. We are not concerned with high professions, nor with the fact that these professions often do not have matching behavior in the lives of the people. A high profession is not necessarily what the religion really is. Our concern is to understand what the real principles of the religion are.

In God's system of religion, the cross is the revelation of His character. In all false systems it is the revelation of the character of the man of sin, the son of perdition. Therefore, while the cross as a symbol did not appear till the days of Tammuz, that which it represents dates back to Lucifer's defection when he established his counter-philosophy.

The cross, as the conveyer of God's message to the universe, is the expression of that spirit which seeks the blessing and salvation of others no matter how much the cost might be to one's self. As the symbol of Satan's way, it declares that character which seeks its own benefit, no matter what the cost to others.

Give careful consideration now to the development of the first sinful character. Sin is not original, that is, it was not created that way. The first created being was righteous. That is a self-evident truth for, in the beginning, the Lord made all things good. Therefore, sin must be a perverted development of the original righteousness.

Then, step by step, for this can never be the work of a moment, the deviation matured until it became utterly at enmity with the God who had given only perfect righteousness in the beginning. Its first appearance was in Lucifer, the bright and morning star, but what happened in him has been repeated in every subsequent departure from the living God and the cross of Christ.

The way of the living God is self-sacrificing, self-renouncing love. In God's infinite wisdom He has created a circle of love reaching out from Him to the uttermost limits of the universe. Returning to Him is the praise and joy of His creation. No one is to receive merely for his own gratification and advantage. Each is to be a channel so that everything received is passed on to those around. While that beautiful stream flows in unbroken rhythm, no note of sadness or jarring discord can break the sweet harmonies of God's kingdom.

Lucifer's Rejection of the Cross

When Lucifer, as the covering cherub, was a part of this system, he was happy and faithfully fulfilled his appointed mission of service. But the time came when his fidelity to this principle began to waver and then break down.

He was the brightest of all the angels. He held the highest position available to a creature. His talents were developed more than that of any other angel, and all of this was due to the gifts showered upon him by his Creator, combined with his own diligent effort. At first he felt only gratitude to God for His wonderful love.

His heart daily responded to the life flowing from God to him. But with the passing of time, he imperceptibly became increasingly aware of himself and his brilliance and less aware of the God who had given it all to him. With wonderful clearness the Scriptures discern the cause of Lucifer's fall from his lofty elevation:

Ezekiel 28

¹⁶ By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned.

Lucifer gradually transferred his faith from the Giver of all good things to the gifts provided by the Giver. He began to believe that if he retained that which came into his possession, then he would accumulate so much more of these delightful things. Thus the already wealthy angel thought he would become just that much wealthier.

The Way of Apostasy

All this is not so easily seen in Lucifer's life as it is in the lives of men and women. The procedure has been repeated countless times since Satan came to Eve at the forbidden tree. It is most noticeable in the history of movements which have been raised up by God to effectively demonstrate His character and thus bring about the termination of sin and its attendant horrors.

Such movements are born out of times of great spiritual apostasy. The exodus movement from Egypt lifted the people out of the deep darkness of the long Egyptian night. So it was with the return to the promised land after the Babylonian captivity. Later the apostolic church emerged from the darkness of the long Jewish rejection of divine principles as did the reformation churches from the papal midnight.

Such returnings to God are championed initially by a lone voice pitted against overwhelming opposition from the ruling elite who are aided by the superstition, fear, and ignorance of the general populace. The Lord's chosen messenger sees with vivid clarity his hopeless inadequacy to cope with these combined powers of darkness, but he cannot draw back. He is committed to his mission. Therefore, he is forced to flee to the Mighty One for strength.

As he pours out his confession of frailty and need and by faith makes a living connection with the Almighty, the windows of heaven are opened and light, power, and material aid are directed to him. He hurries these gifts into the battle, and, as quickly as they are exhausted, he returns to receive more and still more. As others join him, they, with like consecration, throw all they have into the battle, looking to God and God alone for their guidance and support. The sense of need during this period is very great, resulting in a total absence of self-sufficiency.

As time goes by, great victories are achieved, numbers are added to the ranks, and the initial struggles are followed by a relatively quieter period. God continues to deliver His wonderful blessings to them for the purpose of their using them to reach out still further with the message of power.

But, like the Israelites of Joshua's day who did not push the battle to the utmost ends of the land but allowed pockets of rebellion to remain, so the believers do not follow the directive to go beyond Jerusalem and Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth. Privation, self-denial, and sacrifice are not attractive to the human

nature which prefers ease, pleasure, comfort, and above all, security. The temptation to turn aside at least in part from the heat of the battle is so attractive as to win little by little. More and more of God's gifts are appropriated for personal security and comfort.

As a firm base of material security is formed, the intense sense of need which previously drew them to God as the Supplier of all good things diminishes, while the accent is placed more and more on the acquisition of the material and the visible. Soon, house is being added to house, and land to land, until the whole mission of the church is lost, and the accumulation of personal wealth becomes the one great objective in life.

Inevitably this produces a change in the spirit and experience of those who had once been devoted only to the service of God and humanity. Their thoughts and interests center less and less in God, and more and more in merchandise. The increase in possessions breeds a growing feeling of security. The basis of their faith becomes money, houses, land, and other material things. Such have lost faith in God. But it is important to understand that they have not lost faith. Instead they have transferred it from the great Giver of all things to the gifts given by the Giver.

They take increasing pride and personal satisfaction in their enlarging prosperity. They view with gratification their industrious labor, their honest, faithful payment of accounts, and their scrupulous attention to their various obligations. To them this is proof that they have gained their wealth blamelessly. They feel entitled to all that they have. They consider themselves blessed of heaven and possessors of no more than their just rights. This conviction develops in them the spirit of contention for those rights so that if anyone should threaten to relieve them of the least part of their gains, they will resist and even counterattack to the limit of their powers.

The human tragedy is that the real nature of what they have done is hidden from them. That which they regard as being a perfectly legitimate course is in fact one of fraud and embezzlement,

for they have misappropriated the goods entrusted to them to a purpose other than that designated by the Giver.

This earth is not heaven. It is a wilderness of suffering and despair created by the entry of sin. A crisis situation exists which the Father and the heavenly ministers are devoted to ending as soon as possible. But it is impossible to accomplish this without the entire cooperation of His people. God does not leave those who accept their responsibility to do this work alone. He has made available every necessary facility. But none of this is given to man to make this earth into a paradise for himself while the vast majority suffer want, disease, affliction, and degradation. All these gifts are given for carrying forward the vast program of salvation.

Jesus Christ provided the finest example of this. There was much which He received from His Father day by day, but none of it was used for His own personal gratification. Everything entrusted to Him was faithfully consecrated to preaching the gospel of the cross.

Tragically, this peerless example is seldom understood and even less emulated by those who claim to be followers of the meek and lowly One. Instead of being strictly faithful stewards, they have misappropriated into other uses that which the Lord gave for specifically designated purposes. The charge of unfaithfulness will be laid against such stewards. The stream of blessing intended by God to flow through them has stopped and become a Dead Sea.

But this is only the early stages of human defection. The Scriptures tell us that in Lucifer's case, the multitude of his merchandise filled the midst of him with violence.

Ezekiel 28

16 By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned.

Therefore the decay is not complete until it develops into violence, and this it will always do. As man becomes obsessed with the drive to accumulate more and more material merchandise, he shows less and less consideration and regard for his fellow men. Should they stand in the way, he will oppress them. If they can be used to assist him in building his empire, he will not hesitate to exploit them.

While he retains a superior advantage, he will successfully rise in power and wealth by this means. However, there will be a continually growing resentment on the part of those being used which will eventually break out into open violence. Throughout earth's history it is possible to find examples of this as long oppressed races rise against their overlords. Rivers of blood are shed, great changes are made in the political structure of the world, and the scepter of power passes from one group to another.

Jesus Shows the Way

The ruling elite's development of a power structure through the heavy oppression of the masses had been achieved by the Jewish hierarchy by the time of Christ's first advent. God had appointed the Jewish nation to carry the truth of His righteousness to the farthest parts of the habitable globe. To them had been given every possible advantage and blessing as equipment for the speedy and complete execution of their calling. But they had turned from living by the law of self-renouncing service to others, to gathering power and glory for themselves. They had fully transferred their faith from God to the earthly, and by the time Christ came, they exhibited all the outworkings of such a course.

Every principle of operation among them was that of Babylon which declares that you either serve the powers that be as they want you to serve them, or you perish. This is the very heart and substance of Babylonian philosophy by which she seeks to justify her mass slaughter of those who dare refuse to submit. That is her

religion, and her symbol, the cross, dates back to Nimrod and Tammuz.

Into this Babylonian darkness and sorrow Jesus came to shed forth the light of the opposite principle of self-sacrificing love. As a result, the Pharisees and Sadducees found themselves confronted with a threat, the like of which they had never known before. The peril of losing their authority, power, wealth, and all else which they had so painstakingly and untiringly worked to achieve, suddenly became terribly imminent to them. They had experienced throughout their quest for wealth and power, the continual danger of someone coming to wrest it from them, but this was by people devoted to the same principles as themselves. They could understand the workings of their enemies' minds. They knew how to cope with such supplanters and did so to the full extent of their powers.

But Jesus brought an entirely different method of working. He did not seek their power and wealth. He came to implant in the hearts of all men a new principle which in reality is the oldest principle of all, for it had operated throughout the limitless eternity of the past before sin entered. That principle is the cross of Christ as distinct from the cross of Tammuz. It is the guideline for living. It is...

The Desire of Ages, p. 20:

...the love which "seeks not her own" [and] has its source in the heart of God.

Every word spoken by Christ taught these principles. Every act of His life was a living, practical demonstration of them, while the potency which flowed from God through Him as a stream of vibrant life, bequeathed upon those willing to receive its ministry, the same spirit of selfless service. Because of it men and women were drawn to Him and longed to be recipients of His wonderful life.

Its drawing power reached out to encircle even those who had devoted their entire lives to self-aggrandizement. Those proud

and sensual minds recognized the call to an entire change in their attitudes and procedures. They saw that this involved the surrender of that which they cherished as their rights. But for the most part, they, with increasing vehemence, resisted the Saviour's loving ministry.

The more earnestly Christ worked to save them, the more decidedly they entrenched themselves in their way and devised every means possible to prevent Him from reaching the minds of the people. They hoped that mild measures would intimidate and turn Him from His mission. When this did not work, they went on under the command and leadership of Satan, their master, until they had Him nailed to the cross.

Before Christ began His public ministry, the devil met Him on the mount of temptation. There he made a proposition to Christ by showing Him the kingdoms of the world with their glory and power and promised to give Him all of it if He would but worship him.

Matthew 4

⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

⁹ And he said to Him, All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.

Those kingdoms with their pomp and glory had been put together by following the methods of serving self no matter what the cost might be to others. They could be maintained as such only by continuing those same procedures. Therefore, when Satan called upon Christ to bow down and worship him that He might receive the possession of all these earthly kingdoms as His reward, he was by implication asking Christ to change from His principles of kingdom building to those of Satan and sinful man. He was seeking to have Christ abandon the principle of self-sacrificing service for that of self-service. Satan well knew that if Christ should abandon those principles in favor of his, he would forever be the victor in the contest.

When Christ utterly rejected Satan's offering, then the king of demons was left with no alternative but to fully live out the spirit which motivated him. He would have his own way and serve his own interests no matter what it might cost others. As day by day Christ pursued with unwavering fidelity the way of the cross, the devil mounted an ever-intensifying campaign against Him. He strove to force Christ to deviate from His chartered course by making His mission as costly as possible. One of the greatest possible tests which can be imposed on human nature is service to others at one's own expense. When that expense calls for the supreme sacrifice of life itself, exacted under conditions of extreme torture and fearful mental suffering, then the test has achieved maximum intensity.

John 15

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends.

This was the service which Christ came to give thereby demonstrating the very heart of the nature of God's character. We see God declaring through Christ that He will serve the creatures He has made no matter what the cost to himself. God had declared before sin ever entered that this was what He would do as the outworking of His nature. When rebellion arose, then that declaration was tested to the uttermost. God in Christ demonstrated that He is true, that He is motivated by the principle of service to others no matter what the cost to himself. If Calvary does not prove this, then it proves nothing.

Inasmuch as Satan understood that his principles could become the established way only by the dethronement of God's way, he worked relentlessly to make Christ's service as costly as possible. He hoped the time would come when His humanity would protest to the point where He would proceed no further in paying the price for others.

But no matter how much Satan levied upon Him cost after added cost, the Saviour continued with undeviating consistency

toward the moment of total sacrifice. Not only on Calvary, but at every step towards that pivotal point in eternity, Jesus lived out the principle of service with no regard for the cost to himself. Therefore, in principle the crucifixion was nothing new to Him. It was but the ultimate confirmation of what He had been and lived eternally and would continue to live forevermore.

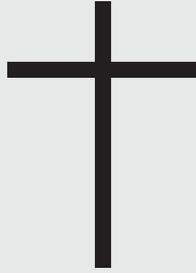
The revelation of God's character as the One who serves others irrespective of the cost to himself, was only one side of the picture. On the other side, Satan's continual exaction of the highest possible cost to the Son of God was revealing his character. He was demonstrating his determination to gain his ends no matter how high the cost paid by others.

Calvary was nothing new for Satan. It was the ultimate manifestation of his character of total selfishness. As we behold his behavior there, we are given a view of the nature of his principles and their ultimate outworking. It is seen that there is no length to which he will not go, no suffering he will not cause, no price that he will not exact from others to get what he wants. He will even take the life of the very Being who gave him life and everything he ever had, whereas this Being had given him only kindness, justice, and mercy.

Thus the cross on which the Saviour hung was in reality two crosses. It was the cross of Christ where the best demonstration of God's ways was given. It was also the Roman or Greek cross which dated back to the initiation of satanic rebellion. It was the statement, in its most cogent expression, of Satan's principles of operation. There Satan demonstrated to every creature in the universe what he would do to them if they did not pay the price whereby he could have the best for himself. Every person, system, and organization which has followed his leadership operates under the same principles to whatever extent they have the power to enforce their wills.

A graphic illustration of this is found in the behavior of the war lords of Europe during the second world war. More than one car-

One Cross Two Messages



God's

The Law of Life
is the principle of
self-sacrificing love

This is
service to others
irrespective of the
cost to self

Christ's garment is
dipped in blood
– His Own –

The Holy
Covenant

Satan's

The Law of Life
is the principle of
self-serving love

This is
service to self
irrespective of the
cost to others

Satan's garment is
dipped in blood
– Others –

The Unholy
Covenant

toonist illustrated this with pen and brush depicting Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini piling the sacrifice of millions of human lives, hopes, and fortunes into a mountain high enough to permit them to view and seize the coveted prize of absolute world dominion. It was inconsequential to them how much others had to pay, provided they acquired what they desired.

There is nothing foolish to the Greek in this cross. He understands and accepts its message. That is the only way of life he understands, for to him it is the secret to survival and access into the comforts and powers which the sinful human nature craves.

The greatest contrast to this cross and its message is the cross of which Paul spoke so reverently and enthusiastically. This is the cross as Christ presented it to the universe both in His daily life and on the cross itself. This is the supreme testimony that it is God's way to make any sacrifice to serve others, even if it means sacrificing his own life.

Take Up Your Cross

From that cross the beautiful and touching submission of Christ to the demanding cost of our salvation calls every being in God's kingdom to take up his individual cross and follow where He has led the way. Hear His voice ringing down the ages from that day when He addressed His counsels to His beloved apostles:

Matthew 16

²⁴ If any one desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

This is no plea to take two pieces of wood and secure them in the form of a cross, or to hammer into shape gold, silver, or other precious metals. This directive is not fulfilled by wearing a cross on a cord about the neck, or by fixing it to our homes.

Rather, this is an invitation to abandon forever the Babylonian principle of making the service of self foremost no matter what the cost to others. It is a challenge to so utterly deny self, that service to the needs of others will be life's first and greatest mission

no matter how costly such a work might become. Rightly understood and lived, it means that:

- When they smite you on one cheek, you will offer them the other also;
- When they sue you at the law and take your coat, you will let them have your cloak as well;
- When they compel you to go the first mile, you will cheerfully go the second;
- You will give to them that ask and will loan to those who would borrow;
- You will love your enemies;
- You will bless them that curse you;
- You will do good to them that hate you; and
- You will pray for them which despitefully use and persecute you.²²

To the unsanctified mind, the mind of the Greek, this is indeed foolishness. He can see no sense in it. But he can see much sense in the sacrifice of another on his behalf. Therefore, if the cross were no more than Christ giving His all for others, then it would not be foolishness to the Greek or anyone else. But when it calls on him to follow in the same pathway, to live as Jesus lived, to serve others no matter how great the cost to himself, then that to the Greek is foolishness indeed. That is to lose all that would ever make life worth living.

He can see himself becoming a slave, being exploited, and finally discarded, and all this for nothing, while those to whom he gave himself in service live fatly and comfortably, at his expense. Such a prospect makes this way only foolishness to the Greek.

There are indeed heights and depths in the cross of Christ as distinct from the cross of Tammuz which eternity itself can never exhaust. When it is truly seen, it will be appreciated as the finest revelation of God's character available. The Lord of glory and His

²² See *Matthew* 5:38-45.

righteousness will appear at their wondrous best while Satan and his unrighteousness stand forth at their very worst.

The cross does prove that God does not destroy as man does, for, should He do so in order to preserve His kingdom, then He would be serving himself at a terrible cost to others. That is not the way of the cross of Christ, and it is not the way of God's character. It is the principle of the kingdom of darkness.

But, while it proves this point, the cross is vastly more of a message to God's people than that, vitally important as that truth is. Calvary challenges every individual in the universe to find and follow the way which received its most magnificent, explicit, and comprehensive exhibition on Golgotha's hill. Look again, deeper and still deeper into its splendors.

When the lessons to be learned at the foot of the cross are truly comprehended and daily and more deeply refreshed, there will walk this earth a transformed people through whom at last the finishing of the sin problem can be accomplished.

To the Greek, it was foolishness;
To the Jew it was a stumbling-block,
But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks,
It is Christ,
 the power of God, and
 the wisdom of God.²³

²³ See *1 Corinthians* 1:23-24.

22. God Is Not a Criminal

WHAT has been studied so far of the revelation of God's character as provided by Christ's life and death, is only the barest beginning of what may be learned of God through this means. Volumes could be written on Christ's life as the unfolding of the Father's character, and the temptation to write at much greater length on this aspect is very strong but must be curbed when consideration is given to the purpose and limited scope of one volume.

In the future, God, through whatever means He chooses, will reveal more light concerning His character, and this knowledge will be a deepening and expanding of what has been presented so far. There will be no necessity to abandon or revise the positions already laid down, or the great verities unfolded.

There can be no mistaking the kind of Heavenly Father introduced to us by the Saviour in every act and word of His ministry. It is the picture of a God filled with love and compassion whose mercy endures forever, who does not condemn or destroy but seeks only and ever to save. As a king He is different from any earthly king. As a judge there is no other like Him. No earthly ruler or empire provides us with an illustration of this great and wonderful God.

The God of the Old Testament

But this is not how we have viewed Him in the Old Testament. There we have seen Him as a stern God who has maintained His authority by superiority of power and knowledge. We have seen Him as One who spelled out His law as the symbol of His authority and called upon men to obey it so that He could feel the satisfaction of being in power. Thus, even though unwittingly, we have seen Him as a self-centered God. We have failed entirely to see the provision of the law as a love gift to save us from destruction. Therefore, we have failed to see God as One in whom there is no selfishness.

Having seen the nature of the law in this light, it has been natural to conclude that the plagues upon Egypt, the fire upon Sodom, the flood upon the world, and every other destructive incident, was God demonstrating that He was not to be ignored, trifled with, or disobeyed. We have looked upon God as personally upholding His position and authority. We have regarded the utter destruction of God's opponents as a just act on His part to terrify the remainder into obedience and thus into personal favor with Him. But it is not the view of God which Jesus held. Nor is it the picture of God which He presented. It was an altogether different God of whom Jesus came to speak.

What then? Are we to hold two differing views of God, one as presented in the Old Testament and the other as proclaimed by Christ? God forbid! He sent His Son with the commission to reveal Him as He is and thus to sweep away the sad misconceptions developed prior to the appearance of Christ. Therefore, we cannot hold two conflicting views of God and justify them by saying that each applies to a different situation. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He never changes. Sin has not and cannot change Him. For that to happen, sin must become part of Him which it never has done and never will do.

Before sin entered, Lucifer, his angels, and men did not destroy. But sin changed them, and they became destroyers. And when the religion of Christ truly takes hold of a man, it returns him to the original position, and he ceases to be a destroyer. But God has never sinned, therefore He has never destroyed.

If we cannot hold any other view of God than that presented by Christ, how are we to understand God's actions in the Old Testament? The majority will object that the pictures in the Old Testament are so clear that it is impossible to view God in any other than the traditional light. This is exactly where the mistake has been made. There is another way of looking at God's actions in the Old Testament. Viewed through the colored lens of human preconceptions, it seems that the traditional way is the obvious

and only way. But this is not so. Furthermore, when the implications of the standard view of God are considered, then God is characterized in the worst possible light.

The time has therefore come to reconsider God's ways in the Old Testament. This time His actions will be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary and which flowed from the life and teachings of Christ.

The Case of Pharaoh

A beginning might be made almost anywhere in the Old Testament wherein are recorded numerous incidents of God's behavior in the human arena. But let us begin with the story of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. This story is well known to Bible students.

The mighty Pharaoh, in his day the greatest king in the world, stood defiantly against God's purpose to release His people from Egyptian bondage. But, when a certain point of time was reached, the Lord called Moses and sent him with a message to the king. He was commanded to set the people free with the warning that should he refuse, plague after plague would descend upon the hapless Egyptians. The king did refuse, and the plagues did come until the king's power was broken and he was obliged to release the captives.

The average view of this event is that God is the Almighty One whose power is limitless. Backed by that power and the right to do as He wishes by virtue of His position as Creator and Ruler of the Universe, He rightly and justly orders Pharaoh to release the Israelites. But Pharaoh is defiant and is prepared to resist God's power. This, it is generally accepted, leaves God with no option but to obtain by force what the king will not surrender willingly. People generally do not question either God's justice or right in dealing with the monarch as they see Him doing.

The dreadful outpouring of destruction upon Egypt and the king's steady resistance of this pressure until the very end, is seen by most as being a contest of power between God and the king.

They see it as physical power versus physical power. They do not doubt that God will win, for He has the greater power. In the end, after a protracted struggle, He does win.

In viewing this as a contest between two great powers, people see the plagues as direct instruments wielded in the hand of God against the hapless Egyptians. These things were sent upon the Egyptians, it is believed, because God decided that this was the way they should be humbled. Then, having decided it, the Lord specifically gathered these forces and directed them against His enemies.

Nor is this all. Because the Lord desired to really show the nations of the world that He was not One to be trifled with, He raised up a Pharaoh who was unusually tough, defiant, and resilient. Such a king, because he would fight doggedly to the very end, provided God with the opportunity to manifest how great He was, whereas a weaker king would have given in before the Lord had the chance to demonstrate the full range of His judgmental powers.

The same situation exists in the world of human contest and combat. A world champion boxer will not enter the ring with a novice or amateur. The man whom he fights must also be of world class so that the champion can demonstrate his skill, strength, and endurance. If his opponent was so inexperienced and weak as to go down with the first blow, then the champion would be deprived of the opportunity to display the full extent of his skill and power.

Let the reader pause here and carefully consider the picture of the Egyptian episode as presented above. Such a check will certify that this is the way in which most people view God's behavior there. Furthermore, when the subject is brought up for further study, the average person will be surprised that it should, for he feels that the whole matter is settled and no other verdict is possible. That response is an instant revelation that he has simply ac-

cepted this view of God as being correct. To him that is unquestionably just what the Scriptures say.

There is no denying the fact that, when based upon the usual method of interpretation, that is what the Scriptures will appear to say. For instance, consider such verses as the following:

Exodus 7

¹ So the Lord said to Moses: See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.

² You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh, that he must send the children of Israel out of his land.

³ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.

⁴ But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay my hand on Egypt and bring my armies and my people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.

⁵ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.

Exodus 9

¹⁶ But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you, and that my name may be declared in all the earth.

Romans 9

¹⁷ For the scripture says to Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared in all the earth.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 263:

The Lord would give the Egyptians an opportunity to see how vain was the wisdom of their mighty men, how feeble the power of their gods, when opposed to the commands of Jehovah. He would punish the people of Egypt for their idolatry and silence their boasting of the blessings received from their senseless deities. God would glorify His own name, that other nations might hear of His power and tremble at His mighty acts, and

that His people might be led to turn from their idolatry and render Him pure worship.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 267-268:

Still the heart of Pharaoh grew harder. And now the Lord sent a message to him, declaring,

Exodus 9

¹⁴ I will at this time send all my plagues upon your heart, and upon your servants, and upon your people; that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.

¹⁶ And in very deed for this cause have I raised you up, for to show in you my power.

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. His people were permitted to experience the grinding cruelty of the Egyptians, that they might not be deceived concerning the debasing influence of idolatry. In His dealing with Pharaoh, the Lord manifested His hatred of idolatry and His determination to punish cruelty and oppression.

These are the references and statements to which people point as support for their view that God wielded the powers of force in His own almighty hands to compel Pharaoh to release the Israelites. To human minds trained for so long to think of God as doing things man's way, the Scriptures provide weighty support for such arguments and views. The deeper and correct message of these writings totally escapes those whose interpretations of God's Word are guided by this concept. It is hoped that what follows will correct such sad misconceptions of our wonderful Father.

The Way of Criminal Organizations

That which should alert every mind to the erroneous nature of such conclusions, is the extremely bad light into which God is placed by them. Such teachings, no matter how well meaning the teacher might be nor how deeply sincere his professions of love for God, are declaring that the ways of God and of criminal organizations are identical. Note the following comparison.

The agents of a large criminal organization come to a certain businessman from whom they wish to obtain regular payments. The services they offer are “protection.” The businessman courageously refuses to make these “contributions” whereupon the syndicate resorts to a tried and proven method of obtaining their objective. They possess weapons of force with which they demonstrate the power at their command. These they now wield, though they do not at first use all of their might. They begin by smashing his plate glass windows and emptying the displays into the gutter.

This first blow is relatively mild, but as the owner continues to refuse, they hit him harder and harder until he is literally pounded into submission. No decent citizen, no Christian, can approve of these tactics. All would fear to be subjected to them, yet, oddly enough, they accept it as perfectly right and just in God, for that is exactly how they regard His behavior in Egypt.

The Common Misunderstanding

Here is how the Almighty is understood to have solved the Egyptian problem. God desired the release of His people. He came to Pharaoh and demanded this, but the king refused to obey. In God’s hands were mighty weapons of destruction and with these He struck the Egyptian monarch a severe blow. He did not unleash all He could have, so as to give opportunity for compliance with His demands. When this was not forthcoming, God struck Egypt again and again until king and people were pounded into submission. Thus the nation did under compulsion what it would not do any other way.

Anyone who candidly thinks about the standard view of the Egyptian plagues will recognize that this is a correct analysis of how God is seen as behaving. Immediately, it is evident that this places God in the same class as the crime syndicate. It means that the methods used by the world's leading criminals to secure their ends are those used by God. Once this is realized, the question of how we shall relate to it arises. There should be a great awakening to the need of obtaining a reversed and corrected view of God's activities in Egypt.

But this is seldom done. Marvelous are the powers of the human mind to rationalize. As a sample of this I cite a conversation held with a highly educated person who mentioned that God does personally raise His righteous hand to destroy the disobedient. Specifically, the conversation turned to ancient Egypt. He said,

“My view of the situation is that God desired and demanded of Pharaoh the release of His people. The king refused. God then struck a first blow to show that He was not speaking idly. The king was not intimidated. Therefore God struck blow after blow until Egypt was pounded into submission.”

That is, God achieved His purpose by the direct use of force when all else had failed. My friend immediately saw with great clarity that criminal organizations use the same methods.

1. They desire and demand.
2. The person involved refuses.
3. They strike the first blow to demonstrate that they mean their threats.
4. The subject continues to resist.
5. Therefore they hit him again and again until he is forced to concede.

That is, they achieve by force that which they otherwise could never gain.

I was most encouraged to see how clearly this man recognized the nature of his beliefs about God and that he could see that the syndicate operated in the same way as he understood God did. I naturally expected him to admit that he had never quite realized this before and that he was startled to see the real implications of his belief. Instead, I was given a demonstration of the power of the human mind to rationalize. Unhesitatingly he said,

“Of course God uses the same methods as criminals. What makes the difference is God’s intention. He does it with a good intention for the benefit of others. The criminal does it all for self.”

I replied,

“In that case you are saying that the end justifies the means used!”

He stoutly denied this, though the fact was inescapable. Here it is in simple terms:

- The means used by the criminal were unjustified because the end was selfish.
- The same means used by God were justified because the end was unselfish.

Once this line of reasoning has become established, any crime can be justified. During the Dark Ages millions of fine people were martyred on the basis of this rationale.

The end can never justify the means.

Let every true child of God forever reject such a philosophy. There is no place for it in the ways, character, and government of God. God has never worked like this and never will. All His ways are ways of righteousness and peace. Any belief that God and the criminal use the same methods must be forever denied by the testimony of God himself when He said,

Isaiah 55

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

Do we believe God? Shall we hold to a plain, “thus says the Lord?” Assuredly! Then we must deny the long-held traditional view of God’s behavior in Egypt because it makes God’s ways to be the ways of wicked men.

There is no issue in regard to God’s intentions versus the intentions of criminals. With few exceptions, every person would admit that God intends only good, while the motivation of wicked men is purely selfish and cruel. There is no question about that, and this book is not even involved with discussing or proving that the intentions of God and man are different. They are different. This we accept as a fact.

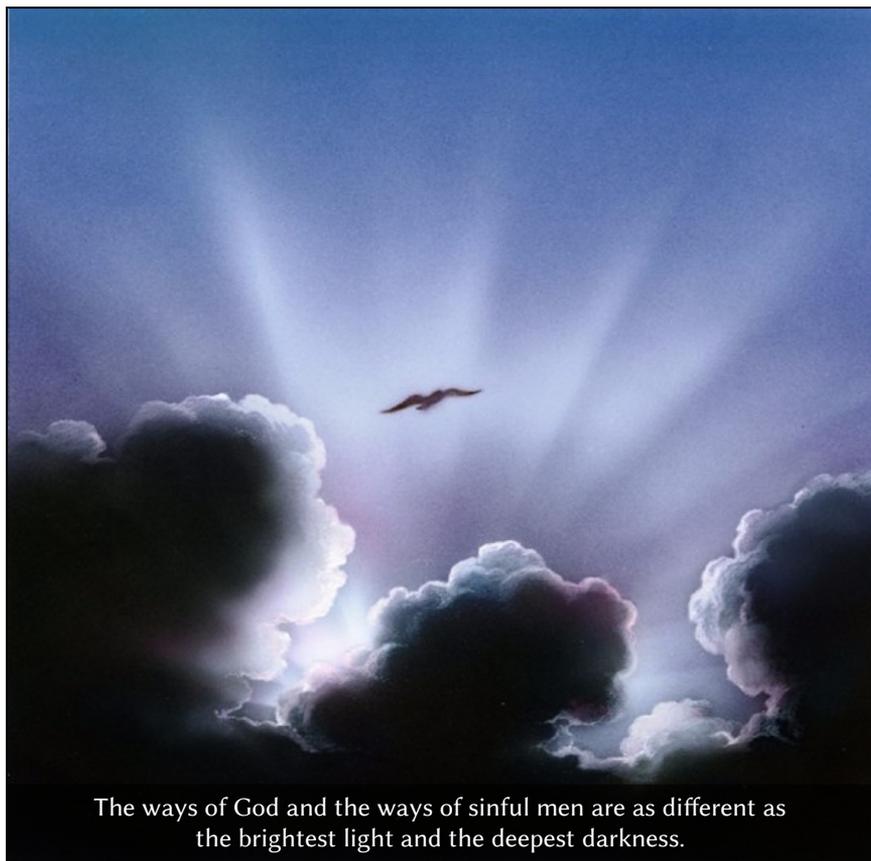
What this book is devoted to proving is that the *methods* of God and of men are different. It aims to develop the unshakable conviction that God’s words in *Isaiah* 55:8-9, mean exactly what they say. It will demonstrate that the methods used by God when dealing with those who oppose Him are not different from man’s ways in only some respects: they are totally different. No resemblance between them can be found.

Not a God of Force

God is not a God of force. This is a weapon He never uses.

The Desire of Ages, p. 759:

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. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God’s government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power.



The ways of God and the ways of sinful men are as different as the brightest light and the deepest darkness.

The Desire of Ages, p. 22:

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.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 12:

Earthly kingdoms rule by the ascendancy of physical power; but from Christ's kingdom every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion, is banished.

The Desire of Ages, p. 466:

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.

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 76:

God does not employ compulsory measures; love is the agent which He uses to expel sin from the heart.

The message of these statements is clear. The use of compelling power is found only under Satan's government. Herein lies at least one great distinction between the ways of God and the ways of Satan and men. The only course they know by which to build their kingdoms and achieve their ends is by employing force. If God builds His kingdom by using compelling power, as so many believe, then His and man's ways are the same. But they are not. Man rules by compulsion. God does not employ this means at all. Therefore, the standard view of what God did in Egypt is a false one needing to be replaced by another.

A New Foundation

While it is sound Scriptural truth that God did not use force to obtain the release of the Israelites, it cannot be concluded that He was neither present nor active in the Egyptian situation. He certainly was there, working with great intensity and purpose, but along very different lines from those generally supposed.

An entirely new and correct understanding is now needed of the role played by God that will harmonize with the following principles:

- God must be seen as doing only that which Christ lived and taught.
- He must not be seen relating to this problem as sinful man would relate to it, that is, by using force.
- Everything done must be in righteousness.

As the law is the definition of righteousness, and as God's character is the transcript of the law, then all that God did must be within those principles. As the law says, "You shall not kill," then God did not destroy or kill in the land of Egypt. Any teaching or

view which sees God as operating other than within these limits is erroneous and must be rejected as such. It is not the teaching of Christ, and is therefore of the devil.

The evidences argued here call for a restudy of the Egyptian incident. The long-closed case must be reopened and a new verdict obtained—one which will indeed reveal God as He is:

The Lord our righteousness.



23. Rods and Serpents

THIS chapter will be devoted to the study of what really happened in Egypt. It will be a radical departure from the traditionally accepted concept, but it will be in harmony with the life and teachings of Christ, the principles of God's character, and God's eternal upholding of His sacred law.

By sending Moses and Aaron to enact the parable of the rod and the serpent, God detailed before Pharaoh exactly what was about to transpire. The Lord would have spelled it out in words, but the monarch's mind was so darkened by sin that it was necessary to tell it in the clearest possible way—in pictorial form.

Since then, millions of other darkened minds have failed to correctly read the message God sent to the king that day. It has been almost universally read as the ultimatum of an all-powerful executioner who had come to personally administer His judgments. But,

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.

The Ministry of Joseph

Correctly read, this was the message delivered to the haughty monarch. God had ever looked with saving love upon the land of Egypt. It was not alone for the salvation of Israel that Joseph had been kidnapped and taken to the southern kingdom. It was that Egypt might also hear the tender voice of mercy. Joseph was a type of Christ. Both were betrayed and sold, had no record of sin written in the Bible against them, and finally became instruments to save their own nation.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1098:

The sin of the Egyptians was that they had refused the light which God had so graciously sent to them through Joseph.

Christ did not come to save Israel alone, but the whole world. Therefore, as a true type of Christ, Joseph's mission was to bring salvation to the world, not just to his own family. 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 the directions of the King of kings. That obedience resulted in Egypt not only being saved from starvation, but also in her becoming the wealthiest nation on the face of the globe. They prospered beyond imagination.

Such prosperity is the natural outworking of obedience to the laws of God's kingdom. Any study of the Church's history will show that whenever the people of God obeyed Him, they were wonderfully blessed with prosperity in health, knowledge, wealth, and power. This is the outworking of following out the law of self-sacrificing service, the principle of receiving so that more can be given.

The Decay of Egypt

The continuing and despairing tragedy of mankind is the swift forgetfulness of the principles of righteousness which had elevated them in every way. Initially the basis of their security lay in their complete faith in God. It was a faith so deep and firm that it enabled them to give all they had to meet the need of the moment and know that God would provide for tomorrow.

No better illustration of this faith can be found than the widow of Sarepta. When Elijah came to her, she had only enough flour and oil to make a last cake for her son and herself. Beyond that, death was her next expectation. When Elijah's need was presented before her—and though she knew it not, how essential to God's work was the life of Elijah—she unhesitatingly shared with him her last morsel, and simply trusted God to supply her own needs thereafter.

This kind of faith is the basis of that self-sacrificing love which brings great prosperity to God's people. But, as material possessions accumulate, little by little they displace faith in God as the

basis of security. It is always so much easier to believe in money in the bank, a good solid house, and a prosperous farm or business which you can see, than in a seemingly distant God whom you cannot see.

It is not that faith has been lost. It has simply been transferred from the God of the gifts to the gifts themselves. This does not happen instantaneously. It is a slow process, so gradual as to be imperceptible except to those on guard against it. But, in direct proportion to its development, is an increasing desire to amass wealth to strengthen this material security base. In addition, there is a corresponding drying up of the spirit of self-sacrifice.

Increasingly the gifts of God are devoted to selfish pleasure until selfishness becomes the dominating force in the life. The person or movement which began so richly in God's service comes to deny the principles of righteousness. As the years pass, they will go on from this point to develop into the full stature of the man of sin. Step by step they thereby remove themselves from the protecting circle of God's love until they stand fully exposed to Satan's malice. So it was with the Egyptians.

While God was working only for their salvation, Satan masterminded a plot for their total destruction. He knew he could touch neither them nor the Israelites while they remained obedient to God. So he worked with unflagging diligence to turn their eyes away from God. He wished to divert their attention from the God who had blessed them to the blessings received from God. As so often is the case, he was successful. Egypt became proud, self-confident, and oppressive. This led to their becoming taskmasters over the Israelites who had blessed them.

Satan's Plan of Destruction

Thus Satan engineered a situation wherein the Israelites were not able to serve God fully except at the direct cost of their lives. The daily sacrificial system ceased, the Sabbath was hardly kept, if at all, and the people became degraded in sin. This was just as Satan wanted it, for he knew that once he had led Egypt into the full

practice of self-service and therefore of utter rejection of God, they would move outside the circle of God's mercy and would be in his destructive power.

As generation after generation of Egyptians descended more deeply into the mire of abandoned iniquity, Satan saw the day drawing nearer when there would be none of God's protection left. He also exulted in the increasing depravity of the Israelites, for this meant that they too had less and less of God's protection.

Plotting every move with calculated care, he proposed to involve the land of Egypt in a destructive cataclysm of such proportions as to exterminate every Israelite, thus certifying that the Redeemer would never be born. If this necessitated obliterating every Egyptian as well, he would not hesitate.

It must be emphasized that, as the day of Egypt's doom approached, God did not wish to withdraw His protective presence from them. They were taking themselves outside of it. They were making it impossible for God to remain. Meanwhile Satan was marshaling destructive forces in an attack ring around the whole nation. All that remained for the plagues to begin was for the Egyptians to make the final dismissal of God from His position as Protector.

The Powers and Laws of Nature

To help clarify the situation which had developed, it will be of value to make a quick review of the original creation and the intrusion of sin.

As an act of infinite, inexpressible love, God purposed to give life to the human family. The equally infinite wisdom of God saw that life without a home in which to live would be misery, for no one could enjoy being perpetually suspended in super-cold, utterly dark space. Thus wisdom and love gave birth to this beautiful planet. But that was still not enough. No home could function without the necessary powers to do so. Thus God gave powers within man and without. These are God's mighty powers which

He gave to His beloved children and must be distinguished from the powers which are in Him as a Person.

But there is, by nature, a problem with these powers. While given only for blessing, they have in them the potential for destruction. To remove that possibility is to take away the power itself. This therefore was no solution. To solve the problem, God gave man the love gift of the law. While they used those powers according to law, they lived in perfect safety, but the moment they cast aside the law, those mighty powers which God had put into nature were turned into a terror of destruction.

It would be well if every person on the earth knew that all nature, from the instant Adam and Eve rejected the law, became deranged and poised to collapse into all-obliterating devastation. The reason it has not done so is because:

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1085:

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. I will stand in man's place. He shall have another chance."

When man rejected the law, then God gave himself to save man. Ever since the fall in Eden, Christ by His personal power has been holding under control that fearsome wrath all around us.

Should sinful, defiant men during any period of history, make a total rejection of their Saviour, then they dismiss Christ from His post, His restraining power is removed, and a flood of death pours upon the unprotected. God, in it all, has gone the second mile and beyond. It is sinful man who finally puts God in a position where there is nothing more that He can do.

If everyone upon this earth understood and believed the truth of these words, with what diligence would they return to God and

watch with care that they remained under His pavilion of protection.

But the Egyptians neither understood nor believed this. They were unthankful, self-sufficient, and self-serving. They believed that they had no need of God and even thought they were superior to Him. They had advanced from one depth of wickedness to another and had come to the place where they were about to make the final dismissal of Christ from their world.

The Message of the Rod

It was at this point of time that Moses and Aaron appeared with the rod. This was God's last love message to the haughty king. It was an attempt to explain to him the principles laid out above. The message was given in the simplest possible form—pictorially, in an acted parable. The symbols God used were:

- Moses,
- Aaron,
- the Rod, and
- the Serpent.

Moses was the representative and symbol of God. He portrayed before the monarch, God's role in the coming time of terrible trouble. This is certified in God's own words:

Exodus 7

¹ So the Lord said to Moses, See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.

Moses had not become God. By no means could this be true. He was still Moses, but he portrayed God's role to Pharaoh. He demonstrated God's behavior and appealed to the rebel to recognize and accept the petition of love being presented to him.

Aaron was Moses' prophet and held the rod in his hand. He spoke and acted on Moses behalf. Whatever he did with the rod, he did for Moses and under Moses direction. Therefore in the

Word of God the rod is called Moses' rod, and so we will also call it that.

The rod in the hand of Aaron who held it on Moses' behalf was the symbol of the powers God had given to mankind as a blessing. However, because of sin, they were poised to destroy. But because of Christ's interposition, they still remained in God's hands and under His direction. This rod is directly referred to as the "rod of power."²⁴

The importance of distinguishing between the powers which God had given to man and the powers of God himself, was mentioned earlier. This distinction is well illustrated by the parable. Allowing the rod to symbolize the powers given by God to man, it is not difficult to distinguish between those and the powers in Moses himself. The rod of power could be separated from him and his direction, but not so the powers within him. While he lived, they were inseparable from him.

So with God. The powers within himself can never be separated from Him, but the mighty powers given to mankind can be separated from His direction. This distinction must be clearly seen for the Egyptian incident to be correctly evaluated.

Finally, there was the serpent into which the rod turned. No one will have any difficulty in recognizing the serpent as a symbol of the destroyer.

The symbolism established, we return to the story.

Exodus 7

¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the Lord had commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent.

¹¹ But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.

¹² For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

²⁴ See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 396.

¹³ And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

As the brothers stood before the king, the rod was held firmly in Aaron's hand. But because Aaron stood only as Moses prophet, we can speak of the rod as being in Moses' hand and under his direction. As long as the rod remained there, it could not become a serpent. Only when it passed out of his hand, which meant that it was no longer under his direction, did it change, and instantly as well. As long as this situation remained, it continued to be a serpent, but the very moment Aaron, under Moses' command, took it back into his hand, it again became a rod.

With what simple and beautiful clarity the Lord sought to communicate to Pharaoh the vital truth that at no time whatsoever, while the powers of nature were still in God's hands and under His direction, could they be agents of destruction. Only when out of His hands and not under His direction could they be such.

This truth is not limited to those days or to that particular situation. The Lord does not change. Ever since man fell and right down to the end of the thousand years, the truth revealed by the rod and the serpent is and will be the same. Never while the powers of man and nature are in God's hands and under His direction, can they be destroyers. That is impossible.

This is beautifully illustrated in the experience of Elijah at Horeb. He had fled from Jezebel in fear and discouragement to take refuge in a cave.

1 Kings 19

⁹ And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, What are you doing here, Elijah?

¹⁰ So he said, I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.

¹¹ Then He said, Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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;

¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

¹³ So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And suddenly a voice came to him, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah?

Had God been in the wind, that is, had that force been in His hands and under His direction, no storm would have been possible. There would have been only peace and blessing. Likewise the earthquake and fire were manifestations of great natural forces turned into agencies of destruction, but they would not have been such had they been under God's direction, for He was not in the earthquake or the fire. Had He been in the mighty powers unleashed, there would have been an altogether different result. Firm ground would have been beneath Elijah instead of the earth rolling like the sea.

The truth that the powers of nature can never break into any form of destruction so long as they are in God's hands and under His direction, needs to become forever settled in the minds of every child of God. This is the message with which God sought to convict and convert the heart of the king of Egypt.

As Moses and Aaron stood there in his presence with the rod firmly held in their hands, they portrayed to the wicked ruler a picture of things as they then stood. This picture showed that, despite the many decades during which Egypt had sunk into deeper iniquity, the mighty powers of nature were still under God's direction.

But the time had come when, unless immediate steps were taken in repentance and obedience, God could no longer direct the powers of nature. Instantly they would then become fearful

scourges of destruction, even as the rod released from Moses' hand turned into a serpent. What those powers did to Egypt when not under God's direction, were not God's work or responsibility. He had exhausted every possible means to prevent this from happening.

The king's response revealed the extent to which self-sufficiency had become his. He simply called in his magicians who threw down their rods. Satan, through witchcraft, made it appear that they were also turned into serpents.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 264:

The magicians did not really cause their rods to become serpents; but by magic, aided by the great deceiver, they were able to produce this appearance. It was beyond the power of Satan to change the rods to living serpents. The prince of evil, though possessing all the wisdom and might of an angel fallen, has not power to create, or to give life; this is the prerogative of God alone.

But all that was in Satan's power to do, he did; he produced a counterfeit. To human sight the rods were changed to serpents. Such they were believed to be by Pharaoh and his court. There was nothing in their appearance to distinguish them from the serpent produced by Moses. Though the Lord caused the real serpent to swallow up the spurious ones, yet even this was regarded by Pharaoh, not as a work of God's power, but as the result of a kind of magic superior to that of his servants.

This produced a situation where the serpent formed from Moses' rod was faced with quite a number of what appeared to be real serpents. Here was Satan's and, likewise, Pharaoh's counter to God's appeals. Just as God was saying something by producing that one serpent from the rod, so the apparent turning of many rods into serpents constituted a counter-message from the powers of darkness. Pharaoh may not have fully understood what he was saying, but the devil who inspired and motivated him certainly did.

Instead of humbly accepting the warning which the Lord gave them, Pharaoh and his priests answered by saying that they were not concerned if the Lord did cease directing those mighty powers, for they had more than sufficient forces to contain those plagues. Did not the king have multiplied serpents? What hope did one have against so many? So, let the Lord cease His direction. Pharaoh would not be intimidated into freeing his profitable slaves.

Thus the monarch displayed a terrible and dangerous ignorance of the extent and magnitude of the powers which, up till this point of time, had been held under the direction of a merciful and loving God. Knowing nothing of the might of those powers, he was likewise ignorant of the strength of the God who held them in check. Therefore, he had no fear, no realization of the awful danger he was in, no sense of need of God, and no trust in Him.

This is a revelation of self-sufficiency at its very worst. It had been developing in the king and his people for a very long time until it had reached this state of maturity. Having rejected any sense of need of God, the king and his subjects were in fact rejecting all connection with, and dependence upon Him. By this means they cut themselves off from God, placing Him in a position where He could no longer continue directing the powers which threatened their destruction.

Filled with an altogether false and grossly exaggerated view of his own powers and a terribly deficient concept of the magnitude of the powers around him, the king was confident that he could easily handle anything God might release. The sight of his numerous serpents advancing against one, reinforced that conviction.

It was not possible for the king to have a more misleading or dangerous self-assurance. His puny power could never withstand the onrush of the mighty forces of nature. Such ignorant and foolish thinking in the face of this loving appeal from God, could only serve to separate him entirely from God and place him outside the circle of His protection.

Even though the king rejected God’s call, God did not abandon him to his errors but continued to seek to save him. To accomplish this the Lord demonstrated the futility of the king’s forces to contain the powers symbolized by the one serpent. Though to all appearances hopelessly outnumbered, the one serpent busily swallowed the rest. This was a message saying to the king, if only he could see it, that no matter how great an effort he might put forth to hold in check and redirect the forces released against him, he would be unable to do so. He and his people would be consumed while the mighty powers remained as undiminished as if they had not been touched at all.



The rod only became a serpent when it passed out of Moses’ hand.

This was the message brought to him through the rods and the serpents. It was a message of love designed to soften and save.

Had the great ruler perceived both the message and the spirit of infinite love in which it was given, he would have quickly confessed his spirit of rebellion and his utter helplessness to change his heart to one of obedience to God. Then he would have pleaded with Moses to show him the way of salvation so that he could obey God and release the Israelites from slavery. Instead, the king resisted the loving appeals of the Holy Spirit, who was there to bring home God's message with convicting power. By so doing, he took the final step whereby he placed himself and his nation outside the limits of God's protection. By casting aside God's law, he also cast aside Christ.

There was no more God could do. The assembled forces of destruction were not under His direction and the plagues began. Yet, even so, 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 to. He could have taken himself completely away and left the land to be swamped with all the plagues at once, but instead He went back only one step at a time, each move being forced upon Him by Pharaoh's increasing stubbornness. Each successive withdrawal released from His hands another powerful element of nature to scourge the Egyptians. The Lord was enabled to leave them only one step at a time, because the nation was not as fully hardened against God as Pharaoh.

While Israel was the primary target of Satan's wrath, the plagues did not consume them for the simple reason that, even though they were far from fully righteous, there was at least a goodly number among them who loved and served God as best they could under those circumstances. They had not cast aside either the law or Christ. Consequently, Christ was able to shield the house of Israel from the successive pestilences.

In the acted parable of the rods and serpents, God demonstrated His role in the coming catastrophes. If the king saw the truth of

it, he certainly neither believed nor heeded it. However, his scorn and unbelief did not change the certainty that the mighty forces of sin-deranged nature would punish him and his people. Nor did his insulting attitude provoke God into taking those forces into His hands and using them as a personally directed scourge against the Egyptians. That which devastated them were forces which were not under God's direction. Furthermore, they were taken from His grasp, not because He had chosen to release them, but because the Egyptians themselves had displaced Him from His position as their Protector.

Thus the plagues were not what God did to the Egyptians. They were altogether what they did to themselves. So it will ever be. God never changes. He does not do one thing to the sin-cursed Egyptians and something different to like rejecters of His mercy in another age.

When, at any time or place, nature in a state of implacable and merciless wrath savages human life and lands, it is because those powers are no longer under God's direction—never because they are instruments in His hands to destroy. Therefore, whenever we witness the desolating work of plague, fire, or earthquake and are tempted to think that God is at work, let us remember the message of the rods and serpents. Then we will know the real truth of what is happening.

Why Not Before?

To believe that God forcibly subdued the Egyptians in order to effect the release of His people, is to level, by implication, a terrible indictment against the Lord. It is to charge Him with deliberately and callously leaving the Jews to suffer for centuries when they could have been released long before they were.

He who, in the possession of omnipotent power, uses it as the means of executing his will, can do what he wishes when he chooses. If this is God's way as so many suppose, then the Israelites' continued bondage was due to His choice not to release them. For centuries they were ground down in brutal bondage, all

the misery of which would have to be accounted to God for failing to exert His mighty power at any chosen time to set them free. God could not be a God of love and at the same time behave in this fashion.

The truth however is that God has committed himself never to solve problems by the use of force. Therefore, the timing of the Israelites' release was determined, not by God's own personal choice, but by the effects of the Egyptians' deepening apostasy. This brought about a separation from God which released destructive powers upon them until they had destroyed their capacity to hold their slaves. Then and only then could the Israelites go free. When these principles are understood, no problem will be seen in their being left in servitude for so long.

God will not deviate from His ways, for He knows that the use of force is self-defeating. Had it been His principle to rule by force, then He would have stamped rebellion out of existence as soon as it manifested itself initially. There would have been no long period of sin in this world.

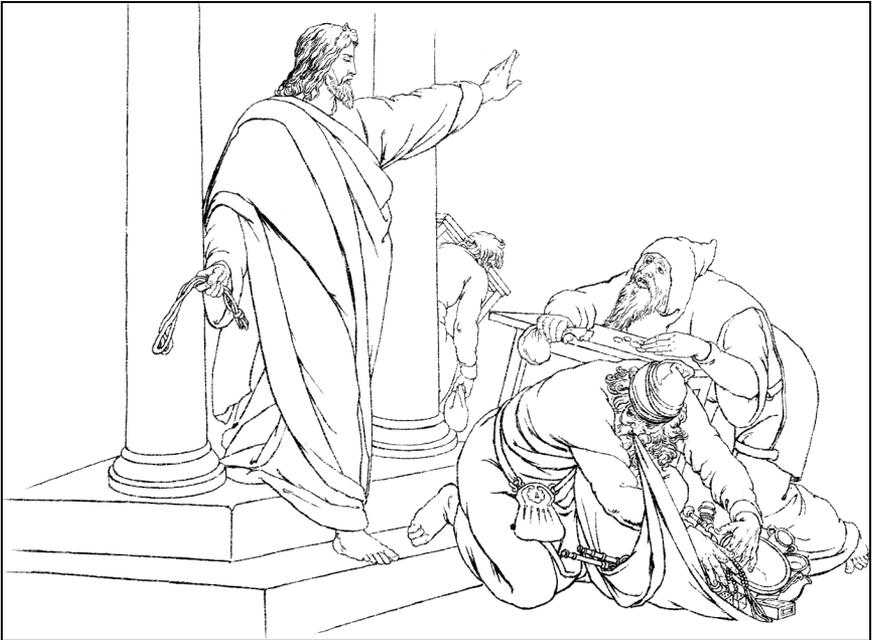
But sin must be allowed to run its course until it ultimately destroys itself and all who cling to it. Then the Lord will be free to make the new heavens and the new earth with no danger of their defilement.

Christ and the Scourge

The same message which God sought to convey to the stubborn Egyptian ruler, Christ endeavored to impress upon the minds of the traders in the temple when He cleansed it for the first time. Some study has already been given to this event in chapter sixteen, but further thought was deferred until Moses' rod had firstly been considered.

The declaration given by Christ when He held the scourge is the exact counterpart in the New Testament of what Moses did in the Old when he held the rod in his hand. The symbolism is identical.

As has already been established, the rod Moses directed symbolized God's powers in nature still under His direction. As Moses gripped the rod, so Christ held the scourge, which likewise symbolized God's powers in nature. 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 under Christ's direction.



The story can be as easily misinterpreted as was the Egyptian episode. Most would argue that, while it is true that Christ did not actually strike the offenders in the temple, He most certainly threatened to and would have done so if they had resisted Him. To adopt this view is to regard the character of Christ as being identical with that of men, while missing the message which the Saviour desired to convey.

He had come upon them while they were practicing serious iniquity. Their behavior could only serve to separate them from the protection of God so that they would be left exposed to the terri-

bly destructive forces surrounding them. Christ desired to save them from this, so He portrayed before them the situation which was developing. He wished them to understand that the usually mild and beneficent forces of nature were being transformed into a punishing scourge. That they had not yet been smitten by this whip was due alone to the fact that Christ still directed it.

For them, that was still several years away. During the ensuing interval of time, God's presence was progressively withdrawn from the land. Christ announced His eternal departure from the temple in the sad words,

Matthew 23

³⁸ See! Your house is left to you desolate.

This was just before His final sufferings and death. In 34 AD, probation closed on the nation as a whole in accordance with the prophecy of *Daniel 9*, but the retribution still tarried. Christ still held the scourge in His hands, until in 70 AD He laid it down, and the full fury of enraged nature in the form of the Roman soldiery burst upon the shelterless, unprotected heads of the Jews.

In the temple, Christ had as vividly warned them of their impending fate as Moses had warned the Egyptians of theirs. But, just as the ancient oppressors of Israel would pay no heed to God's entreaties, neither would the Jews. This being their choice, there was nothing further the Lord could do to save either. With the scourge no longer under Christ's direction, the rod became a serpent.

When the warning was given to each, it was not too late to repent. This above all else the Lord desired them to do. Therefore, the demonstrations were given in infinite love and mercy. In no sense of the word were they the expression of a spirit of vindictive anger and revenge. No matter how far they had gone or how long they had persisted in rebellion, the Lord was still ready and anxious to save them. That they were not saved was entirely their own fault.

Some may argue that Christ did overturn the tables and scatter their money thereby establishing the fact, as they see it, that He would destroy their possessions. But again, He was only giving them an object lesson of the real truth that all the earthly treasure in which they were putting their trust would be no support to them in the hour of trouble. Instead, it would be swept away, even as the coins were scattered in hopeless confusion across the pavement.

Rightly considered, Jesus Christ did exactly in the temple what He and His Father had done in the land of Egypt. He came to both with the offer of forgiveness, protection, and life. He showed each of them the terrible consequences of continuing in their present course, in the hope that the realization of their need would prompt them to reach out for God's solution to it.

In both of these situations, God and Christ were living out the maxim of their lives, in contrast to that of the devil who is the destroyer. Christ expressed the truth of this in these words:

John 10

¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

His sorrow is:

John 5

⁴⁰ But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life.

24. The Upraised Rod

BY USING the parable of the rod and the serpent, God communicated to Egypt's proud ruler exactly how He would act in the coming devastations of the land. Thus He assured Pharaoh that the impending plagues would be neither by His decree nor by His administration. Their advent would be occasioned by His withdrawal from the scene, not His intrusion into it.

The message was clearly given, and the scourges followed inevitably because the warning went unheeded. Before each plague began, however, God instructed Moses, as His direct agent and representative, to perform an act with his rod. Before the river turned to blood, Moses was directed to strike the water. Before the frogs covered the land, Moses was to hold the upraised rod over the waters of Egypt, and so on through each succeeding calamity. These actions could easily be interpreted to mean that God did very differently from what He said He would do, and usually they are interpreted that way.

During the initial demonstration in Pharaoh's palace the rod was separated from Moses' hand, indicating that the powers would descend upon the hapless heads of the Egyptians because God no longer directed them. But before each plague came, Moses held the rod firmly in his hand and under his direction while he used it to touch or indicate the place where the trouble would come. Here, for instance, is the inspired description of the coming of the first plague:

Exodus 7

¹⁴ So the Lord said to Moses: Pharaoh's heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go.

¹⁵ Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and you shall stand by the river's bank to meet him; and the rod which was turned to a serpent you shall take in your hand.

¹⁶ And you shall say to him, The Lord God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness; but indeed, until now you would not hear!

¹⁷ Thus says the Lord: By this you shall know that I am the Lord. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood.

¹⁸ And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river.

¹⁹ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, Say to Aaron, Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone.

²⁰ And Moses and Aaron did so, just as the Lord commanded. So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.

²¹ The fish that were in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

²² Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

²³ And Pharaoh turned and went into his house. Neither was his heart moved by this.

²⁴ So all the Egyptians dug all around the river for water to drink, because they could not drink the water of the river.

²⁵ And seven days passed after the Lord had struck the river.

Without question God was again communicating a message to Egypt's leader, otherwise the whole drama would never have been deliberately enacted in his presence. God determined that he should personally witness it. The matter is on record in the Scriptures as a message to us as well. God expects us to rightly understand what He was doing there and why.

Two Different Interpretations

That message may be interpreted in at least two different ways. There is the way common to the human mind which has been so long accustomed to viewing God's behavior as being the same as man's. There is also the interpretation seen by those who have

become trained in correct principles of biblical research, and who measure all things by the witness of the life and teachings of Christ and the cross.

According to the former, God is seen carefully communicating to Pharaoh that he has incurred the wrath of an offended God who would therefore smite him with terrible consequences for his rebellion. So that this point would not be missed, the Lord had Moses strike the water which instantly turned to blood thereby declaring that, as Moses had smitten the water with the rod, so the Lord would smite Pharaoh with powers both in His hand and under His direction.

This is how the average person reads the message of this demonstration, and he feels that he is accepting the only possible explanation. He is fully convinced that no other interpretation exists. But a few moments' consideration will show that a second explanation must exist and needs to be found. Here are some of the questions which need to be asked.

- Does God announce on one day what He will do and then on the next day do the very opposite?
- That is, does He on the first day declare that only when the powers of nature are not under His direction do they become destroyers, and then on the second day proceed to place those powers under His direction and use them as instruments of devastation?
- Is that consistency?
- Is that the kind of God we serve?

Most certainly not! When God declares what He will do, He most assuredly does what and as He said He will do. Upon that we can rely with unshakable and unquestioning confidence. Therefore, when God directed Moses to smite the water with the rod firmly held in his hand, He was neither saying nor doing anything different that day from what He had announced the previous day. Furthermore, He expects us to understand this. At first it

may be difficult, but with earnest prayer and study, the problem will be resolved and perfect harmony will result.

Firstly, let reference again be made to the earlier discussion on the Bible being its own interpreter. There it was clearly shown how such expressions as these are to be understood:

Numbers 21

⁶ The Lord sent fiery serpents...

Matthew 22

⁷ And He [God] sent out His armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

1 Chronicles 10

¹⁴ He [God] killed him [Saul].

By careful comparison of Scripture with Scripture in combination with the rule that the Bible is its own dictionary and interpreter, it was learned that the Lord expects us to understand such pronouncements as meaning that He had been obliged to withdraw His protection and leave the sinner to his fate. Admittedly this is the opposite meaning from what it would be if men were using those words to describe their activities. But when the Lord indicates that this is how they are to be understood, we must follow His directions and then we will know the truth.

Exodus 7

²⁵ ...the Lord had struck the river.

This expression is another such statement and must be understood in the same way, for the Bible is consistent in its use of language. Only confusion would result if certain words were understood to convey one idea in one place and something different in another. Unless the reader is thoroughly confirmed in the principle that the Bible is its own interpreter and has trained his mind accordingly, it is recommended that a thorough restudy of chapter thirteen be undertaken at this point.

In that chapter, the parable of *Matthew 22:7* was mentioned. This verse reads:

Matthew 22

⁷ But when the King [God] heard about it, He [God] was furious: and He [God] sent out His armies [the Romans], and destroyed those murderers [the Jews], and burned up their city [Jerusalem].

By matching this verse with an inspired explanation of its meaning, it is plainly revealed how God expects it to be understood. That explanation is found in:

The Great Controversy, p. 35-36:

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.

God's own explanation of what He meant by *Matthew 22:7* is opposite from what the human would expect those words to mean. It is made clear that the Lord was not present there, but that He had been obliged to depart, leaving them in the unmerciful hands of Satan and the Romans. In other words the rod of power had passed out of God's hand and had become a serpent of destruction. That is the way the Lord directs us to understand this Scripture.

Not only does He provide the explanation of this Scripture, but He supplies the key to how all such statements in Holy Writ are to be understood. If this is how God expresses himself, then every time He uses such expressions, we can know that they are to be understood in the same way. It cannot be otherwise, for God is utterly consistent.

Therefore the identical phraseology found in *Exodus 7:25*, "...the Lord had struck the river;" is to be understood exactly as the Lord has shown how *Matthew 22:7* is to be comprehended. That is, as

surely as the words in *Matthew 22:7*, "...He [God]... sent out His armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city," mean that the Lord withdrew from them and left them exposed to the forces waiting to destroy them, so the words of *Exodus 7:25*, "...the Lord had struck the river," tell us that the Lord released His grip upon the forces around Egypt, and for this reason the Nile turned to blood.

Herein is demonstrated the importance of being established on correct principles of Bible interpretation. It is vital that the tendency to interpret these things according to our human senses be resisted, and the mind be disciplined to read them according to God's directions. In this is complete safety.

This lesson was once firmly impressed on my mind when I was engaged in a flight lesson. To simulate instrument conditions a hood was placed over my head shutting out the view of all but the instrument panel. I was instructed to hold a course due north. Soon I had the aircraft established on this heading. The compass indicated that we were flying north, while other instruments showed correctly that we were climbing.

But, in a very compelling way, my senses told me that I was turning to the left while the compass assured me that I was flying straight ahead. Every instinct called on me to deny the instrument and fly by my feelings. It required a decided act of the will to resist this deadly influence and fly by the instruments. It is a lesson which has to be thoroughly learned by every pilot. Many have gone to their deaths because they did not overcome their feelings in favor of the gauges.

Likewise it is essential that every Bible student learn that he must ignore his feelings and instincts, and discipline his mind to accept only the methods of interpretation which the Lord has revealed as being the correct ones. It takes training to achieve this, but it can be mastered. When this stand is positively taken, it will be recognized that there is no contradiction between the actions

of Moses and Aaron in casting down the rod before Pharaoh and in using it to strike the water.

The pilot who does not learn to believe his instruments will crash sooner or later.



The Lesson Repeated

Through the demonstration of the rod and the serpent God was showing Pharaoh that the powers of nature could be a blessing to mankind only so long as they remained under divine direction. On the next day when God directed Moses to strike the water with the rod, He was saying that, because of Pharaoh's resistance, He was forced to withdraw from that area of nature touched by the rod, and that the natural powers in this area would be turned over to another director. However, outside of this designated area, God still held the rod in his hand.

This demonstration was, when rightly understood, a continued outreach of love calculated even yet to persuade the king to bow to the truth, cease his resistance to God's appeals, and place himself and his people where the Lord could both protect and bless them.

God had already gone further than can reasonably be required by giving the warning contained in the rod and serpent. After that warning the king had no further excuse, but the Lord is so possessed of yearning love that He will never stop short of doing all that possibly can be done. It was important for the ruler's own good that he should understand the connection between the withdrawal of the presence and protection of God, and the onslaught of the plague which immediately followed. Therefore God sent Moses to use the rod to designate the exact time and place from which God would step back.

It was an impressive demonstration. There stood Aaron with the pointer in his hand. The river flowed on as usual with no indication of brooding trouble. Aaron brought the rod down to strike the surface of the water, by so doing declaring to the king that the time had come and this was the place from which the presence of God would be withdrawn. Horror blanched the defiant face of the royal observer as he saw the water turn to the ghastly color of blood. Thus he was deprived of any opportunity to rationalize and claim that all this was but a happenstance which had no connection with Moses' predictions and would have happened anyway. It was love that directed the action, and it was love that the king spurned.

The Death of the Firstborn

The succeeding plagues all came as did the first one, with God continuing to play His stipulated role. Once the first one is correctly understood, no problem should be encountered until the last one is reached. Then the question must arise as to why the last one was so selective. If God's protection had been removed from every house but those upon whose doors the blood was

sprinkled, why did only the firstborn die? How did the rest escape?

God said,

Exodus 12

¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.

There should be no problem now with the language of this verse, for we have learned how God intends us to understand these words. The problem of selectivity remains.

First, let it be established that it was not God, the Saviour, but Satan, the destroyer, who took those lives. Three times in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 278-280, the one who slew the firstborn is named. Here are the sentences.

All who failed to heed the Lord's directions, would lose their firstborn 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 firstborn in the land, “from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle,” had been smitten by the destroyer.

Who is the destroyer?

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 388-389:

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. The world has disregarded the word of God. They live as though there were no God. Like the inhabitants of the Noachic world, they refuse to have any thought of God. Wickedness prevails to an alarming extent, and the earth is ripe for the harvest.

Therefore it was the destroyer, Satan, who slew the firstborn. But why did he select only one in every family? Satan had specifically purposed to wipe out every household in Israel. To do this he had organized some destructive pestilence which would flow through the whole land. Apparently it was beyond his ability to confine this silent death to Israel only. In order to make quite certain of their genocide, he must take the Egyptians too. That the Israelites were directly threatened is certified by the fact that they had to provide themselves with special protection by sprinkling the blood upon the door. Thus Satan could not touch Israel at all, even though he still attempted it.

As the midnight hour arrived, the silent death flowed across the horror-stricken land, seeping in through doors and windows, striking in every unprotected house till the silence of the night was shredded with the mourners' piercing wails.

The killer found a barrier of protection not only around the Israelites but all the Egyptians except the firstborn. This could have been provided only by God. He would also have protected the firstborn, but they were situated where this had become impossible. What was it then that had exposed the eldest child to the malice of the destroyer while the rest could not be touched by him?

No direct revelations in the Scriptures tell the answer, but there is information to strongly indicate what the cause was. From his earliest moment the first child in the family was dedicated to Satan's service. Following this dedication he was continually trained to fill the office and role of the priesthood in his own family. Some of them went on to fill national positions. Thus they were joined to Satan and separated from God more than any other people in the land. As such they were definitely the ones who would be found without God's protection in this special time of attack while He was still able to extend it to the rest of the Egyptians, though marginally so.

Throughout the sad sequence of the plagues, God manifested himself only as a God of love, though it is doubtful if, in their blindness, the Egyptians could see this. And despite the unheeded entreaties of centuries, God was not discouraged in His endeavors to bring them to obedience. But sadly, due to their wrong reactions, the work designed in wisdom to turn them to repentance only served to drive them farther and still farther away.

Finally, those who had escaped the silent death which deprived them of their firstborn, plunged with blind and senseless stupidity after the Israelites as they crossed the Red Sea. Where the Israelites were, the power of God operated to withhold the tremendous forces of nature, but the rebellion and defiance of the Egyptians was so total that there was no possibility of the Holy Spirit remaining where they were. Thus they forced the powers of the waters out of the hand and control of God with only one possible result. Unmeasured tons of water rolled over them, destroying them to the last man.

Pharaoh and his hosts would not learn the lesson of the rod and the serpent. Their disregard of the message sent to them in love did not change the lesson itself. Its truth stood, whatever their attitude to it might have been. They dared to depose God from His position of Saviour and Protector, and the rod turned to a devouring serpent of destruction.

The whole experience is a revelation, paid for at a terrible cost by those idolaters, 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 laid on God who emerged from the event as impeccably perfect as ever:

- 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.

He was exactly what Christ later revealed Him to be.

25. The Showing of God's Power

BEFORE leaving the story of the plagues on the Nile valley, another aspect of the case should be considered. God saw and accepted the opportunity to salvage a saving blessing from the disaster. In the following words this thought is expressed but rarely understood:

Exodus 9

¹⁶ But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you, and that my name may be declared in all the earth.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 267-268:

Still the heart of Pharaoh grew harder. And now the Lord sent a message to him, declaring, "I will at this time send all my plagues upon your heart, and upon your servants, and upon your people; that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth....And in very deed for this cause have I raised you up, for to show in you my power." 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.

His people were permitted to experience the grinding cruelty of the Egyptians, that they might not be deceived concerning the debasing influence of idolatry. In His dealing with Pharaoh, the Lord manifested His hatred of idolatry and His determination to punish cruelty and oppression.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 263:

He [Moses] was informed that the monarch would not yield until God should visit judgments upon Egypt and bring out Israel by the signal manifestation of His power. 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.

The Lord would give the Egyptians an opportunity to see how vain was the wisdom of their mighty men, how feeble the power of their gods, when opposed to the commands of Jehovah. He would punish the people of Egypt for their idolatry and silence their boasting of the blessings received from their senseless deities. God would glorify His own name, that other nations might hear of His power and tremble at His mighty acts, and that His people might be led to turn from their idolatry and render Him pure worship.

These statements inform us that God realized a purpose in His dealing with that rebellion. It was that Egypt, Israel, and the nations beyond might be given the opportunity of seeing something of the magnitude of God's power. They could see:

1. The futility of human resources to either control or contain what it had required God's power to withhold.

Clear evidence was given that,

2. In order to survive, man must recognize his dependence upon the arm of the Almighty.

Implicit in the whole matter was the message that:

3. The protection of the all-powerful One was available only to the obedient.

But essential to the success of this divine plan was the presence upon the Egyptian throne of an extremely stubborn king. It was by God's providence that just such a king was there at the very time when the hour for Israel's deliverance had come. Alterna-

tively, God could have placed upon the seat of power a more pliable ruler.

Once again, unless these words are interpreted in the light which streams from the life and teachings of Christ in a spiritual depth exceeding the rather human and superficial study of the past, they will be misunderstood. Therefore, these questions must be raised and correctly answered:

1. Why was God so anxious to give a demonstration of His power to the people of that day?
2. How was the revelation of power given?
3. In what way did God place the hardened monarch upon the throne just at that time?
4. Why did God wait so long before delivering His people?

Contrary Views

There is more than one proposed answer to these questions, but only one correct answer. The answer which correctly outlines what God did and why, will accurately reflect both His wisdom and character. Conversely, the incorrect responses will produce an erroneous view of God's nature and His principles.

If God is obsessed, as earthly rulers generally are, with the demand that all men give unqualified acknowledgment of His position and authority as the absolute ruler of the universe, then His motivation in exhibiting His infinite power would be to force submission, thus insuring that He be given the homage He feels is His due. Thus His message to all nations would have been,

“Take warning, people of the earth. I am making an example of the Egyptians so you will know how I treat those who do not give me the respect I deem mine. Dismiss any thought of resistance, for my power is such that none can contend with me. This Pharaoh of Egypt was the greatest on earth. He was more hardened and stubborn than all of you. He dared to resist my will. See him now shattered and dead. Now serve me, or I shall deal with

you likewise. Know that I will brook no insubordination nor even the ignoring of my claims upon you.”

Is this the message which the Lord sought to communicate through His activities in Egypt? The vast majority are convinced that it is. But majority support is no confirmation of truth, especially when it is considered that so few of the world’s population even serve God.

Careful reflection upon the implications of this assessment of God’s behavior in Egypt quickly reveals that it cannot be true. For God to conduct His affairs as outlined above would show Him to be self-centered, self-exalting, and therefore totally unrighteous.

God is love to the infinite degree. It is impossible for Him to be love and at the same time manifest any trace of self-love, self-protectionism, or self-exaltation. Therefore everyone must choose between believing that:

1. God is love; or
2. He asserted His power in Egypt to intimidate the nations into forced obedience.

Both views cannot be held. The two positions are entirely incompatible and, in fact, hostile to each other.

To maintain the concept that God did act from self-interest in dealing with Israel’s bond-masters, is to think of Him as being exactly like the proud monarch with whom He dealt. It is to make Him like every dictator, king, despot, and, in short, every unconverted man. The further such rulers depart from righteousness, the more acutely they exhibit this supreme concern for self and its attendant preoccupation with demanding homage and submission from others.

God’s Power Revealed by Withdrawal

On the other hand, the nearer men approach to God and become like Him in character, the more this disposition diminishes. Never

was this more forcibly demonstrated than in the life of Jesus Christ who was, and ever will be, the express image of His Father.

Never was a life more devoid of selfishness, giving no place for even the faintest suspicion that He had come to establish recognition of His position and authority for His own sake. Christ, as the revelation of the Father's character, swept away forever any basis for the notion that God unveiled His power in Egypt to bring the world to heel.

Therefore He is not burdened with any concern over His position and seeks no recognition for His own sake. Thought of himself and His position and whether or not He is being treated properly never troubles Him.

But He is aware of the fearful peril in which every human being on the earth stands. He knows that in the Garden of Eden, man cast away the protection of the law and instituted in His place, one who could not control the powers surrounding this earth. He knows that only because of the interposition of His Son are these perils held in control during the period of probation. He knows that Christ cannot maintain His station as Protector of the people of the earth while their mounting attitude and spirit of self-sufficiency demand He vacate that role.

Therefore, as a loving Father, He views with deepest distress the developing self-centeredness and foolish, self-destructive boldness which is edging His wayward children nearer and nearer to the abyss. As such a situation develops, He will do anything within the limitation of law to save them.

God knows the dreadful peril in which everyone lives daily, but man does not know it. He is unaware that since the fall, he has been living under a divinely supplied umbrella of protection. Puny man is utterly powerless to save himself, and the continued provision of a canopy of protection depends upon his having a sense of humble dependence upon the Saviour. This humble spirit will enable God to remain and protect man.

Man leaves God out of his reckoning, confident instead that all the powers of nature have evolved to their present high state of efficiency with no danger of collapse. He cannot see the power of God at work and so remains in ignorance of it and what it is doing for him.

Therefore for those who have not the eye of faith and thus cannot see God's wondrous power, the revelation can only come by the power being withdrawn. Then, as storm, tempest, fire, earthquake, or pestilence ravage the people, they can then see by the might of what comes, the measure of the power which had previously held it all back.

Keep in mind the rods and the serpents. Then there will be no danger of making the age-old mistake of thinking that the onslaught of great destruction is God at work. The devastating onslaught is not the revelation of what God is doing with His almighty power, but the making known of what His hand had previously held in perfect control.

Salvaging from the Wreckage

This is not the way God desires His might to become known to humanity, for it exacts tremendous cost to life and land. Therefore He labors with all the resources of heaven to prevent such a crisis from developing. But He cannot compel men to obey. They must serve Him from love—intelligently, or not at all.

The Great Controversy, p. 493:

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. 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 He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.

The Great Controversy, p. 498:

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.

But despite the utmost devisings of infinite love, humans such as the Egyptians will press on in defiance of love and entreaty to that point where God's power will be revealed by its withdrawal. In all His efforts to save the catastrophe from coming, God has been motivated by consuming love for His endangered children. When, because of their blind and persistent refusal to receive that ministry of love, they force Him to remove His hand from the helm, He still continues to work according to the same love. While the loss to life and property will be enormous, the Lord will work to salvage much from the wreckage.

Firstly, He will endeavor to arouse individuals from the very midst of the obdurate to an awareness of their need of that power which alone can control the fearful forces of nature and man. Likewise, He will seek to impress the same saving truths upon the thinking of the onlookers near and far to encourage them not to act with rash irresponsibility. God will never engineer these conditions in order to convey 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 needy.

This work is not done in vain. For some, such as the proud despot and many of his people, it was. But many of the dwellers in the Nile Valley, recognizing how impotent were their own gods to take over the powers laid down by the Lord, turned instead to serving the true God. When the Israelites left Egypt, many of these people went with them. When Moses announced the coming of the hail, a goodly number of the farmers revealed their newly formed convictions by hurrying their live stock into shelter. If those awesome scourges were what God's power had been controlling, then what stupendous might was God's! It required such an event as this to reveal this fact to them.

The Plague of Hail

At this point we should take a moment to consider how God related himself to the people regarding the plague of hail. It can be readily seen that God behaved as a Saviour rather than a destroyer.

Exodus 9

¹⁸ Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now.

¹⁹ Therefore send now and gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every beast which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die.

Here we have a wonderful example of God's saving character in action. If He wanted to destroy the Egyptians and their possessions with hail, then why did He warn them of its coming and tell them to seek shelter? Not only did He try to save them from the hail, He also designated the approximate time that it would come so that no one would have to guess and be uncertain.



This incident clearly shows that God did not send the hail to destroy them. It came in spite of His best efforts to prevent it, and when that failed, then He did as much as He could to warn them that it was coming in order to save as many as were willing to be saved.

Exodus 9

²⁰ He who feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses.

These were not the only people helped. It was a lesson to the Israelites. And far away the Canaanites had cause to stop for a moment in their headlong rush into total iniquity and its attendant destruction. Thus God achieved a saving purpose through events which He had untiringly worked to prevent.

Naturally, the more intense, prolonged, and total the destruction was, the more emphatic the lesson and the more God's message was underscored. Such it could not be without the presence on the throne of a Pharaoh who was especially stubborn and rebellious.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 267-268:

His [God's] 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.

The same truth is repeated in:

Daniel 4

¹⁷ This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the Holy Ones, in order that the living may

know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.

These Scriptures likewise call for a careful, thoughtful, and above all, prayerful consideration, for they can be seriously misunderstood.

How God Appoints Rulers

If, for instance, it is to be drawn from these words that God personally determines who shall occupy positions of leadership over the nations and elects those men irrespective of the wills of the men and their nations, then serious questions about God's character must assert themselves.

It would mean that in the great democracies when men cast their votes, they are merely puppets in God's hand to execute His will. Worse still, some rulers only come to power through rigged elections, bribes, threats, and many other unrighteous methods. Some rise to power along a path slippery with the blood of their opponents. It is by these means that men rise to be heads of nations.

Does God work through such measures as these to effect His election of this man or that? The answer must be a resounding No! Furthermore, if God purposefully arranged for men like Nero or Hitler to assume absolute authority, then their reigns of terror and the awful atrocities perpetrated must be charged to God. He becomes responsible for the torture of innocent victims, mass executions, and even for heaping difficulties in the way of His own Church.

This is not to argue that the words of this Scripture are false. It is to argue that the average human interpretation and way of thinking are false. Once again a deeper, more spiritual, and correct understanding must be gained.

When men set out to make a king, they firstly determine who shall be that man. Then they bring to bear every pressure of force, bribery, or persuasion at their command to effect their wishes.

The greater the power at their disposal, provided it is skillfully used, the more successful they are.

God is possessed of infinite power and wisdom. Therefore if He were to exercise His superior power in the human sphere as men exercise their lesser power, then only those of God's specific choice would ever occupy any positions. We would expect of God the very best choices from what is available; the selection of wise, strong, merciful, and just rulers.

But, the annals of history reveal very few such men ever rising to the seat of power. Instead, most rulers have been despotic, unjust, and cruel. Men such as Nero, Hitler, and Pharaoh are only a few examples.

The only occasions in history when God made direct choices of individuals were when His Church was working in harmony with Him, or, failing that, there was an individual He could use who was totally submitted to His ways and will. Examples of some of God's choices are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, the various prophets, John the Baptist, Paul, and many others. It is noteworthy that every one of these individuals had a character like unto that of God and was very different from the kings of the earth.

The setting up of kings is according to men's choices, but with God's permission. In order to understand the principle involved, we will refer to the choosing of the twelve disciples. Eleven apostles were chosen by Christ and one by men. It should also not be overlooked that Judas chose himself:

The Desire of Ages, p. 294:

While Jesus was preparing the disciples for their ordination, one who had not been summoned urged his presence among them. It was Judas Iscariot, a man who professed to be a follower of Christ. He now came forward, soliciting a place in this inner circle of disciples. With great earnestness and apparent sincerity he declared, "Master, I will follow You wherever You go."...

The disciples were anxious that Judas should become one of their number. He was of commanding appearance, a man of keen discernment and executive ability, and they commended him to Jesus as one who would greatly assist Him in His work.

Even though Jesus did not recommend this choice, he permitted Judas to become a disciple and he ordained him. We are clearly informed that Jesus did this for two reasons. Firstly,

The Desire of Ages, p. 294:

The disciples had been much disappointed that Jesus had not tried to secure the cooperation of the leaders in Israel. They felt that it was a mistake not to strengthen His cause by securing the support of these influential men. If He had repulsed Judas, they would, in their own minds, have questioned the wisdom of their Master. The after history of Judas would show them the danger of allowing any worldly consideration to have weight in deciding the fitness of men for the work of God. The cooperation of such men as the disciples were anxious to secure would have betrayed the work into the hands of its worst enemies.

Secondly, as an expression of His great love and hope for the worst of sinners, Jesus gave him an opportunity to become a true disciple.

The Desire of Ages, p. 294:

The Saviour read the heart of Judas; He knew the depths of iniquity to which, unless delivered by the grace of God, Judas would sink. In connecting this man with himself, He placed him where he might, day by day, be brought in contact with the outflowing of His own unselfish love. If he would open his heart to Christ, divine grace would banish the demon of selfishness, and even Judas might become a subject of the kingdom of God.

Even though Judas was man's choice, he had to be respected in the position of disciple because he was ordained by Christ. In the same manner kings are set up by God. He permits human choices in order to give men an opportunity to learn His ways as well as reveal to them the results of their own choices.

Prophets and Kings, p. 536:

The history of nations speaks to us today. To every nation and to every individual God has assigned a place in His great plan. Today men and nations are being tested by the plummet in the hand of Him who makes no mistake. All are by their own choice deciding their destiny, and God is overruling all for the accomplishment of His purposes.

With these principles in mind, we can understand how God placed upon the Egyptian throne a leader of exceptional stubbornness.

It must be remembered that the fullness of wickedness is developed in a man when the Spirit of God, through one of God's chosen messengers, has appealed mightily to him, and he has chosen to reject that loving ministry. Under such a service of love, there is a powerful drawing toward God which, if unresisted, will certainly lead its receiver into harmony and fellowship with the heavenly family. To resist this pull requires a decided spiritual effort, just as to hold back from being drawn along by someone who is pulling your arm requires physical effort.

Whether in the spiritual or physical world, such exercise strengthens the muscles used to resist. The greater the power to be resisted, the more energy required to resist, and the stronger the powers of resistance become. That is a reliable law simple to understand. Thus there is a hardening of the spiritual muscles.

Therefore in order for Pharaoh to be as tough and hardened as he was, he must have been subjected to the strong wooing of the Spirit and persistently resisted it. This was accomplished through Moses who spent forty years in the land of Egypt before fleeing to Midian. He was placed there by God to bring a powerful and saving witness to the court. He was successor to the throne, yet he faithfully refused to enter the priesthood and stood as a pillar of light for God's truth.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 245:

By the laws of Egypt all who occupied the throne of the Pharaohs must become members of the priestly caste; and Moses, as the heir apparent, was to be initiated into the mysteries of the national religion. This duty was committed to the priests.

But while he was an ardent and untiring student, he could not be induced to participate in the worship of the gods. He was threatened with the loss of the crown, and warned that he would be disowned by the princess should he persist in his adherence to the Hebrew faith. But he was unshaken in his determination to render homage to none save the one God, the Maker of heaven and earth.

He reasoned with priests and worshipers, showing the folly of their superstitious veneration of senseless objects. None could refute his arguments or change his purpose, yet for the time his firmness was tolerated on account of his high position and the favor with which he was regarded by both the king and the people.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1098-1099:

The strength of Moses was his connection with the Source of all power, the Lord God of hosts. He rises grandly above every earthly inducement, and trusts himself wholly to God. He considered that he was the Lord's. While he was connected with the official interests of the king of Egypt, he was constantly studying the laws of God's government, and thus his faith grew. That faith was of value to him. It was deeply rooted in the soil of his earliest teachings, and the culture of his life was to prepare him for the great work of delivering Israel from bondage. He meditated on these things; he was constantly listening to his commission from God.

After slaying the Egyptian, he saw that he had not understood God's plan, and he fled from Egypt and became a shepherd. He was no longer planning to do a great work, but he became very humble; the mists that were beclouding his mind were expelled, and he disciplined his mind to seek after God as his refuge.

When Moses fled to Midian, he gave up his prospects of becoming Pharaoh, and another took his place as heir of the throne. This man was the Pharaoh²⁵ when Moses returned with the rod of power in his hand. He must have known Moses, for it is most likely that he also lived at Pharaoh's court when Moses was there. Therefore, he must have stood within the beautiful circle of spiritual influence which surrounded the servant of God.

Through this heavenly radiance the Lord designed to soften and convert the hearts of the entire Egyptian court including the young man who would later be the Pharaoh in Moses' place. But that which had been sent to save was resisted and rejected. The spiritual power in Moses must have been very great, for the resistance to it developed in that other prince a hardening of his heart to an exceptional degree. No doubt the burning demon of jealousy intensified the worsening condition in the man.

The placing of Moses in the court was a masterstroke of love on God's part. Moses was God's direct and personal messenger by which He offered to Egypt complete and saving conversion. Had this taken place, Moses would have been the leader of Egypt upon the death of the existing ruler. It was an extremely unusual thing for a Hebrew to obtain such a high position among the Egyptians.

But nevertheless, placing Moses in Pharaoh's court was not an arbitrary act on God's part. It was not something which had to happen because He forcefully decreed it. God merely took advantage of the circumstances.

He knew Pharaoh's daughter came down to wash, that she was lonely for a child, and that this particular babe would touch her heart. So He instructed Amram and Jochebed to hide the child in the reeds. He also used His angels to influence the princess to

²⁵ See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 493 for historical notes on the sequence of the Egyptian kings. It is there indicated that Thutmose III, 1482-1450 BC, was the ruler from whom Moses fled. "After Thutmose III, his son Amenhotep II came to the throne (1450-1425 BC). He began a reign of calculated frightfulness over his foreign possessions, and fits remarkably well into the role of the Pharaoh of the Exodus."

come to the river at the same time.²⁶ The princess was not so hardened against God that He was not able to send His angels to her to guide her.

Tragically, the royal household did not accept God's call of love. The result was a terrible hardening of heart, the development of a spirit of rebellion, self-sufficiency, and utter defiance against heaven. Any subsidence of such evils which may have occurred during the forty years of Moses' absence, would have instantly been fanned into a fiercer intensity when the proud monarch found himself confronted again by the man whom he must have hated more than any other.

If placing a spirit-filled messenger in the royal court for twenty-eight years gave occasion for the development of a king so hard and stubborn, the failure to place Moses there would have produced a king of far less determined defiance. God did place on Egypt's throne an exceedingly wicked king by putting Moses in the court to help save everyone.

Two Calls

There is a principle laid out in *Matthew 22:14* which shows that God gives two calls to a people after they have apostatized but never a third. This fact is clearly revealed in the history of the Egyptian nation.

In Joseph's day the word of God was obeyed. God's servant, Joseph, was accorded a position of power and influence second only to the king, a position which he certainly used to establish the worship of the true God. To what extent he was successful we are not told. But by the ministry of Joseph the nation was bidden to the spiritual marriage and to some extent they responded.

Then followed apostasy. This placed them in need of a call from God which He sent to them as soon as He had the messenger through whom it could be done. In Moses He found His opportunity. By life and word, during the years of his presence in the

²⁶ See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 243.

Egyptian court, Moses conveyed to those in authority, the love and justice of God. But the call was rejected.

There could remain only the second call which was again given through Moses when he returned with the rod that became a serpent. The call began when the rod was cast down, and continued to be sounded as plague after plague fell. But that second call was not heeded. From that day to this, that nation as a nation, has never had another call sent to it, nor will it ever again.

Not until the second call had come and been refused, did God separate His people.

Why the Long Delay?

The period of servitude spanned several centuries. Why did God wait so long to free His people? Because He had no other choice. Firstly, He could not do it by force for:

The Desire of Ages, p. 759:

Compelling power is found only under Satan's government.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 12:

Mark 4

³⁰ Whereunto, [asked Christ,] shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

He could not employ the kingdoms of the world as a similitude. 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.

Secondly, He will not voluntarily withdraw His presence to unleash the deranged forces of nature to break the hold of the oppressor.

All God could do was to take every opportunity to save the Egyptians. He did this when Moses was born. Hopefully, they would repent, but if not, then they would come more speedily to that point where they would force the withdrawal of their canopy of protection.

They themselves would break their own power to hold the people of Israel, thus leaving God with perfect freedom to take His people out. Note how God waited till Pharaoh said,

Exodus 12

³¹ Rise and go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the Lord as you have said.

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 and therefore, the commonly understood views of what God did in Egypt are erroneous. If God brought Israel out by force, then why did He not do it hundreds of years before? Anyone who is all-powerful can do what, when, and where, he wishes. But God is bound by the principles of righteousness and acts only within the limitations of law. Therefore He had to wait until the inevitable outworking of Egypt's wickedness brought its own harvest of self-destruction and the consequent release of Israel.

This does not mean that God did nothing at all. He was ever there, working to save. Even though He did not get the desired response from the majority, there were those who did find salvation even among the Egyptians, while the rest came more speedily to their ruin.

It is recommended that the student now rereads the Scriptures quoted at the beginning of this chapter. If the principles outlined in these pages have been grasped, they will be read in a new light altogether. A picture of God will be seen which is consistent with the life and teachings of Christ, thus establishing a perfect harmony between the Old and New Testament revelations of God.

26. The Flood

IN NO one place in the Scriptures does God unfold every aspect of His character. The evidences are given in various places, and it is left to the student of the Word to bring them all together. So, in one place we are told that there is no unrighteousness—law-breaking—with God:

Romans 9

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

In another,

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 315:

His law is a transcript of His own character...

Yet again,

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.

In still other places, God is careful to give examples to show how He intends us to understand such expressions as “God destroyed them,” “God hardened,” “God sent.” The life and all the teachings of Christ perfectly endorse, combine, and amplify these principles.

In the Egyptian episode, the rod and serpent supply us with God's statement of how He conducts His affairs. But a clear scientific explanation is not provided of how the water turned to blood, how each plague followed, and how the firstborn of the land died. It would be of considerable help if it were, but such information is not essential to faith.

Environmental Evidence for the Flood

In the report on the flood, however, it is different. God has given us sufficient evidence in various parts of the Bible to establish the

scientific way in which the flood did come. The study of this great cataclysm will be taken up from this angle.

When it is seen what caused the flood and how it came, powerful confirmation will be given to the truth that God does not execute the sinner nor destroy the earth. 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 desired. There is no difference between God's behavior during the flood and the decimation of Egypt.

Conditions before the flood were radically different from what they have been since. The key to that difference lies in the state of the sun and moon. The former was seven times as hot as it now is, and the moon was a small sun. The heat which the earth received from the moon at that time was equivalent to what is received today from the sun. This meant that eight times today's heat and light was being beamed upon the earth before the flood.

The Scriptural evidence to this effect is found in:

Isaiah 30 [KJV]

²⁶ Moreover 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.

This is both a prophecy of the future and a description of the past. God is telling what He will do when He will bind up "the breach of His people," and will heal "the stroke of their wound." This is restoration, the bringing back of that which was already there. Since this involves increasing the sun to seven times its present intensity and making the light of the moon as the present sun, then this is how it was before "the breach of His people," and the infliction of "the stroke of their wound."

It will be when the Creator makes a new heavens and earth that this restoration will be achieved. At that time the sun and moon

combined will be transmitting eight times the heat and light now being produced.

Modern man knows the moon as a dead satellite with no light or heat of its own. It is nothing more than a reflector of the sun's rays. If, in the coming re-creation of the physical heavens and earth when the sun will be increased seven times, the moon was to continue as a reflector, then it would give only seven times today's brightness. This would not make it equal with the present sun which gives off four hundred and sixty-five thousand times the light reflected by the full moon.

Verification of this difference in intensity is found in this statement.

The sun is about 465,000 times as bright as the moon, with an observational error of about 20%. A real variation in brightness of 20% results from the moon's varying distance from the earth and sun.²⁷

Therefore for the moon to increase in brightness four hundred and sixty-five thousand times, while the sun increases but seven times, it will have to become a self-luminous body. It will cease to be a reflector and will upgrade to a little sun.

Being only two hundred and fifty thousand miles from the earth, it would not need to be as large as the sun in order to transmit as much heat. The sun is stationed ninety-three million miles from the earth, a distance almost four hundred times as great as the moon's position. This makes a very significant difference in the sizes required to generate the same amount of heat and light on the earth.

With these two orbs of fire jointly serving the new heavens and new earth, a vastly changed condition of things will prevail from what they do now. If all other conditions remained the same, these changes would force us to conclude that this Scripture must

²⁷ *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 15, p. 780. 1963 Edition.

be figurative. However these words are to be understood literally as the following statement verifies.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 505²⁸:

All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving—the robe of Christ’s righteousness. All nature in its surpassing loveliness will offer to God a tribute of praise and adoration. The world will be bathed in the light of heaven. The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold greater than it is now. The years will move on in gladness. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, “There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.”

The reason for querying whether this statement can be literally accepted is because of the belief that eight times more heat would be unendurable. On an uncomfortably hot summer’s day the temperature can go as high as 120° F, or 49° C. This is about as much heat as anyone would want to endure. But let the temperature be increased by a mere fifty percent to become 180° F, or 73° C, and it would be impossible to survive. What hope then would anyone have if the temperature rose by eight times to 960° F, or 587° C? This is above the melting point of lead, 621° F, or 327° C, and approaching the melting point of aluminum, 1220° F, or 660° C.

The human body is composed of almost 75% water which boils at 212° F, or 100° C. Long before this temperature is reached, human beings would boil to death in their own body fluid, and plant life would be destroyed. The earth would become a hell rather than a home.

While this overheating would be unendurable if the present atmospheric conditions existed, the placement of a layer of water above the earth would solve the problem. This protective covering would absorb all but the heat necessary to produce a perfect climate on the entire surface of the earth below.

²⁸ See also *My Life Today*, p. 348 and *The Review and Herald*, November 26, 1903.

If God were to re-create the sun and the moon to their original intensities and then leave the eight-fold heat to elevate the water into the atmosphere again, some time would elapse before the transition was completed. In the first creation it was not left to the sun and the moon. God lifted the water from the earth's surface to the upper levels by His creative fiat. As the second creation will be an exact duplication of the first, this is how it will be done again, with only one difference. Whereas the human family did not exist at the first creation, during the re-creation they will be interested spectators.

The conditions existing on this planet before God began to form it into a habitable home were reproduced during Noah's time. When the ark rode the stormy seas, the flooding was so complete that no dry land appeared. The record in *Genesis* shows that it was the same as in the beginning:

Genesis 1

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

² And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Not one square inch of rock, sand, or soil penetrated the unbroken expanse of water. It was not until the third day that the dry land appeared.

Genesis 1

⁹ Then God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear; and it was so.

¹³ So the evening and the morning were the third day.

These verses establish that the entire earth was submerged prior to the third day. What is of great interest now are the events of the second day. Thereon God took a tremendous quantity of water and elevated it above the surface of the earth where it remained in a state of suspension. Some concept of the volume of

water thus raised is given by the story of its return to earth to produce the flood:

Genesis 7

¹² And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.

This was no localized storm. It rained over every square inch of the earth's surface for forty days and nights in an unbroken downpour the like of which has never been repeated.

We do not know how deep the flood was in the early creation days. We are told that even after the Lord had elevated an enormous amount of water, that which remained had to be gathered in one place in order, even then, for the dry land to appear. This would be achieved by reshaping the earth's surface. Some parts must be heightened, others lowered. The water would then naturally gravitate to the lower areas.

This meant that a great deal of the land was higher than when the entire surface was flooded. Yet when, in Noah's day, the water which had been placed high above the earth on the second day of creation, returned to the earth, it was so vast in quantity that it flooded the world again. From these evidences it is established that an enormous volume of water was lifted into suspension on that second day.

Genesis 1

⁶ Then God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

⁷ Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so.

⁸ And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.

The marginal reading for "firmament" is *expanse*. God called it *heaven*. Calling it thus did not designate this expanse as being His central dwelling place, the heaven of heavens. The word, "heaven," has several applications:

1. The heaven where God dwells
2. The starry heavens, and finally
3. The atmospheric area around this earth where birds fly and clouds exist.

It is this last to which reference is made here. So God left some water upon the earth, but the remainder He stationed high above and completely around the world. In between there was an atmospheric heaven. How high that mantle was we do not know. No doubt a scientist could calculate it. God made reference to it in His conversation with Job when He said,

Job 38

⁴ Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

⁹ When I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band.

Thus a deep, protective, insulating mantle of water vapor cocooned the earth, just as cloud partially and periodically does today. The height and thickness of this was precisely calculated by the Creator to produce the perfect climate upon earth.

Having positioned the water vapor, the Lord then commissioned the sun and moon to hold it there, as well as to give light to the earth.

Genesis 1

¹⁴ Then God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years;

¹⁵ And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth; and it was so.

¹⁶ Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also.

¹⁷ God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth,

¹⁸ And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

¹⁹ So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

The sun and moon were not established in their appointed orbits to give only light to the earth. The Scripture clearly testifies that they were to...

Genesis 1 [KJV]

¹⁵ ...give light upon the earth, and...

¹⁸ ...to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness.

The purpose of giving light to the earth is easily understood, but more study needs to be given to the meaning of the phrase, “to rule over the day and over the night.” “To rule” is to govern, to exercise a controlling influence of some nature or the other. In the light of Scripture evidences revealing the physical conditions existing at the time of creation, something of the nature of this rulership becomes apparent.

The sun and moon shared a responsibility beyond that of lighting the earth. An enormous amount of water had been elevated above the globe where it rode in suspension to form a complete mantle. To hold it there required a considerable supply of heat without which the pull of gravity would draw it down again.

The sun and moon were placed in command of this situation. They were to rule over the moisture mantle, wrapped like swaddling clothes around the planet, preventing it from returning to the surface again and causing complete flooding. In order to have sufficient heat energy to accomplish this important task, the moon had to be hot enough to give the earth what it now receives from the sun, and the sun had to be seven times hotter than it now is.

The arrangement was a masterpiece of balanced meteorology. The amount of heat produced from the two suns was calculated to keep just the correct volume of water vapor at the optimum altitude. But this process did not absorb all of the heat energy. Enough heat was left over to warm the earth and the dwellers thereon.

But effective as the water mantle was in absorbing the greater part of the sun's energy and thus protecting the world below from its searing blast, God's purpose for it did not end there. It served to conserve, distribute, and equalize the warmth reaching the surface.

The sun's rays do not heat the air as they pass through it. They heat the earth and the sea. The air coming in contact with these surfaces absorbs this heat and is warmed. Thus the atmosphere directly in contact with land and sea is the warmest, while the further removed it is by altitude, the colder it becomes for the simple reason that it has no contact with sources which will transmit heat to it.

What heat does reach levels above the earth arrives there by the process of convection. Hot air rises while cold air sinks. As the air nearest the earth is warmed, it begins to rise through the colder areas above. In so doing it gives up its heat to the surrounding air until, by the time it reaches a certain altitude (depending on its original temperature), it will be totally deprived of the heat with which it began.

If there is no cloud cover, then there is no restriction on the levels to which the convecting air will ascend so that the heat gathered by the earth from the sun will be lost out in space. The earth warms fairly quickly and also quickly loses its stored heat. So as the sun sets, the earth and the air above it quickly cool, especially if the night is clear. This is why clear, still, winter nights are cold and crisp while cloudy ones tend to be warmer. Conversely, cloudy days are cooler while the clear days are hotter especially if the weather is at full summer intensity.

Whereas today the cloud cover is never completely around this globe, it was in the original design. This resulted in retention of the accumulated warmth near the earth's surface. There was a limit to the rise of the convection currents which obliged them to flow upwards and then outwards, generating breezes and gentle winds which evenly distributed the warmth from pole to pole.

Thus there was a relatively uniform climate all over the planet, devoid of sweltering tropical regions and frozen polar zones. No more perfect conditions could be imagined.

In effect the earth was located within a giant green house where the temperature inside was maintained at the best possible comfort level for man, animals, and plants. With no adjacent areas of great temperature differences, there was nothing to generate storms, low and high pressure systems, or any form of violent weather. Instead there was a climatic pattern of perfect stability and reliability. Anyone could be a successful weather prophet in those days when conditions were so regular, consistent, and delightful.

There are no detailed eyewitness accounts of the antediluvian world, for understandably any eyewitness testimonies other than those saved in the ark were destroyed with the witnesses themselves. Neither does the Bible provide detailed descriptions. Nevertheless the Lord has not left us without evidences concerning that era as Alfred M. Rehwinkel has observed in his book, *The Flood*:

Nor is it mere speculation to speak of the first world as a “veritable paradise.” For though there are but meager written records concerning this first world, there is another kind of record which God has preserved for us in His wisdom. This record is reliable and true and is written in large and legible letters in the very foundation rocks of our present world. The record I refer to are the fossil remains that have been found in great abundance in every part of the globe. These fossils may be called the mummified remains of an extinct world.

Fossils do not lie. Just as the pyramids of Egypt and the monuments of Greece and Rome are an evidence of the greatness of the civilization that produced them, so these fossils speak an eloquent language of the glories of a world which has passed away. These fossils have been preserved by God for a purpose. They are, as it were, the inscription on a tombstone erected to that magnifi-

cent world and at the same time a warning to the world which was to follow.

The fossils have stimulated the imagination of men ever since the early Greeks. The early church fathers were familiar with them. Tertullian mentions them and gives a fairly correct interpretation of them. Luther also knew of them and understood their meaning. Others since then have had very fantastic ideas about them, but to us their language is clear. A more detailed discussion of these fossils will follow in a later chapter. Here I merely wish to refer to them as evidence and conclusive proof that the physical condition of the world of Noah, the climate, animals, and plant life, was vastly different from that of our world today.

With respect to climate, the fossils show that there was a uniformly mild climate in high and in low altitudes of both the northern and the southern hemisphere. That is, there was a perfectly uniform, non-zonal, mild, and spring-like climate in every part of the globe. This does not mean that the climate was of necessity the same in all parts of the earth. There were differences, but not the present extremes. Sir Henry H. Howorth, a noted geologist and competent interpreter of these fossils, says: "The flora and fauna are virtually the only thermometer with which we can test the climate of any past period. Other evidence is always sophisticated by the fact that we may be attributing to climate what is due to other causes. But the biological evidence is unmistakable; cold-blooded reptiles cannot live in icy water; semitropical plants, or plants whose habitat is the temperate zone, cannot ripen their seeds and sow themselves under arctic conditions."

Or another outstanding authority, Prof. Alfred R. Wallace says: "There is but one climate known to the ancient fossil world as revealed by the plants and animals entombed in the rocks, and the climate was a mantle of spring-like loveliness which seems to have prevailed continuously over the whole globe. Just how the world could have thus been warmed all over may be a matter of conjecture; that it was so warmed effectively and continuously is a matter of fact."...

Or Prof. George McCready Price writes: "It would be quite useless to go through the whole fossiliferous series in order, for

there is not a single system which does not have coral limestone or other evidence of a mild climate way up north, most systems having such rock in the lands which skirt the very pole itself. The limestone and coal beds of the carboniferous period are the nearest known rocks to the North Pole. They crop out all around the polar basis; and from the dip of these beds, they must underlie the polar sea itself. But it is needless to go through the systems one after another, for they uniformly testify that a warm climate has in former times prevailed over the whole globe.” *The New Geology*, p. 652.

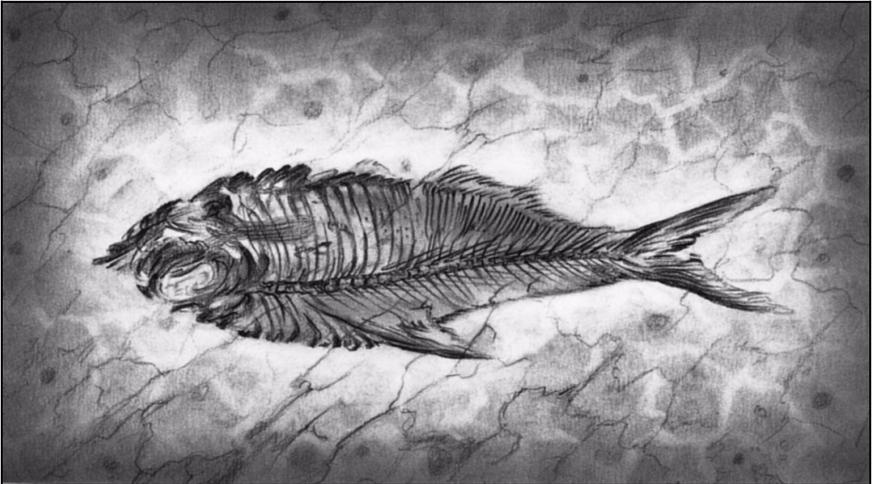
It is difficult for us today even to imagine a world as just described, a world in which there was neither arctic nor antarctic and no steaming jungles of the Equator. We know that our present climatic zones and seasons are the results of the changing relations of the earth to the sun, the source of the heat that warms our globe. It is, therefore, quite natural to ask at this point: How could these laws of nature have functioned in that world so as to produce conditions so different from those prevailing today, and what caused the change?

That our earth at one time in its history enjoyed a uniformly mild climate in all of its parts is a fact which can be demonstrated, as we have seen, and that a change came suddenly, in fact, very suddenly, and probably at a time of a universal flood, seems to be established beyond a doubt from the frozen mammoths found fully preserved in the flesh in the frozen tundras of northern Siberia, of which we shall hear more later.²⁹

The witness of the fossils is of great value in the search for information about the antediluvian world. They verify incontrovertibly that there was a uniform climate over the entire planet prior to the cataclysm which produced those fossils. In the frozen north are fossil remains originating from plant and animal forms which now are found only in the temperate regions further south. As these plants and animals are unable to grow in any other than temperate zones, it can only be concluded that those which are

²⁹ Alfred M. Rehwinkel, *The Flood*, p. 6-9.

now frozen wastes were then beautiful, verdant, temperate climes.



Fossils have been discovered in every part of the earth including those which are now the frozen zones. This proves that the living things which these fossils once were, flourished where it is now impossible for them to do so. Thus is provided today a record book of the distribution and kind of life and climate that existed before the flood.

Perhaps the most amazing finds of all are those of the mighty mastodons which were the elephants of that antediluvian period. These have been discovered in perfect condition deep frozen in the icy wastes of Siberia. The evidence shows that they were overwhelmed by a most sudden catastrophe, for in the mouths of some, unchewed, were yellow buttercups likewise perfectly preserved. Such vegetation does not grow in frigid regions, and its presence in the mouths of these great beasts testifies to two things. Firstly, the climate in that part of the world which is now frozen waste, was at one time considerably warmer, and secondly, life in that region was overwhelmed suddenly and disastrously.

The whole of the Arctic seems to be a vast treasure store of fossil remains. Obviously they are better preserved there than elsewhere because of the extreme cold and because these regions are least disturbed by passing civilizations.

Starting with the islands in the Arctic Ocean along the coast north of Siberia, Howorth says that every one of them contains in its strata abundant animal remains. There is a group of islands off the coast, in the Arctic Ocean, called New Siberia. Concerning one of these, the Island of Lachov, a small island about fifty miles square, Howorth said its soil is “almost composed of fossil bones.” The same is true of another of these islands called Kotelni, which is over a hundred miles long and fifty miles wide. Howorth quotes a visitor to this island named Hedenstrom, who said that so plentifully were elephants buried beneath its surface that, as he walked along on the island for half a mile, he counted ten elephant tusks sticking out of the ground. This general condition existed throughout the whole island. Besides the fossils of elephant, skulls and bones of rhinoceros, horse, bison, ox, and sheep were observed scattered over and embedded in the earth of the island.

Concerning still another island in this group, Howorth quotes Hedenstrom to this effect: “In one island is a lake with a high bank, which splits open in the summer when the sun melts the ice and discloses heaps of tusks, mammoth bones, bones of rhinoceroses and buffaloes. In other parts of the island bones and tusks are to be seen projecting from the ground.”³⁰

These are the animals which we associate with warm and even hot climates. We know that they would not have lived in the areas where their remains are now to be found if the climate was as it is now—frigid. Therefore at the time when they lived there, which was before the Noachian flood, the climate was mild and warm.

The fossil remains from the flood clearly indicate that there was an overall climate of temperate levels before the flood, but they are not the only evidences to support this fact. Nor do we wish to turn this into a geological study to prove in great detail that this is so, interesting and enlightening as such a study would be. However mention can be made of certain other evidences such as the location of volcanoes.

³⁰ *Idem*, p. 243.

Spiritual Gifts, vol. 3, p. 79:

Before the flood there were immense forests. The trees were many times larger than any trees which we now see. They were of great durability. They would know nothing of decay for hundreds of years. At the time of the flood these forests were torn up or broken down and buried in the earth. In some places large quantities of these immense trees were thrown together and covered with stones and earth by the commotions of the flood. They have since petrified and become coal, which accounts for the large coal beds which are now found. This coal has produced oil. God causes large quantities of coal and oil to ignite and burn. Rocks are intensely heated, limestone is burned, and iron ore melted. Water and fire under the surface of the earth meet. The action of water upon the limestone adds fury to the intense heat, and causes earthquakes, volcanoes and fiery issues.

Since one cause of earthquakes and volcanic activities is the ignition of vast amounts of combustible material in the form of giant trees buried at the time of the flood, then we must expect to find volcanoes today where such vast amounts of vegetation grew before the flood. If, in the days before the flood, the climate was as it is today so that the greatest forests are found in the temperate and tropical areas, then it would be largely in these that we would find the active and extinct volcanoes of the present world. On the other hand, if the world had a fairly equal climate over its whole surface so that these trees grew in profusion at the north and south poles as well as in between, with equal or nearly equal vigor, then we would expect to find volcanoes all over the earth.

And the latter is the case. The entire surface of the earth has had its active volcanoes at one time or the other. The location of each, be it active, dormant, or extinct, marks the place where huge forests were buried. Here is a statement showing the universality of the incidence of volcanoes on this earth:

Probably there is no part of the earth's surface that has not, at some time in the past, been the site of volcanic activity. Indeed, some regions such as the British Isles that we would hardly think of today as volcanic have formerly experienced violent and long-

continued volcanic activity...Even ice-bound Antarctica has its active volcano, Mt. Erebus, on the edge of McMurdo sound.³¹

The very fact that there is still an active volcano in Antarctica after approximately four thousand years, is proof that a vast quantity of timber was buried there in order to provide fuel for such an intense, long-lasting fire. This enormous supply of fuel certainly could not have been produced if the climate had always been the frigid one it now is. Here is the clearest proof that at one time the area was under the balmy influence of pleasant temperatures conducive to vigorous growth.

Coal and Oil

As the statement above indicates, the burial of trees at the time of the flood produced coal which in turn produced oil. Just as the distribution of volcanoes shows where vast forests once grew, so does the location of modern coal and oil fields. These are not confined only to those areas where the climate today is such as would produce mighty forests, but are also to be found in the frigid regions of the earth and under the ocean floors.

In the past few years tremendous stores of crude oil have been discovered in the frozen wastes of northern Alaska from where, despite the forbidding nature of the terrain and climate, men are determined to bring the oil out to the world. Likewise there is a vast coal field in Antarctica:

Coal has been found near Mawson and in many places in the Beacon group from Coats Land, the Horlick mountains, Queen Maud range, Beardmore glacier region and northward into Victoria Land.³²

All these things tell their own story of what was there in the past, leaving no doubt that the overall climate of the earth was such as to produce vast forests which were not restricted to the temperate and tropical zones as we now know them.

³¹ *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Volume 23, p. 243A. 1963 Edition.

³² *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Volume 2, p. 4. 1963 Edition.

There are of course many more evidences from the world of fossils, coal, oil, volcanoes, and so forth which might be studied in this connection, but we believe that enough has been given here to establish the fact that there was an equalized climate over the entire face of the globe before the flood.

Already evidence has been advanced to show that the moon was then a heat generator which provided the earth with heat and light equivalent in power to our present sun. God carefully designed it to fulfill a specific and important role which in the Scriptures is declared as being the rulership of the night while the sun ruled the day.

There certainly have been far-reaching changes since Adam's time, for not only has the moon been extinguished, but it no longer occupies the night sky alone. At times it rides the daylight hours with the sun. Its original appointment was the night while the sun commanded the day. Each was faithful to its appointed sphere so that they never appeared at the same time.

The scientific necessity of this is readily discerned. During the day the enormous heat energy from the sun kept the canopy of water vapor in place, but as the earth turned away, there would be a cooling of this mantle to the point where flooding rains would mar each night. A lesser light was required to give just enough heat to prevent the excessive cooling of the water vapor and yet not too much heat so as to allow some condensation to irrigate the vegetation. The moon provided exactly what was needed. Each night there was just sufficient cooling to produce a ground fog which bathed all the plant life with a gentle dew meeting the moisture requirements for the day.

Genesis 2

⁵ ...for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground;

⁶ But a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

No more perfect system could have been devised. There were no pounding, windswept rains deluging one area at the expense of another, leaching the soil of its life-giving nutrients and eroding the land into the sea. There were no severe contrasts of climate ranging from the blistering heat of today's tropics to the super cold of the polar regions. Everywhere on the whole earth the climate was delightful and invigorating. Neither were there vast oceans as we have them today. All that water was suspended far above. The earth was almost entirely elevated land with only pleasant rivers and lakes well distributed by the perfect design of a marvelous Creator.

Thus the earth had the capacity for supporting billions upon billions of people without overcrowding and without any want. Some concept of what its potential population would have been can be gained by considering what this earth now supports when so much of it is drowned by oceans, and taken up by deserts, mountain ranges, and frozen regions impossible to inhabit, while the remainder has very low fertility compared to the earth as it emerged directly from the Creator's hand.

Any comparison between things as they then were and are now immediately shows that very great changes have taken place. The sun has been reduced to one seventh of its brightness and the moon has gone out. The great water canopy is no longer suspended as a protective veil and insulating blanket above and around the earth. The moon and the sun no longer sustain the same relationship to each other.

The climate has changed. Deserts dominate vast areas; huge, restless oceans occupy the greater part of the globe; great up thrusting mountain chains divide nations, control the weather, and create useless wastelands on their lee side; and the northern and southern caps are frozen solid. The earth is now watered by leaching rain in place of the gentle mist in Adam's garden.

When and how all these changes took place has not been left as a matter of guesswork. Certainly they did not happen before the

flood. When Noah announced the coming of a deluge by a global rain storm to last for forty days and nights, the antediluvians scoffed at the idea. It had never rained during the one thousand six hundred and fifty-six years before the flood came.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 90:

In the days of Noah a double curse was resting upon the earth in consequence of Adam's transgression and of the murder committed by Cain. Yet this had not greatly changed the face of nature. There were evident tokens of decay, but the earth was still rich and beautiful in the gifts of God's providence. The hills were crowned with majestic trees supporting the fruit-laden branches of the vine. The vast, garden like plains were clothed with verdure, and sweet with the fragrance of a thousand flowers. The fruits of the earth were in great variety, and almost without limit. The trees far surpassed in size, beauty, and perfect proportion any now to be found; their wood was of fine grain and hard substance, closely resembling stone, and hardly less enduring. Gold, silver, and precious stones existed in abundance.

Furthermore the great, scientific minds of that day could prove mathematically that no rain was possible because of the continued generation of heat by the sun during the day and the moon by night. They also boldly declared, as scientists do today, that the sun would continue its radiation of heat energy for millions of years to come. Like the Pharaoh as yet unborn, they had lost sight of the essential knowledge that nature is not self-acting but requires the continued presence, control, and sustenance of God.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 97:

The world before the flood reasoned that for centuries the laws of nature had been fixed. The recurring seasons had come in their order. Heretofore rain had never fallen; the earth had been watered by a mist or dew. The rivers had never yet passed their boundaries, but had borne their waters safely to the sea. Fixed decrees had kept the waters from overflowing their banks. But these reasoners did not recognize the hand of Him who had stayed the waters, saying,

Job 38

¹¹ Hitherto shall you come, but no further.

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. They continued their festivities and their gluttonous feasts; they ate and drank, planted and built, laying their plans in reference to advantages they hoped to gain in the future; 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. They asserted that if there were any truth in what Noah had said, the men of renown—the wise, the prudent, the great men—would understand the matter.

For the first time ever, rain fell, beginning its torrential and incessant downpour seven days after the closing of the door to the ark. Thus the change came suddenly. Up to a certain day it had never rained. With the advent of that day, it rained, not gently and then increasingly, but in an absolute deluge. The water literally dropped out of the sky. At the same time mighty underground supplies burst forth out of all control.

But this change could not occur unless firstly changes had taken place in the sun and moon. There is only one way in which rain can come. Suspended water vapor must cool down to the point of condensation. Today this takes place when rain clouds drifting in from warmer areas either encounter a cold air front or are forced to rise to cross a mountain chain. In each case the saturated air is cooled. The water vapor turns to heavier-than-air water droplets and the result is rain.

But there were no great mountain barriers in Noah's day, nor was it possible for traveling saturated air to encounter a cold front, for there were no polar regions to generate them. There was only one way for the water vapor in suspension above the earth to be chilled, and that was for the moon and sun to begin to wane in heat production. This they did.

The moon eventually went out altogether, and the sun faded to one seventh of its former brightness. The vast volume of water vapor up there found itself steadily being deprived of seven-eighths of the heat it had been receiving. This produced chilling and condensation. Practically all the water that had been taken from earth to sky by God's direct power on the second day of creation, was returned through natural causes during those 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 and nights to return to the earth. The result was that for the second time the earth became completely flooded with water. Not a trace of dry land appeared anywhere.

From the evidences investigated so far, it is confirmed that the dimming of the sun and the extinguishing of the moon were the direct and natural causes of the flood. What caused the sun and moon to lose their powers is a question yet to be determined, but the answer will come as we proceed.

First, some consideration must be given to New Testament evidences that great changes did take place at the flood.

27. Great Changes

IN THE Old Testament it is Isaiah who provides the information that there was a great change at the time of the flood. In the New Testament it is Peter. In fact the latter writer is even more specific in that he names the flood as the point of change:

2 Peter 3

³ Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

⁴ 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.

⁵ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,

⁶ By which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

⁷ But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

In these words, Peter divides history into two periods. In doing so he uses the expression, “the world that then was,” to indicate the world as it was before the flood and which was destroyed by the flood. When referring to the world after that catastrophe, he speaks of “the heavens and the earth, which are now.”

A Change in the Heavens

He does not speak only of the earth which is now as being different from what it was before. He also includes the heavens in the change. In actual fact, Peter does not define the particular heavens to which he is referring, but there is no need for any ignorance of this on our part. The information contained in other Scriptures makes it clear that the heavens which changed at the time of the flood were those governed by the sun and the moon of this solar system.

As we studied in the last chapter, before the flood the sun was seven times brighter, and the moon was a sun. There was a wonderful mantle of protective vapor around the earth and the climate from pole to pole was of pleasant, even temperatures. But how different are the heavens and the earth of today. The sun is dimmed to one seventh. The moon has gone out. The mantle of protection is not there. A wide diversity of climatic conditions cover the earth, and natural disasters scourge it frequently.

These are the great changes of which the wise men of today are ignorant, and willfully so. It is not that they do not believe in the flood, for many of them do, but the deluge is seen as if it were no more than the same disasters which occur today except on a lesser scale. They see the heavens and the earth before the flood as being essentially the same as the heavens and the earth after the flood. There simply came the time when an abnormally wet season flooded the entire earth. When the flood ended, as all floods do, the earth gradually returned to the same situation as before. This is the thinking of those who do recognize the flood but fail to acknowledge the real changes which took place there.

However, a thorough and careful study of the Scriptures points us to these changes. It is needful that their full extent be understood, together with the causes, namely, the dimming of the sun and the extinguishing of the moon.

When Noah emerged from the ark, God made a special promise and prophecy to him that there never would be a flood upon the earth again. That promise is repeated again in *Isaiah*.

Isaiah 60

²⁰ Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.

In what sense are these words to be understood? Usually we refer to the sun as “going down” when it appears to sink below the western horizon, but this is an erroneous expression, for the sun does not go down in relation to the earth. It only appears to. The

disappearance of this heavenly body over the horizon is caused by the rotation of the earth on its own axis.

The evening sunset is something that God gave at creation before sin began its destructive work. It gives us the blessing of night. If the sun did not set in the western sky, then there would be no day or night. There is really no reason to believe that, after the recreation of the earth, this celestial pattern will be changed. From these thoughts it is quite reasonable to conclude that *Isaiah* 60:20 is not referring to the evening setting of the sun. Some might remember the reference in:

Revelation 22

⁵ And there shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign for ever and ever.

However, this Scripture is not describing conditions in the new earth generally but as they will be in the new Jerusalem.

Revelation 21

²³ And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

Even then it does not say there will be no sun, but only that there will be no need of it in the city for there will be the greater light streaming from the presence of God. Jerusalem and the rest of the earth will have, as promised in *Isaiah* 30:26, a blazing sun and a brilliant moon. The earth will still rotate on its axis, and each evening the sun will set behind the western horizon as it does today.

The promise in *Isaiah* 60:20 is a precious one to the people of God who will inherit the new earth. They know what happened in Noah's time when the sun diminished in power and the moon went out, and they find great comfort in the promise that this event will happen "no more." "No more" means that it has happened in the past but will not be repeated again.

When the earth is made new, God will do this according to the pattern of the first creation where there was a layer of water above the entire earth and was held there by a sun seven times brighter than our present sun, and a self-luminous moon.

Just like *Isaiah 30:26* and *2 Peter 3:3-7*, *Isaiah 60:20* is referring to the great changes which occurred in both the earth and the heavens when the sun went down and the moon withdrew itself. Consequently the world “that then was,” was very different from the “heavens and the earth, which are now.”



The moon lost its light-giving power at the time of the flood.

A Mistake in Dating Methods

It is the utter failure by modern scientists to understand the full extent of these changes which has led them into erroneous con-

clusions in all matters of dating extending beyond existing historical records. While the earth is, in fact, not quite six thousand years of age, they date it in the hundreds of millions of years.

Great excitement was experienced during the nineteen-forties when the radiocarbon method of dating was developed. Careful testing of the procedure with materials of known age proved its accuracy. Thereupon, the dating of materials of otherwise undetermined age was undertaken and, to the delight of the scientists, the readout agreed with established postulations of the age of the earth and life upon it. Whereas the Biblical record allows for only about six thousand years, they confirmed figures running into millions.

Radiocarbon age dating, developed in the late 1940's at *The University of Chicago*, is an example of the application of one of the newest sciences (atomic energy) to one of the oldest (archaeology). The technique involves measuring the relative activities of radioactive carbon (C14) in (1) present-day living organic matter and (2) the sample under investigation, and multiplying the logarithm of this ratio by the rate at which the activity of C14 decays with time. Careful measurements have shown that the activity of any given preparation of carbon-14 is reduced by exactly one-half during each interval of 5,568 (plus or minus) 30 years. This value is called the half life of C14.

Radiocarbon is produced in nature by an indirect process involving the interaction of cosmic rays from outer space with the nitrogen in the earth's atmosphere. The competing processes of formation and of decay of C14 have been going on for so long that the equilibrium has been established, and the world inventory of C14 is estimated at about 70 metric tons. Radiocarbon therefore has been introduced into the biosphere, and all living matter contains a small quantity of radiocarbon which averages 15.3 (plus or minus) 0.1 disintegrations per minute per gram of contained carbon. This activity remains constant throughout the life of the organic matter because of the above-mentioned equilibrium processes.

However, at death the introduction of radiocarbon into the specimen ceases, while the normal decay of the contained radiocarbon continues according to the half life mentioned above. Therefore an archaeological specimen (for example, a mummy or a tree) which yields 7.65 disintegrations per minute per gram of carbon instead of 15.3 is judged to be 5,568 (plus or minus) 30 years old. If the material shows only one-fourth of the radiocarbon content of living matter, the age of the specimen is 11,136 (plus or minus) 60 years, etc.³³

In less scientific terms the above may be restated as follows: There is a continual bombardment of this earth by cosmic rays from outer space. These, interacting with the nitrogen in the atmosphere, cause all living organisms to absorb radiocarbon 14. This continues until the death of the living thing, be it plant, animal, or human. Thereafter the radiocarbon 14 breaks down at an accurately known rate. To determine how long since death took place, the residual radiocarbon in the specimen is measured. If half the original activity remains, then it is known that the age of the subject is very close to 5,568 years.

As mentioned above, when the procedure was tested using samples with ages already established through other means, it always checked out accurately. It was natural to assume then that it would be equally reliable in testing materials for which the age was unknown. Coal was an excellent example of this kind of matter.

When samples were tested, there was found to be a complete absence of any radiocarbon 14. It was natural to conclude that it had been there in the usual strength in the original living trees and that they had been dead for so long that complete disintegration of the radioactive material had taken place. Knowing that this could happen only over an exceedingly long period of time, they dated the coal as being much older than it really was.

³³ *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Volume 18, p. 904-905. 1963 Edition.

In doing so they did the very thing God, through Peter, foretold they would do. They denied that there had ever been a great change in the heavens and the earth and worked on the assumption that:

2 Peter 3

⁴ ...all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.

Had they understood that the earth was mantled by that protective water vapor, they would have known that before the flood, cosmic rays could never have penetrated into our atmosphere as they do today. Plants and animals did not absorb any radiocarbon 14 before the flood because the band of moisture filtered the rays out before they ever reached the nitrogen in the earth's atmosphere. Therefore scientists found no radiocarbon in the coal—not because it had all disintegrated, but because it was never there originally. Thus the radiocarbon clock, far from denying the truth of the Bible, actually serves to confirm it.

Had the heavens and the earth been the same before the flood as they are now with no better protection from cosmic ray penetration, then the trees would have absorbed it as they do today. When buried by the flood, the breakdown would have proceeded and the measuring instruments today would have shown the coal to be a little less than five thousand years old. We know how old the coal is without the help of a radiocarbon clock. We have the Word of God, and from its utterly reliable source we know that the flood occurred about four thousand four hundred years ago.

If the scientists were to allow for the great changes made in the heavens and the earth at the flood, they would also make allowances for their dating techniques and would not propose such astronomical figures for the age of the earth. It is interesting to note that since the introduction of this system, it has been discovered that the method is by no means as reliable as first thought.

Some may question the effectiveness of the moisture mantle in screening out the cosmic radiation, but the fact is that even the

limited presence of moisture and atmosphere around our earth today is a protection from this problem. When supersonic jets traverse the skies at high altitudes where the air is much thinner, it is necessary to keep a continual watch on solar flares. Should these break out while they are in flight, they must immediately return to a lower altitude to place atmosphere between themselves and open space so as to obtain protection from this radiation.

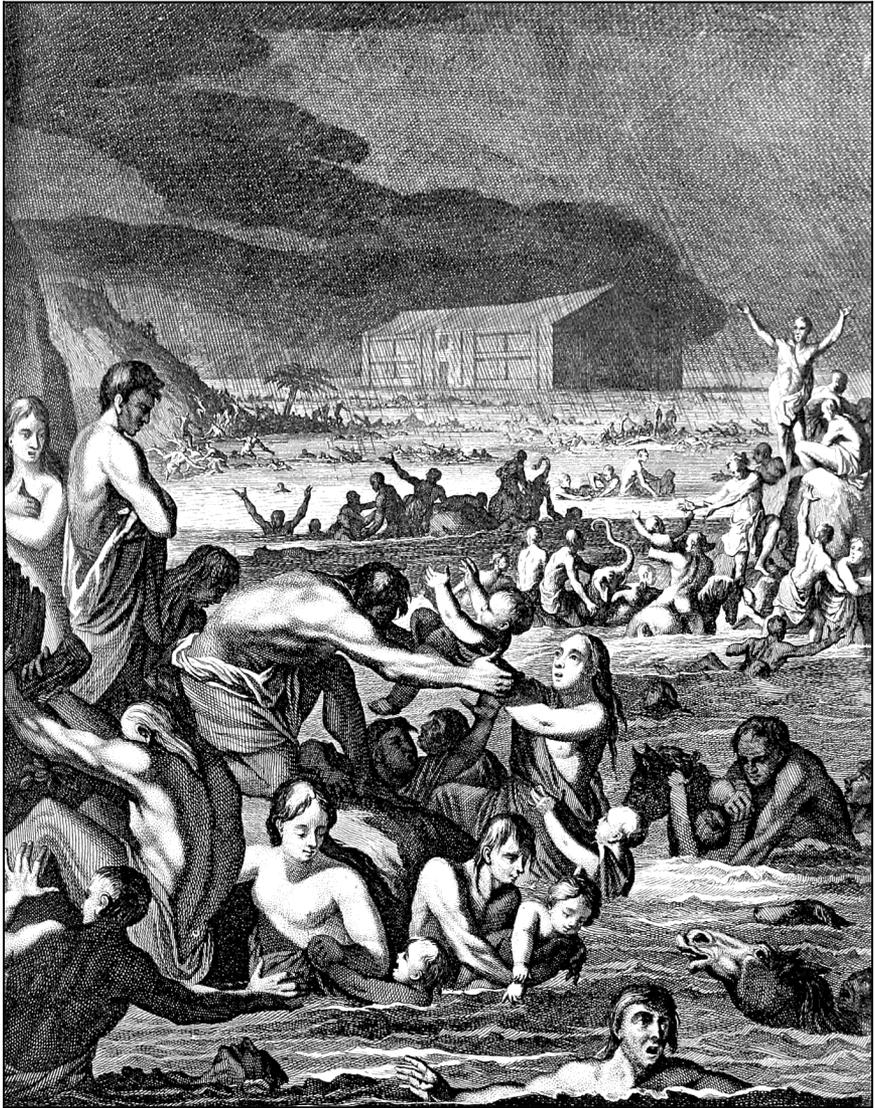
This clearly shows how completely the protective mantle before the flood screened out radiation from outer space. Therefore any fossils of things living before the flood will always give a zero readout so far as radioactive carbon content is concerned. This is proof, not that they are so old that there has been a complete decay of this material, but that it was never there in the first place. Its absence confirms the vastly different conditions existing in the heavens and the earth prior to the deluge.

Thus the Word of God offers us a great deal of information about conditions as they were before the flood, the natural forces which maintained those conditions, and the changes in those forces which produced the flood. This information is of tremendous value in searching out the specific role the Lord played in that fearful event. It does not seem that the same wealth of scientific information has been offered to us in the Bible to explain how the plagues of Egypt fell. At least such has not been found in the Scriptures though it might well be there, only waiting to be revealed to God's children.

On the other hand, the revelation of the scientific causes of the flood is a strong confirmation of the truth that God does not execute the sinner, and that the catastrophes which destroy mankind are the outworking of natural forces no longer under God's control.

While the Lord has not supplied the same detailed information about the scientific basis of the Egyptian plagues, faith that such a basis exists is strengthened by the scientific evidences revealing

the causes of the flood. If the scientific facts concerning the plagues of Egypt are ever revealed, then it will be possible to understand just what happened back then.



28. Revised Concepts

THE Biblical evidences gathered so far confirm the scientific nature of the flood. The perfect arrangement of balanced heat supply and protective mantle producing a mild and equalized climate over the earth, was critically dependent on the uniform production of heat from the sun and the moon. When that failed, the flood was inevitable.

The question now remaining is why the sun came to be dimmed and the moon extinguished. This problem solved, there will remain no difficulties in connection with God's character as it was manifested in that catastrophe.

If the reduction in output of those two bodies was God's deliberate act performed at a moment dictated by Him, then God certainly was an executioner of the sentence against transgression. He did not leave the rejecters of His mercy to themselves to reap that which they had sown. He was a destroyer. Undeniably, He departed from His stated principles and resorted to measures foreign to Him and His kingdom prior to the entrance of sin.

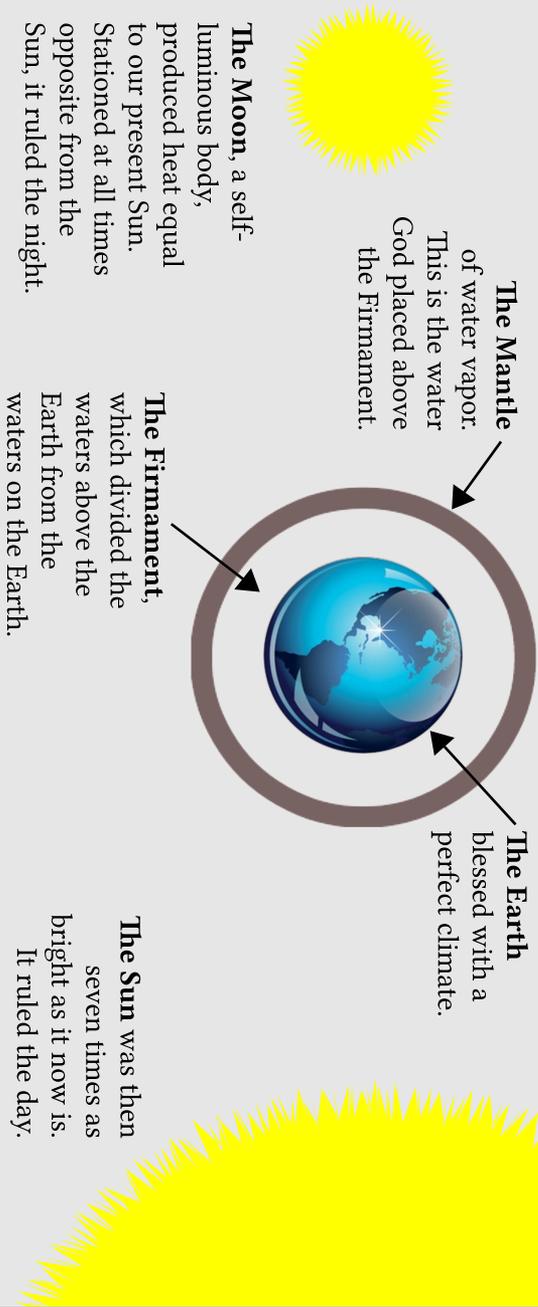
This is the generally accepted view, but unfortunately its implications are rarely considered. If men did but contemplate the full import of what they believe, they would heartily reject many errors.

Strengthening the tendency to adopt this position is the awareness that God has full power to extinguish the moon and dim the sun, easily and instantly. There is no possibility, need, or intention of denying this. God possesses infinite power. As by a word God created those blazing orbs of fire, so He could as readily put them out. There is no contention over God's ability to be the executioner. He possessed all the power necessary and much more besides. It required Him only to speak, and it would be done; to command, and it would be destroyed.

The controversy is over whether He who was in possession of such power would use it in this way. Those who have grasped the

The Sun, the Earth, and the Moon as they were from Creation to the Flood

This resulted in a perfect climate on earth from pole to pole



principles laid down in this book will understand that while God has the power to do this, He did not because He is bound by immutable principles of righteousness. All who understand this will praise the excellence of character which, though equipped with infinite might and pressed under the severest provocation, does not retaliate. That is righteousness at its beautiful best.

Foundational Principles

The story of the flood is very significant and important to me, for it was this recital which, back in 1952, first exercised my mind on the problems of understanding God's character. Prior to this I had simply accepted the traditional concepts of God's character without question, but from that time forward they became subject to serious challenge. It happened as follows:

Through certain circumstances my attention was directed to the beginning of the great controversy in heaven. With fascinated interest I studied the rise of sin in Lucifer, his opposition to God's government and law, and the divine response to this terrible spirit of rebellion. It became increasingly and sharply clear that the struggle was not a contest instituted to prove who was physically stronger, for there could be no doubt about God's infinite superiority in this area. Neither Lucifer nor any other creature challenged this.

Furthermore, had that been the issue, then God could have resolved it with one overwhelming demonstration of His almighty power. It would not have been necessary to wait for almost two thousand years and then bring the flood to prove that He was physically stronger than Satan and his hosts.

I came to understand that the contest was over the respective merits of two opposing and irreconcilable systems of government, the one long established by God versus that which was 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, prosperity, and advancement.

- Satan counterclaimed that the divine order was not all it pretended to be, a point having been reached where it had ended its effective reign. Far from being a system designed for the universal good of all, he charged, it was a master plot formulated for the special exaltation of the Father and the Son.

Because of this, he insinuated, an oppressive era was about to be introduced which would increase in severity as eternity dragged on. While he admitted that up till that time conditions had been good, he declared that the future would certainly reveal the defects in the divine system. He agitated that it was imperative that every member of the angelic host stand up for themselves before they were so circumscribed by bondage that they would be powerless to assert their rights.

Satan's attack was upon the principles of God's character and thus of His government. The question was whether the established ways of God's government could impeccably emerge from subjection to the most searching test Satan could give it, or whether defects would become evident. God knew that it would emerge immaculate and therefore was not afraid to submit it to the ultimate test. Let the devil attack and counterattack! Let him use all the weapons of force and deception! God knew that His system would come through vindicated and perfect.

So God entered into the great controversy, and this earth became a further answer to Satan's charges; an expression of God's love. I recognized back there the critical importance of understanding what was under test and what was at stake. God did not permit the testing of His system of government simply to preserve His personal honor and word, for God is not self-centered. He did it for the salvation of the creatures in His universe.

I perceived that a clear distinction must be seen between the principles of God's government itself, and the personal power

resident in God by which He could enforce the observance of His ways if He chose to use those methods. When this distinction is seen, it then follows that if God's principles are under test, they must stand or fall on their own merits.

If the Lord should find it necessary to introduce another factor, such as the use of omnipotent power to settle the controversy, then this would depart from His original commitment to leave the principles of righteousness to stand or fall on their own merits. It would also be an admission that they were defective and could not stand by virtue of their own intrinsic qualities. It would give Satan the whole argument, for this action would prove the adversary correct in his charges.

So I emerged from studying the beginnings of the great controversy clearly understanding its legal aspects, what it was all designed to prove, and assured that God had positioned himself where He could not interpose His omnipotent personal power to ensure that the victory was His. He had not assumed this position for the first time just to meet the issue. Eternally He had occupied that place, but under the pressure of the test He reaffirmed this truth with a much more clearly defined statement of His eternal principles and purposes.

My only sources in this study were the inspired writings, and I emerged from them thrilled with these discoveries of truth. I had come to see and know God as I had never seen Him before, and I was exceedingly happy with the revelation.

Mounting Pressure

But a few weeks later I studied about the flood. Naturally up till that time I had held the universally accepted view that the wickedness of man had become so great that the Lord was obliged to step in with His judgmental power and wipe them out as a stern warning of what all others would likewise receive if they pursued a similar course of defiance against God.

Now, however, I found this traditionally-held view in sharp conflict with the principles of God's position in the great controversy. I was unable to reconcile the newly discovered truths revealing the legal basis of the great controversy with the view I had always unquestioningly held of God's behavior at the flood.

On one side I could see clearly that the Father and Son had allowed the conflict to play itself out upon the stage of this earth. They had declared that the victory for the cause of righteousness must and would come by the application of its own power and rightness—not because of the interposition of omnipotent power on God's part being used to destroy the nonconforming.

But, on the other hand, it was clear that as time passed and men began to really multiply upon the face of the earth, things were going from bad to worse for God's cause. Continually, in increasing numbers, the inhabitants of the earth were joining Satan, while God's accounting finally showed only eight to His credit. Yet even among them the loyalty was far from absolute as demonstrated by Ham's behavior after the flood.

There are no records in Holy Writ showing just how many inhabitants the earth then supported. Yet to appreciate the minuteness of the minority in contrast to the majority, one has to consider the likely population of the earth at that time. In his book, *The Flood*, Alfred Rehwinkel estimates that the population might have been anywhere between two billion and twelve billion. Of course it is impossible to arrive at an exact figure. As one reads this author's arguments, one realizes that he is being very careful in his assessments. He is a responsible researcher, not a sensationalist. Therefore the population could have been well in excess of his estimates.

According to the 1991 *Britannica Book of the Year*, page 373, the population of the earth is "estimated at 5.3 billion." This is approaching three times the minimum figure suggested by Rehwinkel and close to half the maximum figure. These comparisons should give us some idea of the disparity between the forces

gone over to Satan's camp and the very few who remained loyal to God.

Would God's Plan Fail?

Every appearance then suggested that Satan was about to emerge as the outright winner in the great controversy. Everyone except eight considered disobedience to God as the superior way of life. In time these few would either die or possibly defect anyway. As I looked upon the whole problem, my thoughts ran along these lines:

It was desperately important to God that the situation not be allowed to continue to the point where there was no one left on His side for, essential to the ultimate success of His plan, was the birth of the Redeemer through the righteous line. Should the righteous line be cut off, then God's plan would fail; not simply because the intention of God to save the human family would be frustrated, but because God would be deprived of the means of removing the cause of the rebellion.

That cause, as has been proved earlier in this book, was the misrepresentation of the character of God, firstly in the mind of Lucifer and later through him in the other creatures. The only satisfactory and successful way to solve a problem is to remove the cause of it. Once the problem of sin, which is rebellion against the principles of God's government, entered the universe, all the resources of heaven were devoted to its solution.

It is a mistake to limit the solution to the cleansing of sin from those who will be saved, while the rest are simply left to their annihilation. The problem will not be solved until the cause has been removed from the mind of every creature who has ever come into existence including all those who will, in the end, be eternally lost.

Inasmuch as the cause of all the trouble is the misrepresentation of God's character, so long as that misconception remains in the minds of angels and men, the rebellion must continue. There-

fore, to end it, that misconception must be corrected. This cannot be done merely by declarations on God's part or by the use of force. There is only one way to accomplish it. The character of God must be manifested by One who was equal with God. Only Christ could do the work.

But it was impossible for Him to do it successfully in the perfect environment of heaven. It could be done there to a certain extent but not wholly. There is a very valid reason for this. In heaven Satan had not developed the fullness of his attack against the character of God. It remained for him to do that on this earth.

It was not God's intention that sin should develop on this earth, but when it did, it imposed upon Christ the necessity of coming right to the place where Satan was perpetrating the fullness of his lies against God and there, side by side with the character of Satan, provide the contrasting revelation of God's character. Only as men and angels were able to see both of them side by side, could the revelation of God and Satan be so fully given that the cause of the struggle could be erased from angelic and human minds.

For Jesus Christ to come into this position, He must be born into the human family. He could and would not force any woman to be His mother. The one through whom He would enter the earthly arena must be absolutely willing to perform this office. We can be assured that no one who was on Satan's side would undertake such a commission. Satan knew this. Therefore he realized that one way to secure the victory in the contest was to either win every human being over to his side, or to win all he could and then use them to exterminate the rest.

Satan was terribly afraid that if Christ did appear on the earth, He would be successful in exposing the lies he had leveled against God, with the result that he would be rejected with loathing by all the creatures whose support he so desperately sought. He knew that everything depended on his successfully preventing such a demonstration from being given. Therefore he worked with fanatical and unsleeping zeal to win as many of the human family as

possible to his side and to destroy the remainder. Success in so doing would deprive God of the means whereby Christ could enter the earthly arena of battle.

Victory for Satan would have been assured at any point of time before the first advent of Christ when he could have destroyed the righteous line. It was vital to his cause that he achieve this, while for God it was equally vital that the righteous line be preserved. Had God lost every follower to the devil, He would have been unable to bring His Son into the world, provide thereby the necessary character demonstration, unmask the deceptions of the devil, and thus, by removing the cause of the rebellion, bring it to its end. Instead His kingdom would remain cursed with an ever widening and deepening scourge of rebellion.

Never did Satan come so close to absolute success in his determinations than just prior to the flood. God saw His forces of loyal followers dwindle down to a mere and doubtful eight while the devil numbered millions as his. It was all too obvious that but a short time would elapse before the death or apostasy of these few would swing the balance totally in Satan's favor.

Erroneous Views

With the future of the entire kingdom of God throughout the infinite reaches of His domains at stake, such a development placed enormous pressure upon God to step in and take direct and decisive action to save the situation from total and eternal disaster. If the traditional view of what God did at the flood is correct, then God succumbed to that pressure. He stepped in with a natural catastrophe.

Back there in 1952 I saw a terrible conflict between the popular concept that God in personal judgment sent the flood upon the earth, and the truth that God has submitted His principles to stand on their own merits against the mightiest attacks the devil could make upon them. It was impossible for me to question the veracity of the truth that God and Christ had agreed to this ut-

terly fair and proper contest between their principles and those the devil wished to introduce.

I realized that if God and Christ had entered into such a plan and then organized the flood sixteen centuries later when things had moved to the brink of disaster for them, then they must have gone into conference and reasoned as follows:

“In the beginning we agreed and announced that we would permit the principles of righteousness to be subjected to the severest tests the devil could place upon them. We went on record as testifying that those principles are so perfect and complete that they are immortal and cannot be destroyed. We averred that there was no need to introduce superpower weapons to force a conclusion favorable to us. But things are turning so badly against us that if we do not step in now with our infinite power and curb the onrush of Satan and his people, all will be loss for us and gain for him. Therefore the situation now developed demands that we arise and do something. What shall it be?”

Popular theology asserts that the Lord then stepped in with the flood to thoroughly curb the advancement of Satan’s cause. He wiped out Satan’s forces to the last individual and so savaged the earth that it has never been the same again.

If this is what God did, then He made a complete farce of the original statement of willingness to submit the case to fair contest, and of His expression of confidence that the principles of righteousness could survive such a test. It would appear that He started out in the hope that they would, viewed with growing dismay the turning of the tide against Him, held out till the last possible moment, and then found himself obliged to resort to the use of His limitless power to contain the rebellion within certain limits.

An Illustrative Story

I thought of a number of people who, year after year, entered the competition for the best front garden in town. One man of unusual skill took the prize time after time until he came to think it

was his by right. Yet, each year, he put forth the utmost effort to ensure that none outclassed him. The time came when, to his consternation, a new face entered the contest, and it became apparent as the months went by, that this newcomer was an exceptional gardener whose efforts showed every prospect of taking the first prize.

The usual prize winner became convinced that unless something was done, he certainly would not be the number one man this year and perhaps never would be again. Desperately he worked harder on his own plot but he was never able to outstrip the new man. He saw at last that he could not win the contest by fair means, so he determined to win it otherwise.

In the dead of night he let loose some animals to rampage through the property of the other, with the result that the beautiful garden was destroyed. When the judges came the next day, he received the prize as usual. No one knew, of course, that he was responsible for the devastation of the real prizewinning garden, and he was most careful not to reveal this, for he knew with what indignation such an action would be viewed. Furthermore the revelation to all concerned of what he had done would have turned the judges against him. Not one of them would have awarded him the prize. They would have agreed that the man whose garden had been ravaged was the real prize winner.

Only in Righteousness

Once it is clearly understood that the Lord had agreed to submit the principles of righteousness to any kind of test and declared that they would stand on their own merits without the interposition of arbitrary power, it will likewise be seen that 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 will be literally giving the case away to Satan.

God would give His enemy every just right to charge Him with unfairness and deception. Satan would ask how he could ever fairly demonstrate his claims when the Lord lets him go until he

is on the very brink of success and then, because He is the possessor of omnipotent power, uses that to wipe out all Satan has achieved. Satan could rightfully complain that he never would have 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.

When I came to understand these things, I was thrown into quite a state of perplexity. Fortunately my faith in the justice and honor of God's character and the veracity of the Scriptures was such that I was well prepared to hold on till the problem was solved. I believed that the Lord would answer my earnest and honest searching. Frankly I recognized that I was confronted with two contradictory pictures and with equal strength of conviction I knew that there was no such thing as a contradiction in the Scriptures but only in the human understanding of them.

For a number of days little else but this problem weighed upon my mind. Every opportunity I had was devoted to studying the Bible and to prayer. I knew that there must be a solution which would fully reconcile what God did at the flood and the eternal principles to which He was committed.

I knew that the standard evaluation of God's behavior there could not be reconciled with the new truths I had learned about His character and law. Therefore I became more and more doubtful of the popular view. I could not accept the idea that God, who knows all things from the beginning, would commit himself to a position which would later result in circumstances around Him getting out of hand, forcing Him to introduce methods He had originally declared would never be used. If God did this, He would have to be rated as an impractical idealist and we need a God superior to that.

When God committed all the resources of heaven to ending the great controversy, He knew already the coming numerical imbalance.

ance at the flood. It did not catch Him by surprise, and He had made full provision to meet the emergency. Therefore when He promised the ultimate triumph of truth and predicted Christ's coming to the earth as an essential part of the plan, He was well aware how close the scheme would come to failure in Noah's day. Knowing all this in advance did not perturb Him in the slightest. He made no provisions for it outside of His eternal principles of truth. He still committed himself to fair and open contest.

A New Picture Emerges

Yet, while the traditional view of God's conduct at the flood had become suspect, I found at first no alternative to take its place. Then suddenly, after several days of intense mental concentration on the subject, the solution came to my mind. All the things I had learned fell neatly and harmoniously into place, and the problem was resolved. From that day to this no argument raised by anyone has caused me to doubt what I saw then.

I saw that God had not sent the flood to obliterate Satan's forces. On the contrary, He had done His very best to keep the flood from coming for as long as He possibly could. When it finally came, it was not because He had sent it, but because He could no longer prevent it.

The key to the problem lay in the application of two principles:

1. God will never force His presence where it is not desired,
and
2. Every power in nature is directly and continually dependent on God's creative power to keep it on station fulfilling its appointed task.

Therefore in the era leading up to the deluge, the sun and the moon, which were critical factors in the coming of the flood, were dependent on the presence of God's power to keep them burning at exactly the correct heat levels and stationed at the proper distance from the earth. Let the Lord's hand be removed from the

control and direction of those two orbs of fire, and the flood had to follow.

Under Satan's determined and relentless influence, men increasingly desired total separation from God. They wanted nothing of His ways or principles. God, knowing the dreadful consequences of such a course, sent message after message pleading with them to change their course, but they steadily 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, the control of the heavens and the earth. The moon, being nearer to the earth, was the first to feel the effect of God's departure. It went out entirely. The sun, much further away from men and much larger than the moon, took longer to diminish completely.

Before it could do so, the wicked had perished and suddenly the situation was reversed. Whereas the majority had been against God, now the changed situation placed the everyone on His side even though they were only eight in number. These, of course, desired the Lord to fill His office and do His work of sustaining the powers of heaven and earth. Thus the returning Spirit of God was able to arrest any further decay in the sun and maintain it at the diminished level. It has remained that way ever since.

Since it was not possible for the surviving remnant to live on a shoreless ocean, the water must be relocated to expose sufficient land to produce food for man and beast. This was accomplished by the violent upthrusts of land masses forming the great mountain chains and peaks found in the Himalayas, Andes, Alps, Rockies, and so on. Additionally, enormous quantities of water were held in cold storage at the poles.

Artists' representations of conditions experienced by the disembarking voyagers give the impression that the water gently subsided and Noah and his family emerged to a scarred but peaceful earth. This has to be far from true.

We have no concept of the titanic convulsions which all but tore this earth apart. There were no great mountain chains between the creation and the cataclysm. The earth was beautifully formed with pleasant undulating land, low hills, verdant valleys and slowly moving rivers. Think then of the energy necessary to open up the present ocean depths and thrust those huge mountain chains into the sky the highest peak of which is nearly six miles or almost nine kilometers high.

During the flood unbelievable quantities of organic material were buried in the earth which quickly generated heat. This burst through to the surface in explosions and fiery issues. Volcanoes circled the globe. Most of them are extinct today, but then they belched forth smoke and fire incessantly.

Grim indeed was the view confronting the patriarch, his wife, and children as they stepped out of their boat. The sky was filled with the pall of black smoke, the earth heaved and shook as earthquake tremors succeeded each other. It must have required some time before it settled down again.

But none of these terrible destructions were the work of God. Neither man nor Satan can justly charge God with the damage done. It was not His direct act by which the moon was extinguished and the sun dimmed. He labored unceasingly to save man from stepping so far out of the ways of righteousness as to compel His retirement from control. If His efforts had been successful, there never would have been a flood. It came, not because God sent it, but because He could not stop it.

Those who believe that there are two sides to the character of God—the loving side and “His strange act”—see the flood coming as a result of God’s changing from the former to the latter. The real truth is that the flood was inevitable, not because God changed His tactics, but because He remained undeviatingly the same.

With Him the use of force has ever been excluded. Therefore, to have prevented the flood once His final appeals had been rejected,

would have required Him to change to forcing His presence where it was emphatically not desired. This He could not do, thus leaving nothing to prevent the onset of disaster.

Satan through deceived mankind had applied the greatest possible pressure upon God to force Him into changing His ways and introducing the weapons of force into His arsenal. But they failed. God had foreseen it from the beginning and simply went composedly on His way as the crisis developed, knowing that His principles would stand the test. And they did.

Therefore there is absolutely no difference between God's conduct at the flood and His conduct during the falling of the plagues on Egypt. In both cases the rod of power slipped out of His grasp and became a serpent of destruction.



29. Sodom and Gomorrah

NOAH and his family emerged from the ark to tread a shattered earth. The destruction was beyond description. They needed no convincing that the flood had come, but they did need a very real assurance that it would not happen again. This the Lord was able to give them.

Genesis 9

⁸ Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying:

⁹ And as for me, behold, I establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you,

¹⁰ And with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth.

¹¹ Thus I establish my covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.

¹² And God said: This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

¹³ I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

¹⁴ It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud;

¹⁵ And I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

¹⁶ The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.

¹⁷ And God said to Noah, This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.

These words assure us that there will never again be a repetition of the deluge which twice before has covered the earth, firstly in the opening days of creation, and secondly during Noah's time.

The Noachic flood was none of God's doing. It came in spite of His efforts to prevent it. Therefore His statement that there would never again be a flood of water, should not be understood as an undertaking to restrain himself, but a prediction of what the future held. Specifically, the prophecy is limited to a flood of water. It does not ensure against the deluge of fire by which the earth will finally be consumed.

For there to be another flood of water, the conditions necessary to produce it must exist. Before Noah's time they did, but today they no longer do. The only way total flooding could reoccur would be for the polar caps to melt, and the land presently above and below sea level to become fairly even in height.

All the water which covered the earth in the first days of creation and which returned to submerge it again, is still here. Therefore it would cover the earth if its surface was evenly distributed. But we are well informed in God's Word that this is not the direction things will take when His presence is finally and fully withdrawn from the earth. Rather, a flood of fire, not water, will engulf the planet.

These floods, firstly of water and lastly of fire, are not disconnected. The former is the parent of the latter. This relationship should be clearly understood, and it is the purpose of the evidences and arguments immediately following to certify this.

The Flood: Mother of Climate Catastrophes

It is not usual to think of the flood as producing fire, for water is the most commonly used means of extinguishing a conflagration. However it is easily proved that the flood was the direct cause of destructive fires which have burst forth from the earth ever since. Though the flood is long since over, it lives on in the form of offspring: hurricanes, tornadoes, cyclones, and tempests, volcanoes, earthquakes, and tidal waves. These deviations from God's original scheme of things may be divided into two categories:

1. Those found in the earth, and

2. Those found in the atmosphere.

Problems arising within the earth were spawned when the flood waters buried vast forests whose timbers were of majestic and durable quality. Under the pressure of earth and rock beneath which they were entombed, they turned to coal which then produced oil. In some cases these materials are ignited and cause volcanoes and thermal activities.

There are situations where the opening earth admits tonnages of water which, contacting the molten rock, transforms into steam. Great pressure is built up causing underground explosions, the radiating shock waves of which trigger earthquakes. These are also caused by subsidence of the earth as the supporting material below is consumed. When an earthquake happens at sea, a tidal wave is launched.

All atmospheric conditions, from their mildest to their wildest forms, are the product of the redistribution of land and water masses, the location of mountains and flat lands, and the inequalities of climate—changes which were brought about by the flood. Without going into the details of weather research, one example will be given in order to show the relationship between the weather and earth's geography.

In November, 1977, a severe snow storm ravaged South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin in the United States before crossing the border into Canada. A moisture-laden mass of warm air had flowed northward from the Gulf of Mexico until it met a south-bound cold front originating in the Arctic zone. At the meeting point over the northern states, the warm, moist air was chilled and immediately precipitated in heavy snowfalls. Roads were closed, lives were lost, and extensive damage was done. It was days before life returned to normal.

This was possible only because of the geographical and climatic factors existing. Had there been another arrangement of these elements, the northern states would never have had that storm. If

for instance the Rocky Mountains had lain east and west across southern Texas, the advancing warm air would have been forced upward to chillier elevations causing it to condense into rain which would have fallen on the coastal plains and run back to the sea again. There would not have been the confrontation between warm and cold fronts which produced the storm and losses in the north. Likewise if the mountain chains had been lying in an east-west direction in Canada, the cold front would never have reached the south. It would have detoured off to the east or west.

Consideration of other possibilities would produce interesting results. Suppose that the Gulf of Mexico was dry land, that the mountain chains all lay in an east-west direction, and a plain stretched between them from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Suppose that the United States was another shape altogether. The weather patterns in each case would be very different.

What tremendous changes the flood set up, producing results which will reach down to the end of time. The destruction initiated at the flood but halted before it had finally consumed all things, will then break forth to completion. Those fires by which the earth will be reduced to ashes, will also be the child of the flood, for the remaining deposits of coal and oil in the earth will fuel that last conflagration.³⁴

Not every area is afflicted with the same type and intensity of scourge. Some places are less plagued than others. This means that some centers of sin pass unscathed year after year, while others, seemingly less iniquitous, are struck down with shocking suddenness. Those cities located right where one of the more serious children of the flood resides, need to be far more careful than those in positions more favored.

For years the giant of destruction will remain unseen or manifest itself only in mild forms because the restraining power of God holds it in check while He seeks to woo men from their danger and while there remains in the city a faithful remnant for

³⁴ See *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 76-89.

whose sake He will continue His restraint. But, during this time, the unwitting inhabitants continue to resist His appeals until finally He has no choice but to leave them to their desires.

The unfettered monster then bursts with unannounced fury upon the unprotected heads and homes of the abandoned sinners whose destruction may be as total in the area where they are, as it was over the whole earth when the flood came.

Sodom and Gomorrah

Sodom and Gomorrah were a case in point. The Scriptures report the devastation of those cities and their peoples in the same way that all the other destructions which fell upon abandoned sinners are described.

Genesis 19

²⁴ Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens.

²⁵ And He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

How easily are these words understood to picture a God who personally pours great sheets of flame from His own hands upon the hapless victims below. But if we come to learn and accept the principles of God's character as explored in this study and use the Bible as its own dictionary, then we will know that such an interpretation is wholly incorrect.

Rather, the truly Biblical interpretation of these words is that the Lord had no option but to withdraw and leave the inhabitants of those cities to the fate they had chosen. This He did only when every means and appeal had been totally exhausted, and there was nothing more He could do. Then the particular power of destruction in that area which was just waiting to happen, was unleashed. The result was terminal.

A good way to determine the nature of a given belief, is to assess its implications. So study will now be given to see in what image God is cast by the belief that He personally poured that fire

down upon the dwellers on the plains. Only a certain kind of God would do this.

Death by fire is one of the cruelest and most-to-be-feared ways to die. On February 1, 1974,



...a fire, started by an electrical short-circuit in an air-conditioner, engulfed the upper fourteen stories of a newly constructed twenty-five story bank building, trapping hundreds of workers as the flames fed on combustible interior-finish materials; due to inadequate escape facilities, at least two hundred and twenty-seven persons lost their lives.³⁵

Those in the higher floors above the fire level found themselves cut off. As the fire advanced upwards, many chose to die by leaping from the upper levels rather than face the hungry flames.

In the jungles and forests it is the thing most feared by the animals. They lose all fear of each other as they flee pell-mell from the roaring flames. There is good reason for this, for death by fire is a horrible death.

Think of yourself as facing the death penalty, the only consolation being that the choice of how you will die is given to you. The choices are a firing squad, gassing, the electric chair, beheading, hanging, or being burned alive. None of these is a pleasant prospect, but when you sit and think of your body being roasted while you are still alive, you know that that is the very last choice you would make. It is not difficult to realize that this is the kind

³⁵ 1975 *Britannica Book of the Year*, page 238.

of death which a judge or king would impose upon a person whose death he wished to make as painful as possible.

Picture the scene back there when the consuming flames fell upon the cities of the plain. The Scriptures tell 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. Therefore it was an early morning conflagration.

The sun is beginning to mount in the heavens. The family is astir. Breakfast is on the table and the mother is busily bathing and dressing her young children of whom one is still but a nursling. Suddenly the ordinary sounds coming from the street are exchanged for frantic cries of alarm and agony. The golden glow of the morning is changed to fiery orange and red.

The father and mother look quickly and apprehensively outside and see an appalling spectacle. Fire is falling from the sky, and those on the street fall writhing and twisting in searing agony. Their boy rushes into the house screaming while his clothes and hair burn like a torch. He flings his body into his mother’s recoiling arms scorching her and baby alike.

Within the house there is protection for only a short time. The flames are consuming the timber, licking in through doors and openings and reaching out for the trapped ones inside. They retreat to an inner room, but though it gives them a little more time to live, it makes the end more agonizing.

Steadily the temperature in the room rises while the flames batter at the walls without, until the room becomes an oven in which they are slowly but terribly baked alive. The temperature of their clothes rises above ignition point and bursts into flames. As they tear them off, their flesh comes away in great sheets, and the stench of cooking human tissue chokes the air.

When the flames at last break through the walls, the family members are already dead, lying naked of clothes and skin in twisted, bloated, horrible postures. The expressions frozen by

death on their faces express the extreme suffering of terror and pain through which they departed.

It is not a pleasant scene upon which to dwell. It would have been a far worse one to behold. Yet it must be visualized as realistically as possible so that it can be comprehended that no God of mercy, justice, and love, would ever behave in such a way to personally and deliberately inflict a death of this nature upon anyone.

The ability to do certain things reveals the disposition within the doer. It is not possible for any being in the universe, including God, to do everything. The truth of this statement is confined to the spiritual and ethical side of the person. Admittedly God has the physical power by which He can do anything. But while He has the might, there are some things His character will never permit Him to do. Just as surely as Satan's character will not allow him to love, so God's character prevents Him from hating any other individual, no matter how much that person may have wronged Him.

Therefore if God poured the fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, it could only be because it was in Him to do so. It would be a part of His character. Therefore God would have within Him a spirit of cruelty by which He would be motivated to select the cruelest possible death for those who have refused to obey Him. Without that, He could never have treated the Sodomites as He supposedly did.

But that is not God's character. He is not cruel, sadistic, and revengeful. He would never select the worst conceivable punishment and then administer it to those who did not appreciate His ways and acted contrary to His ideas.

Terrible are the implications of believing that God determined that the cities of the plain should be consumed by fire and then proceeded to do so. It is to equate Him with the papacy whose constant practice was to burn to death those who refused to submit to her assumed authority.

When the papacy dealt with dissenters and her first efforts were unsuccessful, she exerted pressure upon them. When it was clear that the subjects of her ministrations had no mind to ever obey her, she cruelly destroyed them, and sometimes with fire. In doing this she represented herself not only as administering the will of God, but of doing so as she believes He does. In all of this she was carrying out Satan's plans.

It is with horror and loathing that many read of the papal practice of burning victims to death. Yet they have looked with satisfaction upon God's use of fire to destroy those who would not obey Him. But careful thought will lead all to understand that if they do continue to believe that God personally decreed that the Sodomites should die by fire and then as personally administered the destruction, then our God is thoroughly barbaric.

This is contrary to the revelation that Christ has given. He would rather die himself than require that the life of another be taken. This is the ultimate expression in real life of the injunction to turn the other cheek and go the second mile. A God who counseled this kind of behavior as the reflection of His own character and behavior, could never pour fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. He did there just what He did on every other occasion. He did not...

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

...stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He [left] the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.

If the Lord of heaven did not act the part of an executioner and personally pour fire on those cities, then how were they destroyed? Are we left with no scientific information to reveal the nature of that disaster?

There is a considerable amount of information available if careful search is made for it. There are those scholars who have looked for the cities on the northern side of the Dead Sea, but:

Other scholars seek these cities underneath the waters of the southern end of the Dead Sea. Arguments for this view are more numerous and weighty:

(1) The “vale of Siddim” in which these cities were located is identified with the “salt sea” in *Genesis* 14:3. The northern two-thirds of the present Dead Sea reaches a depth of one thousand, three hundred and twenty-eight feet, and must have existed as early as Abraham’s time, but the depth of the southern part nowhere exceeds sixteen feet. Submerged trees show that part of this area was dry in relatively modern times, and accurate measurements have shown that the level of the sea has been steadily rising during the last century.

(2) Asphalt is found at the southern end of the Dead Sea, while the Vale of Siddim is said to have been “full of slimepits,” RSV “bitumen pits” (*Genesis* 14:10). Bitumen, or asphalt, still erupts from the bottom of the southern part of the Dead Sea and floats to the shore.

(3) Statements made by classical authors, Diodorus Siculus (ii. 48. 7-9), Strabo (Geogr. xvi. 2. 42-44), Tacitus (Hist. v. 6. 7), and Josephus (War iv. 8. 4), describe an area south of the Dead Sea (presumably now covered by its rising water) as scorched by a fiery catastrophe that destroyed several cities whose burned remains were still visible in their day. Foul gases are said to emerge from fissures of the ground. Compare *Deuteronomy* 29:23.

(4) Geologists have found oil and natural gases in the ground at the southern end of the Dead Sea, which is at the same time an area frequently disturbed by earthquakes, hence furnished all the conditions for the catastrophe described in the Bible, if God used natural means in the destruction of the cities (see above). Furthermore, Jebel Usdum, the “Mount of Sodom,” at the southwestern shore of the Dead Sea, consists of 50 per cent rock salt. Some have conjectured that in an upheaval during the destruction of Sodom some of this salt may have been dislodged and may have buried Lot’s wife, piling over her to form a “pillar of salt” (*Genesis* 19:26). (The place where the Israelis have a potash extraction plant, on the southwestern shore, has been named Sodom, but it has no connection with the ancient Sodom.)

(5) A number of streams enter the southern part of the Dead Sea from the east, in a region that is still very fertile, and it is reasonable to believe that the whole valley now forming the southernmost part of the Dead Sea was once that exceptionally fertile plain, one fitting the Bible description which compares the land with the Garden of Eden and the Nile valley (*Genesis* 13:10).

(6) Kyle and Albright, in their exploration of the region lying southeast of the Dead Sea, found no ancient ruins of cities, but discovered an elaborate place of worship on a hillside with remains dating from before 1800 BC. This site, Babedh-Dhra, evidently was a place where the annual festivals of a large population were held. The cities in which this population once lived must have been in the area now covered by the waters of the Dead Sea.

(7) Zoar, one of the 5 cities of the plain (*Genesis* 14:2), was at the southern end of the Dead Sea in the time of Christ.³⁶

This statement gives excellent reasons for concluding that the site of those ancient cities was at the southern end of the Dead Sea. But it also tells some further interesting facts about the area.

Bitumen, or asphalt, still erupts from the bottom of the southern part of the Dead Sea and floats to the shore....Geologists have found oil and natural gases in the ground at the southern end of the Dead Sea, which is at the same time an area frequently disturbed by earthquakes.

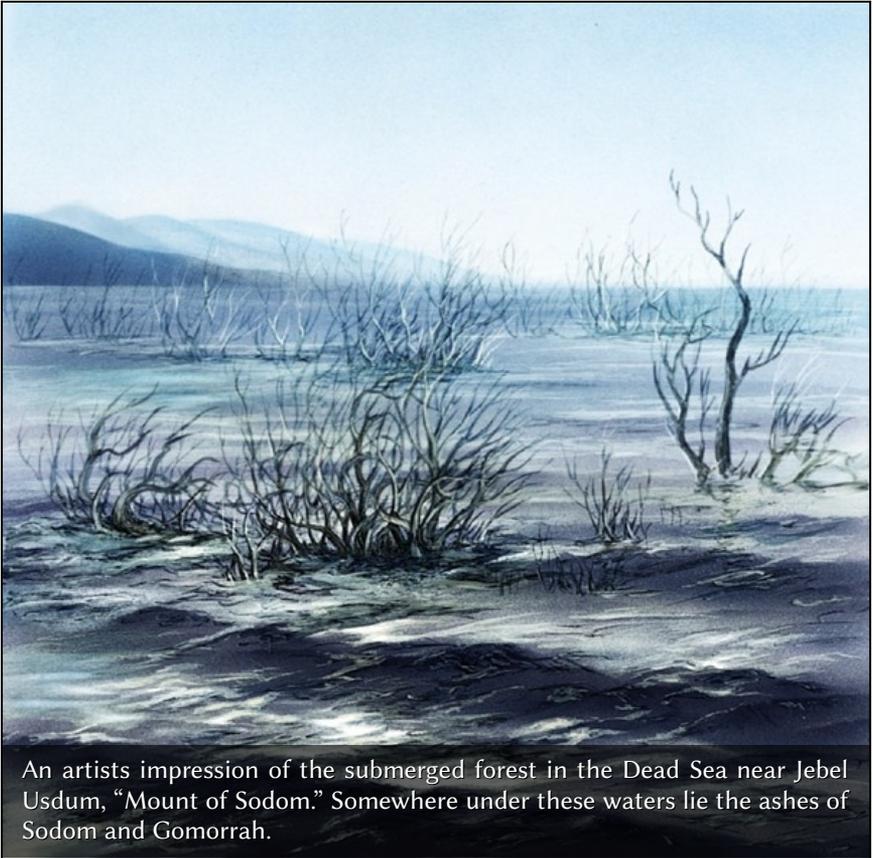
The *Encyclopedia Britannica* 1975 Edition, Macropedia, Volume 14, p. 165, states:

The Dead Sea was known in ancient times as Lake Asphaltites (from which is derived the term asphaltum) because of the semisolid petroleum washed up on its shores from underwater seepages.

Even today the southern region of the Dead Sea is rich in asphalt. Inflammable gases still escape from rock crevices in the area. Asphalt rising to the surface of the southern part of the Dead Sea gave to it the name Lake Asphaltitis in classical times.

³⁶ *The SDA Bible Dictionary*, vol. 8, p. 1028-1029.

Massive lumps of asphalt floating on the surface are often of sufficient size to support several persons. Asphalt, sulfur, and other combustible materials have been reclaimed and exported from this region for years.³⁷



An artists impression of the submerged forest in the Dead Sea near Jebel Usdum, "Mount of Sodom." Somewhere under these waters lie the ashes of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Asphalt, oil, natural and highly inflammable gases, and earthquakes are not common to every part of the world, but they are a combination often found together. Where they are found indicates a spot where enormous amounts of organic matter were buried at the flood. Where such material is found, there is the formation of coal, oil, gas, and petroleum which may or may not ig-

³⁷ *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 335.

nite. If they do, then volcanic or thermal activity will result, usually accompanied by earthquakes and tremors.

Spiritual Gifts, vol. 3, p. 80:

Before the flood there were immense forests. The trees were many times larger than any trees which we now see. They were of great durability. They would know nothing of decay for hundreds of years. At the time of the flood these forests were torn up or broken down and buried in the earth. In some places large quantities of these immense trees were thrown together and covered with stones and earth by the commotions of the flood. They have since petrified and become coal, which accounts for the large coal beds which are now found.

This coal has produced oil. God causes large quantities of coal and oil to ignite and burn. Rocks are intensely heated, limestone is burned, and iron ore melted. Water and fire under the surface of the earth meet. The action of water upon the limestone adds fury to the intense heat, and causes earthquakes, volcanoes and fiery issues. The action of fire and water upon the ledges of rocks and ore, causes loud explosions which sound like muffled thunder. These wonderful exhibitions will be more numerous and terrible just before the coming of Christ and the end of the world, as signs of its speedy destruction.

Coal and oil are generally to be found where there are no burning mountains or fiery issues. When fire and water under the surface of the earth meet, the fiery issues cannot give sufficient vent to the heated elements beneath. The earth is convulsed—the ground trembles, heaves, and rises into swells or waves, and there are heavy sounds like thunder underground. The air is heated and suffocating. The earth quickly opens, and I saw villages, cities and burning mountains carried down together into the earth.

This means that there are a lot of places on the earth where enormous amounts of vegetation have been buried to petrify into coal and oil, but where no volcanic eruptions and devastating earthquakes have occurred. Yet there is the potential for them to happen. The evidences still existing today show that Sodom and

Gomorrah and their associated villages and towns were located over just such a spot.

The inhabitants of these cities were in danger constantly, for they were living over a powder keg, a disaster which was only waiting to happen. But the Lord desired their salvation. He was loathe to see them perish as He is to see anyone destroyed. So He filled His usual role of Protector of those wicked cities, while His Spirit pleaded with them to repent and escape the wrath to come.

But they would not, and the time came when finally the protecting Presence had to be withdrawn leaving no power to control the seething elements beneath the ground. These powers had been long held back, and when released, they exploded in one spectacular and all-consuming fireball of destruction that shot into the heavens above and came down to scorch the earth beneath.

It was not something which God sent in the sense that He decreed what should happen to them and then personally used His power to see that it happened. Rather, it came because He could not hold it back any longer. There was no one the Sodomites could blame for their destruction but themselves.

A Modern Counterpart

The burning of the cities of the plain is not an event singular to them. There is a modern counterpart to this in the destruction of St. Pierre, on May 8, 1902:

It was on May 8, 1902, that the town of St. Pierre, on the lush West Indies island of Martinique, abruptly died. At exactly 7:50 AM on that disastrous morning, 4,583-foot Mont Pelee—a long-dormant volcano—blew its top in one of the world’s most cataclysmic explosions.

The French-held island of Martinique shuddered like a stricken giant at the violent eruption. From the yawning mouth of the volcano, a huge black cloud of super-heated air and gas emerged that rolled down the sloping side of the mountain like a mon-

strous 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 leaped into instant flame and people were turned into human torches. The hideous black ball—its core later estimated to have been at least 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit—quickly reduced St. Pierre to smoldering ashes. Only two people survived the fiery devastation, and the rest of the populace—more than 30,000—died.

Elapsed time from the moment of eruption to extinction of the city was less than two minutes!³⁸

The disaster did not come without warning. Mont Pelee dominated the island's mountain chain, and, though long dormant, showed signs of considerable activity during the few days prior to the fatal outburst. However, the populace did not think in terms of an explosion but only of an eruption and considered the town to be at a safe distance of four miles.

Then on the night of May 2, six days before the end and half an hour before midnight, an awesome explosion shook the entire island, awakened the inhabitants, and drove them panic-stricken into the streets.

Even in the dark they could see dense black smoke issuing from the crown of Mont Pelee, smoke that was cut through by jagged streaks of lightning. Suddenly a second formidable explosion rocked the entire island, followed by several more. Then the loud detonations stopped and a shower of hot cinders fell on St. Pierre. When daylight came the people of the city looked at their town in amazement. It was no longer the bright colorful city it had been. It was now covered with a ghostly gray ash.³⁹

All during that day and night the volcano exploded at six-hour intervals, but on the following day everything had quieted down.

³⁸ Hal Butler, *Nature at War*, p. 131-132. Copyright 1976. Published by Henry Regnery Company, 180 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60601.

³⁹ *Idem*, p. 136.

The wind changed direction, and the ash was blown to the north where it fell on the cities there.

But tragedy was building up in the crater known as Etang Sec. Boiling water had now reached its rim, and suddenly the side of the crater collapsed and an avalanche of hot water and mud cascaded down the side of the mountain, joined the Riviere Blanche, and formed a fast-traveling torrent that swept everything before it. As it sped down the mountain the great slide gathered earth until it became a moving mountain of hot mud that rolled over anything and anyone in its path. It raced all the way to the mouth of the Riviere Blanche, where the Guerin sugarworks lay open and unprotected. Workers saw it coming and tried to flee, but the wall of mud rolled over them, killing M. Guerin, the owner, as well as the overseer and twenty-five employees. Nothing remained of the sugarworks except the smokestacks, still standing but bent to one side.

At precisely the same time, in the roadstead of St. Pierre, the sea withdrew, stranding several anchored ships, then rushed back ferociously to flood the streets of the city. This was the first violence to hit the coastal area, and the people acted in curious ways. More refugees from the mountainsides poured into St. Pierre, while others already in the city decided to leave—some by horseback to Fort-de-France and others by ships that were ready to depart for safer ports. The inflow and outflow left the population of St. Pierre about the same—some 30,000 frightened citizens.⁴⁰

May 6 was a relatively quiet day. At four in the morning of the next day the volcano began to roar loudly, but by the early morning of the fateful day, the eighth, the volcano was as quiet as it had been before all the fuss began.

The fatal day of May 8 was bright and sunny, with hardly a cloud in the sky. It was Ascension Day and the people awoke to the ringing of church bells. Most of the staunchly Catholic populace had risen early to attend eight o'clock mass.

⁴⁰ *Idem*, p. 137-138.

The night had passed with the usual internal growling from Mont Pelee, and the mercurial volcano was now emitting a grayish smoke that rose in a plume from its crater. Still, it was as quiet as it had been for some time, and the people hoped that Ascension Day would be an appropriate time for the Lord to deliver them from the wrath of Mont Pelee.

Stores and shops were closed for the holiday. Only the churches were open, and by 7:30 in the morning they were filled with anxious worshipers thanking the Lord that Mont Pelee's spasmodic eruptions had been no worse and praying that the mountain would now resume its placid ways.⁴¹

At 7:50 AM the final, ferocious eruption of Mont Pelee took place. At 7:52 AM the city of St. Pierre and its 30,000 inhabitants ceased to exist.

It was a deafening explosion, one of the most devastating volcanic eruptions of all time. The top of Mont Pelee was literally torn apart, and from the innards of the earth a great black ball of heated air and gases shot into the sky. Within seconds the huge ball had blotted out the sky for fifty miles across. For an instant it clung to the top of the mountain, then rolled down the sloping sides directly toward St. Pierre. It swept over the city and out to sea, burning buildings, ships and people in its path.

There were a few eyewitnesses outside the area covered by the black ball who survived, a handful on land and a dozen or more on ships at sea. From these came the most graphic descriptions—in fact, the only descriptions—of the sudden catastrophe.

An unidentified passenger on the Roraima described the destruction of St. Pierre this way:

“I saw St. Pierre destroyed [he related]. It was blotted out by one great flash of fire. Thirty-thousand people were killed at once. Of eighteen vessels lying in the roads, only one, the British ship Roddam, escaped and she, I hear, lost more than half on board. It was a dying crew that took her out.

“Our boat arrived at St. Pierre early Thursday morning. For hours before we entered the roadstead we could see flames and smoke rising from Mont Pelee. No one on board had any idea of

⁴¹ *Idem*, p. 139.

danger. Captain G.T. Muggah was on the bridge and all hands got on deck to see the show. The spectacle was magnificent. As we approached St. Pierre we could distinguish the rolling and leaping of the red flames that belched from the mountain in huge volumes and gushed high in the sky. Enormous clouds of black smoke hung over the volcano.

“When we anchored at St. Pierre I noticed the cable steamship Grappler, the Roddam, three or four other steamers and a number of Italian and Norwegian barks. The flames were then spurting straight up in the air, now and then waving to one side or the other for a moment, and again leaping suddenly higher up. There was a constant muffled roar. It was like the biggest oil refinery in the world burning up on the mountain top.

“There was a tremendous explosion soon after we got in. There was no warning. The side of the volcano was ripped out and there hurled straight toward us a solid wall of flame. It sounded like thousands of cannon....Before the volcano burst the landings of St. Pierre were crowded with people. After the explosion not one living being was seen on land.”

M. Albert, owner and manager of an estate near St. Pierre, witnessed the eruption from a position on land, and gave a vivid account of his experience:

“Mont Pelee had given warning of the destruction that was to come [he said] but we who had looked upon the volcano as harmless did not believe that it would do more than spout fire and steam, as it had done on other occasions. It was a little before eight o'clock on the morning of May 8 that the end came. I was in one of the fields of my estate when the ground trembled under my feet, as if a terrible struggle was going on within the mountain. . . . As I stood still, Mont Pelee seemed to shudder and a moaning sound issued from its crater. It was quite dark, the sun being obscured by ashes and fine volcanic dust. The air was dead about me, so dead that the floating dust seemingly was not disturbed.

“Then there was a rending, crashing, grinding noise, which I can only describe as sounding as though every bit of machinery in the world had suddenly broken down. It was deafening, and the flash of light that accompanied it was blinding, more so than

any lightning I have ever seen. It was like a terrible hurricane, and where a fraction of a second before there had been a perfect calm I felt myself drawn into a vortex and I had to brace myself firmly. It was like a great express train rushing by, and I was drawn by its force.

“The mysterious force leveled a row of strong trees, tearing them up by the roots and leaving a bare space of ground fifteen yards wide and more than one hundred yards long. Transfixed, I stood not knowing in what direction to flee. I looked toward Mont Pelee and above its apex formed a great black cloud which reached high into the air. It literally fell upon the city of St. Pierre. It moved with a rapidity that made it impossible for anything to escape it. From the cloud came explosions that sounded as though all the navies of the world were in titanic combat. Lightning played in and out in broad forks, the result being that intense darkness was followed by light that seemed to be magnified in power. That St. Pierre was doomed I knew, but I was prevented from seeing the destruction by a spur of the hill that shut off my view of the city.

“When I recovered possession of my senses I ran to my house and collected the members of my family, all of whom were panic-stricken. I hurried them to the seashore where we boarded a small steamship to Fort-de-France. As we drew out to sea in the steamship, Mont Pelee was in the throes of a terrible convulsion. New craters seemed to be opening all about the summit and lava was flowing in broad streams in every direction. My estate was ruined while we were still in sight of it.”

One incident suffices to demonstrate the swiftness of St. Pierre’s complete destruction. The night shift telegrapher at St. Pierre had just transmitted to the operator in Fort-de-France the latest reports on the volcano. The transmission contained nothing new and mentioned no unusual developments during the night. When he was finished he clicked the key to signal the Fort-de-France operator to reply. The telegrapher in the capital city pressed down his key. The line was dead. No answer came from St. Pierre because the city had died in that split-second.

Leon Compere-Leandre, the shoemaker who was sitting on the doorstep of his home trying to decide whether or not to leave St.

Pierre, had his reverie shattered by Mont Pelee's final eruption. The explosion was so violent that it shook the entire island, and Leon felt a shuddering spasm under his feet. He staggered upright and caught a glimpse of the darkening sky and the menacing black ball rolling down the side of the mountain toward the doomed city. Trembling with fear, he turned to enter the house, but a hot wind buffeted him and he felt his body burning as if tongues of flame already were licking at his flesh. With difficulty he made his way into the house and staggered to the table. Three men and a ten-year-old girl were in the tiny house, all of them screaming with pain as the heated air raged over them.

Leon moved to a table and hung over it, wondering if the end was near for him. Then he saw the girl collapse and die in twisting agony, and the three men fled blindly from the room. For what seemed hours—actually about a minute—he held tightly to the table. Then, noticing that the strange hot wind had abated, Leon pushed himself erect and walked into the bedroom where the little girl's father lay. He found the man dead in his bed, already burned to a crisp by the heat. Stumbling into the courtyard he discovered the three men on the ground, their inert bodies charred. The thought crossed his mind, How can I be alive when the others are all dead? Screaming, he ran back into the house, threw himself on a bed, and awaited death.

But for some strange reason no one since has been able to explain, death did not come. Instead Leon became aware that the roof of the house was burning and once more he stumbled outside. He saw now that his legs and arms were severely burned and bleeding, but he managed to run six kilometers to the next town—Fonds-Saint-Denis. Once he looked back. All of St. Pierre was in flames. A strangled cry escaped him and he staggered on. Unknown to him, he was one of only two people who had survived the annihilation of St. Pierre.

Louis Cyparis, the prisoner, awaiting a breakfast that would never be served, knew that something more dreadful than a thunderstorm had taken place when Mont Pelee's final paroxysm laid waste to St. Pierre. The noise of the explosion penetrated his underground chamber and the ground beneath his feet vibrated. He rushed to the grate to peer out but staggered back under an

onslaught of heated air. The superheated cloud that had engulfed the city had stabbed through the open grating and seared Cyparis' face and body. With a scream of pain he rolled in agony on the dungeon floor.

"Help! Save me!" he yelled, hoping to attract the attention of one of the jailers. But by this time there was no one to hear or to care.

The fiery intrusion in the cell lasted only minutes, then faded. But it left Cyparis in agony, tortured by his burned flesh. For three days he lay groaning in the cell, not knowing what had happened or why no one came to his aid.

On the third day he heard voices over his head and he yelled at the top of his lungs for help. This time he was heard. A rescue party searching the ruins of St. Pierre at once broke open the cell door. When Cyparis was brought out into the light of day, he was amazed to find that the city of St. Pierre no longer existed. In the case of Louis Cyparis, as in the incident involving Leon Comperre-Leandre, the blast from the volcano had acted capriciously, leaving him as the only other survivor of the doomed city.

Mrs. Thomas Prentis, wife of the American consul, had suffered misgivings about the peculiar activity of Mont Pelee for weeks. She had studied the threatening mannerisms of the volcano from her rear windows daily, and then had made frequent trips to her front balcony to watch the exodus of people from the city—including their good planter friend, M. Fernand Clere, on the morning of May 8. She yearned secretly to get away from St. Pierre, but her husband had duties to perform there and was sure that Mont Pelee would simmer down in time.

"There's no danger at present," he told her several times. "If real danger threatens, we will leave."

But Prentis and his wife stayed too long. When Mont Pelee exploded on Ascension Day, it took less than two minutes for the fiery air and gases to snuff out their lives. Two charred bodies were found later in the blackened hulk of their home.

On the freighter Roraima, Chief Officer Ellery S. Scott turned his telescope from the city of St. Pierre, where he was watching the colorfully attired people wending their way to and from

church, toward the summit of Mont Pelee. At that exact moment the volcano exploded, and Scott witnessed the destruction of St. Pierre in the less than two-minute interval that followed. Afterward he was able to provide a detailed account of the tragedy:

“The whole top of the mountain seemed blown into the air [he related]. The sound that followed was deafening. A great mass of flames, seemingly a mile in diameter, with twisting giant wreaths of smoke, rolled thousands of feet into the air, and then overbalanced and came rolling down the seamed and cracked sides of the mountain. Foothills were overflowed by the onrushing mass. It was not mere flame and smoke. It was molten lava, giant blocks of stone and a hail of smaller stones, with a mass of scalding mud intermingled.

“For one brief moment I saw the city of St. Pierre before me. Then it was blotted out by the overwhelming flood. There was no time for the people to flee. They had not even time to pray.”

The great black ball of destruction that bounded down the mountain side and swallowed the city of St. Pierre did not stop there. It rolled out into the roadstead where seventeen ships lay at anchor. Scott watched helplessly as the ball billowed out over the water and swept toward his ship. At the last moment, Scott and a few others sought shelter by leaving the open deck and retreating into the innards of the vessel. The move saved Scott’s life, but many caught on the deck perished.

When the ball hit, the *Roraima* rolled almost on her port beam-ends, then suddenly went to starboard. The stack, masts and lifeboats were carried away, and dozens of fires broke out. Eventually Scott and other survivors were removed from the burning ship by a rescue craft and taken to a hospital in Fort-de-France.

M. Fernand Clere, the wealthy planter who left St. Pierre just before the catastrophe, was nearing his plantation with his wife and four children when Mont Pelee belched forth its lethal black cloud. M. Clere watched in horror as the cloud tumbled down the mountain slopes toward St. Pierre, but he maintained a remarkable presence of mind under the circumstances. “Knowing how people will exaggerate,” he said afterward, “I timed the cloud from the moment it started until it ran into the sea, and found that less than two minutes elapsed.”



Watch in hand, M. Clere observed that everything in the path of the rolling cloud burst into flames. He saw his own plantation home leap into flames and saw the great ball of heat roll over his sister's estate in the valley as it aimed its deadly blow at St. Pierre. Two hours later, when he had left his family in a safe place, M. Clere went back to the city of St. Pierre. He found nothing but blackened corpses among the smoldering wreckage of the

town. "All were dead," he reported later. "I knew I could do no good there, so I hastened back at the first opportunity and sent my family to Guadeloupe."

In the roadstead of St. Pierre, all but one of the seventeen ships at anchor sank or perished in the flames after the black cloud passed over them. Only the British ship *Roddam*, covered with seething volcanic debris, afire in a dozen places, and with 28 crewmen and most passengers dead, managed to escape. She got away because she happened to have steam up at the time and was ready to sail. Her captain, badly burned, personally took the wheel and guided the ship to the nearby island of St. Lucia. A port official, horrified at the battered condition of the ship and the blackened bodies strewn about the deck, said, "My God, what happened to you?"

"We just came from hell," the captain said.

The full extent of St. Pierre's fate was not known until a relief ship set out from Fort-de-France two days later, when Mont Pelee had once again quieted down and the burned city had cooled enough to permit exploration. Aboard was Vicar-General Parel, along with soldiers, policemen and priests. When the ship rounded an out-jutting of land and moved into the roadsteads of the stricken city, those aboard the ship saw the widespread destruction for the first time. Sixteen ships burned in the harbor, some of them overturned with only blackened hulls above the ash-covered waters. The French cruiser *Suchet* was already on duty, picking up badly injured seamen.

The once-proud city of St. Pierre had disappeared; in its place was smoldering wreckage stretched for two miles along the coast. The Vicar-General turned his glass on the burning city, looking in vain for survivors. He laid the glass down, shaking his head.

"Not a living soul," he said.

Eventually, the Vicar-General and the police, soldiers and priests went ashore. In a letter written to Monseigneur de Cer-mont, Bishop of Martinique, who was in Paris, the Vicar-General described what he saw:

“We disembark [he wrote] provided with disinfectants, on the Place Bertin, once so full of life and movement. We pick our way through the wreck. The Place is now nothing but a heap of confused ruins. Here and there are decaying bodies, horribly disfigured, and showing by the contraction of the limbs how awful must have been the death agony. Among the seared branches of a fallen tamarind tree, which proved inadequate to protect him, we find the body of a poor creature lying on his back, with his head raised, and his arms stretched to heaven in a gesture of supplication. The legs are drawn and twisted, the flesh has been torn away from the entrails.

“It was only with difficulty that we could reach the cathedral, it being impossible to recognize streets. In the interior of the houses, the walls of which are standing in places, there are still flaming and smoking braziers. Hot stones, iron, lime, cinders, materials of all sorts, scorched the soles of our feet. It was imprudent even to touch the charred walls, which crumbled at the slightest shock.

“One of the square cathedral towers, with its four bells, is still upright; but it is riddled throughout, and we dare not approach it. The left tower has been thrown down, together with its great bell. The statue of the Virgin, belonging to the facade, seemed to me to be intact as it lay among the ruins of the cathedral. The walls, with the exception of a part of the apse, have disappeared. We made our way in through the Rue de College and saw several bodies in the ruins. Here, as elsewhere, most of the victims are buried under the piled-up masonry.”

Those aboard the Vice-General’s relief ship and others who followed had the unpleasant task of burning or burying 30,000 bodies that quickly putrified in the heat of the sun. They found many of the victims in casual repose, indicating that the black cloud had snuffed out their lives suddenly and painlessly. Others, however, were distorted in agony. Most of the victims caught outside their homes were naked, with their hair burned away and what had been clothing either torn or seared from their bodies; others, indoors, were still covered with their charred clothes. Every stone house in the city had collapsed, and most lay completely in

fragments. The entire city was covered by a ghostly white ash that in some places was several feet deep.

Even though the giant ball of volcanic horror had swept the city in less than two minutes, it had enough time to play capricious tricks along the Way. In many cases solid objects were pulverized, while fragile articles were left untouched. Silver stored inside a safe had melted and adhered to the sides of the safe itself. Glass tumblers were fused together by the intense heat, while nearby crockery was not even cracked. In one place a carafe of wine was untouched, but the stems of wine glasses nearby were bent. Although the wall of the military hospital was completely leveled, one section containing the clock still stood. The hands of the timepiece had stopped at 7:52, marking the exact moment that St. Pierre had died.

In all, the volcano's devastation covered an area of about eight square miles. The focal point, of course, was St. Pierre, where there was complete destruction and loss of life. Along either side of the tumbling ball of death was a section where loss of life and damage was reduced. Still farther outside this zone was one where no loss of life occurred, no buildings were damaged, and only vegetation was burned off. On the slopes of the mountain, the rivers that had once flowed with pure water were now either dried up or choked with slowly flowing mud; one mud slide was later estimated to be 80 feet deep.

On May 20, cantankerous Mont Pelee erupted again. This time a violent explosion rent the air over the mountain at 5:15 in the afternoon. The Vicar-General, in Fort-de-France, stood on his balcony and watched the same amazing scene reenacted—a black ball of heated air and gases again tumbled down the slopes toward St. Pierre. After the eruption, the Vicar-General ordered the Suchet to investigate the situation. The report that came back was simply that the remains of St. Pierre had been ravaged again but, since there was little left of the town, the second black ball had failed to increase the damage.

On a recent visit to Martinique we saw a few remaining walls standing in what had been St. Pierre. That was all, for the city that was once called the "Paris of the West" was never rebuilt.

Mont Pelee had not only destroyed a city of 30,000 people; it had ended a way of life.⁴²

We have no eyewitness accounts of the destruction of the ancient cities as we have of the modern decimation of St. Pierre, but only the short Bible statement of what happened there. Yet the similarities between the two situations are very obvious.

Both were located in an area of intense volcanic and earthquake activity and both were suddenly overcome by the descent of fire upon them of such ferocity and intensity that the cities were obliterated and the population was exterminated but for very few survivors. In the case of Sodom there were only three survivors, Lot and his two daughters. In St. Pierre, only two in the city and the family who fled just in time, escaped death.

Like Sodom, St. Pierre was a place of abandoned wickedness. Here is the description of it as given by Hal Butler:

In 1902, St. Pierre, on the western coast of the island and only four miles from Mont Pelee, was Martinique's major city. Twelve miles to the south was Fort-de-France, the capital of the island, but this was a small village that bore no resemblance to glittering St. Pierre. France was proud of St. Pierre; indeed, the French often referred to the city as the "little Paris" or "the Paris of the West" because of its sparkling social life.

Both the city and its people were picturesque. The city stretched for two miles along the coast and, from an approaching ship, it looked like a welcome oasis. The houses, fashioned of stone and stucco, were alive with color. Most of them were painted yellow or bright orange and all had red-tiled roofs. Two main roads ran parallel to the coast, interlaced by cross streets that began at the sea and climbed upward toward the mountain slopes behind the city. With the green mountains as a backdrop, the city had the appeal of a glistening jewel embedded in a costly setting.

In addition to being the social capital of the island, St. Pierre was also the commercial center. One of its major industries was

⁴² *Idem*, p. 142-152.

the rum distillery, and its principal business street, Rue Victor Hugo, was lined with banks, stores and other commercial establishments. The “Paris of the West” was also equipped to cater both to the welfare of the soul and the gratification of the flesh, for it boasted a stately Catholic cathedral and several parish churches, along with a theater where actors from France entertained, cafes, nightclubs and assorted emporiums designed specifically for uninhibited revelry.

The French colonists, whose ancestors had settled on Martinique generations before, represented the elite of the island. They owned and supervised plantations producing tobacco, coffee, cacao and sugarcane. Most of them had built ostentatious villas in the mountains and spent much of their time either relaxing at these summer homes or sipping cognac in St. Pierre’s hotels and inns. This wealthy group of Pierrotins—as residents of St. Pierre were called—numbered about 7,000.

Most of the city’s 23,000 other inhabitants were blacks. The men—usually bare-chested and dressed in canvas trousers and hats made of bamboo grass—were typically handsome; the women couched their natural beauty in colorful robes and turbans and strode the streets with trays and baskets of salable goods balanced on their heads. The waterfront was a scene of continuous activity as stevedores loaded and unloaded ships calling at what was one of the most profitable ports in the Caribbean.

This was St. Pierre in 1902—a city that had every reason to believe in its future but a city that had no future at all.⁴³

God Not Directly Implicated

Life in St. Pierre and Sodom followed a similar pattern. Sodom and Gomorrah were places where study was given to the development of every means whereby the desires of the flesh could be gratified and, from the description given here, so was St. Pierre. Thus the very things which caused the departure of the restraining and protecting Spirit of God in the ancient situation were also present in this fair city. In both cases the balmy climate and abun-

⁴³ *Idem*, p. 132-133.

dant wealth tended to stimulate the pursuit of licentiousness until a fever pitch was reached.

It is not to be supposed that Sodom was irreligious, for in those days worship of the sun god was the devoted spiritual exercise of those peoples. Wherever this religious influence has been present, it has encouraged licentiousness and immorality of all kinds. The Roman Catholic religion which dominated the spiritual life of St. Pierre is the modern counterpart of ancient sun-worship⁴⁴ and has demonstrated that it likewise is the spawning ground for every kind of sin and wickedness. The same religious influences therefore which brought Sodom and Gomorrah to that pitch of wickedness which manifests itself in total and unrestrained rejection of God, also brought the inhabitants of St. Pierre to the same point.

St. Pierre then provides us with a splendid illustration of the death of Sodom and Gomorrah. God did the same thing in both the ancient and the modern situation and for the same reason. He left the rejecters of His mercy to themselves to reap that which they had sown, and He did that because that was what the people in each case demanded of Him. Because the cities concerned were sitting over a time-bomb just waiting to go off in the form of a volcanic eruption, that was the fate which overtook them. In other words they died, not because God decreed that this was the way it should be, but because that was the potential destructive threat in their area.

A wide variety of destructions befall 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 flood, earthquake, tempest, accident, fire, or by the savage outburst of human wrath. The only consistent pattern through it all is that the nature and intensity of the disaster depend on what is lying nearest and how powerful it is at the time.

⁴⁴ See *The Two Babylons*, by Alexander Hislop, published by S.W. Partridge and Co., 4, 5, & 6, Soho Square, London, W.I.

This denies the charge that God personally takes hold of the powers of nature and manipulates them according to His design to punish sinners. God has the power to create any kind of destruction at will. He is not bound to the particular peril present in a given area. Being a God of utter justice and consistency would require Him to punish the same offenses with the same punishments. But this is not what happened. The same offenses are dealt with by widely varying punishments always according to the destructive potential in the place where the offenders reside.

There is as great a disparity in the severity of the judgments as in their type. Some of the sinful suffer lingering deaths of intense pain, while others die quickly and mercifully. This is unequal enough, but observation shows that those who live lives of great and unrestrained wickedness usually suffer much less than the relatively innocent. Consider the situation in wartime. Behind the titanic struggle are the warmongers, men burning with lust for power and have no regard for the cost others must pay in order that they achieve their desires. They are the truly guilty ones who deserve the greatest punishment of all.

Out in the community are many people who do not want a war and would far rather live in peace with their neighbors. But when the battles ravage the land, they are the sufferers. Their sons are killed, their houses leveled, their businesses ruined, their livestock destroyed, and their bodies are starved, mutilated, lamed, and finally killed.

Of the two classes the leaders are the ones upon whom the desolations should justly fall, but they grow wealthy from the merchandise of blood. Justice is truly turned around. If this is the decree and work of God, then He is a strange God indeed.

But we know that He is not that kind of God. He is absolutely just and strictly impartial. He never excuses one while favoring another, nor does He deal more harshly with those less deserving. If God were the one administering the punishments, then the penalty would be exacted according to the offense. The very fact

that it is not is clear proof that these situations are not the result of God's handiwork.

The same unequal discrimination is found in the fate of the earth's large cities. To walk their streets is to behold sin under direct and willful cultivation, with study being given to the art of gratifying the flesh to the highest degree. Many, coming in from country areas to encounter these things for the first time, have been so appalled at the spectacle that they have felt that God should and would arise to wipe these cesspools from the face of the earth. But decade follows decade during which the corruption prospers. Seemingly it enjoys the patronage and protection of God himself.

While this is going on, the judgments which one would expect to see fall on these cities, strike with merciless ferocity in other places where one would judge the state of iniquity to be mild by comparison.

The examples which might be cited are numerous. Here are two which are typical. In Guatemala, February 4, 1976, an earthquake which measured 7.5 on the Richter scale, caused extensive damage and huge loss of life. It was estimated that the dead numbered twenty-three thousand and the injured, seventy-five thousand.

On December 25, 1974, a cyclone ripped through the quiet tropical city of Darwin in northwest Australia, in what has been described as the worst natural disaster ever to strike in Australia. Ninety percent of the city was leveled and fifty people lost their lives.

If an investigator was sent to find the most iniquitous city on earth, neither Darwin nor Guatemala would be first on the list. His thoughts would naturally turn to the populated centers of the world. Yet those places live on relatively unscathed year after year while these quieter places are razed to the dust.

Why this disparity? The answer is quite simple. Firstly it must be obvious that it is not the work of God, for it is far too partial

and capricious to be His handiwork. If He was the destroyer, then He would certainly visit the large cities filled with vice and sin before He touched the smaller ones where evil is not nurtured to anywhere near the same degree. He would administer the punishments with carefully calculated exactitude so that the guilty would receive their just reward. Things would be very different from what they are.

The nature and location of these catastrophes are clear proof that they are not the work of God. They occur because of the presence of potential destruction seeded at the time of the flood. Those who live in such areas need the protecting care of God more than do others who live where there is a lesser threat.

But, by their impenitent living, they grieve away the shield of omnipotence thereby exposing themselves to those particular powers of nature poised to strike in their area. Therefore they suffer more awful consequences from the withdrawal of God's presence than do others in less dangerous places.

This does not infer that there are places of entire safety, for this is not true. As the withdrawal of God's presence becomes more extensive, the uncaged powers of nature will reach out to waste areas previously untouched. As we draw nearer to the end, this will become universal.

There is no problem in understanding what God did at Sodom, Gomorrah, and St. Pierre, if care is taken to consider all the implications and if the principles which govern God's behavior are carefully kept in mind.

30. An Execution

THE flood was the first occasion when nature, no longer under God's direction, broke with cataclysmic fury on men's and demons' shelterless heads. Powerless to control such stupendous forces, mankind suffered a stroke of such magnitude as to all but obliterate him.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 99:

[Even] Satan himself, who was compelled to remain in the midst of the warring elements, feared for his own existence.

But, while the flood was the first and greatest disaster to hit mankind, it was certainly not the last. After the destruction of the tower of Babel by lightning, the next incident of great note was the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah.

After this the list lengthens. There were:

- the plagues upon Egypt,
- the returning waters of the Red Sea,
- various pestilences which smote the Israelites,
- the invasion of the fiery serpents,
- the swallowing of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in the earthquake,
- the overthrow of the walls of Jericho,
- the great hailstorm in Joshua's day,
- the extermination of Sennacherib's army,
- the death of the children who were killed by two bears,
- the fire which consumed the men who came to take Elijah captive, and many more.

In our day, one disaster follows another in steady succession until each fresh one brings no surprise. To examine each case would be repeating the same arguments already advanced in respect to the flood, the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the

plagues of Egypt. Once the principle has been established, it can then be applied to all other situations.

Sometimes it is possible to see a scientific explanation for the disaster but not always. Just what took the lives of Sennacherib's men is not revealed. The withholding of this information simply provides an exercise in faith, testing one's grip upon the principles of righteousness revealed in the Scriptures.

Because no revelation is given of how they died, the temptation is to revert to the idea that God personally executed them. Such a temptation must be positively rejected. Cling to the simple belief that God does not execute the sinner but leaves him to himself to reap that which he has chosen. This is so emphatically revealed in God's Word that there is no excuse for losing sight of it.

As far as the consumption of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram is concerned it is obvious that the disaster was brought about by released natural forces. The earth opened up and swallowed the unrepentant. Certainly none of the people of Israel knew of the danger that threatened them. In like manner human beings today are unable to predict just where and when these disasters will strike. When those rebels continued their defiance of God, they compelled Him to withdraw from where they were, leaving only one possible consequence. The disaster so long restrained was unleashed.

Once the understanding has grasped these principles and faith determines that they shall never be relinquished, then there is no incident when the rod of power passed out of God's hands and control that will cause any serious problem to the true child of God. He will see that it was not God but deranged nature which destroyed the unrepentant. There will be times when it is possible to see how this actually happened, but other situations will be inexplicable. Faith will know that the same God acted in the same way whether it can be seen exactly how nature behaved or not.

But there are other occasions, in some respects different from those cited above, in which God's actions are most difficult to un-

derstand. They have so perplexed earnest Christians for centuries that some have been led to doubt the character of God and even to forsake His service. What God appears to have done denies every principle discussed so far in this study.

These incidents are those in which God commanded the Israelites to take their weapons and utterly slay all men, women, children, infants, and livestock.

- The execution of the defiant ones at the golden calf;
- The genocide of the Amalekites; and
- The extermination of the Canaanites;

—all these were all accomplished in obedience to God's directions. While God himself did not carry out the slaughters, they were administered at His command. Considering that, in the natural order of things, he who orders the execution is the real executioner, then it appears that God did fill the role of a destroyer in these instances.

More than any other, the biblical recital of these events is used to justify those who cling to the view that God does inflict judgments on those who offend Him. In any confrontation between them and those who see the true character of God, it will be observed that these are the statements to which they cling with great determination. To them they provide incontrovertible proof.

It cannot be denied that these are difficult to understand, but they are not beyond human comprehension provided we are taught by God and guided by the principles which underlie His character. When these incidents are correctly understood, it will be found that God has not subverted His codes to meet an emergency but has acted with impeccable consistency. Not even in these situations has He been an executioner or destroyer.

It cannot be over stressed that success in uncovering the real truth of God's part at the golden calf execution, the genocide of the Amalekites, the annihilation of the Canaanites, and so forth, depends upon complete confidence in God's consistency. There

must be the unassailable conviction that there are no contradictions in the Word of God, that He does not make a declaration about His character and behavior in one place, and then proceed to do the opposite in another.

Unless the student is settled on this point, he will not arrive at any satisfactory solution to apparent contradictions, but if he is, then solid searching combined with earnest prayer and the forsaking of sin will repay rich dividends of spiritual truth. All disharmonies will disappear. That which firstly appeared as an unanswerable indictment against God's character, will prove to be the strongest evidence in favor of it. What previously was hoped no one would mention, turns out instead to be the best argument for the case.

To clarify the nature of the problem, three statements outlining God's commitment never to use force will be quoted:

The Desire of Ages, p. 759:

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; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 12:

Earthly kingdoms rule by the ascendancy of physical power; but from Christ's kingdom every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion, is banished.

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.

There is no ambiguity in these statements, but they do become a problem when brought into direct contact with a story such as the slaughter of the rebels at the golden calf. When these two are brought together, it appears that God states one thing in one

place and then proceeds to do the opposite in another. Compare the record which follows with the statements quoted above:

Exodus 32

²⁷ And he [Moses] said to them, Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.

²⁸ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.

²⁹ Then Moses said, Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that He may bestow upon you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 325-326:

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 idola-

try 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 a 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.

The people's behavior can only be classified as rebellion. In the case of those who refused to repent of it, it was persistent and incurable. There is no possibility of viewing their course in any other light, and there is no point in attempting to. It must be recognized for what it was—rebellion.

With equal clarity it is to be seen that the insurrection was overcome by force. The Levites took their swords and slaughtered the rebels. What makes this critically different from the numerous other occasions when rebellion has been overcome by force is that God ordered this solution to be applied.

Thus, at first, it appears that every step God is reported to have taken denies what He laid out as His principles in the first three references quoted. God declared that it is not His way to overcome rebellion by force, yet He directed that it be done in just that way. He claims that He leaves the sinners to themselves to reap what they have sown, but it seems that He did not do that here.

It is simple to see how quite a case can be built up against God by using this evidence. It is argued by those who believe God does execute, that the only way to deny this is to make the Bible read as we wish it to be read. Before this study is over, it will become evident that those who make this charge are, in fact, the ones who are guilty of doing this.

When rightly understood, Scriptural records will show that at the golden calf, God did nothing in violation of His stated principles. He will emerge from this examination as a Saviour only. His character will glow with a brighter radiance exciting the wonder, admiration, and emulation of all who will respond to it.

How is it, though, that the vast majority have failed to rightly perceive the work of God at the base of the mountain? Why has He been viewed as the maker and executioner of the sentence?

Why has no real difference been made between the behavior of God and any earthly monarch? It is because one vital factor, being completely overlooked, is never taken into consideration. That factor was Israel's introduction of the sword into their lives. Undertaking this was an extremely serious and tragic step which placed them on a different relationship with their divine Leader. It amounted to the institution of man's procedures in the place of God's.

Because the choice of which was to be the established and recognized way, rested not with God but with Israel, Jehovah could not and therefore did not compel them to discard it. All He could do was to labor to save them from the worst effects of what they had elected to do.

The Lesson of Jacob

Their decision to take up weapons of coercion and destruction was not made in complete ignorance of God's will. Their Heavenly Father had faithfully communicated to them that the sword was to find no place among them whatsoever.

They were named after their revered father Israel, whose history of victory over his foes was well known to them. God designed that this should be a witness to them of His ways. The lesson was especially pertinent, for there was a distinct parallel existing between Israel's situation and theirs. As he was a prisoner of his scheming uncle, Laban, and desired to depart for the promised land, so they were held in Egyptian bondage and longed to leave for Canaan's land.

When the patriarch set forth on his journey, he was pursued by Laban who was determined to bring his son-in-law back with him. It cost Laban seven days to overtake Jacob, seven days in which his temper had time to reach fever heat. When he found Jacob,

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 193:

He was hot with anger, and bent on forcing them to return, which he doubted not he could do, since his band was much the stronger. The fugitives were indeed in great peril.

Jacob, knowing full well that he would be pursued, made every provision possible to prevent his being forced to return. But, in all his careful planning for the security of the ones he loved so dearly, he made no move to arm his servants. He put his entire trust in God as his Protector and so effectively did the Lord fill that commission, that not only did Jacob not go back to Laban's home, but not one of his household was even so much as scratched.

This peril gone and the pacified Laban having returned to his place, Jacob pressed on to meet the greater peril of Esau who reportedly was coming to meet him with four hundred armed men. Esau had only one objective in mind—to ensure that Jacob could never dispossess him of their father's wealth. The only way to assure this was to slaughter Jacob and his band. That would settle the question for all time.

As this deadly peril threatened Jacob, there were at least two different courses he could have adopted. The common human reaction is to turn to the power of weapons. Accordingly Jacob could have chosen to divert from his course and arm his servants as quickly as possible. But he did not do this, for he rightly understood that this was not God's way. Instead he continued without deviation, his entire confidence resting in the assurance that God would faithfully fulfill His responsibility of protecting him and his entourage.

On the night before the encounter he turned aside to pray, his deep concern arising from the fear that unconfessed sin would obstruct God's work and leave him exposed to his enemy. There was no lack of faith in God's power to deliver him. His only fear was that his own spiritual condition would make that power un-

available. The long hours of agonized wrestling brought the victory.

God did not force Esau to leave his brother unmolested. Instead He sent an angel to reveal to him the true character of Jacob, his sufferings, his spirit, and his intentions. Thus Esau was led to view Jacob in a new light. He realized that Jacob was not a threat to him and therefore did not need to be eliminated. His rage was replaced by sympathy, and the outcome again was that not a single one from Jacob's household received so much as a scratch.

Here is a point 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 took the sword, there was nearly always loss of life which in some cases was very heavy.

From Jacob's experience, the true Israel of God from then to now has an everlasting message which should never be forgotten. It is the message reiterated by the Psalmist:

Psalm 46

¹ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

² Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

³ Though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.

Psalm 34

⁷ The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.

The great controversy is not between us and Satan, but between Christ and Satan. We do not have the power to overcome the enemy. God alone can do that and has undertaken to do so. 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. How much more wonderful it was for him to see the Lord's salvation than to gain a victory by the

sword at the cost of the lives of some of his dearly loved servants and sons.

Through this experience God provided the Israelites with a perpetual testimony of the security available to them if they trustingly committed the keeping of their lives to Him. As a preparation for their departure from Egypt it was sufficient to assure them that they were to make no provision for acquiring and using swords. They were to entrust their defense to God as fully as Jacob did, knowing that they could expect the same results.

The Lesson of Moses

God, knowing that the success of the great venture depended on their strict adherence to these principles, reiterated the lesson repeatedly during the exodus and the period leading up to it. Moses had been thoroughly trained in the art of war and had proved himself on the battle field to be a brilliant tactician:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 245:

His ability as a military leader made him a favorite with the armies of Egypt, and he was generally regarded as a remarkable character.

Moses, therefore, naturally expected that the Lord would deliver them by force of arms, and he saw in his Egyptian education a divinely provided training for such a campaign. Had God purposed to do things this way, no better man than Moses could have been found anywhere in history. It is significant that God made no use of this ability in Moses at any time in his life, for not once did Moses lead the armies of Israel into battle.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 245:

The elders of Israel were taught by angels that the time for their deliverance was near, and that Moses was the man whom God would employ to accomplish this work. Angels instructed Moses also that Jehovah had chosen him to break the bondage of his people. He, supposing that they were to obtain their freedom by force of arms, expected to lead the Hebrew host against the armies of Egypt, and having this in view, he guarded his af-

fections, lest in his attachment to his foster mother or to Pharaoh he would not be free to do the will of God.

Thus Moses was dedicated to the divine purpose of delivering Israel, and he and they longed for the fulfillment of the plan. One day when he saw an Israelite being oppressed by an Egyptian, he slew the persecutor and supposed that thereby he had initiated the armed struggle which would liberate the slave nation.

But, even though the Israelites were aware of God's appointment of Moses, there was not a man inspired to rise with him. Instead he was forced into precipitous flight to Midian. This unexpected development caused Moses a great deal of deep heart-searching, providing God with the needed opportunity to educate into him the realization that it was not by warfare that Israel was to be delivered.

Forty years later he returned clad, not in the armor of a military leader, but in the simple garb of an eastern shepherd with a staff in his hands. Before all Israel God was proclaiming the way by which they would be taken out of bondage and by which they were to be preserved forever from their enemies. It was a reminder to them of the same truth as revealed in God's dealings with Jacob.

The Deliverance from Egypt

God did not introduce a temporary provision to be followed by changed procedures once the children of Israel, having gained their freedom, became competent in the art of warfare. God started the exodus upon principles which were to be forever preserved and maintained. At no time did He deviate from His established course of action. During the reign of sorrow as plague followed plague, the Israelites had no part to play other than merely standing by and letting the Lord handle everything.

When, just before their final departure, God impressed the Egyptians to liberally provide the travelers with everything they would ever need on their journey, He did not put it into the

hearts of their former masters to give them weapons of war. It was a people for whom God had made every provision, who went out of Egypt...

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 282:

...unarmed, and unaccustomed to war...

If the Lord had intended a change from His fighting their battles to their doing this work for themselves, then He certainly would have made sure that they were equipped for this role. The fact that He did not impress the Egyptians to arm them is clear proof that He never intended that they should be. As the exodus began, so it was to continue.

Had the Israelites manifested living faith in God, they would have reasoned as follows:

“The Lord knows exactly what we need to bring us to the promised land. From the vast storehouse of Egypt He has given us every necessity, but He has not drawn from its arsenals. Therefore this is the clearest endorsement of the message demonstrated in the experience of our father, Jacob, that we, like him, are to return to the promised land an unarmed people. We are to entrust the matter of our protection entirely to God.”

How much happier their subsequent history would have been had this been their thinking. There would have been no substitution of human, faithless methods in place of the infallible, divine procedures. God would never have commanded them to take their swords and slaughter men, women, and children. In every situation He would have been their defense and deliverer.

So they came to the Red Sea where once more the Lord displayed before them the way in which the power of their enemies would be broken. There it was shown in the most vivid way that the rejecters of God’s mercy were simply left to themselves to perish. As the Egyptians’ greatest act of rejection was to seek to destroy the people who were walking closely with God, the point

where the Israelites seemed to be most endangered was, in fact, the moment closest to deliverance.

Those who depend on the strength of God
are as unmovable and as invincible
as the everlasting mountains.



When Pharaoh led his army into the corridor between those standing walls of water, it was an act of terrible presumption on his part. The only way in which the Israelites could pass over

safely was by remaining within the circle of God's protection. But the Egyptians had deliberately and defiantly cast off that protection, and therefore the Spirit of the Lord could not maintain the waters in their position. As the army advanced, the Spirit of God had no choice but to retire before it. As that power was withdrawn, the waters simply rushed back to their original position, overwhelming the enemies of God and His people.

The Right to Choose

The Lord was very diligent in the education of His people. He knew that the day of decision was fast approaching when they must make the critical choice between continuing in God's order or turning from it to their own. While He could train them to hold to the right course, He could not make the decision for them. There is no compulsion with God. He will never depart from this principle by so much as a hair's breadth.

Pharaoh had exercised that choice to his destruction. No blame for the outcome can be charged to God, for He had been more than fair in sending warnings to the proud ruler.

This right to choose was given to the human family when Adam and Eve were placed in possession of their inheritance. The angels imparted the information to them

The Story of Redemption, p. 30:

They told Adam and Eve that God would not compel them to obey—that He had not removed from them power to go contrary to His will; that they were moral agents, free to obey or disobey.

The entrance of sin did not change this. When man exercised the gift of choice by turning aside from the principles of righteousness, God still did not infringe upon this freedom. Men were not deprived of it by Jehovah, rather, they lost it by giving themselves over to sin.

God's commitment to freedom of choice would be no more than empty words if there was no opportunity to choose another course. Accordingly, in order to give full support to His declared

principles, the Lord must be careful not to deprive man of the means whereby he could go in another direction if he wished.

So while the Lord had made it absolutely clear that the Israelites were not to carry the sword in their journeyings from Egypt, He did not make it impossible for them to do so. They had the same freedom to obey or disobey as did their first parents in Eden.

Picking Up the Sword

The special opportunity for them to take the sword was afforded when the armor-clad bodies of the Egyptian soldiers were washed up at their feet.

Exodus 14

³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 287-288:

As morning broke, it revealed to the multitudes of Israel all that remained of their mighty foes—the mail-clad bodies cast upon the shore.

Here was the great test for the men of Israel. Temptingly offered them was a veritable arsenal of weapons—swords, spears, helmets, shields, and breastplates. They could either rush down and take the spoils, thus equipping themselves to fight as other nations fought, or they could turn their backs upon it and leave their protection in the Lord's hands.

The real issue was God's continuation as the sole Protector of His chosen people versus their taking His work into their own hands. It was a question of implicit trust in God versus greater confidence in the power of their own fighting abilities. It was a critical point in their history, for the sad decision made there influenced the full span of their future. It was a departure from strict adherence to the only safe course. It determined their final failure and rejection as a people.

There are no direct records confirming that they did rush down and take the armor from the Egyptians. But all the evidence points strongly in that direction. Here are the facts:

- They approached, crossed, and emerged from the Red Sea without implements of war.
- Shortly after leaving the Red Sea, they engaged in warfare against the Amalekites in which they did not use sticks and stones.

As there were no sword smiths between the Red Sea and the location of this battle, the only way they could have become equipped was by salvaging the weaponry washed ashore.

What makes the decision taken so significant are the circumstances under which it was made. God had just spoken to them in a most thrilling and convincing demonstration of His ability and willingness to cope with their enemies according to the principles of eternal righteousness. With a God like that, what need did they have of weapons?

To seek military equipment under ordinary circumstances was bad enough, but to lay hands on it in the light shining from God as it did then, was totally inexcusable and highly irresponsible.

In taking up the sword at that point, Israel failed tragically. They introduced a new order into the camp and replaced the divine arrangement. Thus they failed to give a true representation of God's character, and this eventually led to their losing their position as the channel of God's communication to the world.

Some would argue that this change was an inevitable development made necessary and possible as conditions changed. This line of reasoning views the children of Israel in Egypt as starting off being both untrained and without equipment so that there was no recourse but for the Lord to fight for them, just as initially a parent does everything for the infant.

Then, as they grew in wisdom and strength, the time came when the Lord could progressively turn over to them the care of

their own needs and interests. Accordingly He kindly caused the Egyptians to be washed up at their feet so that they were provided with the armor they needed. From then on they became His appointed instruments in decimating the heathen.

This argument is not illogical, but it is nonetheless false. If it were true, then the subjugation of Canaan as it did in fact take place, was in the order of God. That it was not is proved by the following statement as well as by all the principles which undergird God's character:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 392:

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.

It was not God's purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, for the important reason that that is not His method. The use of force is exclusive to Satan's kingdom. It has no part in God's order. They were to possess the promised land by strict obedience to His commands, one of which prohibits killing.

The human mind finds great difficulty in understanding how a vigorous, warlike nation can be dispossessed without using force. Israel had the same problem even though they had witnessed the mighty manifestations of God's methods in the plagues of Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea.

The dwellers on the Nile suffered because they had refused God's every effort to save them. The same resistance among the Canaanites had brought them to the position where destruction was all that remained to them. But Israel could not see this, nor could they rest in the Lord's promise that He would give them the land. Therefore they determined that they would take it in the only way they understood—by force.

It is true that they gained the land in this way, but let it not be forgotten that they also lost it in the same manner. Their sad his-

tory confirms the truth of Christ's words to the valiant and bel-
ligerent Peter,

Matthew 26

⁵² Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will per-
ish by the sword.

Jesus did not give these words a limited application in time. He
was not saying,

“From this time forward, all who take the sword will thereby
perish.”

What He stated is an eternal truth. It is a statement of the fact
that the use of force engenders counter-force. While the individ-
ual or the nation may be strong enough today to occupy the top
position, the time soon comes when another power will be
stronger and will seize the opportunity to destroy those who have
previously ascended the pathway of blood.

The veracity of Christ's words as a universal application is ade-
quately proved by six thousand years of human history. That pe-
riod reveals that whenever a nation was built by the use of the
sword, that power eventually perished, and it will be likewise
with those that have not yet perished. The same is true of individ-
uals.

It may be argued that men of power rose by the sword and
maintained that lead through their lifetimes to die unconquered
rulers of the world. But these people will yet face the future judg-
ment in which, through natural causes, they will suffer retribu-
tion for their sins.

God, understanding perfectly that those who live by the sword
will perish by it, knew that for Israel to have it was to ensure
their destruction. God did not desire such an outcome. Therefore,
from this motivation alone, it is certain that He never instructed
them to take the sword. More than this, if He had done so, then
He would be responsible for their destruction, for he who gives to
another that which will assuredly effect his death must carry the

blame for that demise. It follows then that it was never in God's purpose that Israel or anyone else should ever carry the sword. It has no place in His character and corresponding methods, and therefore is to find no acceptance in the character and behavior of His people.

The recognition of this truth is essential to understanding the directives from God which sent the Israelites forth with the sword to utterly destroy the peoples who opposed them. The institution of this form of defense was entirely the people's work, the expression of their having more faith in themselves than in God. It was the establishment of human principles and procedures in place of the divine.

Therefore in every instance where the Israelites went to war or executed the wrongdoers among themselves, their actions were not a revelation of the character of God. There has been a universal readiness to conclude that they were, on the erroneous assumption that the people were simply doing as the Lord told them. If they had been a truly obedient people, they would not have had the swords at all and therefore would never have gone forth with them to slay their enemies.

The Commands to Kill

Yet God did give directions to them. There is no denying this, nor any desire to do so, for the nature of those commands reveals a very wonderful and beautiful Father in Heaven ever reaching out to save and never to destroy. The tragic error is that He has been terribly misunderstood to the point where the actions designed to minimize the evil effects of the slaughtering to which they were committed, have been judged in an altogether different and wrong light.

The purpose here is to establish that it was in spite of God's best efforts to the contrary that the sword became an establishment in the camp of Israel. The recognition of this truth is essential to understanding the directives given to Israel which have

been viewed for too long as an indication that He was personally using them as executioners.

If God's will had been respected, they would never have carried the sword, 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. God would have been left free to do His work for them according to the eternal principles of righteousness.

The command given by God at various times in connection with these slayings makes it difficult for the average person to see this. It is argued that God was personally and directly involved, that He decided the particular sentence, and then ordered its execution.

This certainly appears to be a watertight argument, but it still leaves those terrible contradictions. God does not give orders contrary to the principles of eternal rectitude and righteousness. Therefore more study is required to remove those seeming inconsistencies. This may be done with the sweet consciousness that there are no contradictions in the Word of God and that God's character is perfectly consistent in all its behavior.

It will be seen, as we proceed, that the commands given by God were to a people who had already chosen the way they would go and who, if left completely unguided, would use those weapons in the worst way. God's commands were designed to minimize the evil effects of what they had chosen to do. In this, He was acting out the role of a Saviour.

The people insisted on taking up the sword. Now God would try to save them from its worst effects.

31. The Ever-loving, Saving Father

WHEN the Israelites took the sword, thus rejecting God's way in favor of their own, the Lord was faced with several possible courses:

1. ABANDON THEM

He could have simply abandoned them to their own devices. This would have been perfectly just on His part though it would have been justice without mercy. The result would have been the speedy disappearance of the household of Israel from the face of the earth. Their enemies were multitudinous, highly-skilled, and well-equipped in the business of war. Satan desired nothing so much as the extermination of Israel, and he would have quickly seized upon the opportunity.

2. OVERPOWER THEM

God had the physical power to force the Israelites to continue in His way. But would He exercise such a form of rulership? This would have satisfied neither mercy nor righteousness. He had given them, along with the remainder of humanity, the freedom to choose. For moral reasons He would not use force to accomplish His purposes. It was for them to choose how it would be, and when they made that choice, God could respect it.

3. IGNORE THE PROBLEM

God could have simply ignored the sin and pretended that it did not exist. To do this would have been to condone it, which would be mercy without righteousness. This would also be contrary to God's character.

These three are apparent alternatives, but there is another possibility which is normally overlooked.

4. WORK WITH THEM AS A SAVIOUR

The Lord works with them to save them from the evil results of their choice. Herein the Lord recognizes that they have chosen to take the wrong course and that the work calculated to save them

has been rejected. Because they have not yet experienced the bitter consequences of their apostasy, they are not disposed to come back. But they have not gone beyond the possibility of restoration. So God in His infinite love does not abandon them and thus cut off their opportunity to rectify their errors.

If no saving help is provided to draw them back from going into the worst effects of their choice, then they will not survive long enough to ever return to God. Therefore the Lord works to save them from those evil results both to make their sufferings as mild as possible, and to extend the time in which they may learn and repent.

It is because this aspect of God's working has not been understood that He has been so seriously misjudged in the Old Testament.

An Illustration

The following illustration will serve to clarify these alternatives and to identify the divine choice among them.

Picture a smallish town located in an area where wild animals, such as bear, deer, mountain sheep, and various big cats abound. As is to be expected, the majority of men in the town are keen hunters never missing the opportunity to take their guns and track down some game.

But one man was different. He had the love of God in his heart and to kill the beautiful dwellers in the forests and mountains was contrary to his nature. So he was never seen in company with the men trailing off to seek their adventures in the blood of others.

For their part they were troubled by this odd man and never lost an occasion to try and persuade him to join them. At one time they even bought him a splendid hunting rifle for his birthday. With Christian graciousness he gently declined the gift.

This was naturally resented causing those men to increase the pressure on him. But despite this, year after year there was no change in him. The only equipment with which he would hunt was a good camera.

This man had a fine son whom he was most anxious to protect from the influence of the hunters. He worked untiringly to instill into him the same love of the wildlife which he possessed, and was gratified to see that he was having good success in this direction. Thus the father was working to have the boy do things his way as distinct from the hunters' way.

But the father did not take away the boy's freedom of choice. When he eventually reached later youth, he became answerable for himself and was no longer under the direct control and discipline of his father. Then he received an invitation to spend some weeks away from home and, eager to see new country, accepted the offer.

This was a clever plot by the huntsmen who took their sons along. They hoped that their sons would have a greater influence over him once he was away from his father. The boys urged him to try hunting just once to see how he liked it. Feeling that no harm would be done by an on-the-spot personal appraisal of the hunting business, he went along.

His first reaction was unfavorable but, something about the challenge and excitement drew him in, and soon he was an enthusiastic devotee. He went to the sports store, selected a beautifully engineered weapon, and in due time returned with it to his dismayed father.

He had exercised his choice, and now the father was confronted with a situation which required a response. How would he now relate himself to this turn of events? Clearly the young man had instituted in his life a course contrary to the ways of his father and of God.

For the boy's father, as for God, the choice lay between several alternatives:

1. DISOWN THE SON

The first option was to disown the son, forbidding his entrance into the home and requiring he go his own separate way. The justification for this would have been the certainty that the principles of father and son could never harmonize.

2. FORCE HIM TO SURRENDER

Another course would have called for the use of force to coerce the lad's surrender to his father's wishes and ways. This was not the answer for two reasons. Firstly, the youth had achieved the age of independence, so it would have been impossible for the father to achieve the desired result anyway. But secondly, it was not in this father's nature any more than it is in the character of God, to use force. To them the only acceptable service is that which springs from an educated heart of love.

3. IGNORE THE PROBLEM

A third alternative was to quietly ignore the change, pretend that the rifle had never been brought into the home, and act as if all were well when, in fact, it was not. Again, this was no way out, for sin cannot be ignored. Neither love nor justice will permit it. Iniquity demands attention. A response to it will always be forthcoming whether it be the saving outreach of love or the vindictive reaction of destructive hate.

Having considered and rejected each of these possibilities, what would have been left for this godly man to do? What would God do in the same situation?

4. ACT AS A SAVIOUR

Firstly, the boy's father recognized that his son had placed himself, other people, domestic livestock, and wild animals, in a position of great danger. Being an inexperienced and untrained rifleman, he needed to learn:

- the necessity of looking beyond the target to ensure that there were no buildings, people, or farm animals in the line of fire;
- how to carry the weapon safely and how to climb through fences so that he did not, as so many have done, shoot himself or his friends;
- the awful potential of a ricochet which endangers life far to the right or left of the original target;
- to come close enough to the game to reduce the possibility of only wounding the animal which would then drag itself away to suffer a lingering death.

These and other things he could be taught in order to save himself and others from the worst effects of what he had chosen.

While the father could no longer save the youth from taking the gun, he could, if permitted, provide the instruction needed to save him from these serious consequences. Even the wild animals would benefit from this saving ministry, for, while they could not be saved from death, they could be delivered from a painful and lingering one.

As the response of God and those who walk with Him will always be the outreach of saving love, there is only one course among those suggested above that the Lord or this father would follow. God is by nature a saviour. So too is the father pictured in this illustration. When God is blocked from saving people in one area, He will still exercise His saving power in whatever ways remain.

Thus when the boy's father found that his long pursued objectives of saving the youth from taking up weapons had failed, he still recognized that there was much he could do to save the boy from the worst effects of what he had chosen. So, sadly but with tender dignity, the father drew his son aside and spoke with him. He expressed disappointment that he had chosen to go the way he had, but assured him that he would respect his decision fully.

He gently suggested that there were dangers associated with the use of such a weapon, from which perils he could only be safeguarded by receiving and obeying a number of specific precautions. The father intimated that he was more than willing to carefully instruct the son in these things so that he would be saved from accidents.

This father seems to be instructing this young man to be a hunter. But in fact, he is advising the lad, who has elected to be a killer against his father's wishes, how to be safe and merciful in the use of a gun.



The son, relieved that his parent was not launching against him a fiery denunciation, no longer braced himself to resist such pressure. Instead he expressed his willingness to learn. By so doing he exhibited the strange quirk of human behavior which gives men an unwillingness to obey God where the higher levels of faith are concerned, but permits them to follow His counsel at lesser levels.

Israel, for instance, was not prepared to trust God fully by leaving the sword alone, but they accepted and followed His counsels regarding the restrictions designed to minimize its evils. In like manner the son who had abandoned his father's principles regarding the total rejection of firearms, was prepared to respect his counsels in the use of them.

So the father introduced the training session by emphasizing that nothing he was about to do or say indicated that he had changed in any way.

God, who has been placed in the same position by the determination of His children to take up weapons of destruction, has likewise solemnly warned that His effort to save them from the worst effects of what they have chosen does not indicate any change in Him, even though His actions could and have been interpreted otherwise.

Malachi 3

⁶ I am the Lord, I do not change.

Hebrews 13

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.

James 1

¹⁷ ...with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Despite the fact that men know that before sin entered, God never destroyed, and despite these solemn declarations from God that no change has ever occurred in Him, men still look on His everlasting efforts to save, and interpret them as being the actions of one who has become like man himself.

The father in our story did not have to change his ways in order to instruct the son how to be a kind killer. Neither did God have to change His ways to save Israel from being cruel users of the sword. Neither of them took life. They were only bent on saving it. And when that was no longer attainable, they tried to save it from as much suffering as possible.

Now suppose that one of the villagers, the man who had most ardently sought to convert the father, had happened to come down the lane as this session was in progress. From a distance too great to hear all that was being said, he beheld the father instructing the son in the use of firearms. What assumptions will this man make? What conclusions will he draw? He never had the spirit of the father and therefore could never understand it. Accordingly there was no possibility of his correctly assessing what the father was doing. Instead he would have interpreted what he saw as sure proof that the father had changed.

The onlooker would have lost no time in returning to his hunting companions to announce the father's conversion. He would have told them that he was now one of them—a gunman. He would have offered as proof to his incredulous listeners, what he had seen of the father actually instructing the boy in gun-handling. His report of the physical actions of the father were factually true, for this is exactly what he had seen the father doing, but the conclusions drawn from those evidences were the opposite from the truth.

Even as that father was misjudged, so God has likewise 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 have drawn 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, one like them—a destroyer. They could not be more mistaken.

Thankfully, God has not changed. He has not become like men. He is not a destroyer. Sin has not changed Him, neither have sinful men. When His character and work are correctly understood, it will be seen that He did nothing differently at the golden calf than He did when Adam and Eve elected to go their own way.

When they made that choice, God was faced with the same options which confronted the father when his son came home with a gun:

1. SEPARATE FROM THEM

He could have separated from them and left them to go their own way. How thankful we can be that He did not do this. Very quickly they would have perished, and we would have been deprived of existence and any opportunity for salvation.

2. USE FORCE AGAINST THEM

The use of force was another alternative, but this is unacceptable to God, for the only obedience He will accept is that which comes from a willing heart. If force was the answer, then Lucifer would never have sinned in the first case, for God would have compelled him not to.

3. IGNORE THE SIN

God could have chosen to ignore the sin, to simply pretend that it did not exist, but this could not be, for its intrusion into the universe affected too much. It had to be dealt with. It refused to be ignored.

4. ACT AS A SAVIOUR

In His great love and mercy, God does not leave man to himself to reap the worst consequences of what he has sown. To whatever extent man will accept it, God provides him with counsels and blessing so that his life is less severe and painful.

In doing this, God makes himself suspect of becoming participant in man's way, of having compromised His principles, and of having changed. What we are now striving to show from the clear evidences of God's Word, is that the Lord does not change, compromise, or participate in the least degree with man in his ways.

The illustration of the father who refused to become a hunter yet instructed his son in the safe use of the gun, should greatly assist in making this principle clear. God is not a legalist. He is a

very wonderful God, and it takes deep spiritual insight on the Christian's part to understand His character—to see how He can assist man in this way and yet not compromise himself or His principles in the least.

Even though He is misunderstood in doing these things to the point where He is charged with becoming a destroyer, God does not deviate from principle. It is more important for Him to do the right thing than to be understood in the doing of 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. At the same time those who have chosen a life of rebellion will be convinced of His righteousness and will confess it, even though it is too late for them to be saved.

From the very beginning God has worked this way, and He will do so to the last. Firstly, He does all in His power to save His creatures from going into sin. Then, when they do, He works equally hard to save them from the worst effects of what they have done. When they finally reject even this saving effort, there is nothing more He can do to save them, and they are left to perish.

The golden calf episode is not the easiest place in the biblical record to see this principle. There are others where it is more clearly revealed. Therefore it is better that they be studied first. Then a preparation will have been made for an enlightened re-assessment of God's part at the golden calf.

Dealing with Apostate Israel

The outstanding example is God's behavior before and after the Israelites went into Babylonian captivity.

Israel pursued a highly provocative course toward God in those years of apostasy, rebellion, and idolatry between the reigns of Solomon and Zedekiah. After an excellent beginning in Joshua's time, there had been the heartbreaking frustrations of Israel's oscillations from good to bad during the period of the judges.

However, in David's day the kingdom had reached a high point. The people were basking in the manifold blessings of the Lord, and everything was set for the most glorious reign of righteousness yet to be witnessed in the world. But instead, the people took the gifts of the Lord, transferred their trust from God to them, and entered into the worst period of their history up to that point.

It had cost heaven a great deal to bring Israel to this hour of promise and opportunity, only to see it all thrown away so despitely, selfishly, and irresponsibly.

Men, treated after this fashion, will reciprocate with destructive punishments. Such men, devoid of any true understanding of God's character, expect Him to react in the same manner. From the human point of view, God would never have been more justified than if He had done so when Israel pursued so heaven-daring and insulting a course as they did during that great apostasy.

But the Scriptures do not reveal any such disposition developing on God's part as the fateful years dragged on. Instead they reveal Him in an entirely different attitude. He is shown as a compassionate Saviour, not offended at their terrible defiance and ingratitude, but seeing instead the dreadful, self-imposed plight of His people. He can be seen working to deliver them from the power of the Babylonians and the sufferings which would follow their triumph. Hear Him speaking through the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 7

² Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the Lord!

³ Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.

⁴ Do not trust in these lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.

⁵ For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor,

⁶ If you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt,

⁷ Then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for ever and ever.

As these words were spoken, a mighty nation darkened any bright hopes of the world's future. Babylon was rising spectacularly in power, and nation after nation was succumbing. Israel, weakened by years of idol worship and sin, could not hope to resist the northern tide.

If God had possessed even the slightest traces of the spirit men think He has, His attitude would have been very different at this time. He would have declared to Israel,

“For centuries I have blessed, protected, and prospered you, and all I get in return is insult, disobedience, disrespect, and rejection. The might of Babylon is coming against you in the very near future. They will savage you, and you will deserve all you get and more. I wash my hands of you and leave you to your fate.”

But we do not find such an attitude on God's part. If we did, then God's love must be less than infinite. There would be a limit to it. It would go so far and then stop, to be replaced by a spirit of revengeful reciprocation. Such is the changing nature of man's love, but it is never the way of God's infinite love. Nothing can change that.

Striking evidence of its unchangeable qualities is given in the history of Israel during those dark days of apostasy. Seldom, if ever, have a people who have received so much from God, done more to provoke Him.

- They turned their backs on the sanctuary and worshiped the gods of the heathen.
- Baal became their lord.
- They offered their beautiful children as living sacrifices to Molech.

- They slaughtered each other, devoted their bodies to every species of licentiousness and debauchery, and robbed the poor, the widowed, and the fatherless.
- They did everything conceivable to offend and drive the Lord away.

Theirs is indeed a sad, terrible, and provocative record. But look at God's behavior. In the face of it all He could truthfully say,

Malachi 3

⁶ For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

His relationship to them was the same at the end of this trying experience as it had been at the beginning. It is true that at the end they were not recipient of His blessings to the same extent as when their relationship with Him had been so good, but that was not because the Lord had retaliated by withdrawing those blessings. It was only because they had shut themselves away from them.

Steps to Christ, p. 68:

In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.

As the flower turns to the sun, that the bright beams may aid in perfecting its beauty and symmetry, so should we turn to the Sun of Righteousness, that heaven's light may shine upon us, that our character may be developed into the likeness of Christ.

In these paragraphs, two illustrations of God's provision for man's physical needs are referred to—the air and the sun. Irrespective of man's behavior these blessings are as abundant on any one day as another. They flow with unrestricted power to all. If men choose to shut themselves away from these life-giving agencies, then they will suffer, but the blame can never be laid on God.

So Israel had no justification for any charge they might level at God for cutting off the blessings to themselves. They alone were responsible for putting themselves where they could not receive those benefits.

It was for this reason that the invasion of the Babylonians was possible. The Israelites had placed themselves outside the circle of God's protection thereby preventing Him from saving them. They were doing just what Pharaoh had done before them. As that proud ruler had teetered on the brink of self-destruction, God had sent Moses to plead with him to repent so that the calamities might be averted and he be saved from receiving the just punishment for his sins.

When Israel stood under the shadow of Nebuchadnezzar's power, they likewise were standing on the black edge of the abyss. God had not changed. For this reason He did for the Israelites what He had done for the Egyptians. He sent a prophet, Jeremiah, to plead with them and to assure them that if they would only repent, then they could remain in their own land forever. They would entirely escape the terrible calamities which they fully deserved and which were so imminent.

God did not call on them to endure appropriate punishments or a period of penance before they were reinstated in their land and in His favor. This is very difficult to accept, for man's philosophy demands that if a man sins, he pays for it. Therefore no matter how sincerely a man may repent or be changed in nature, human justice requires that he endure an appropriate punishment for his sin. Only when he has done this can he be deemed to have "paid his debt to society."

There is a double motivation behind this human disposition. One is the spirit of rendering evil for evil, the other is the impulse for self-protection and security. Accordingly courts of justice seek to measure an evil to the man equal to the evil he has committed, thus demonstrating that the human way is to render evil for evil. This satisfies the requirement for revenge.

At the same time the penalty is administered in such a way that the public is aware of it. An example is made of the wrongdoer which serves as a warning deterrent to other would-be offenders. By this means the hope is entertained that security will be guaranteed.

But this is not God's order. He does not mete out evil for evil. He returns good instead. Though this is the truth, it is exceedingly difficult for earthlings to grasp. So deeply ingrained is the concept of meeting evil with evil, that it cannot be understood how God can operate according to opposite principles.

Yet the case under study here verifies that this is His way. To prove otherwise will necessitate finding Scriptures which record God's demand that offenders endure a series of punishments before they can regain His favor. But such references are not to be found. The only chastisements they would suffer were those they had brought upon themselves but from which God had worked to save them.

The Prodigal Son

If any doubt this beautiful attribute of God, let him study the story of the prodigal son which teaches this truth. In this parable both of the sons exhibited the same belief that appropriate punishments must be endured before there could be a restoration. The erring son asked for it, and the other demanded it. The father, who directly represents God's behavior, would not hear of it. All that was needed was true repentance.

The elder brother was incensed when he heard of the immediate restoration of the sinner to the place from which he had gone. He thought of the prodigal's wasteful expenditure of health, money, time, and the father's reputation. He did not mind the repentance and the return, but he did object to the reinstatement without penance. If the younger brother had been compelled to live in the servants' quarters and then scrub the floors for a year or two before being slowly elevated to the place of a son, he would have been satisfied. But for him to come back, receive a

royal welcome, and be accorded the same place as he had left without being sentenced to an appropriate punishment, was too much for his human morality to accept.

But the father accepted that boy back into the household as if he had never sinned. Exactly so, God receives the sinner back and accepts him as though he had never sinned.

Steps to Christ, p. 62:

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.

Romans 8

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

When the full beauty of that Scripture opens to the mind, it will be seen that it, too, is saying that when the sinner repents, the Lord really does treat him as though he had never sinned at all.

This is the truth expressed through Jeremiah to Israel when the Lord said that if they would repent, they would stay in their own land forever. In other words He would treat them as though they had never sinned. No clearer view could be given of the unchanging nature of God. His blessings never cease to flow toward man. His attitude is always the same. When men turn away from Him, they place themselves out of touch with those blessings, but the moment they return, they find themselves back in the same position they were in when they left.

The Original Rebellion

In the great, original rebellion this truth is revealed with clarity and force. Lucifer had served God with unflinching devotion for what must have been a long period of time. Throughout it all he received the fullness of God's blessings and the joy of fellowship.

Eventually he lost his confidence in God and consequently entered into rebellion against Him. If he had gone no further, it would have been bad enough, but he added greater offense by enlisting as many as possible in the same spirit of disaffection. A threat was thus directed against the entire kingdom.

When this happens in an earthly dominion, the monarch speedily deals with the offender, making such an example of him as to effectively deter others from the same course. But the ways of men are not God's ways. Therefore no greater mistake can be made than to expect God to employ the same measures to deal with a given situation.

Consequently God did not relate himself to Lucifer by making an example of him, by administering disciplinary actions, or by changing His relationship toward him in any way. Instead all the loving agencies of heaven were put in motion to plead with him not to persist in a course which could only propel him into deadly ruin.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35:

But the warning, given in infinite love and mercy, only aroused a spirit of resistance.

God did not even demote the covering cherub. He did not take this type of action no matter how far the bright one departed from Him. The initial vacating of his position and later of heaven itself, was Lucifer's own action. The confirmation of this can be obtained by reading through the chapter from which the above statement is taken.

In a loving effort to save both Lucifer and the angels who were coming under his influence,

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 36:

The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son, and show the relation He sustained to all created beings.

That was a marvelous sermon on the divine order and organization in which was revealed the love of God toward every one of His creatures. They were brought to see that the position occupied by Christ was one of great personal sacrifice, made for their good from a heart warmed by infinite love and wisdom.

Lucifer came close to yielding, but the strange, fierce conflict raged within him until self and pride obtained the mastery. It was then that he left his place in the throne room of God. God did not dismiss him and require his departure. Lucifer took himself away as it is written,

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 37:

Leaving his place in the immediate presence of the Father, Lucifer went forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels.

Now the rebellion had really started. Corruption was solidly setting in and the endangering of God's kingdom was well under way. This was no secret to God. He knew the very thoughts in Lucifer's mind, how he was now totally committed to his course, and that he would go on and on to perdition. Even now God would not take any action requiring force. He would use only the outreach of saving love to draw His much-loved creature back from destruction.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 39:

A compassionate Creator, in yearning pity for Lucifer and his followers, was seeking to draw them back from the abyss of ruin into which they were about to plunge.

The result of this was that he came close to the point of yielding and coming back to God. Quite some time elapsed, and he did a tremendous amount of damage in God's kingdom. From the human point of view he deserved a great deal of punishment, but

Though he had left his position as covering cherub, yet if he had been willing to return to God, acknowledging the Creator's wisdom, and satisfied to fill the place appointed him in God's great plan, he would have been reinstated in his office.

Therefore when Christ revealed His Father in the parable of the returning prodigal, He was not simply telling what the Father would do to the repentant. He was confirming what He had always done. What Jesus told of the father's attitude toward the prodigal son is exactly how God related himself to Lucifer. The only difference is that the prodigal son was repentant; Lucifer was not.

The Bible requires two or three witnesses to confirm any truth as it is written,

Matthew 18

¹⁶ ...by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

Here are the three needed witnesses to confirm this truth about God's character. The case of Lucifer, the experience of the Israelites as they faced Babylonian oppression, and the parable of the prodigal son all confirm that God does not administer arbitrary punishments to sinners but seeks to save them from sin and its consequences. If they will only repent and return to the circle of His blessings, then they will be accepted back as if they had never sinned.

But those who do not really believe that God's love is infinite and that He never changes by so much as a hair's breadth, will argue that there was a limit to His patience, and when that was exhausted as in Lucifer's case, He turned to active warfare to run him out of heaven. Their proof text is:

Revelation 12

⁷ And war broke out in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought,

⁸ But they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any more.

⁹ So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

To millions these words have pictured an intense physical struggle between the forces loyal to heaven and the rebels. It has been seen as a conflict involving the use of physical power versus physical power. Artists have portrayed Christ at the head of hordes of shining angels standing with an unsheathed sword before which Lucifer is plunging downwards into the darkness of empty space.

But this is a superficial and inaccurate view of the nature of that struggle. It is a view based upon the belief that God's behavior is identical to man's. There was war in heaven, it is true, but not war as men fight. Satan was cast out, but according to God's way, not man's.

The Desire of Ages, p. 759:

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. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power.

In that struggle then, God did not use force. This weapon is never found in His kingdom but only in that of Satan's. Therefore it was by another way that Satan was cast out of heaven, never to return. God fought with none other than the weapons consistent with His kingdom. It is difficult for sinful man to understand the nature of those weapons, for they are so foreign to his experience and nature.

The struggle in heaven was a very real one nonetheless. It was war—a total effort on Satan's part to change the entire structure of heaven's order and organization. In order to succeed he needed to convert the angels' allegiance away from God to himself. At that time the only sword Satan could use was that of deception, against which God used only the weapon of truth.

The battle raged on over a considerable time span until the point was reached where the devil had penetrated as far as he could. Each angel had made his choice with sufficient numbers standing for the truth to enable God to maintain His position as Protector of the heavenly hosts. With God's continued presence assured, there was no hope of the proposed new order being established. The old and proven order would remain.

But Satan's deformation had brought him into such disharmony with those principles that he found it impossible to remain where they continued to operate. To him, heaven had become a place that was foreign, unacceptable, and unendurable, and he could not leave it quickly enough.

It was the truth of God which drove him out, not the use of any kind of physical force. The same reason for Satan's leaving heaven is the reason why the wicked would never be happy if they were to return there. They would not be able to tolerate the place and would want to leave it as soon as possible. They would be driven out by their sheer unfitness to remain.

The Great Controversy, p. 542-543:

Could those whose lives have been spent in rebellion against God be suddenly transported to heaven, and witness the high, the holy state of perfection that ever exists there,—every soul filled with love, every countenance beaming with joy, enrapturing music in melodious strains rising in honor of God and the Lamb, and ceaseless streams of light flowing upon the redeemed from the face of Him who sits upon the throne,—could those whose hearts are filled with hatred of God, of truth and holiness, mingle with the heavenly throng and join their songs of praise? Could they endure the glory of God and the Lamb?

No, no; years of probation were granted them, that they might form characters for heaven; but they have never trained the mind to love purity; they have never learned the language of heaven, and now it is too late. 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 wel-

come 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.

Confirmation of this is already available. There are people who have gone so far in their rejection of the gospel that they find the society of true Christians intolerable to them. They desire only to leave such society, for they are happier elsewhere.

In like manner Satan's rejection of the ways and principles of God in exchange for other pursuits, so worked changes in him that he could no longer endure heaven's holy atmosphere. Being there was such torture to his deranged nature that he had to go, and go he did.

As Pharaoh's heart was hardened by his continual resistance to God's efforts to save him, so Lucifer's whole being was warped by his fighting off God's loving efforts to draw him and his followers back from the abyss into which their steps were surely taking them. This is how Satan was driven from heaven, not by God physically driving him out, but by His efforts to save him.

There is much more which could be written on Satan's expulsion from Paradise. Many more proofs could be supplied from Scripture to enlarge the point made here, but for now we will pass on and leave further discussion of this until we come to the falling of the seven last plagues and the Battle of Armageddon. That final struggle is simply the culmination of the war which began in heaven and has continued ever since. God and Satan will still be using the same weapons in the last confrontation as they did at first, and the outcome will be the same. Therefore a clear understanding of what is to happen then will illuminate what took place in the past.

From God's recorded behavior toward Lucifer and apostate Israel and as further described in the parable of the prodigal son, it is obvious that God's behavior toward man is vastly different

from man's behavior toward his fellowmen. With man there must always be the exacting of a penalty; the enduring of a punishment no matter how penitent and changed the criminal may become. Men are not satisfied until the malefactor has "paid his debt to society."

But if Lucifer had repented of his evil course, he would have been reinstated in his office as if he had never sinned. Likewise if Israel had repented and turned away from idol worship and all the licentiousness and evil which goes with it, they would have been delivered from the Assyrians and the Babylonians as if they had never sinned. The certainty of this is contained in the Word of God when He told them through Jeremiah, already quoted in this chapter, that this is the way it would be.

That these were not mere words is proven by the fact that when He was given the opportunity to carry out His desires, He surely did so. The mighty Sennacherib marched victoriously against the whole idol-worshipping world. The ten tribes of Israel fell before him, and he intended to add Judah as a further prize to his conquests.

But a king mounted the throne who believed God. Hezekiah came to power after a succession of very wicked and idolatrous rulers. The land had been filled with images and the sanctuary was in a sorry state.

Over the whole land loomed the dark shadow of Assyrian global conquest demanding that instant action be taken to meet the threat. Many a man would have concentrated on the formation of military preparedness by gathering, equipping, and training the largest army possible in the shortest time. The restoration of the sanctuary and the obliteration of the images could wait till a later date.

But not this king. Firstly he set to work to cleanse and restore the sanctuary and its services. With his whole heart he turned to the Lord and put his trust there. He claimed the promise that they would be protected and saved in their own land, and they were.

God dismissed the Assyrian threat with such totality that it never assailed Judah again.

Study the story with care and see how the Lord did not demand that they pay their debt to Him. He did not require a long period of proving before He would act on their behalf. As soon as they repented, He stepped back into His rightful place as their Protector and Saviour and delivered them as if they had never sinned.

Had Zedekiah been a king of Hezekiah's character, then Nebuchadnezzar would never have had any hope of overcoming the Israelites. The King of Heaven sent His prophet Jeremiah to him with the assurance that if he would repent, then the Lord would work for him as if he had never sinned at all. Zedekiah also had proof of this fact in the history of Judah's deliverance from Sennacherib. But despite all of this the king elected to reject God's counsels and go his own way. This frustrated any hope of God doing what His loving heart longed to do, namely, save them from the cruel oppressor.

What the Lord would have done for Lucifer and Zedekiah, He did do for good king Hezekiah and for many others who have believed Him. These experiences are the proof that the portrayal of God rendered in the parable of the prodigal son, is the truth. Satan is desperate in his fear 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 machinations. 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. Then the devil leads the soul into sin so terrible that the victim knows he can never serve out the sentence and is thus discouraged from ever seeking God.

Let God's wonderful willingness to forgive and restore Israel in the face of their sad and desperate apostasy, be to every man and woman an inspiring encouragement to come back to the God of mercy and light. God says to the sinner,

Isaiah 44

²² I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins.

Jeremiah 31

³⁴ I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Isaiah 55

⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Jeremiah 50

²⁰ In those days and in that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, but there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, but they shall not be found.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 206:

What assurance here, of God's willingness to receive the repenting sinner! Have you, reader, chosen your own way? Have you wandered far from God? Have you sought to feast upon the fruits of transgression, only to find them turn to ashes upon your lips? And now, your substance spent, your life-plans thwarted, and your hopes dead, do you sit alone and desolate? Now that voice which has long been speaking to your heart but to which you would not listen comes to you distinct and clear,

Micah 2

¹⁰ Arise, and depart; for this is not your rest; because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction.

Return to your Father's house. He invites you, saying,

Isaiah 44

²² Return unto me; for I have redeemed you.

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,

John 6

³⁷ Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out.

Tell the enemy that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Make the prayer of David your own,

Psalm 51

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

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. His ear is open to the cry of the contrite soul. The very first reaching out of the heart after God is known to Him. 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. Even before the prayer is uttered or the yearning of the heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working upon the human soul.

Those who rejoice in deliverance from the old Satan-inspired concepts of God will know Him as He is presented in the parable of the prodigal son. They will have the faith and courage to bring their sins for pardon and cleansing and to thus stand before Him as if they had never sinned.

These are they in whom true love for God will be found, and from whom a stream of dedicated service will flow. Such will inhabit the universe throughout eternity to experience the fullness of eternal joys and pleasures.

There is small wonder then that heaven will be a place of perfect bliss and security.

32. God Goes the Second Mile

WE ARE still seeking Bible evidence to throw sufficient light on the incident at the golden calf to enable us to clearly see that God did not violate one principle of His character there.

Because for so long we have viewed this in the wrong light, and because we are so prone to interpret God's ways as being the same as men's, then it is necessary to examine a lot of evidence to entirely clarify the point.

When the light of the Word of God shines with force and clarity on the situation, it will be seen that not only was God still acting as a Saviour at the golden calf slaughter, but that He has also been seriously misunderstood in that role. That which was the revelation of Him as the Saviour has been interpreted as the manifestation of Him as a destroyer or executioner.

The truth being developed here is that Israel elected to reject God's way when they took up the sword. Not only had the Lord not given this weapon to them, but He had done all in His power short of direct compulsion to prevent them from taking it up. Despite those loving efforts to save them from that terrible fate, they had chosen it, and the Lord could only respect that choice. He never makes the choice of how we shall act. He warns and teaches us, but the choice remains ours. There is no compulsion in God's relation to His creatures.

Once they had made that choice, then by it they had instituted their way in place of God's way. It is impossible for both the way of God and of man to operate within a society at the same time. It can be only one or the other, never both. So, when they elected to institute their way in place of God's, then God's methods could not be used in dealing with the rebellion at Sinai. Therefore what happened at Mt. Sinai was not after the order of God. It was the application of the procedures which Israel had instituted by adding the sword to their way of life. The only part God filled was

to apply some restraint and guidance to their use of it to minimize its evil effects.

What complicates the problem and makes it difficult for many to understand God's behavior, is that Israel was still reckoned as His people. Therefore, it is reasoned, if God was still their leader and, from that position, instructed them to execute the rebellious, then He was responsible for the slaughter. If this is correct reasoning, then it can only be concluded that destruction of the enemy was the divinely instituted solution to the problem. Rebellion, therefore, was to be overcome by force.

Such reasoning will satisfy the superficial thinker to whom serious, clashing contradictions in the Bible can be rationalized away, but it will not satisfy the truly spiritual student who knows that there can be no real contradictions in God's Word. He will search with faith-filled, intensive dedication until the problem is resolved according to Bible principles.

Only Partial Dependence

What is overlooked is that the Israelites were God's people only to whatever extent He was permitted by them to be their Sovereign. This way of relating to God is a sad tragedy of human history. Men and movements are prepared to obey God's orders and accept new revelations of truth up to a point, but most people and every movement in history have come to some point under God's leadership where they would not go further unless they could introduce some of their ways in the place of God's. So it was with Israel.

While in large areas they retained God as their leader, followed His ways, and served Him fully, there were others where they took His work to themselves. For instance, they still followed the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night; they looked upon themselves as the custodians of His law; respected the Sabbath; and continued very faithfully in the services of the sanctuary.

But, by taking up the sword, they had deprived the Lord of His position as their defender and protector from enemies within and without. While it is true that they expected God to assist them in this work, it does not alter the fact that they were doing it in His stead and according to their own human principles. Therefore, their actions as such, were not the revelation of God's character but of their own. It was the manifestation of the outworking of such wicked unbelief which led them to have more confidence in their own power to protect themselves than in God's.

Yet, God did something in this domain where they had taken the work to themselves. Inasmuch as His every act is a revelation of His character, then God revealed himself by what He did in directing the Levites to cut down the rebels. Unfortunately the majority have seen His actions in a very different light from reality and consequently have retained an erroneous concept of His character.

It must be recognized that God is a Saviour. He had worked intensely to save them from taking the sword in the first place, but when they spitefully did so, then the best He could do was to give counsels designed to save them from the worst consequences of their choice. They were not compelled to obey those counsels, but they were well-advised to do so if they wished to save themselves from terrible evils.

It is interesting to note the perversity of humanity which will refuse to obey God in some things and yet implicitly follow His guidance in others. Thus while Israel did not have the faith to leave their protection to God, they were prepared to follow to the letter His directions in dealing with crime in the camp.

Into Captivity

It is doubtful that a better illustration of God's saving efforts exists than is found in the relationship of God to the Israelites when they went into captivity.

The evidence presented in the previous chapter shows that right up until Israel was carried into Babylon, the Lord did His best to save them from it:

- He sent messages of warning and entreaty.
- He assured them that if they would only repent, then, even at the last moment, they would be delivered as if they had never sinned and would be kept safely and prosperously in their own land.
- He did not show the least trace of vindictiveness or desire to retaliate.
- He did not demand that they serve out a sentence of punishment for their evil deeds.

But they would neither heed nor repent. Because they would not, the Lord could not save them from that captivity. So they became captives. Their going into captivity effectively terminated God's efforts to save them from it.

But this did not mean that the Lord ceased to be a Saviour to them. Certainly He could no longer save them from going into captivity, for that possibility was past. But He could save them from the worst effects of that which they had chosen, and this is what He did.

He acted exactly as the father did in the story told in an earlier chapter. When he could not save his son from taking the gun, he offered him instruction designed to save both him and the creatures he would hunt, from the worst effects of that choice.

The record of God's doing this is beautifully recorded in the Scriptures. Not only is He revealed there as an unchanging and ever-loving Saviour, but, by contrast, the devil is shown to be the destroyer. The evil one had worked incessantly to bring Israel into captivity and had succeeded. Then, when he got them there, he worked with equal frenzy to make that captivity as destructive to their physical and spiritual well-being as possible. Thus we find

God and Satan working in exactly the opposite way as the following statement declares.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 113:

The Saviour in His miracles revealed the power that is continually at work in man's behalf, to sustain and to heal him. Through the agencies of nature, God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive, to build up and restore us. 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.

This truth is clearly portrayed in the inspired record of the way in which Satan and God related themselves to the people who had been carried captive into Babylon.

Prophets and Kings, p. 440-442:

Zedekiah at the beginning of his reign was trusted fully by the king of Babylon and had as a tried counselor the prophet Jeremiah. By pursuing an honorable course toward the Babylonians and by paying heed to the messages from the Lord through Jeremiah, he could have kept the respect of many in high authority and have had opportunity to communicate to them a knowledge of the true God. Thus the captive exiles already in Babylon would have been placed on vantage ground and granted many liberties; the name of God would have been honored far and wide; and those that remained in the land of Judah would have been spared the terrible calamities that finally came upon them.

Through Jeremiah, Zedekiah and all Judah, including those taken to Babylon, were counseled to submit quietly to the temporary rule of their conquerors. It was especially important that those in captivity should seek the peace of the land into which they had been carried. This, however, was contrary to the inclination of the human heart; and Satan, taking advantage of the circumstances, caused false prophets to arise among the people, both in Jerusalem and in Babylon, who declared that the yoke of

bondage would soon be broken and the former prestige of the nation restored.

The heeding of such flattering prophecies would have led to fatal moves on the part of the king and the exiles, and would have frustrated the merciful designs of God in their behalf. Lest an insurrection be incited and great suffering ensue, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to meet the crisis without delay, by warning the king of Judah of the sure consequence of rebellion. The captives also were admonished, by written communications, not to be deluded into believing their deliverance near.

Jeremiah 29

⁸ Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, [he urged].

In this connection mention was made of the Lord's purpose to restore Israel at the close of the seventy years of captivity foretold by His messengers.

With what tender compassion did God inform His captive people of His plans for Israel! He knew that should they be persuaded by false prophets to look for a speedy deliverance, their position in Babylon would be made very difficult. Any demonstration or insurrection on their part would awaken the vigilance and severity of the Chaldean authorities and would lead to a further restriction of their liberties. Suffering and disaster would result. He desired them to submit quietly to their fate and make their servitude as pleasant as possible; and His counsel to them was:

⁵ Build houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;

⁷ And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall you have peace.

How clearly and wonderfully God's behavior is revealed in this story in contrast to Satan's. By their stubborn rejection of God's efforts to save them from captivity, the Israelites had brought themselves into subjection to Babylon. Satan was delighted, for this was just what he desired. But it was not all he determined to bring upon them. He planned their total subjugation and extermi-

nation so that there would be no possibility of the appearance of the royal seed, Jesus Christ.

He inspired false prophets to utter predictions which would foster a spirit of unrest, rebellion, and insurrection among the captives. This could only madden the king of Babylon and particularly so as he had extended mercies to those under his now enlarged dominion. He would naturally expect a response of gratitude from those whom he had treated so well, but when they returned only conspiracy, rebellion, and strife in exchange for the good things he had afforded them, he was roused to anger. He was left with no choice but to deal very harshly with them.

Satan was greatly assisted in his planning by the natural inclination of the human heart. They wanted their freedom back. Foolishness had taken the place of wisdom, and rashness the place of discretion. In the end, despite God's loving efforts to save them from going into still deeper troubles, the devil did succeed with the result that terrible calamities befell them at the hands of the Babylonians.

So, while Satan was working to make their captivity as unpleasant and terrible as possible, the Lord sent Jeremiah with messages to the people which, if heeded, would make their enforced stay in that foreign land "as pleasant as possible." He also specifically warned them against heeding the messages from these professed prophets of the Lord. Thus, while Satan was working to effect the destruction of those who deserved it, the Lord was striving to deliver them.

Hardly a more beautiful revelation of God's character can be given than this. Here was a people who for centuries had done everything possible to provoke God into bitter retaliation. Between the death of David and the Babylonian captivity almost four hundred years had passed by. They were years marked with the very worst in rebellious apostasy.

The sanctuary was desecrated, the daily taken away, the abomination of desolation set up, and the altars of Baal were erected

throughout the land. They gave offerings to a pagan goddess, sacrificed their children in the hideous ceremony where babies were burned alive, resorted to witchcraft, wizards, and all kinds of spiritualism, took every gift which the Lord had given them and turned it to abuse and misuse, and were a depraved, insolent, and rebellious people who turned from the God who had called and blessed them and made a mockery of His word.

If ever a being was justified in taking vengeance on a people, God was. If He had risen up in terrible anger and destroyed them all, none would have blamed Him or been surprised at His doing so. The least we would expect Him to do would be to withdraw all further help so they would suffer as much as possible and thereby at last, hopefully learn their lesson.

But for God to have taken this course would have necessitated His changing from a being of infinite love to one with a spirit of revenge. This is not the God we serve. He testifies of himself:

Malachi 3

⁶ For I am the Lord, I do not change, therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

One thing must be abundantly clear from this story, and it is this. Had the Lord changed in the least degree in His attitude and actions toward those punishment-deserving people, then they would most certainly have been consumed. But there was no change.

Before they went into captivity, there was the Lord, the Saviour, doing all in His power to convince them of the folly of their course and seeking to draw them back from the pit into which they were sinking. And when, despite His wonderful efforts for them, they did descend into that pit, then He did not stop being the Saviour. True, He could no longer save them from going into the pit, for they had now gone in, but He could give them counsel that would save them from the worst conditions which could befall them while in that pit.

Thus the revelation of God's works in this story is the revelation of an unchanging God who, at every step of the way, performed only one work—that of a Saviour. The actual nature of the saving work done differed according to necessity, but the spirit and principle behind it were unchanging.

Once this view of God is grasped and understood, then the key has been obtained which will perfectly explain the true nature of the command to the Levites to go and destroy all those who worshiped at the golden calf.

However, before the application is fully made to the situation back there, let this story be developed a little further. Even though the Lord's behavior toward apostate Israel is sufficient evidence to make the point that God acts out only the role of a Saviour, yet even more evidence is provided.

Care for Other Nations

This time, though in the same story, it concerns other people outside the family of Israel. They were the people of Edom, Moab, Tyre, and other nations.

Of all the people in the ancient world, none had been more committed to an aggressive and hostile war against God and His cause than these people. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, the Moabites of Lot, but leading encyclopedias such as *The Britannica*, are unable to give any origin to the people of Tyre. However in *Ezekiel 28*, the wickedness of the king of Tyre was so great that he was spoken of as if he were the Devil himself.

While we may be able to accept the idea that God could retain some favor toward the Jews, we cannot think of any such thing being still available for the Moabites, Edomites, and the people of Tyre. We would not expect that God would act towards them as a Saviour too.

Yet the Lord made no distinction between them and the Israelites. When they too were in great danger because of their willingness to listen to the voice of Satan and their own wretched

human desires, God sent them the same message He had given to His own people. Through Jeremiah He warned them not to resist the king of Babylon, for their cause was hopeless. He told them that the best thing was to be discreet and cooperative so that they might be saved undue suffering and further loss.

God did not go so far as to send Jeremiah to those nations, for they had long since made it clear that neither God nor His servants were welcome among them. But when ambassadors from those lands visited the king of Judah to discuss the possibility of combined revolt against Nebuchadnezzar, they then placed themselves where the Lord could give them a message. God made use of the opportunity to stretch out a hand to save them.

Prophets and Kings, p. 442-444:

From the first, Jeremiah had followed a consistent course in counseling submission to the Babylonians. This counsel was given not only to Judah, but to many of the surrounding nations. In the earlier portion of Zedekiah's reign, ambassadors from the rulers of Edom, Moab, Tyre, and other nations visited the king of Judah to learn whether in his judgment the time was opportune for a united revolt and whether he would join them in battling against the king of Babylon. While these ambassadors were awaiting a response, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying,

Jeremiah 27

² Make bonds and yokes, and put them upon your neck,

³ And send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah.

Jeremiah was commanded to instruct the ambassadors to inform their rulers that God had given them all into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and that they were to...

⁷ ...serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come.

The ambassadors were further instructed to declare to their rulers that if they refused to serve the Babylonian king they should be punished "with the sword, and with the famine, and

with the pestilence” till they were consumed. Especially were they to turn from the teaching of false prophets who might counsel otherwise.

Jeremiah 27

⁹ Hearken not to your prophets, [the Lord declared,] nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, You shall not serve the king of Babylon:

¹⁰ For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and you should perish.

¹¹ But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, says the Lord; and they shall till it, and dwell therein.

The lightest punishment that a merciful God could inflict upon so rebellious a people was submission to the rule of Babylon, but if they warred against this decree of servitude they were to feel the full rigor of His chastisement.

The amazement of the assembled council of nations knew no bounds when Jeremiah, carrying the yoke of subjection about his neck, made known to them the will of God. Against determined opposition Jeremiah stood firmly for the policy of submission.

Here is the revelation of God the Saviour at work. This story shows with great clarity the contrast between Satan’s work as the destroyer and God’s work as the restorer. It is a thing of beauty and wonder that the Lord would do this for Israel, but an even greater wonder that He would do it for the people of Tyre, Edom, and Moab.

Here it is shown that the behavior of God and Christ is indeed identical. Jesus both taught and lived the principle of loving your enemies, going the second mile, and of doing good forever to those who have done evil to you. God had gone the first mile by doing His very best to save them from going into captivity. Then, when they did, in spite of His efforts for them, He went the second mile by giving them guidance on how they could make their captivity as pleasant as possible.

But their rebellious hearts were no more prepared to accept God's saving efforts when He went the second mile with them than when He was going the first. Thus they deprived God of any hope of saving them from their own foolish selves. The disasters which befell them were not from God, but from the natural reactions of those to whom they should have been subservient. They sowed the seed, and they reaped the harvest. All that happened to them was the inevitable outworking of their own course of action. They provided the cause and thereby determined the effect.

The tragedy was that they did not understand God's character. Instead of seeing in those loving efforts a great work of salvation springing from a heart of infinite, unfathomable love, they saw Jeremiah as being in league with the Babylonian king and openly accused him of this.

If reference is made back to the story of the father, the son, and the huntsmen, it will be remembered that when the neighbor looked over the fence and saw the father acting out the role of a saviour to his son and all the wild creatures whom he would hunt, the neighbor completely misunderstood the father's actions. He saw him as a hunter in spirit, just like the rest of them, instead of seeing that he had not changed one bit.

This is just the problem people have with God in the Old Testament. Men have consistently misunderstood what He really did and see Him as doing something entirely different. This is why He has come to be looked upon as a God of terrible destruction.

But He is not. Back there He behaved toward His people and others always and only as Christ did in the New Testament. He loved His enemies, blessed those who cursed and despitefully used Him, and went the second mile. He was ever and only the Saviour to all.

When destruction came upon them, it was only because they had rejected His efforts to save them, leaving no alternative. Thus God never determined their punishment and never personally exercised His power to administer it.

The Golden Calf

Now that this principle of God's workings has been seen in the experience of Jeremiah with the last king of Judah and the ambassadors of the other nations, there should be no further problem in seeing what the Lord really did back in the days of the golden calf. In that situation God went the second mile as surely as He did in Israel's captivity to Babylon. But whereas Zedekiah and the surrounding nations would not accept God's counsel during the second mile, the Israelites at Mount Sinai did.

As has already been shown, God's efforts during the first mile back in Moses day were directed at saving them from taking the sword. He used various means to speak to them. There was:

- The illustrious witness of Jacob's deliverance,
- Moses' failure to deliver Israel by the sword,
- The fact that the Egyptians did not provide them with weapons, and
- The fact that God did not instruct them to ask for any,
- And then the marvelous deliverance at the Red Sea.

Through all of these the Lord told them as plainly as it could ever be told, that they not only should not take the sword, but that they would never need it while they walked in His ways.

But, while He could teach the truth of His way both by declaration and demonstration, He would 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 on the shore of the Red Sea, in that moment school was ended and the examination began. Which would they choose? Would the Lord's saving efforts indeed prove the effective means of keeping them from taking up the sword?

We wish that this had been so, but the sad record of history is that they took up the sword. There is no direct statement to say that they did this right there on the shores of the Red Sea, but there are statements which prove that just before this time they

were still an unarmed people, while shortly after that we find them locked in physical combat with the Amalekites.

The exact point of time is not the most important item in this discussion. The vital factor is that after all God's efforts to save them from taking the weapons of destruction, they did choose to take them. When they did that, they chose to institute man's way in place of God's. This fact is critical in understanding God's character in this situation.

God did not institute an alternative to His first and best procedure. He does not operate after this fashion, for His way is so perfect that it requires no provisions for failure. In fact, to supply any secondary system would be to admit that the first was faulty and therefore needed adjusting. Neither God nor His principles have ever failed or appeared in any way defective. The problem lies only in the refusal of some of His creatures to abide by them.

Whenever this happens, they replace His perfect codes with their destructive ones. Therefore on every occasion when the sword was used in Israel, it was man acting in man's way, not the carrying out of an alternative which God was obliged to accept because His way of perfection had failed. Man was the destroyer. God had not compromised in the least. With undeviating consistency, He had continued His eternal work of being the Saviour.

But what makes people think God has changed is their misunderstanding of His action in going the second mile, the further work of salvation. That which in actuality was God's continued effort to save, is viewed all too often as His turning into a destroyer. No greater misconstruction of God's acts could be imagined.

When Israel took the sword, the Lord was left with different alternative courses of action. He could simply have said that He would walk with them no more, that they were now on their own, and what happened to them was entirely their own fault. This was the same course open to Him in the Garden of Eden. There, He could have argued that He had given them everything,

including adequate warnings of the cost of disobedience. Having shown their ingratitude, they were undeserving of any further help from Him so He would have been entirely justified if He had left them to their fate. This is how He could have chosen to act.

Anyone who cares to reflect upon the consequences to the human family of God's having made that choice, can breathe a deep sigh of relief that He did not choose that way. Very speedily the human family would have passed out of existence. There would have been no salvation for any of us.

Likewise, if the Lord had chosen this when Israel took the sword, how speedily that nation would have been destroyed. Firstly, they would have fought with their weapons among themselves. Secondly, they were no match for the highly trained and experienced Canaanites who, as Satan's allies, longed for nothing so much as to remove Israel from the face of the earth. For God to have walked out on the Israelites would have committed them to certain death.

If the Israelites had elected to completely go their own way, then God would have had no choice but to leave them to themselves with all the consequences. But in many things they were still prepared to go God's way. They accepted the Sabbath institution, the sanctuary service, the general leadership of God, the provision of their daily bread, and even His counsels on how to best use their swords.

Therefore, in the very nature of His character, God could not leave them because they had departed from His ways in one thing or even in a number of things. He would stay with them, as with any man, while there was still some place where He could bless and heal them. He will never leave nor forsake us. It is the human who leaves and forsakes God. When God and humanity become separated, it is only because humanity has gone away from Him, never He from them.

As a mother will not reject its young,
so the Lord will not reject His people,
even though they have introduced their own ways into His work.



The second option was to use force which God would not do. He gave them freedom and allowed them their choices even when they were the wrong ones.

The third option was for God to simply ignore the people's sin and pretend that it had not happened. But He certainly could not do this. Sin demands attention. It imposes a situation which cannot be left unattended. To ignore sin is to condone it, or excuse it, or to admit that there is no answer to it. It is to suggest that if you pretend it is not there, the wretched nightmare will simply fade away.

This leaves the fourth possibility. God would remain with His people to whatever extent they would have Him in their midst. He would lead, protect, forgive, bless, and teach them. In those areas where they had chosen their own way, He would offer them counsels which, if received and obeyed, would save them from the worst effects of what they had chosen. In the meantime they might be led to see the error of choosing their own course of action and return entirely to the Lord's way.

This is what God did in the incident of the golden calf and in all the conquests and slaughters in the land of Canaan. What they did in all this was their doing not His. They had established their own codes, and God respected the freedom of choice He had given them to have it thus.

But He could and did counsel them on how they could operate in their own way without its being the worst of that way. This was love. This was returning good for evil. This is going the second mile.



33. The Consistency of God

HAVING considered the general principles which underlie God's behavior at the golden calf incident, the time has come to look at this and other specific incidents in detail. One of the great characteristics which sets God apart from all others is His utter consistency and total reliability.

James 1

¹⁷ [He is] the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

With such a God there can be no capriciousness, no acting from the motivation of self-interest, no disregard of the principles involved in the law, no seeking to justify certain means because of a desired end result.

In the history of Israel and of mankind in general, there are two different kinds of situations for dealing with sin:

1. God Alone is the Administrator

God alone is in the position of leadership, so that the sole responsibility of dealing with the problem rests with Him. Should the sinners be unrepentant, then the Lord simply leaves them to themselves to reap that which they have sown. They then perish at the hands of whatever calamity is brooding over the situation, be it fire, earthquake, pestilence, invaders, or plagues. Examples of these are:

- the flood,
- the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,
- the plagues of Egypt,
- the overwhelming of the Egyptians in the Red Sea,
- the death of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram,
- the attack by the serpents in the wilderness,
- the death of Sennacherib's army,
- the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD,

- the coming plagues, and
- the final cleansing of this earth.

None of these calamities befall the children of men until every possible avenue of divine mercy has been exhausted, and there is nothing more that men will let God do for them.

2. Man Is the Administrator

Another situation exists when man has replaced God with himself as the determiner of his fate, the administrator of his own affairs, and has established himself as the investigator, judge, and executioner of those who sin against him. Because God has given the right of choice to His creatures and will never use compulsion, He has no choice other than to let them have their own way and manage their own institutions.

However, He knows that man, left to himself, is a very foolish and cruel administrator who will unwisely adopt a course that brings fearful consequences. The Lord was in a position to see this and to offer counsels which the Bible calls “commands.” If heeded, these enable man to take actions that would save him from the worst effects of his chosen course. Examples of these are:

- the punishments at the golden calf,
- the conquest of Canaan,
- the wars of David and subsequent kings,
- the captivity in Babylon,
- and such like.

The Golden Calf Incident

Let an examination now be made of these principles in respect to the golden calf incident. Israel had broken the law in the worst way. They had made another god in place of the true God, thus separating themselves from Him entirely. They had entered into the licentious practices of the heathen until they had become utterly debauched and depraved.

They could not so wantonly and defiantly break God's law without sowing seeds which, in this case, would bring a very speedy harvest. The harvest would not be something the Lord imposed upon them. It would be the simple and natural outworking of the breaking of the law.

Those who, at the base of Sinai, worshiped at the golden calf, laid themselves open to terrible consequences. At first they joined in a unified revelry which they thoroughly enjoyed. It gave that wild stimulation, feverish excitement, and heady intoxication so loved by the human.

But the more intense the involvement, the greater the reaction when the feeling was replaced by spent physical and emotional powers. Destitute of the restraining Spirit of God yet desperately in need of Him to quiet and control jaded nerves and ugly feelings, there was nothing to stop the outbreak of bitter strife in the camp. It is a characteristic of the heathen that their revelries are usually succeeded by intense conflicts among themselves.

Squabbles would break out and turn into small fights in which a few would be killed. Then the relatives of the dead would engage in a vendetta of revenge. More would be slain calling for still further retaliation until it would escalate into a destructive outburst so great as to threaten to wipe out the entire encampment.

Their ever-vigilant enemies would recognize the opportunity to launch a surprise attack on the confused mass, and the nation would be decimated. Even if they had been spared from destruction by rallying to meet a common foe, the longer the unrepentant lived, the more deeply steeped in rebellion they would become. They would in turn spread the same deadly poison to others so that the outgrowth of the sin at Sinai would have been terrible indeed. In the following paragraph is outlined something of the extent of these terrible outworkings.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 325-326

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 a 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.

These then are the terrible things which would have come upon the transgressors themselves, the Israelites as a nation, and the world in general, if God had done nothing for them. The worst possible results would have eventuated.

The love of God, that marvelous, infinite, and unchangeable love, drove Him to tell them how they could save themselves from so terrible a fate. He could no longer solve the problem for them in His own way, for they had taken over the work themselves, but they could save themselves from the worst effects of their own choice by heeding His counsels.

Whether they followed those counsels or not was as much a matter of their own choice as when they were faced with the alternative of leaving the swords with the dead Egyptians or of appropriating them. There they had elected to take the wrong course by which they had supplanted God as their Protector. But,

while not prepared to obey Him in this area, they were not rendered incapable of accepting His counsels in other matters. They could, if they would, adhere to His directions outlining how they could minimize the evil they had chosen.

As they faced the crisis occasioned by the worshiping of the golden calf, they were confronted with two possibilities:

1. If they did not take some action, millions would perish.
2. If they followed the Lord's suggestions, then only a few would die by comparison, and a great deal of tragedy would be averted.

But, if anything was done at all, it had to be by them because they had deprived God of any opportunity to take appropriate action himself.

Great care must be taken not to slide into the trap of supposing that because force was necessary to put down the rebellion, God compromised His principles on this occasion and resorted to force by using the righteous Levites as His direct instruments. God does not change His principles for anything or anybody. With Him, there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

The Desire of Ages, p. 22:

The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government.

The Desire of Ages, p. 759:

Compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 12:

Earthly kingdoms rule by the ascendancy of physical power; but from Christ's kingdom every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion, is banished.

Had the Israelites been careful never to take up the sword, while fully trusting the Lord to take care of their needs, the problem would have been speedily resolved in accordance with divine

methods of working. By their utter refusal to repent, the rebels would have certified that they wanted no more of God. He would have respected this decision and left them to themselves to reap what they had sown. Then, whatever impending disaster was present, would have taken them as the earthquake took Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, the fire destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, or the Red Sea drowned the Egyptians.

But the situation was not such. Israel had taken the sword and thereby the responsibility of taking care of their own problems of defense against enemies within and without the camp. It was not possible for them to do this and for God, simultaneously, to still hold His position as their Protector. This could not be, for either they did that work, or they trusted Him to do it.

But, because they had not entirely cast off their allegiance and respect for Him, He was afforded the opportunity of being adviser to them. They did not have the wisdom to understand the results of one usage of the sword as distinct from another. He did. If they would listen and obey, He would teach them the differences so that they could save themselves and the world from much unnecessary sorrow and loss. It was for this reason that He counseled them that it was better to destroy the incurably affected than to leave the cancer to contaminate millions more.

Exactly as the father in the hunting story knew that killings were inevitable once his son had taken the gun, so God knew that there was going to be unpreventable slaughterings in Israel. It was no longer a matter of attempting to prevent the killings. All that could now be done was to work to make them as merciful and minimal as possible. God worked here just as He did later during the Babylonian conquest when He sought to direct Israel into a course which would enable them to...

Prophets and Kings, p. 441:

...make their servitude as pleasant as possible.

The unvarying consistency of God is truly remarkable.

It must be stressed that, while the Lord commanded the Levites to kill the rebels, and much later told Zedekiah and the other nations concerned to submit quietly and cooperatively to the king of Babylon, He would not compel them to do this. The Levites chose to obey, but the others did not. By so doing the Levites saved themselves, the whole of Israel, and the world, from the most terrible consequences. By refusing to obey, Zedekiah and his contemporaries brought upon themselves dreadful reprisals.

But the Levites did have a third option. They could there and then have repented of ever taking up the weapons of destruction. Had they truly done this, they would have cast away their swords, bowed before the Lord, and confessed that they had erred. They would have given back to Him the sole responsibility of caring for them against enemies within and without the camp.

The Levites did not have sufficient understanding to do this, but they did know enough to obey the instructions God gave them and thus to avert the terrible consequences of not obeying. Unfortunately by the time we come to the captivity in Babylon, the people were too blind to even follow the Lord's counsels. Thus they suffered the terrible wrath of Babylon for their continued spirit of rebellion and insurrection.

There were some who obeyed, however. Daniel and his companions gave a living demonstration of the honor and freedom to be enjoyed by those who were obedient to God's command.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram

A question must arise here. Why were the people themselves left by God to destroy the rebels in the camp at the golden calf, but not so with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? In the case of the latter the people were simply called upon to separate themselves from the rebels and watch them die at the hands of a terrible natural calamity. Why is there this difference? Israel still carried the sword, so it would be expected that God would have to call upon them to slay the rebels.

At every point where a solution is found for the mysteries surrounding God's actions, more questions appear. This is why it is good if a problem can be solved before the next one is faced. Many make the mistake of wanting every difficulty resolved at once and, when it cannot be, they cast the whole matter aside thereby depriving themselves of great and saving light.

So the problem now arises of what appears to be inconsistency in the ways the insurrectionists were dealt with. Sometimes it was one way and at other times, another.

Once we learn the principle governing God's actions in dealing with situations such as the rebellion at Sinai, we expect that every disorder in the camp would be resolved in the same way. We anticipate that, until Israel handed back to Him the position of full administrator of all their affairs, God would direct them to slay the rebels.

This is precisely what did happen on numerous occasions. Notable examples were:

- the stoning of the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath,
- the adulterer,
- Achan, and
- the extermination of the Canaanites.

But it was not always done in this way. When:

- Korah and his companions arose in defiance of God,
- Miriam and Aaron rebelled,
- the people murmured against Moses and God,

—the people were not commissioned to go out and strike down the offenders. They were taken by:

- an earthquake,
- the infliction of leprosy,
- plagues, and the invasion of fiery serpents.

In none of these punishments did the people have a part. Yet there had been no change in the government. The people still carried the sword. So why was it done one way on certain occasions and differently on others? Is there an underlying principle which decides what it will be each time?

God is neither capricious nor inconsistent. There was an underlying principle which determined how each problem should be dealt with. Within the camp, two different situations existed. One concerned the people in general, and the other, the position of Moses.

The people had placed themselves under the protection of the sword. By doing this they had reconstituted their government accordingly, so that when any offenses threatening that government were committed, they had to be dealt with by weapons of force wielded by the people. Those threats could be internal or external. In the case of worshiping the golden calf it was internal, but when the Amalekites came against them, it was external. Because they did not have faith to accept God as their protector, they were left with self-protection as their only recourse. They became still further entrenched in this when they chose to have a king like the kings round about them.

But there was another area in the encampment not under the jurisdiction of the people. This was the office of Moses. No one stood between him and God. God had appointed him his work so that he was answerable to the Lord and no one else. Furthermore Moses had never joined with the people in taking up the sword. Even though he was the best trained military man of all, he had so learned the lessons of trust in God while in the wilderness of Midian that when the opportunity came to take up weapons, he had chosen not to. Not once do we read of him leading Israel into battle with a sword in his hand.

Therefore when Moses himself sinned as he did at the striking of the rock, the people could not touch him. He was not under their government in any sense. Only God solved Moses' prob-

lems, and He would do this according to His righteous procedures and principles.



Although trained in his youth as a military leader, Moses never used the sword in leading the Israelites.

And when the people sinned against Moses and against God, they transgressed in a realm which did not come under their jurisdiction, for the sovereignty of the sword did not reach that far. So whenever the people sinned in this area, the punishment came

by God's departing from them and leaving them exposed to the surrounding perils.

Consider the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. It was specifically a challenge to God's appointment of Moses, as was the protest of Miriam and Aaron. An example of Israel's miserable complaints against Moses is as follows:

Numbers 21

⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses: Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.

All of these were in the same category. They were outside the jurisdiction taken over by the people when they took up the sword. Therefore God was free and unhampered in dealing with these problems. In every such case He worked in the same way:

- Korah and his supporters were swallowed up by the earthquake,
- Miriam was afflicted with leprosy, and
- Israel suffered from plagues and the invasion of fiery serpents.

Thus each situation in the camp was met in the way appropriate to it. When the people sinned within the area taken over by them when they acquired swords, they had to administer the punishment to assure their continued protection. God's work was limited under these circumstances to offering them the counsel He was so capable of giving whereby they would be delivered from the worst effects of their chosen order.

When they sinned outside this area of jurisdiction, the matter could not be settled by them, for they had neither the right nor the power to deal with it. All God could do was to accept their insistence that He separate from them, and then they were then left exposed to the perils continually threatening them.

God did not depart from them because He was hurt or revengeful. It was with infinite sorrow and only with the greatest reluctance after every saving effort had been rejected, that God accepted the necessity to withdraw.

A careful study of the various incidents confirms that with the utmost consistency, God dealt with each situation according to its nature. How the Israelites perished depended on whether they fell into the hands of their own established governmental system, or whether they sinned outside of that and fell under the powers of nature which were no longer under God's direction.

The question of God's methods of dealing with such problems as the worshiping of the golden calf, has now been thoroughly explored. 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.

Deuteronomy 6

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

He is not divided; He does not show one face in the Old Testament and another in the New. There is no inconsistency with Him, 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. When men perish, it is only because they have rejected His saving efforts and have accordingly placed themselves under the devil's dominion and power.

Indeed, the Lord our God is one Lord, but tragically, He has been sadly misunderstood and His actions grossly misinterpreted, both in the Old Testament days and through the intervening ages.

34. The Wars of Israel

WHEN considering the wars of Israel, we are not looking at anything different in principle from what we have studied so far in this book.

We have already looked at God's methods in dealing with situations where men had taken His work into their own hands. The truth of God's relationship to Israel's wayward behavior should now be self-evident. However some might still find difficulties they feel need to be resolved, so space will be given to the study of God's behavior in relating to the wars of Israel.

The fact that Israel went to war and slaughtered their enemies often to the last man, woman, and child, is not the real problem. The problem arises when we read that God "commanded" them to do this. When they obeyed, they received His approval, but when they did not, He reproved them strongly. For instance, when Saul did not utterly destroy the Amalekites, he received a very severe rebuke from God through the prophet, Samuel.

Whenever a conscientious objector to military service stands before a magistrate and declares that he will not kill because of the law of God, the questions put to him always include references to the wars of Israel. Thus, not only did Israel provide trouble for themselves by taking up the sword, but they have made trouble for God's children right down to the end of time. Such questions about military service only exist for those who do not understand God's character and work. For those who do, the wars of ancient Israel provide strong proof for conscientious objection to military service.

Human Defenses

Despite the Lord's clear instructions, supported and illustrated by frequent demonstrations of His ways of doing things, the Israelites showed a persistent disposition to take matters more and more into their own hands, thereby denying the manifestations of God's character and ways. It all began when they took the sword

after crossing the Red Sea. Between that time and their arrival at Kadesh-barnea in readiness for the border crossing, there had been shedding of blood. The two most notable incidents were the battle with the Amalekites, and the slaughter of the golden calf worshipers.

Yet God had never intended that they should gain the land of promise through the use of the sword. Before they reached the promised land, He told them how it would be done and assured them that He would do it, not they.

Exodus 23

²⁷ I will send my fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

²⁸ 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 become too numerous for you.

²⁹ Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.

³⁰ And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River.

³¹ For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.

Thus the Lord emphasized that He would drive out the inhabitants of the land. Earlier we found that such expressions must be understood one way when describing God's actions and another way when describing men's actions. Therefore God's way of driving them out was not by using compelling power. Rather, as He came to them with His offerings of love, their resistance to and rejection of these would place them outside God's protective circle leaving nothing to save them from the destructive forces in the hands of the destroyer. In some cases the inhabitants had already passed the point of no return as far as their salvation is concerned.

Unfortunately the Israelites did not give God the opportunity to fulfill His promise, so we do not have the exact picture of what God would have done. This is not because there was any weakness in the promise, but because the people did not believe God's word and were not prepared to let Him do what He had promised. They decided that this was something they could not leave to God but had to do themselves.

Human Plans

This spirit really came to the fore when they reached Kadesh-barnea. God's plan was to fulfill His promise to lead them directly into the land. Accordingly, as recalled by Moses, God told them to go on in under His leadership and possess it. Here are Moses' words as he reminded Israel of the event.

Deuteronomy 1

¹⁹ So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the Lord our God had commanded us.

²⁰ Then we came to Kadesh Barnea. And I said to you, You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us.

²¹ Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.

Had they had the spirit of trust in and submission to the Lord of heaven, they would have responded by following without doubt or question where the Lord led. The inhabitants of the land would have fearfully retreated or would have attacked them with a rashness born of desperation. Such an action would have been one of complete and final defiance against heaven, whereby their separation from God would have been so total as to remove all divine protection from them. Speedily they would have perished as did the Egyptians, Korah and his company, or the Israelites themselves when a plague broke out among them.

But the Jews did not trust God, as is evident from their response to His directions. Here is their answer:

Deuteronomy 1

²² And everyone of you came near to me, and said, Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.

Here indeed was the substitution of man in the place of God. Divine leadership was discarded in favor of the human. How did God react to such a development? Was He offended? Did He demand His rights, insisting they do things His way?

Not for one moment. If that was the way they chose to go, then all He could do was respect their choice and bless them in the execution of their ways as far as He could.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 387:

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.

The men were chosen as had been directed, and Moses bade them go and see the country, what it was, its situation and natural advantages; and the people that dwelt therein, whether they were strong or weak, few or many; also to observe the nature of the soil and its productiveness, and to bring of the fruit of the land.

Thus it was that:

Numbers 13

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

² Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.

³ So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the commandment of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel.

If the reference in *Numbers* was read without considering the other statements, it would appear that the whole idea was from God. But it was from the people, contrary to God's plans. Yet it declares that Moses, by the commandment of the Lord, sent the twelve men.

When the word "commandment" is used in connection with human behavior, it indicates an authoritative statement which is given to be obeyed, irrespective of whether the recipient likes it or not. It becomes clear however that when used by the Lord, it is more in the form of instruction or counsel with the choice of whether they will or will not obey being left with the people. It also indicates how important it is to obey in order to avoid serious consequences.

Thus the people took control of their own movements. This was a further step in the wrong direction. Taking the sword gave them their own government in the place of God's in a certain area of their lives, but they still followed the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The time had now come when their self-confidence and their corresponding lack of faith in God led them to reject even that leadership.

God was not offended. He behaved with perfect consistency. He had ever given them the liberty to choose whether they would leave Him to do His work while they did theirs.

If they wanted to send men in before them, they were free to do so, but God wanted to save them from as much trouble as possible. The situation would be worsened if poorly-suited men were to go. Therefore, in His love for them, He gave directions which they were prepared to obey—that responsible men should be elected for the task.

But what a disaster it proved to be. It was a mistake which prevented that entire generation from entering the land of promise. During the following forty years everyone who had been twenty years old and above at the time, was to die in the wilderness, except of course for Caleb, Joshua, and the unnumbered tribe of Levi.

The Blessings of God's Way

When they did finally follow the Lord into the land of Canaan, they did not send twelve spies first. It is true that Joshua sent out two spies, but the basis of their being sent was completely different from that of the previous experience. It had to be different for, whereas the people forty years before had placed their faith in themselves, Joshua had no confidence in his own ability to lead Israel. He placed his entire trust in God.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol 2, p. 993:

Joshua was a wise general because God was his guide....This was the secret of Joshua's victory. He made God his Guide.

Whereas the people called for the spies to go forth at Kadesh-barnea, no such call came from them at Gilgal. This was from Joshua, and it was not motivated from any distrust in the Lord's leading. It is much more likely that the Spirit of God directed him to do this for the salvation of Rahab and her family. It gave her the opportunity to recognize God's power as being supreme and to demonstrate her faith in that power by hiding the two men successfully. As a wonderful reward for that faith, she was accorded the high honor of being a mother in the direct line of the promised Messiah.

In sending those spies into the city, God demonstrated His character of wonderful, saving love. Inasmuch as Joshua had made the Lord his guide, then it was God who had chosen to send the men in. He knew the heart of that woman and her household. He knew that she would respond to His call of salvation, but she was imprisoned within the walls of Jericho and by no means could she go out to the Israelites. Therefore the Lord sent those

two men to her. She responded to the divinely provided opportunity and showed where her faith was. Thus she became known to the Israelites so that, when the city was destroyed, she survived and was rescued.

The Demonstration at Jericho

Thus far we have traced Israel's persistent tendency to replace the Lord's leadership and management with their own. It is now to be shown in more detail that God, with loving regard for His erring people, was trying to bring them back to the only safe path. That would involve laying down their swords, thus giving God His rightful place as Guide, Protector, and Provider for His people. Then they would not need to fight, to break the law, and to stand sadly by the graves of those slain in battle.

When Israel crossed the Red Sea, they had behind them evidence after evidence that they never needed to take up the sword and that God never planned that they should. But they failed their test completely. As has been clearly shown from the annals of Bible history, the Lord did not abandon them, but sought to bring them back to the only safe and correct way.

As they crossed the Jordan and marched on to Jericho, the Lord spoke to them once more in a mighty demonstration designed to reveal His full capacity to fulfill His promises to give them the land. It was an attempt to so establish their faith in Him, that they would abandon all confidence in self, lay down the sword, and permit God to do His work in His own way. It was a reiteration of the same lessons which God had sought to teach their fathers as they left the land of Egypt.

As the waters of the Red Sea were opened before them by the miraculous power of God, so were the flooded waves of Jordan rolled back to make a safe path for the people. As the Egyptians had been prevented from coming near by the pillar of cloud, so the Canaanites were prevented from engaging the Israelites in battle. Yet, from the military point of view, it would have been an excellent time to attack. With half of Israel on one side and half

on the other, their forces were divided. The enemy could have speedily reduced their army portion by portion. But they did not come near them.

Then the Lord commissioned the Israelites to march around that city once per day till the seventh day when they were to march around it seven times. Then the massive walls came crashing down. It should have been enough. They had the mighty promises of God; they had the multiplied lessons of the past; they had God's clear instructions that the land was not to be taken by warfare; and now, once more, they had a personal demonstration of God's tremendous power doing what He promised.

God gave them specific instructions for taking the city. In this He had a purpose. Desiring to deliver them from their own self-destructive ways, He organized an exercise in faith designed to develop in them a sense of utter distrust in human power and planning on the one hand and of total commitment to God's leadership and instruction on the other. God had no disposition to assert His personal leadership of those people, for in Him there is no seeking for self-exaltation. He knew that for them it was the only successful way. Any alternative could only result in their loss and eventual destruction. The confirmation that it did is provided in their subsequent history, when, by choosing the wrong course, they did suffer the worst consequences.

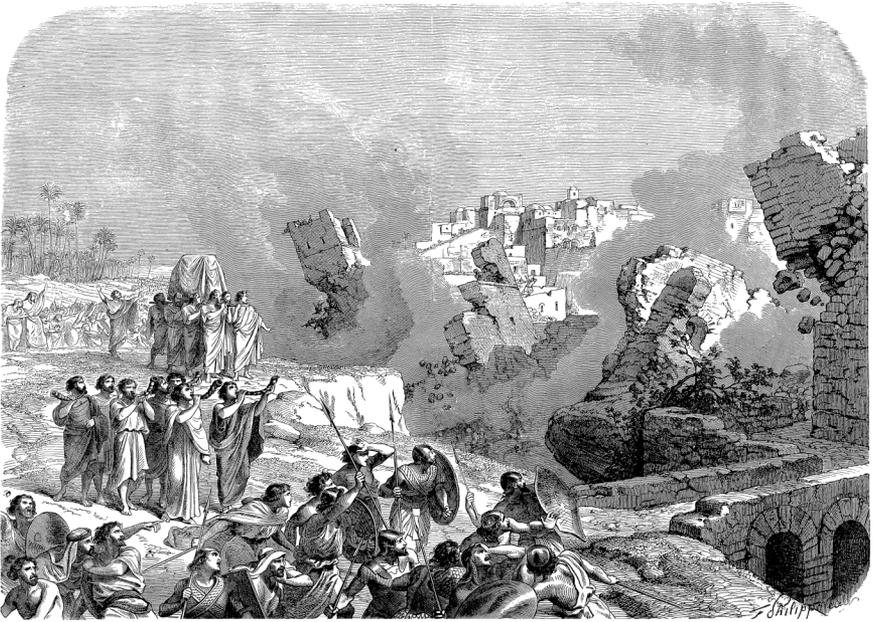
Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 493:

“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 his might, but only in the God of their salvation. They were thus to become accustomed to relying wholly upon their divine Leader.

God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength, is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf. He will help His believing children in every emergency, if they will place their entire confidence in Him, and faithfully obey Him.



Thus God's whole design in this chapter in Israel's experience was to call them back to a nonbelligerent status. Through this means,

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 493:

It was to be impressed upon their minds that their strength was not in the wisdom of man, nor in his might, but only in the

God of their salvation. They were thus to become accustomed to relying wholly upon their divine leader.

Indeed, it should have been enough. Right then and there they ought to have stripped off their armor, laid it in a great heap, confessed the sovereignty of God, and expressed their complete trust in Him to give them the land He had promised in the way He had said He would.

But they did not. They rushed into the city and soon their swords were dripping with the shed blood of men, women, and children. What a terrible, scarring effect that must have had upon their souls! Such a work could not lift a man nearer to God. It would tend to brutalize him, to make him callous of life, and benumbed to the finest, most uplifting attributes of the divine character. With increasing clarity it must be seen that such actions on the people's part were never intended by God.

There are some statements in regard to the overthrow of the walls of Jericho which make it appear that God was a direct destroyer in this case. We will pass over them in this chapter but will take them up later when other difficult statements are discussed.⁴⁵

But against every loving effort on God's part, those people did not see the implications of clinging to the sword which their fathers had taken up. They could not feel secure without it. They depended upon it to protect them from their enemies. They would care for their own protection with the help of the Lord. Thus they basically made this their own work and responsibility while God was simply left as a helper in the situation.

They had taken the sword from their fathers, and they would cling to it. As surely as they did, they came under the inexorable law which declares that all who take the sword will as surely per-

⁴⁵ See Chapter 36, *Difficult Statements*, especially the section "Those Walls of Jericho."

ish by the sword. Their after-history gives the clearest vindication to this principle.

It may be argued that it was not taking the sword but their loss of faith in God which occasioned their destruction as a nation, for whenever they, with the sword in their hands, put their trust in the Lord, they were victorious. Although this is true, what has to be seen is that the act of taking the sword was the fruit of their loss of faith in God. Only a people who did not wholly and totally trust God to be their protector, would take the sword. That first downward step into unbelief must inevitably be followed by others, especially as the practice of warfare would brutalize the warrior and make him still less receptive to the calls and ways of God.

It was Jesus who declared that they who take the sword will perish by the sword, and those words are true. Israel took the sword, and they perished in the same way. There is not a nation in the past which has taken the weapons of force without perishing by them. This is the record of history. It is a witness which tells existing nations that the same fate awaits them.

The Israelites at Jericho came to a point of decision, a crossroads. The choice made there would determine how the conquest of Canaan would be achieved. If they had chosen to divest themselves of the implements of war and to pledge to obey all of God's commandments including the one which says, "You shall not kill," then the Lord would have been free to give them the land according to His ways and methods.

But if they should choose to retain the instruments of bloodshed, then the conquest must be made by them. The choice was entirely theirs. God put forth great effort to persuade them to accept the right way, but He could not and did not compel them to follow it.

Tragically they made the wrong choice—the one which was the fruit of unbelief. Consequently they sallied forth to meet their foes with the sword in their own hands. Palestine was not con-

quered in harmony with God's principles but according to man's. Because they still retained His presence and leadership in some parts of their lives, a measure of His power remained among them so that they were the victorious armies.

Apart from that, all He could do was to give them instructions for conducting the war mercifully. There was to be no torturing of their victims, and they were to obliterate those nations as thoroughly as it would have been done if they had left the whole matter in God's hands.

Asking for a King

Thus far in Israel's history we have seen a number of incidents in every one of which, to a greater or lesser extent, the Israelites chose to go the way of unbelief. There was that persistent tendency to cast off God's leadership and ways, and to substitute their own.

Bad as those choices in the past had been, a worse step was yet to be taken. It was when the people came to Samuel and asked for a king. They wanted a king who would judge them and lead them as it was with all the other nations. The people insisted on this, saying:

1 Samuel 8

¹⁹ No, but we will have a king over us,

²⁰ That we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.

Again the people were making decisions, and again God must relate himself to them accordingly. With unvarying consistency He did here what He had done in every other such situation. He gave them full liberty to make that choice. He made no moves to forcibly stop them. All He did was to outline in vivid terms what they were bringing upon themselves. But when, after that revelation of horror, they still stood by their decision, He then gave them what they wanted.



By choosing a king in the place of God,
the people chose their own bondage.

God did not threaten them with personal punishments if they rejected Him. A careful reading of *1 Samuel* 8:6-18 will show that the Lord outlined only the results of their taking that course. He told them that the king would do terrible things until they would wish that they had never asked for a king to rule them.

1 Samuel 8

¹¹ And he said, This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots.

¹² He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest,

and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, bakers.

¹⁴ And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants.

¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants.

This is the description of a heavy oppression indeed. The king would build up a court of great luxury and ease for himself, but it would be the people who would pay the accounts. Taxation would become increasingly severe until the people were poverty-stricken by it. All this did come to pass, but not by the imposition of God. They had brought it upon themselves by their own waywardness.

The decision made there in Samuel's day was a duplication of the step taken at Kadesh-barnea. It was a direct and specific replacement of God's leadership with that of men.

In the first case a committee of twelve men were chosen, while, in the second, the people wanted a king. In both cases their waywardness led to disastrous consequences. In the first it led to their being unable to enter the promised land and thus being forced to wander for forty years in the wilderness. In the second case it was followed by still further departures from God. Soon they were not only looking to man as their leader, but, worse still, to gods of wood and stone, brass, gold, and silver. The futility of such gods was demonstrated as they became the slaves of their enemies, captives in the land of Babylon.

But they would never learn. They persisted in their determination to rule themselves and go their own way until, in the end, they cried out their total rejection of God and His ways in these words,

John 19

¹⁵ We have no king but Caesar!

This was the final step in that long, long road of persistent and determined substitution of man's ways for God's. They had finally stepped outside the circle of God's presence and protection. The fearful consequences were delayed only for the sake of those who, like Rahab in Jericho, were still open to hear the voice of entreaty and love. That accomplished, the destruction of the city, the temple, and the nation, was no longer preventable.

The history of that unfortunate nation, rightly understood, places God in His true light. Whereas there has been the tendency in the past to see Him as being in total control of that nation so that what they did was the expression of His character and will, it becomes very evident that this was not so. Rather, they had stubbornly refused to allow Him His full and rightful place in their community. They had substituted their ways in the place of His ways so that what they did in the slaughter of the wicked was anything but the expression of His character and methods.

Once they took these affairs under their own control, God could have left them to themselves to reap all the bitter consequences. But His infinite love would not allow this. Instead it moved Him to do everything possible to save them.

It is regrettable that this ministry has been just as misunderstood as the effort of the father to save his boy from becoming a cruel hunter. The pure actions of unspeakable love have been seen as the revelations of a destroyer.

35. An Eye For An Eye

IN ORDER for us to understand the situations where Israel used the sword according to God's instruction, the Bible gives us another invaluable key. It is found in God's directions to exact only one eye for an eye, one tooth for a tooth, and one life for a life. This counsel was given shortly after the proclamation of the law from Mount Sinai and is recorded in:

Exodus 21

²² If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no lasting harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

²³ But if any lasting harm follows, then you shall give life for life,

²⁴ Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

²⁵ Burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

This was the instruction of God to Israel. It was He who gave these directions of how they should deal with these offenses. This is verified by going back to *Exodus 20:22*, where the sequence of verses containing all these instructions begins with the words, "Then the Lord said to Moses..." Specifically, the Lord who spoke back there was Jesus Christ. He was the God who appeared unto Moses and proclaimed the precepts of the decalogue to them.

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 45:

It was Christ who, amid thunder and flame, had proclaimed the law upon Mount Sinai.

Therefore, it was Christ who told them to exact an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Yet when He came to this earth, He repudiated these words as any guideline for the kingdom which He had come to establish. He did this at His first great sermon to a large convocation of people. They had assembled on the mountain expecting to hear His pronouncements of the nature of the kingdom they thought He had come to establish. At the very outset, He warned them that He had not come to do away with the law. He said,

Matthew 5

¹⁷ I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

¹⁹ Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Having asserted that He had not come to do away with the law, He then appeared to do just that. In the Old Testament He had said to them, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” but now He says:

³⁸ You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

⁴³ You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

⁴⁵ That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Ever since the instructions, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, had been delivered to Israel from Mt. Sinai, they had mistakenly regarded them as being exactly what God, in His heart, had planned for them. Like so many millions since, they had shown a sad ignorance of what God's righteousness really is. They did not understand that these instructions were not the expression of His principles, but merely an improved version of their own chosen course.

God delivered such counsels only to those whose unbelief had caused them to depart from the pathway of faith, and enter the paths of self-protection through instruments of coercion. It was out of loving consideration for the victims of those in power that He admonished them to limit the exactions to one eye for an eye and one tooth for a tooth.

Well He knew how the spirit of revenge would not leave them content to impose a punishment equal to the offense committed. Their disposition would demand many eyes for an eye and many teeth for one tooth. This would place them at the opposite end of the scale from God.

However, in between, there was a situation which, though it still could not be God's perfect plan, was considerably better than the one where they were left to their own devices. The three positions were as follows:

1. Gods Perfect Way

Firstly there is God's perfect way. This Jesus lived and taught. It calls upon the manifestation of that love which never retaliates, always turns the other cheek, goes the second mile, loves all enemies, and does good to those who do evil. The weapons of force have no place under these principles.

This requires a real and abiding faith in God to successfully operate. The children of Israel lacked that faith and discarded these

ideas as impracticable and dangerous. They were, in short, foolishness to them. They were not willing to see how survival was possible under these conditions.

2. Man Without God

On the other end of the scale is the behavior of those who have no regard for God and consequently pay no heed to His counsels. These people are ruthless, cruel, and revengeful. They torture their enemies, extracting the utmost suffering to satisfy their revengeful passions. The death camps of Germany during the second world war, such as Auschwitz, Dachau, and Belsen, were demonstrations of this kind of spirit. Tremendous privation and suffering was experienced by those who fell into the terrible hands of the Third Reich.

3. A Mixture

Then there is the situation in between. It is a mixture of two things:

1. God's compassion for the oppressed, leading Him to seek to minimize as far as possible their suffering and loss.
2. A willingness among those who are doing the destroying to obey Him up to a point.

So throughout the world, those nations and individuals who claim to respect God, accept and follow His counsels as long as they are allowed to have their own way in principle. But they do not have the faith to trust Him implicitly as their Judge and Protector.

While Israel maintained some connection with God and was prepared to obey Him at least in some things, they did practice the principle of one eye for an eye and one tooth for a tooth. But when they departed from the Lord still further, then, to whatever extent they drifted, they also abandoned this principle.

Many Eyes

Today, the nation of Israel has no further regard for these principles. Long ago they turned their backs on God when they declared they would have no king but Caesar. Over the past few decades they have been involved in contentions and wars of survival with their Arab neighbors. More than once they have been hit by their enemies and have struck back with ruthless ferocity.

Early in November, 1977, they had been troubled by terrorist incursions from Lebanon. Arming their warplanes, they struck with unrestrained fury across the border, killing soldiers and civilians—men, women, and little children. There was a world outcry against this savagery. Israel protested that they had struck only military targets but found it difficult to maintain this claim in the light of photographs and reports received from the affected area. They certainly gave back much more than they had received which is not the principle of one eye for an eye and one tooth for a tooth.

A cartoonist gave his comment in the Boise, Idaho daily newspaper, *The Statesman*, on November 16, 1977. The cartoon is reproduced on the opposite page and tells the story very graphically. This is exactly what the Lord was seeking to save them and their enemies from when they took up the weapons of destruction.

Well would it have been for the Lebanese if Israel had still been governed by these principles. But how much better for both Israel and Lebanon if the Israelites were obedient to the principle of love for your enemies and returning good for evil, which Christ laid down in the sermon on the mount.

Summary

Thus there are three ways of relating to the problems around us; of dealing with those who hurt us and would do us injury.

Firstly there is God's way which does not use force to put down rebellion, has no retaliation, no exacting of retributions, no violence, no use of the sword, and therefore no killing. There is only

the perfect keeping of the law, the returning of good for evil, going the second mile, and the unending effort to save those who are slipping toward the abyss of ruin. It is all summed up in the unchanging and unchangeable expression of infinite love. It is the work of the Saviour and Restorer, never that of the destroyer.

Christ outlined this way in the sermon on the mount and then identified this alone as being God's pattern of behavior. He advised that those who did likewise would be like His Father who is in heaven.



The worst way is man left entirely to himself. In this way the system is to love those who love you but to hit those who hurt

you as hard as you can; to return multiplied evils for evil; to make the revenge as cruel as possible in order to make sure that the enemy adequately pays for the hurt he has administered to you. The objective is to hit him much harder than he hit you and convince him permanently that it would be suicidal to launch any further assaults against you. Thus each seeks to guarantee his own security by the rule of fear.

When God was not able to hold them safely in the first, then He worked to save them from this last and worst. This is why the second or middle situation exists. What God is really saying in this situation is this:

“You have made your decision to take the sword and thereby depart from my ways. I have tried to influence you to change your decision, but you have made it and it stands. But I can save you from the worst effects of that choice if you will accept and respect the advice I now give you.

- Do not be wanton and revengeful killers.
- Exact only an equal payment for what has been taken from you.
- Let there be no more than one eye for one eye, and one tooth for one tooth.

Meanwhile I will ever seek to win you back to the way of faith and obedience, back to the pathway where there is no killing or revenge but only the manifestation of my character of love.”

If the relationship between these three ways can be clearly discerned, and if it can be recognized that only the first of them is God’s way, then it will be seen that there is not a single story in the Old Testament to prove that God destroys. Satan destroys, and man destroys, but never God. He is the Saviour who is only working to restore and to heal. He knows no other work than that. The whole history of His dealings with ancient Israel, rightly understood, testifies to this.

36. Difficult Statements

THE great truths of the Bible are not established by collecting a series of statements. They are built on solid foundational principles. Once these are ascertained, the superstructure can be accurately and safely constructed.

When searching out the truth of God's character, the guiding principles are found in the nature of His government, the purpose of the law, Christ's revelation of His Father, and the role of the cross as the expression of God's methods of dealing with the unrepenting sinner. The mighty witnesses of God contained in these are more than sufficient to certify the loving, merciful, righteous, and just character of God. They effectively prove that He does not stand as an executioner toward the rejecters of His mercy.

But, as with every other Bible topic, certain statements seem to utterly contradict the witnesses mentioned above. These constitute a serious problem to many who cannot feel at rest with the message until every statement has been explained. This is an unfortunate attitude to hold, since living faith does not wait till every problem has been solved before grasping precious truths.

To my mind, the life and teachings of Christ 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, for me, nothing more is needed. Therefore, it is the standard by which every argument about the Father's character is tested.

If the argument presented cannot find support in Jesus Christ, then, no matter how logical it may seem to be or how convincing it may appear, I reject it entirely even though I may have no explanation for it as yet. My faith grasps the reality of Christ's mission as the outshining of the Father's glory.

I believe that God sent His Son into the world for the express purpose of penetrating the mists of error and delusion which Satan had cast around His character of righteousness. The confirmation of that faith is expressed in the resolution to accept nothing

about God except that which is in total agreement with the witness of the Father attested to by His Son.

Therefore, if anyone wishes to successfully convince me that God destroyed the sinner, offering as evidence the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah or any other punishments of the Old Testament era, then he must be able to bring proof that Christ, during His earthly mission, did the same thing.

It is so impossible to do this that those who cling to the erroneous view that God does execute the sinner, claim that the revelation of God as given by Christ is only a partial manifestation of the Father which omits the sterner roles of judge and executioner. Texts and statements quoted earlier expose this as fallacious thinking, for the manifestation of God as given by Christ was as complete as Christ, the superlative One, could make it. Nothing was overlooked or omitted.

No stand is taken here that there are two different revelations of God, the one given in Old Testament times versus that given by Christ. Not a single contradiction exists in the Word of God. There are no statements, rightly understood, which contradict the eternal principles of truth. On the contrary, when comprehended, they move from a position of apparent denial of the eternal verities, to one of mighty endorsement.

Thus the true Bible student is not afraid of difficult statements. He may have to admit for the moment that their true meaning eludes him, but he knows that this will not always be, as the teaching Holy Spirit leads each trusting student along the glorious corridors of unfolding light.

Not every statement that can be presented has as yet been resolved. There remains one or two for which the correct understanding is still pending, but the Lord will make them clear in His good time. The fact that they cannot be explained just yet is no cause for fear or doubt. There is more than sufficient evidence in God's great principles to establish beyond a doubt the truth about God's character.

But most have been unraveled and, for the help of those still struggling with some of them, an examination of the most commonly quoted will be undertaken. No attempt will be made to twist the statements to fit a desired conclusion. They must be examined to see exactly what they say and, just as importantly, what they do not say.

All too often the problem of interpretation lies in a tendency to assume that a statement infers something it does not. If this inference can be cleared away, the words will then be left free to say what they were intended to.

The Same Powers

What I would rate as the most difficult statement is the one which reads:

The Great Controversy, p. 614:

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.

The portion of this statement causing the most difficulty is this,

The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He permits.

When a person does not have a clear grasp of the principles underlying God's character, it is easy to see how this statement could leave him with the conviction that holy angels destroy exactly as do evil angels. The only difference appears to be that holy angels destroy by God's command while the evil do it with His permission.

What happens is that everyone tends to read into this statement more than it actually says. Here is what the statement does *not* say:

“The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised *in the same way* by evil angels when He permits.”

These four words, “in the same way,” are not in the statement, neither are they inferred there. Furthermore, every principle of God’s character forbids their being there. Yet, despite multiplied evidences to this effect, this is exactly what people read into the reference. They make no distinction between the work of God and of Satan and therefore between the character of each. This is serious.

There is a decided contrast between the role of the good angels and the evil ones. It is the heaven-appointed work of the righteous angels to hold back the four winds of strife for as long as possible. They only release these powers when God judges that the angels would be imposing their presence when they are no longer wanted. There are many statements which teach this.

Revelation 7

¹ After these things 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, on the sea, or on any tree.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 152:

There is a work yet to be done, and then the angels will be bidden to let go, that the four winds may blow upon the earth.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 426:

We are today under divine forbearance; but how long will the angels of God continue to hold the winds, that they shall not blow?

Education, p. 179-180:

Angels are now restraining the winds of strife, that they may not blow until the world shall be warned of its coming doom; but

a storm is gathering, ready to burst upon the earth; and when God shall bid His angels loose the winds, there will be such a scene of strife as no pen can picture.

Early Writings, p. 38:

I saw four angels who had a work to do on the earth, and were on their way to accomplish it. Jesus was clothed with priestly garments. He gazed in pity on the remnant, then raised His hands, and with a voice of deep pity cried, "*My blood, Father, my blood, my blood, my blood!*" Then I saw an exceeding bright light come from God, who sat upon the great white throne, and was shed all about Jesus. Then I saw an angel with a commission from Jesus, swiftly flying to the four angels who had a work to do on the earth, and waving something up and down in his hand, and crying with a loud voice, "*Hold! Hold! Hold! Hold!* until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads."

I asked my accompanying angel the meaning of what I heard, and what the four angels were about to do. He said to me that 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, and that they were about to let them go; but while their hands were loosening, and the four winds were about to blow, the merciful eye of Jesus gazed on the remnant that were not sealed, and He raised His hands to the Father and pleaded with Him that He had spilled His blood for them. Then another angel was commissioned to fly swiftly to the four angels, and bid them hold, until the servants of God were sealed with the seal of the living God in their foreheads.

The Review and Herald, September 17, 1901:

God keeps a reckoning with the nations. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice. Those who work evil toward their fellow men, saying, "How does God know?" will one day be called upon to meet long-deferred vengeance.

In this age a more than common contempt is shown to God. Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. 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. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work."

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 388-389:

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. The world has disregarded the word of God. They live as though there were no God. Like the inhabitants of the Noachic world, they refuse to have any thought of God. Wickedness prevails to an alarming extent, and the earth is ripe for the harvest.

Every one of these statements confirms that the angels' role is to hold back those terrible powers which are only awaiting release to destroy the earth and the heavens. Angels are righteous. They have not instituted their ways in the place of God's. Accordingly, they do only what the Lord would have them do.

As surely as the God of heaven never destroys by direct action, neither do the angels. Therefore, the way in which they exercise those powers is by the withdrawal of their restraint upon them. The released energies pass from an inactive state into one of intense, destructive activity.

This is the way in which the 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. Satan and his followers have studied the secrets of the laboratories of nature and the turbulent forces within man, until they know just how to activate them into becoming destroyers. Thus, while God's angels are working to hold back these fearful elements, Satan and his company are working in the opposite direction.

But, whether they are released into active exercise by the holy angels or manipulated by evil angels, they are the same powers. This is the principal thought that the statement is intended to convey. It does not discuss the way in which those powers are exercised. When this is realized, there will be no problem in understanding the statement.

In the light of these thoughts we can now see that far from proving that good angels, at God's command, sally forth and execute the unrighteous, this statement verifies that they do not since the powers are the same but the characters of those who use them are different and therefore, also the way in which they are used is different.

If God undertook the work of executioner, He would not bother to use anything less than the greatest powers at His command. These certainly are not those in nature and in man. They are the almighty forces within himself, forces so great that He would merely have to speak in order for whole worlds to disappear.

Therefore, if God was the destroyer, He would not use the same powers as those used by the evil angels. God is almighty and is not in any sense dependent on the relatively puny potentials He has given to this earth and its inhabitants. If these facts are kept in mind, then the statement presents no problem.

Doing as He Pleases

Here is another statement which has been a problem to some.

Spiritual Gifts, vol. 4A, p. 50-51:

Moses commanded the men of war to destroy the women and male children. Balaam had sold the children of Israel for a reward, and he perished with the people whose favor he had obtained at the sacrifice of twenty-four thousand of the Israelites.

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 do You do 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.

The main message of this statement is a warning that mankind is in no position to question the actions of God. If God does something, then it is right and just. This rightness is not just because God is the Creator, but because His character is righteous and there is no injustice with Him. However, what troubles people is the part which reads:

“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.”

No problem would exist here if it were not for the persistent tendency of men to think of God as if He too were a man. When men have the power to do as they please and what they please, then their behavior becomes dependent on how they feel at any given point of time and what they want at that moment. They do all things in reference to their own likes and dislikes and not according to unvarying principles.

This is the behavior pattern with which we are most familiar, and we tend to think of the unknown and unfamiliar in God as if it were the same. So we see men sinning against God and His people, whereupon we visualize God as being highly incensed and angered by this so that it becomes His pleasure to exact a revenge against those who have treated Him so shabbily.

But, unlike man, God is not guided by changing emotions. He finds no pleasure in unrighteousness in any form. Therefore, it does not please Him to kill, to lie, to steal, to bear false witness, or

to break any other of the commandments which are the transcript of His wondrous character. We need never fear then that the Lord will destroy us because He has the right to do “as He pleases, and what He pleases.”

On the other hand, if we become subject to a human being with limitless power to do “what he pleases, and as he pleases,” we can know that, unless we are able to serve that person to his entire satisfaction all the time, sooner or later, we are doomed.

In other words, the statement must be understood in the light of what it does please God to do, not in the light of what it would please man to do if he were in the same position.

Those Walls of Jericho

There are a number of statements in respect to the overthrow of the walls of Jericho which, if understood in the way man naturally understands such words, would mean that God and His angels personally exercised the power of force to bring down those mighty battlements.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 161-162:

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 your 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 had the foundation of the battlements been laid in the center of the earth, and their summits reached the arch of heaven, the result would have been the same when the Captain of the Lord’s host led His legions of angels to the attack.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 264:

The city of Jericho was devoted to the most extravagant idolatry. The inhabitants were very wealthy, but all the riches that God had given them they counted as the gift of their gods. They had gold and silver in abundance; but, like the people before the

Flood, they were corrupt and blasphemous, and insulted and provoked the God of heaven by their wicked works. 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. Angels of God laid hold of the massive walls and brought them to the ground.

Review and Herald, March 15, 1887:

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.

The most significant sentence in these statements is the one which says:

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 264:

Angels of God laid hold of the massive walls and brought them to the ground.

It would seem that these words allow only one interpretation which is that the angels of God with Christ at their head, took hold of those walls with their hands and literally threw them to the ground. If this is true, then they did more than tear down buttresses of stone. There were people on those high walls.⁴⁶

Furthermore, there were people who actually lived in the wall as did Rahab who delivered the spies from her countrymen.⁴⁷ It follows that if the angels did in fact throw down those walls as we tend to understand those words to mean, then they took the lives of a great number of people.

If this is so, then we have finally found the long looked for evidence to prove that God did change because of sin and did become a destroyer of life. We have the proof that every principle gathered together in this book is nullified, for God cannot err on a single point. If Jesus, when He came to this earth, had by so much as a thought made a concession to sin, then the devil would have triumphed.

⁴⁶ See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 491.

⁴⁷ See *Joshua* 2:15.

God has gone on record to say that He does not deal with the sin problem by the use of physical force.

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

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.

The Desire of Ages, p. 759:

Compelling power is found only under Satan's government.

God does not destroy:

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 84:

God destroys no man.

Acts of the Apostles, p. 12:

From Christ's kingdom every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion, is banished.

If the Lord were to violate those principles in just one situation, it would be all that was necessary to give Satan the victory in the great controversy. Therefore, our understanding of the principles which govern God's character compels us to look more deeply into the problem in an endeavor to see in what sense the angels laid hold of the walls and brought them to the ground.

However, if such a search for the moment at least, fails to bring to light exactly what the angels did do, then we do not lose faith in the great principles. We simply understand that this is but one of the hooks left to hang our doubts on if we want to do so. God often leaves some points unexplained to give us the opportunity to trust Him in the unknown from what we know of Him already.

The explanation for any difficult inspired statement must be found in some other part of inspiration. In a problem like this the most likely place to find such an explanation is in a similar incident. Such is to be found in the fall of Jerusalem, which, like Jericho, had filled up its cup of iniquity. From Jerusalem the Spirit of God had also departed. Its walls were likewise torn to the ground

with not one stone being left upon another. It is to be expected that the Lord would describe its destruction in the same language as in Jericho's fall. Research quickly shows that He does.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1098-1099:

Men will continue to erect expensive buildings, costing millions of money; special attention will be called to their architectural beauty, and the firmness and solidity with which they are constructed; but the Lord has instructed me that despite the unusual firmness and expensive display, 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 one upon another that was not thrown down.

Consider how explicitly it declares that:

Angels of God were sent to do the work of destruction so that not one stone was left upon another that was not thrown down.

Before He was crucified, Jesus solemnly declared that not one stone would be left upon another in the temple. Now it is declared that the angels were sent to do this work of destruction so that the fulfillment of Christ's words was assured. Just as the language used in the fall of Jericho tends to give the picture of angels personally laying hold of the stones and throwing them down, so this statement tends to give the same impression as far as the fall of Jerusalem is concerned.

But a study of history shows how those stones were cast down. The Romans, once they had captured the temple, razed it and much of the city to the ground making certain that not one stone was left upon another.⁴⁸ Perhaps the greatest authority on Jewish history is Josephus who was actually present at the fall of Jerusalem. His record of the event is as follows:

Now, as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their

⁴⁸ See *The Great Controversy*, p. 35.

fury, (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other such work to be done,) 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 greatest eminency; that is, Phasaelus, and Hippicus, and Mariamne, and so much of the wall as enclosed the city on the west side. This wall was spared, in order to afford a camp for such as were to lie in garrison; as were the towers also spared, in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued; 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.⁴⁹

This notable historian's report is confirmed in:

The Great Controversy, p. 35:

Both the city and the temple were razed to their foundations, and the ground upon which the holy house had stood was "plowed like a field."

Here we have two records of what took place back there. One declares that the angels did the work of destruction, while the other clearly shows that it was at Caesar's orders and by the strength and activity of his soldiers that the city was razed. This would be a hopeless contradiction if we had not studied the way in which the Bible is its own dictionary and the way in which God is said to destroy.

Firstly, it is clear that the angels did not do the work of destruction as man does it. That is, they did not themselves take those stones and throw them to the ground. Yet, at the same time, it must be recognized that they did a work which resulted in those walls being thrown to the ground till not one single stone was left

⁴⁹ *Wars of the Jews*, Book VII, chap. 1, par. 1, by Flavius Josephus. Translated by William Whiston.

upon another. But, they certainly did not use the soldiers as direct servants at their personal direction and command to tear down those mighty bastions.

So what did the angels do? How did they go about a mission of destruction? As already shown by a number of earlier quotations, the angels' role is to hold back the four winds of strife so that they might not blow on the earth. Let those winds be released and there is the terrible out breaking of human anger and the powers of nature. Those angels hold on to their work while ever God's protection is called for because of the presence of some who trust in Him. But when the time comes that this is no longer possible, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah for example, then angels are sent from heaven to instruct the holding angels to let go. In this way the angels come from heaven on a mission of destruction.

Let it be emphasized once more that while this involves a judgment on God's part, it is not His arbitrary act. He assesses the situation and sees that to remain any longer must be to force His presence where it is totally unwanted and this He cannot do. The restraining angels feel this pressure from men to leave, but they await God's command before they do so. These instructions are conveyed to them by messenger angels who, because of this responsibility, are called messengers of destruction which in fact they are.

The picture of this holding and releasing by one body of angels upon receipt of a clearance to do so by other angels is clearly shown in *Early Writings*, p. 36-38.

The chronicle of Jerusalem's destruction bears out the facts cited above. The tearing down of that city into individual stones was the end result of a series of causes:

1. The Romans did it as the expression of their white-hot anger and hatred for the Jews.

2. That in turn was the result of the behavior of the Jews who had given the Romans so much trouble and had been so ungrateful for the favors done for them.
3. The Jews were this way as a result of their persistent determination to institute their ways in the place of God's and of their continual rejection of the appeals of mercy to them.

For the apostasy of the Jews and the fury of the Romans to race away uncontrolled, the angels of God had to fully and totally withdraw their restraining power over the evil passions of men. This they did. That accomplished, the infuriated Roman soldiery was so totally uncontrolled that not even their officers, generals, or Titus himself, could control or restrain them.

Titus had determined to preserve the temple and had given specific orders that it should not be burned, but his orders were flouted. Even though he rushed in among them and demanded obedience, it was as if he were not even there. Here is part of Josephus' account of the burning of the temple:

And now a certain person came running to Titus, and told him of this fire, as he was resting himself in his tent after the last battle; whereupon he rose up in great haste, and as he was, ran to the holy house, in order to have a stop put to the fire; after him followed all his commanders, and after them followed the several legions, in great astonishment; so there was a great clamor and tumult raised, as was natural upon the disorderly motion of so great an army.

Then did Caesar, both by calling to the soldiers that were fighting, with a loud voice, and by giving a signal to them with his right hand, order them to quench the fire; but they did not hear what he said, though he spake so loud, having their ears already dinned by a greater noise another way; nor did they attend to the signal he made with his right hand neither, as still some of them were distracted with fighting, and others with passion; but as for the legions that came running thither, neither any persuasions nor any threatenings could restrain their violence, but each one's

own passion was his commander at this time; and as they were crowding into the temple together, many of them were trampled on by one another, while a great number fell among the ruins of the cloisters, which were still hot and smoking, and were destroyed in the same miserable way with those whom they had conquered: and when they were come near the holy house, they made as if they did not so much as hear Caesar's orders to the contrary; but they encouraged those that were before them to set it on fire.

As for the seditious they were in too great distress already to afford their assistance, [toward quenching the fire;] they were everywhere slain, and everywhere beaten; and as for a great part of the people, they were weak and without arms, and had their throats cut wherever they were caught. Now, round about the altar lay dead bodies heaped one upon another; as at the steps going up to it ran a great quantity of their blood, whither also the dead bodies that were slain above [on the altar] fell down.⁵⁰

The Great Controversy, p. 33-34:

The blind obstinacy of the Jewish leaders, and the detestable crimes perpetrated within the besieged city, excited the horror and indignation of the Romans, and Titus at last decided to take the temple by storm. He determined, however, that if possible it should be saved from destruction. But his commands were disregarded.

After he had retired to his tent at night, the Jews, sallying from the temple, attacked the soldiers without. In the struggle, a fire-brand was flung by a soldier through an opening in the porch, and immediately the cedar-lined chambers about the holy house were in a blaze. Titus rushed to the place, followed by his generals and legionaries, and commanded the soldiers to quench the flames. His words were unheeded.

In their fury the soldiers hurled blazing brands into the chambers adjoining the temple, and then with their swords they slaughtered in great numbers those who had found shelter there. Blood flowed down the temple steps like water. Thousands upon thousands of Jews perished. Above the sound of battle, voices were heard shouting, "Ichabod!"—the glory is departed.

⁵⁰ *Wars on the Jews*, Book VI, chap. 4, par. 6.

Titus found it impossible to check the rage of the soldiery; he entered with his officers, and surveyed the interior of the sacred edifice. The splendor filled them with wonder; and as the flames had not yet penetrated to the holy place, he made a last effort to save it, and springing forth, again exhorted the soldiers to stay the progress of the conflagration. 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, to the fierce excitement of battle, and to the insatiable hope of plunder.



When soldiers who have had instilled into them the strongest discipline of respect and obedience to the Emperor, are so totally maddened with rage that they completely ignore orders he has personally given, it is manifested that human passion is rioting in its most unrestrained form. Such outrage was possible only if the angels had vacated their positions as withholders of the winds of strife. They had no further influence over those men.

The end of Jerusalem casts great light on the fall of Jericho, teaching how the same descriptions are to be understood in the

destruction of that Canaanite city. The only difference between the overthrow of Jericho as compared to Jerusalem is that, while in the latter it was the unleashing of the furies in men which did the work, at Jericho it was the release of the forces of nature. The role of the angels in both instances was the same. They acted only and entirely in harmony with the principles of God's kingdom.

Christ himself led the messengers to the walls of Jericho to give the sad message that that people had forfeited all divine protection leaving God with no option but to call away the restraining angels. Then the furies of nature, hitherto held under control, burst forth to flatten the proud metropolis. The walls were hurled to the ground.

Yet, the word of God says that the angels did it. Surely from the way in which Bible interprets itself, the time has come when it is understood in what sense the angels did this. They had a part to play, the result of which was destruction. That part was to carry the message of doom to the restraining angels. Then the terror followed.

If careful comparison is made between the language used to describe the destructions of both Jericho and Jerusalem, all difficulties will disappear. Just what the angels did will be quite clear. Once more it will be confirmed that they did not act any differently from the revelation of God's character as given by Christ when He came to the earth.

The Wrath of God

The wrath of God is referred to frequently in the Scriptures. It is an expression describing the savage fury of men, nature, or both, 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.

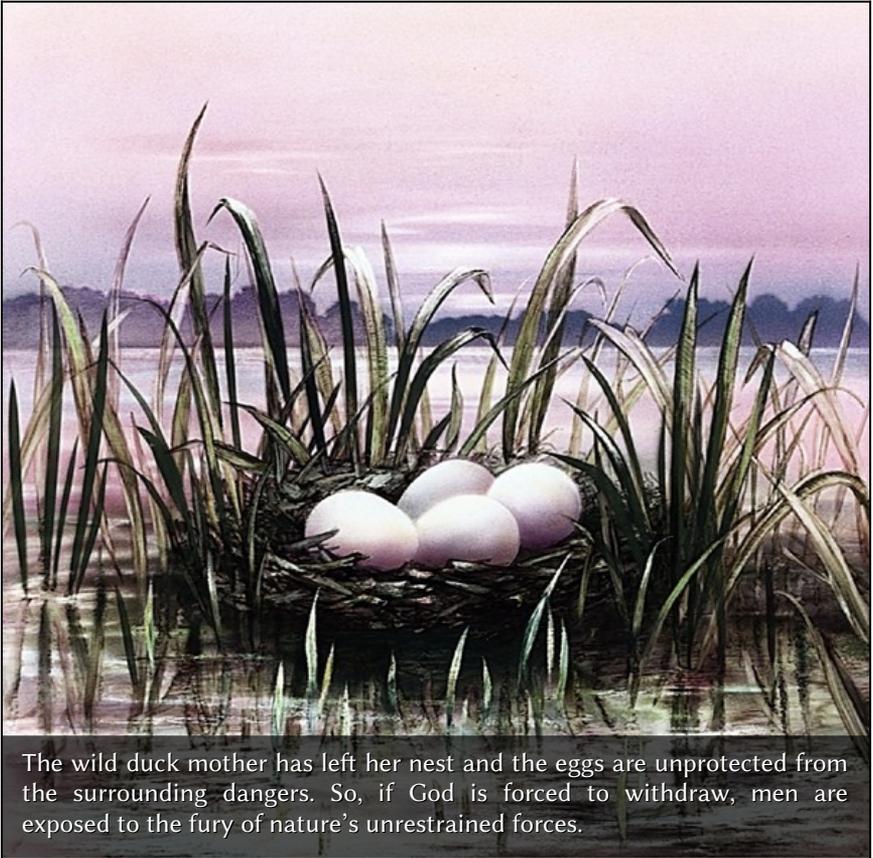
There is very real danger that God's wrath will be understood to be exactly what man's wrath is. Man's wrath is the development within him of fury, anger, and a desire to retaliate against

those who have hurt or offended him. But God's wrath is different, for the ways of God are not the ways of men. Isaiah has made that forever sure.

Isaiah 55

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.



The wild duck mother has left her nest and the eggs are unprotected from the surrounding dangers. So, if God is forced to withdraw, men are exposed to the fury of nature's unrestrained forces.

God's wrath is not the expression of His personal feelings, for, while His wrath is busily destroying man and the world, God is feeling anything but wrathful. He is pained with sorrow and distress to see His creation being committed to so terrible a fate. The

wrath of God is an expression of the very opposite from what He is feeling.

Yet, without question it is wrath. See the blasting might of the roaring hurricane, the thunder of falling buildings and opening crevasses as the earthquake strikes, the crackling roar of the blazing inferno, the shriek of the storm, and the fiendish fury of man at war. This is wrath. It is the complete picture of anger and fury, and these are the things which the Bible terms “the wrath of God.”

From the message God gave through Moses’ rod, He plainly showed that when nature is in this state, it is no longer under His direction. Therefore, it is not the expression of God’s feelings. Why then is it called “the wrath of God?” It is God’s wrath simply because every power which has gone into the state of wrath through God’s directing power being withdrawn, is of God. They are the powers of God in a wrathful state, therefore it could be called the wrath of the powers of God. Instead it is simply and more briefly called “the wrath of God.”

There will be no problem understanding this if it is ever kept in mind that man’s way and the ways of God are very different and, in fact, opposite from each other. There must be a perpetual guard set up in the human mind against the tendency to think of God and man as being the same.

Other Difficult Statements

Some who read this book may be aware of other statements which are a problem to them. It is reasonably safe to say that the most difficult ones have been discussed in this chapter. If the reader has thoroughly understood and accepted the principles of interpretation used here, then he will have less difficulty in understanding other problem verses or statements.

There will come times, as the Bible record is studied, when situations will confront us for which the Lord has not yet been able to reveal any specific explanation. Lacking that, it will seem we

have no option but to believe that in this instance at least, the Lord did resort to the use of force. But true faith knows that the absence of the correct explanation does not compel us to accept the seemingly obvious one, even though it clamors for recognition.

True faith rests in the knowledge that God does nothing out of character and that we are to trust Him in the unknown because of what we have learned of Him in the known. In so many instances we have clear Scriptural revelations of what God did when confronted with the sin problem, rebellion, ingratitude, and idolatry. Every such revelation consistently reveals God as a loving Saviour. Therefore, to the faith-filled person, absolute assurance is guaranteed that in the unknown, God is the same.

One thing is certain: no true student of the Word of God will allow his faith in the great truths to be shattered simply because one or two statements or incidents cannot immediately be understood in harmony with what the rest of the Bible teaches.

He will not forget that there were many more such in the past but that time has produced wonderful clarifications of what initially appeared to be totally inexplicable. He remembers with what changed views he now sees many things which were dark and confusing before.

Therefore, he well knows that it will be the same with these statements which have not yet been clearly explained.

37. The Seven Last Plagues

THUS far, study has been given only to events which are in the past. We should now direct out attention to events in the future. Their coming is known through the prophetic revelations and their nature must harmonize with the nature of similar events in the past. The greatest destruction yet to eventuate before the second coming of Christ will result from the outpouring of the seven last plagues. This will be the drinking by the finally impenitent...

Revelation 14

¹⁰ ...of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation.

Up till this time the judgments of God have always been mixed with mercy so that the wicked were shielded from the full penalty of their guilt.

The Great Controversy, p. 628:

All the judgments upon men, prior to the close of probation, have been mingled with mercy. The pleading blood of Christ has shielded the sinner from receiving the full measure of his guilt; but in the final judgment, wrath is poured out unmixed with mercy.

The same language used in Scripture to describe the destructions on men in the past, is employed to portray this terrible future desolation. It is depicted as being “the wrath of God,” administered by destroying angels. The same terms employed to prophesy the coming seven last plagues are also used in describing:

- the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah,
- the flooding of Noah’s world,
- the plaguing of the Egyptians,
- the serpents’ invasion into Israel’s encampment,
- Jericho’s, Nineveh’s, and Jerusalem’s overthrow,

–and many more such catastrophes.

Harmony of interpretation insists that the events of future and those of the past be understood according to the same principles as outlined in the Word of God. The Bible abounds in explanations of how we are to interpret the declarations describing the punishment to befall the wicked. Therefore, we have no excuse for failing to understand what the Bible means when it says that God destroys. It means that His efforts to save have resulted in the impenitent withdrawing from Him to the place where they no longer have His protection. This is the way it has always been in the past, and so it must be in the seven last plagues.

Therefore, in studying the outpouring of the seven last plagues, it can be correctly expected that the Scriptures, rightly understood, will show that the restraining, protecting hand of God is removed from the impenitent and the rod of power passes out of His direction. The powers in men and nature will break loose in unfettered fury, and men will reap the harvest of their own sowing.

Two Parallels from the Past

We are greatly assisted in the study of the seven last plagues by two events in the past. The first is the plagues of Egypt and the second, the fall of Jerusalem. Inspiration declares that each of these events was a preview of what is to happen in the final scourges.

The Great Controversy, p. 627-628:

When Christ ceases His intercession in the sanctuary, the unmingled wrath threatened against those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark (*Revelation* 14:9-10), will be poured out. 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.

The similarity between the plagues upon Egypt and the seven last plagues is in their character. This indicates that the plagues on Egypt will not be duplicated by the seven last plagues, and a

quick check shows that this is true. In the seven last plagues there will be no frogs, lice, flies, or specific death of the firstborn, and in Egypt there was no earthquake or scorching of men with great heat.

But while the seven last plagues will not be an exact repetition of the Egyptian scourges, they will be similar in character because they will be the offspring of exactly the same conditions. As the one nation of Egypt threw off all connection with God, so the people of the whole world will separate from Him by rejecting the principles of His government. The last appeals of mercy scorned, God is left with no option but to leave them alone. Once again, nature out of control will smite them until none remain.

The second preview of the seven last plagues is given in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

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.

Already the fate of Jerusalem has been studied.⁵¹ The Spirit of God, persistently rejected and abused, had at last no choice but to leave the people to themselves.

1. With nothing to restrain the fierce passions of the Jews, they rebelled so treacherously and seditiously against the Romans that they stirred up the worst spirit of retaliation in them.
2. This brought the mighty power of Rome to bear upon the city of Jerusalem.
3. With the continued resistance of the Jews and the prolonged attack by the Romans, the spirits of all became so

⁵¹ See Chapter 14, *God Does Destroy: But How?*, Section "[The Fall of Jerusalem](#)."

intensified that in the final scenes, the powers in those people simply ran riot.

4. The resulting slaughter and atrocities were worse than human language can picture.
5. When the city had been conquered and there were no more to be slain, the Romans then systematically tore the city stone from stone till the destruction was virtually absolute.

In that fate the doom of the world is to be read. Exactly what befell Jerusalem will befall the whole earth. 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 in nature and man, the earth will be plunged into a time of trouble such as never was.

The seven last plagues will in no sense of the word be the manipulation of those powers by the hands of God. Instead, just as in Egypt and in Jerusalem, God will not even be there. Everything that happens will be due to His absence, not His presence. Once again the rod will have passed out of Moses' hand.

These direct statements will verify the truth of the above principles and the conclusions drawn from them.

The Great Controversy, p. 614:

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.

Early Writings, p. 280:

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.

This statement verifies the truth that it is the removal of God's restraining power which releases the powers of men and nature into Satan's hands. They then burst with destructive fury upon the shelterless heads of the wicked.

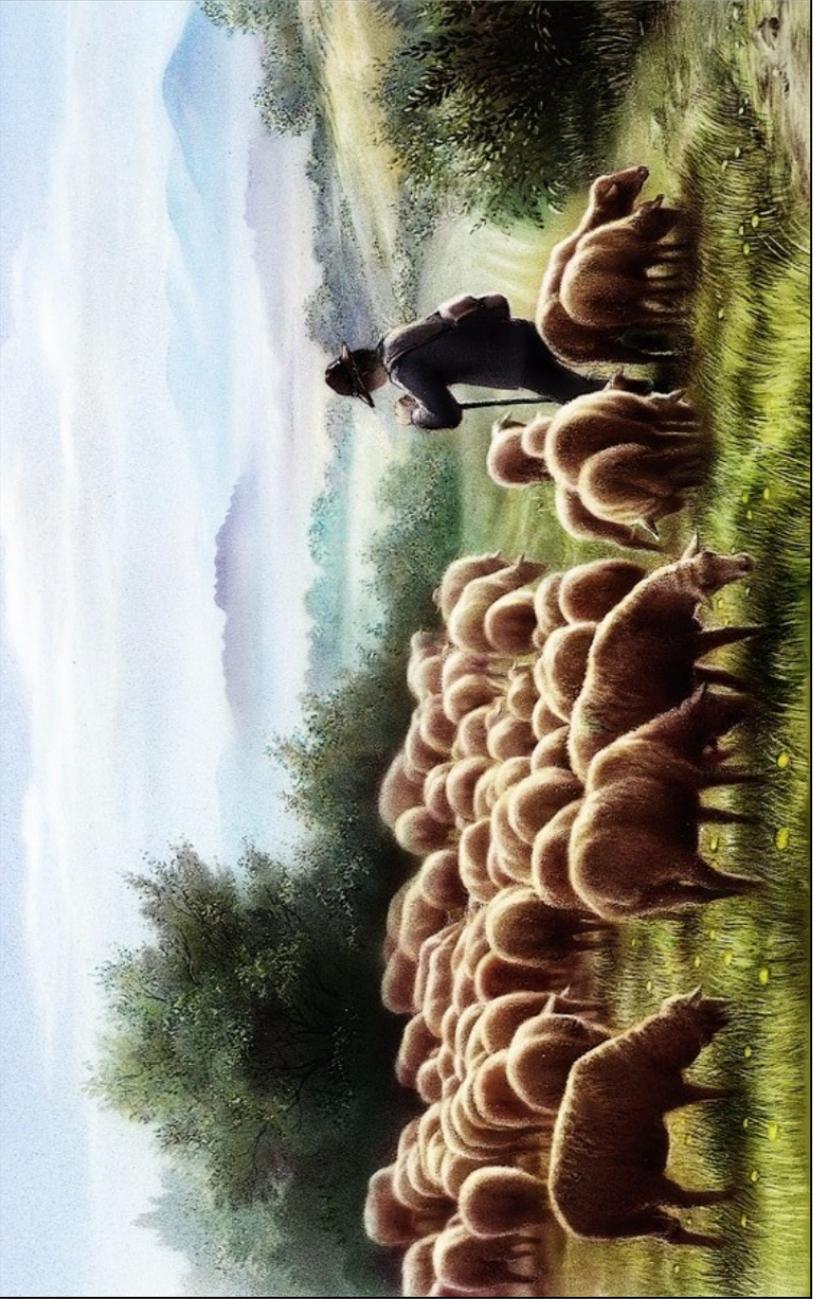
Let the expression, "there is nothing to stay the wrath of God," be guarded from misunderstanding. Before the principles in regard to God's character are understood, this is taken to mean that God was personally angered and therefore anxious to smite the offenders but is restrained by the intercession of His Son until Jesus finishes His work in the sanctuary.

If this interpretation is correct, then Christ and His Father are working against each other. God is longing to destroy man, while Christ is resisting Him. However, it is impossible to believe this and at the same time hold to the great and precious truth that Christ and the Father are one; that, far from working against each other, they are fully united in the task of saving man.

2 Corinthians 5

¹⁹ God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

God shields His children from the power of the destroyer.



There could be nothing closer than the unity of the Father and the Son in the work of salvation. God is not seeking the sinner's destruction while the Son works to delay the unleashing of the Father's fury. They are working together to the limit of their resources to bring men back to eternal life, and only when men utterly reject those saving measures, do they jointly leave the rebellious to their chosen fate.

When it is truly understood that the wrath of God is not a personal feeling, but the perversion and derangement of the powers in men and nature into wrathful and destructive forces only awaiting the opportunity to embark on a rampage of devastation, then there will be no problem in understanding the unity of the Father and the Son.

The Review and Herald, September 17, 1901:

Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. 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. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work."

This time is right upon us. 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.

And so completely will men be deceived by him that they will declare that these calamities are the result of the desecration of the first day of the week. From the pulpits of the popular churches will be heard the statement that the world is being punished because Sunday is not honored as it should be. And it will require no great stretch of imagination for men to believe this. They are guided by the enemy, and therefore they reach conclusions which are entirely false.

The Great Controversy, p. 589:

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.

The Great Controversy, p. 36:

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors 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.

Manuscript Releases, vol. 14, p. 3:

I was shown that the judgments of God *would not come directly* out from the Lord upon them, but in this way: They place themselves beyond His protection. He warns, corrects, reproveth, and points out the only path of safety; then if those who have been the objects of His special care will follow their own course independent of the Spirit of God, after repeated warnings, if they choose their own way, then He does not commission His angels to prevent Satan's decided attacks upon them.

It is Satan's power that is at work at sea and on land, bringing calamity and distress, and sweeping off multitudes to make sure of his prey. And storm and tempest both by sea and land will be, for Satan has come down in great wrath. He is at work. He knows his time is short and, if he is not restrained, we shall see more terrible manifestations of his power than we have ever dreamed of. [emphasis added]

Thus the Lord makes it very plain how the seven last plagues will come. They will certainly not be the direct use by God of the forces in man and nature.

Instead, God will make a judgment or assessment that the wicked have fully and universally resolved to depose Him from their hearts, their affairs, and the world. Since their decision is fully confirmed, God has no choice but to let them have what they want. So He leaves them, and Satan makes the most of the opportunity to stir them to even greater heights 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. They sowed the seed. They reap the harvest.



38. The Brightness of His Coming

2 Thessalonians 2

⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

THIS Scripture has been usually understood to portray the picture of Christ descending the advent skies, while before Him precede great flowing sheets of devouring flame which reach out to consume whoever of the impenitent have somehow managed to survive the plagues.

Such an interpretation of this Scripture, obvious as it may appear, is out of harmony with the character of God and Christ. If fire emanating from Him kills the wicked, then there is a direct, destructive work associated with His presence and Person. Therefore, He would be an executioner after all. But He is not, nor ever will be.

When He came the first time to this earth, He testified that He had not come to destroy men's lives but to save them, and that purpose does not change with His second coming. Once again His intention is 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.

Certainly He would save every individual who has ever been born if this were possible, but tragically, so few are prepared to accept His saving grace. He has not come for the wicked and He does nothing to them. They have taken themselves away from Him, and their fate is entirely a matter of their own appointment.

There are statements which explain this text and which harmonize with this principle.

The Great Controversy, p. 37:

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. 2 *Thessalonians* 2:8. 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.

That this statement is a direct explanation of the verse under study is clear from the fact that firstly the text is quoted, and then comment is made upon it. Therein it is affirmed that the wicked destroy themselves. It is not the work of God but their own. They have sown the seed and they must reap the harvest.

A Parallel

Most significant is the parallel drawn between the way in which Israel perished and the destruction in the last days. As the one perished, so will the other. This indicates that the Jews were likewise destroyed with the brightness of His coming. This is true, for that is exactly how they did come to their end.

To this, one might tend to object that Jesus did not come with outshining glory at His first advent. Furthermore, He was far away in the distant heavens when the Jews met their fate, so there is no visible evidence of their having been consumed with the brightness of His glory. Such an interpretation depends on the understanding of what the brightness of His glory is and how humans are consumed by it. Defining that expression is the key to solving the problem.

The factor which above all others brought the Jews to their untimely end was the manifestation of the brightness of God's character-glory in Christ. Before Christ came, the Jews were in a serious state of apostasy, but, even so, were not totally separated from God, for they had not taken the final steps in rebellion.

But, as the light of Christ's glorious character shone on them, they went to desperate lengths to resist it until they carried themselves to the extremes of apostasy. God did not intend that such be the result of this revelation, but once they determined upon rejection of Him, it became the only possible outworking of that de-

cision. They were destroyed, and it was by the brightness of His coming. The sequence then was as follows:

1. The Jews were in a state of apostasy.
2. Christ shone on them the brightness of His coming, the glory of His character.
3. They rejected this influence and thus separated themselves from His protection.
4. The actual destruction was accomplished by unleashed, natural forces.

In the sacred writings these things are described. There we read of Christ's coming, of the Jews' reaction, and of the separation of the Spirit of God from them. Then we read of the destructive work accomplished by human passion no longer under divine restraint.

In exactly the same way there is recorded the identical procedure which leads to the destruction of the wicked in the final overthrow of mankind.

1. They will be in a state of deep apostasy.
2. The brightness of His coming will be revealed to them in the loud cry.
3. Their rejection of this influence will separate them from God's protection.
4. The actual destruction to befall them will be accomplished by the unleashing of the wild passions within them and by the unrestrained forces of nature.

Basically then, it is the brightness of His coming which destroys them but not in the sense that they are struck down by it. That is left to the unrestrained forces in man and nature, the destruction from which the brightness of His coming would have saved them if they had related to it correctly.

Destructive Forces in Man and Nature

Therefore, in studying the final demise of the wicked, both the character of God and the forces in man and nature must be kept in mind. The student must understand just what is accomplished by each, ever keeping the distinctions sharp and clear.

Inspiration does not fail to mention them. When the fall of the wicked is described in *The Great Controversy*, it shows that they will be obliterated by the furious outburst of their own fierce passions and by the outpouring of the seven last plagues. There immediately follows the statement that they will be consumed by the spirit of His mouth and destroyed by the brightness of His coming. Here is exactly how it appears:

The Great Controversy, p. 657:

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.

Jeremiah 25

³³ 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. Christ takes His people to the city of God, and the earth is emptied of its inhabitants.

The fact that these two paragraphs occur together perfectly expresses the destiny of the unrepentant. The immediate and seemingly obvious means of their destruction will be the terrible onslaught of maddened man and nature. But the deeper, underlying cause is not to be overlooked. Prior to the coming of the physical calamities, divine love will have sent the revelation of Christ's character in the loud cry. Their rejection of this saving revelation will place them where destruction is free to descend upon them.

Those who do not understand this but believe that the death of the wicked will be directly and physically accomplished by flam-

ing fire emanating from the person of Christ, need to have the statement differently written. For them it should appear as follows:

“In the mad strife of their own fierce passions, and by the awful outpouring of God’s unmingled wrath, fall” *the larger proportion* of “the wicked inhabitants of the earth...”

“At the coming of Christ” *the remainder* of “the wicked are blotted from the face of the whole earth...”

The second version provides for the theory that when Christ appears, there will be such an outshining of flaming power that the wicked who manage to survive the seven last plagues and the bloody internecine warfare, will be consumed by it.

But it is not written that way. Instead, we have the truth stated and then repeated in different words of just how the wicked will perish. They are parallel declarations, each saying the same thing in different words. To be slain by the brightness of His coming is to perish under the seven last plagues and the fierce battles the people will fight.

From this reference it is evident that the death of those upon the earth at the second advent is not caused by searing fire emanating from Christ. The actual physical forces which crush out fragile life will be the terrible scourges and the fighting among the people.

Exactly as the Jews, who perished by the physical instrument of the Roman armies, were destroyed by the brightness of His coming, so the plagues will come upon the wicked in the same way. 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, calling upon the hearers throughout the length and breadth of the earth to surrender their ways and accept the perfection of God’s righteousness.

Very few will respond to this powerful, drawing love. Most will resist it with all the determination they can muster. The more effectively the truth of God, which shines with the brightness of His coming, is offered to the people, the more rapidly and deeply will they enter into apostasy if they do not yield to it. This will separate themselves from God to the point where He will be forced to leave them entirely. Then will come upon them the full fury of the seven last plagues by which they will be destroyed. Thus they are destroyed by the spirit of His mouth and the brightness of His coming.

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 a hundred years ago. Much further back it would likewise have ended if the early church had lived true to all the light they had received. The only reason the earth has escaped destruction so long is because its inhabitants have not been subjected to the spirit of His mouth and the brightness of His coming.

Further Evidence

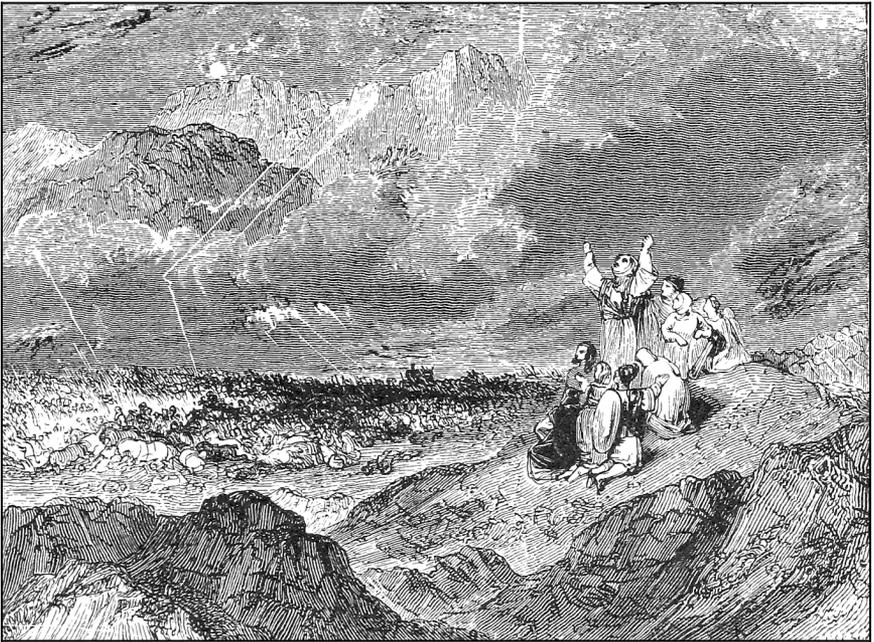
A further evidence to support the fact that it is not the pulsing forth of fire from the Person of Christ which destroys the wicked, is the final confrontation around the city of God. There the wicked come quite close to the presence of Christ who is just as powerful then as when He returns the second time. But they are able to march against the city in which is the presence of God and Christ.

They are able to stand there right through the revelation of the mystery of Christ, and they are able to see all that God wants them to see without being consumed with physical fire from the presence of God and His Son. As will be shown in the next chapter, even when they are destroyed, it will not be by fire which emanates from the person of God or Christ. Therefore, if the fire surrounding Christ does not consume them at the end of the thousand years, why should it do so at the beginning, unless Christ

personally decided that it should? If He did, then of course He would become a direct destroyer which, for Him, is impossible.

This does not mean that the Deities have no power surrounding them and that man can survive in its presence without special protection. When the drunken sons of Aaron—Nadab and Abihu—went into the sanctuary without the protection of the incense, they were destroyed by this power. It is just as if a man comes into physical contact with a powerful electrical field without special protective clothing. He dies. Likewise, if a man enters into a fire, he will certainly die.

But it will not be thus with the wicked either at the second advent or at the end of the thousand years. They are shielded from this power and therefore are not consumed as were Nadab and Abihu.



39. The Final Showdown

WHEN Christ returns, the earth will have been for six thousand years the proving ground for the validity, power, indestructibility, justice, and perfect righteousness of the principles upon which God's kingdom is built. During that span of sixty centuries Satan and his hosts will have:

- mounted every possible assault in their desperate search for that one weakness or flaw needed to supply the evidence to prove that God's ways are not perfect and need to be reformed;
- worked to provoke God to the point where He would arise and sweep mankind off the face of the earth;
- subjected Him to the greatest test which could ever come upon Him.

This has been no light test for God. He is a being of infinite power and love. Usually, the more power a person possesses, the greater is the danger of misusing it. With human beings we see this again and again.

The Pain of God

Furthermore, the intense sensitivity of God's nature causes Him to view sin with a hatred and detestation which no human being could either know or understand. Throughout the entire period of the great controversy, God has been suffering intense anguish.

Education, p. 263-264:

Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and to the world. Few think of its relation to 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:

Judges 10

¹⁶ His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

Isaiah 63

⁹ In all their affliction He was afflicted...and He bore them, and carried them all the days of old.

Romans 8

²⁶ [His] Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

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 lazar 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.

The Desire of Ages, p. 823:

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.

The Desire of Ages, p. 356:

Jesus assures His disciples of God’s sympathy for them in their needs and weaknesses. 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.

The depth of God’s continual suffering needs to be better realized and appreciated. There has been the inclination to think that Jesus came to this earth, suffered with increasing intensity for thirty-three years, and then returned to the perfect bliss and painlessness of heaven. This is anything but the truth. The Father and Son have suffered to a depth of which we have neither knowledge nor experience.

This personal pain is distasteful to God who desires the end of all suffering more than we ever could. He has the power to end it

in an instant by simply obliterating it. Yet He does not yield to this pressure. He is prepared to suffer in order to maintain the principles of His government whereby the happiness and security of all the universe will be eternally assured. If we could enter into the full extent of God's sufferings and, at the same time, if we possessed the power He has, then we would know something of the pressure exerted on Him throughout the great controversy.

The Faithfulness of God

If God, in all that time, had made the slightest move to save himself from suffering by removing the cause of His anguish; had He by even so much as a thought made a concession to the devil's arguments; should He so much as by a hair's breadth have taken away from man his freedom to choose and to act as he chose; had He taken the life of one individual in order to lessen the suffering caused by sin; then Satan would have had the evidence needed to show that his arguments were valid after all.

But during all those ages of darkness and death, temptation and suffering, God has never deviated from the stated and perfect principles of His government and kingdom.

- He has never violated the freedom given to any individual, has never taken a person's life, has never destroyed, and has never in the smallest particular broken the law.
- He has been strictly impartial and just.
- He has been a Saviour, ever and only working to bless, heal, and restore.

Satan has never gained a point in the whole battle. From it all, God emerges as untouched by sin as if it had never entered the universe. He is immaculate. For this, every redeemed soul shall be eternally grateful.

Establishing Everlasting Righteousness

But while God has been immaculately perfect in all His activities, He has not been seen as such. In the eyes of men, Satan has dressed the pure and holy God in his own evil garments. Millions

and added millions have gone to their graves with a decidedly reversed view of the true nature of righteousness and the God of righteousness. The great controversy cannot be settled until every one of those minds sees the true nature of our heavenly Father and confesses His perfect justice and righteousness.

God is not concerned about clearing His name for His own personal interest. He is not proud. He does not take personal offense. But He does understand that His character and the principles of righteousness are one and the same. Therefore, the justification of one assures the establishment of the other.

He further knows that the eternal happiness and security of the universe depend on the vindication of those principles. Inasmuch as His everlasting and infinite love for all His children will not permit Him to provide anything less than the perfect best for them, He is therefore determined not to permit the ultimate desecration of righteousness. He will establish it eternally.

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.

It follows therefore that if it was important for God never to violate the laws of His government during the six thousand years of active controversy, then it is of multiplied importance that He strictly adhere to them in the final showdown around the city after the thousand years have expired.

Some are prepared to believe that, during the six millenniums of the great controversy, God will have withheld His righteous hands from slaying anyone or destroying anything. But they are not prepared to go so far as to believe that He will continue this course at the final showdown. Then, they believe, He will arise to personally exterminate the willfully unrepentant. They reason on this basis:

1. During the six thousand years He restrains himself to give the wicked opportunity to display before the universe their utter defiance and ingratitude.
2. When the inhabitants of other systems see the full perversity of the human race, God will be free to cut them off without being regarded as cruel or unjust.
3. Moreover, they will have become so incensed with this despicable behavior that they will expect and even require God to destroy them.

This is the position held by some. This reasoning, if true, makes God a politician whose policies are determined by public opinion. This is to belittle God; to reduce Him to the level of scheming men who study the temper of their fellow humans and then formulate their policies and procedures accordingly.

But God is not like that. He is motivated by righteousness, not by the feelings of His creatures. Before the great controversy began, throughout all of its duration, and in its final resolution, God has and will act with unvarying consistency.

The reason for God's willingness to enter into the great controversy with the devil, was to demonstrate that the principles of His government were perfect, and that, no matter what the pressure upon Him, He would act only in accordance with them. He knew that only in this way could the controversy be ended.

Accordingly, no matter how wicked men have been in the past, how extensively their destructive ways have desolated the earth, or how violent their insolence against Heaven, God has not raised a finger to obliterate them. They have perished as the fruitage of their own evil seed-sowing.

To believe that God has never destroyed during the course of the great rebellion, but turns to do so in the end, is self-contradicting. It would mean that God, who has spent seven thousand years demonstrating that He is not an executioner of the sentence against transgression, will undo all He has worked to establish by

turning into an executioner for this final judgment. What a tragedy that would be!

During the long defection, Satan and his hordes have worked with relentless determination to provoke God into raising His righteous hand to destroy the rebels, but He has passed every test without defect. In the last showdown He is afforded His final opportunity to confirm that He is not an executioner, that He has given to all the freedom to choose what they want, and that He will not interfere with that choice.

To make the least concession then, after so perfectly demonstrating the contrary over the previous millenniums, would nullify all that has been achieved. It would be as if a man spent a lifetime building a splendid edifice and then burned it to the ground. It is certain that this is not what God will do. There is no possibility of His having faithfully resisted every pressure to provocation for so long, only to give way to it at the last.

Sin Destroys Sin

The final eradication of the wicked will happen exactly as lesser decimations occurred in human history:

- As Jerusalem was overthrown by the Jews themselves,
- As Sodom and Gomorrah perished as a harvest of their own seed-sowing,
- As the flood came, not because God sent it, but because He could not prevent it without violating His righteous principles,

—so the final end will come. It will not be because God sent it, but because He cannot prevent it without taking away people's freedom to choose what they want.

These principles have not been understood by most earth-dwellers, who have gone to their dusty beds with distorted understandings of God's character. This is not God's fault, for He has provided in nature, in His Word, and in the revelation given by

Christ, all that is necessary for understanding His righteous principles.

Therefore, in His great love and mercy, He will especially raise up every human being so that once more, they can be shown His workings and their own rejection of them. This time they will have no arguments with which to counter the witness of God. Every person from Satan down will acknowledge that God has been just and that the loss of their own souls is their own doing.

After one thousand years during which there will not be a living soul upon this earth apart from the devil and his evil angels, the wicked of every generation will be raised up for this final showdown. They come up resuming...

The Great Controversy, p. 664:

...the current of their thoughts just where it ceased. They are actuated by the same desire to conquer that ruled them when they fell.

Satan is astir at once and marshals the mighty hosts into the most prodigious, prestigious army ever to tramp the earth. It will be a most impressive sight as they drill and train day after day. How long a time will be involved in this mammoth preparation we are not told. According to the principle of freedom which the Lord extends to all, they will be given as much time as they wish to take. Satan knows this and, while he is anxious to see the struggle over, at the same time he knows that it will be a titanic struggle. Therefore, he will direct that the preparations be as thorough as possible.

They do not intend to advance to the hoped-for conquest of the city with bare hands.

The Great Controversy, p. 664:

Skillful artisans construct implements of war.

Just how sophisticated those weapons will be, we are not told. It is possible that they will be as highly technical as the scientific men can assemble. The atomic scientists will be there, remember-

ing all that they learned while still living on this earth. They will think in terms of conducting nuclear warfare against the city. Whatever the case, one thing we can be sure of. They will not advance upon the city with sticks and stones.

But no battle ensues. It has been suggested that the battle of Armageddon begins before Christ's coming and is completed around the New Jerusalem. A little careful thought will show that there is no battle around the Holy City. The struggle between God and His people on one side, and Satan and his on the other, will all end before Christ comes the second time.

The Evidence Presented

After that, at the end of the thousand years, God will have at His command the revelations of the principles of righteousness as embodied in His character, which have been provided firstly by the life and teachings of Christ upon this earth, and secondly by the witness of the translated saints as given during the time of Jacob's trouble.

This witness will be unfolded before the multitudes who have been halted in their advance upon the city. As scene after scene passes before them, they will see the great controversy in its true light.⁵²

- They will realize just what God stands for.
- They will see the true nature of Satan's rebellion against Him.
- They will recognize that His law was provided for them as a life-preserver; that disregard of the divine precepts did not bring them release from an arduous bondage, but opened the flood gates of woe upon them.
- They will understand at last, that every woe and trouble they have experienced has been the result of their own course of action.

⁵² See *The Great Controversy*, p. 666-668.

- They will know that they have abused the gift of freedom to their own miserable hurt.

They will see things as they have never seen them before and as the devil was determined that they should never see them. As soon as they do, all intent to continue the rebellion against God is ended.

The point was made in chapter 4 that when a misrepresentation of God's character begins, there, rebellion against God likewise begins. So, when the character of God is fully revealed for what it is, rebellion against God then comes to its end.

This is precisely why there is no war between evil men and God over the New Jerusalem. In the beginning of the great controversy, God did not have so clear a manifestation of His character as would settle the problem right there and then. But at the end of the thousand years, He will have such revelations. These He will use, not only to ensure that there is no war, but to bring from the least person to Satan himself the frank and open confession that they have held wrong concepts of God, that they have been responsible for rejecting His salvation, and that their doom is deserved.

The picture is so clear. The wicked see things exactly as they are and instead of rushing in to attack the city, they fall...

The Great Controversy, p. 669:

...prostrate [and] worship the Prince of life.

Satan also sees it all. His mind travels back over the full span of his life. He sees again those days when he was the covering cherub. He remembers the first thoughts of doubt and then the open rebellion. He surveys the long centuries in between, comparing the loving patience and forgiving power of the Eternal Ones in contrast to his own mean, destructive spirit.

The Great Controversy, p. 670:

Satan sees that his voluntary rebellion has unfitted him for heaven. He has trained his powers to war against God; the pu-

rity, 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.

The great moment has come. There is not a single intelligent being in the universe whose mind has the slightest question remaining as to the perfect righteousness of God's character. Even the arch rebel himself has bowed down to acknowledge the truth of God's ways and the falsity of every other system.

Revelation 15

⁴ Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify your name? for You only are holy: for all nations shall come and worship before You; for your judgments are made manifest.

The Great Controversy, p. 670-671:

Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy has now been made plain. The results of rebellion, the fruits of setting aside the divine statutes, have been laid open to the view of all created intelligences. The working out of Satan's rule in contrast with the government of God, has been presented to the whole universe. 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.

Psalm 145

¹⁰ All your works shall praise You, O Lord; and your saints shall bless You.

The history of sin will stand to all eternity as a witness that with the existence of God's law is bound up the happiness of all the beings He has created. With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare,

Revelation 15

³ Just and true are your ways, You King of saints.

The Purification of the Earth

Once Satan and his followers have been brought to acknowledge the justice and righteousness of God, the stage is set for the final act of the drama—earth’s and heaven’s actual purification from the stain and presence of sin. This will be accomplished by fire. The Scripture says,

Revelation 20

⁹ And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

¹⁴ Then death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

The Great Controversy, p. 672-673:

Isaiah 9

⁵ Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

Isaiah 34

² The indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and His fury upon all their armies: He has utterly destroyed them, He has delivered them to the slaughter.

Psalms 11 [margin]

⁶ Upon the wicked He shall rain quick burning coals, fire and brimstone and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.

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. The earth’s surface seems one molten mass—a vast, seething lake of fire. It is the time of the judgment and perdition of ungodly men—

Isaiah 34

⁸ ...the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion.

The wicked receive their recompense in the earth. *Proverbs* 11:31.

Malachi 4

¹ [They] shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts.

Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished "according to their deeds."

The sins of the righteous having been transferred to Satan, he is made to suffer not only for his own rebellion, but for all the sins which he has caused God's people to commit. His punishment is to be far greater than that of those whom he has deceived. After all have perished who fell by his deceptions, he is still to live and suffer on.

In the cleansing flames the wicked are at last destroyed, root and branch—Satan the root, his followers the branches. The full penalty of the law has been visited; the demands of justice have been met; and heaven and earth, beholding, declare the righteousness of Jehovah.

These texts and statements are familiar to Bible students. Invariably they have given a picture of God personally pouring down fire upon the wicked and thus bringing about their final end. This is no problem to the average person, for he considers that God has a perfect right to destroy those who have rebelled against Him. Furthermore, he knows of no other way whereby the problem can be solved. The criminal must be executed, or else he will go on making trouble forever. Of course this is man's thinking, but it is neither the thinking nor the way of God.

There is no difference in the language used in *Revelation* or *The Great Controversy* from that used in other parts of Inspiration describing the outpouring of terrible judgments.

Genesis 19

²⁴ Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and upon Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens.

Exodus 7

³ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.

Numbers 21

⁶ So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

1 Samuel 16

¹⁴ But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him.

Matthew 22

⁷ But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

We have already considered each of these statements from the Lord. It has been demonstrated that there must be a different definition of the terms and expressions used to describe the behavior of men. Trouble is experienced in understanding these expressions in regard to God's character when no distinction is made between man's ways and God's ways.

Our previous study of these verses confirmed the truth that when God pours out fire, sends serpents, or such like, it is not something dispensed from His hands as a response to His personal decree. Rather, it happens only when He is obliged to depart from the scene thus leaving matters in the hands of men and devils. Then, being no longer under His direction, the rod of power descends in merciless power upon the defenseless heads of the self-willed.

There is no reason to suppose that these verses in *Revelation* are to be understood any differently. What those expressions mean throughout the remainder of the Scriptures, they must still mean at the end of them. Therefore, in the end, God does not decree that the wicked shall die by fire and then set about executing this decree by personally exercising His power. God does not decree what punishment shall befall the evildoer. He foresees what will

happen and foretells it, but He neither chooses nor organizes it to be just that way.

In the light of all the truths we have studied, consider the sequence of events in the drama of destruction outside the city. When the wicked are raised at the close of the millennium, it is only possible for them to live safely upon the earth by God's holding firm hands on the rod of power. All the mighty forces of nature are thus held in restraint in order to afford to the lost, the opportunity of seeing the true nature of the great controversy. Thus, there is no outburst of fire and brimstone during the time that they make their preparations and advance upon the city.

But when the revelations of the mystery of God have been completed and the people are simultaneously convinced that they have rejected the loving appeals of God, then the time has come for the final settlement. Every one of these individuals has, during this life, made an irrevocable decision rejecting salvation in preference for Satan's kingdom. God knows that once this point has been reached, the wicked will never change no matter what opportunity might be given to them. It is for this reason that Jesus solemnly declares as He leaves the sanctuary,

Revelation 22

¹¹ He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.

This declaration of Jesus Christ is an evaluation of the condition of the wicked. It is not to be supposed that Christ says this because He and the Father have decided that probation can no longer be continued, and for this reason those who have not availed themselves of salvation during the designated time limit, are lost forever. It is because, no matter what revelations might be made to them or opportunities given, their decision is final.

But it is one thing for this to be so and for Christ to say it is so. It is something else for God's true children to see it. How often in this life have we looked upon someone who appears to be so sin-

cere and honest, and yet who makes no evident move toward the messages of truth. We feel that if only this person had been given more opportunity to see it, he would have come to Christ. We find it difficult to accept the idea that when this person goes to the grave, he should remain unjust forever. But we trust that God's judgment is correct and that all will be made plain at the end of the thousand years.

The declaration made by Christ will be vindicated by the demonstration of its truthfulness at the close of the millennium. Those who appeared to go down to their graves without the necessary chance to see the light, will be shown what opportunities they really did have in their lives to see and accept the truth, and they will also be afforded a further revelation of truth. It will convince but not convert them. Their rejection of such light as came to them in this life, will have hardened them beyond any possibility of change.

Their conviction that God is right after all, will be expressed by their bowing before Him and saying so, but they do not plead His forgiveness nor ask to be accepted into His kingdom. All of that is foreign and distasteful to them. They still want to live but on their own terms. Knowing that this cannot be and that accordingly, they are eternally to be deprived of any life, they rise from their knees in a frenzy of disappointment and rage and turn upon him who has robbed them of everything.

In effect, at the climax of the revelation of the gospel to them, they will reconfirm their intentions. Hitherto they have reiterated their wish to live without God. The time will come when they must either confirm or deny the plan to continue that way. If it were possible for them to relinquish every desire to be separate from God, then God would save them even then, for:

Psalm 106

¹ His mercy endures forever.

But none of them will be saved at this time, for they will not show any disposition to change. Christ's declaration will be

proven correct. As God waits for their answer, they will confirm in the most emphatic terms that they want nothing to do with Him, but will choose to be left entirely to their own way. They will want the world and life under their own terms.

What can God do under these circumstances? He has made it very plain that they have full liberty to choose what they want. If they prefer to be without Him, then this is what they shall have. When Israel wanted a king, He gave them one; when they wanted flesh, He let them have it; and whenever men have wanted this or that, the Lord has never stood in their way, no matter what dire results might follow their foolish choosing.

At the end of the millennium He cannot change. So, when the wicked choose to be without God, He will release His hold on the powers of nature. It will be as it was at the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt, and the fall of Jerusalem. God, in each case, accepted their choice and turned the control over to them. So it will be at the end. The wicked will be given full possession of the earth and all its powers, but they will be unable to control the frenzied outburst of human, satanic, and natural wrath which has been building in intensity ever since the first sin was committed.

The first manifestation of this will be when the people turn on Satan himself. They see in him the cause of all their troubles. The weapons intended for the city will be directed against him, and he will employ every evasive maneuver conceivable to avoid them. Then the fires will start. Exactly how, we are not told. One thing is certain. Men never go to war without generating fire, especially when it is nuclear warfare. Thus, when they hurl their atomic weapons at the devil, they will certainly start a mighty conflagration.

As in the flood of water when the fountains of the earth were broken up so that water rushed out from beneath the surface, so the stores of oil and coal still hidden from men in the bowels of the earth will burst forth in flaming torrents upon the surface.

Spiritual Gifts, vol. 3, p. 87:

Those majestic trees which God had caused to grow upon the earth, for the benefit of the inhabitants of the old world, and which they had used to form into idols, and to corrupt themselves with, God has reserved in the earth, in the shape of coal and oil to use as agencies in their final destruction.

As He called forth the waters in the earth at the time of the flood, as weapons from His arsenal to accomplish the destruction of the antediluvian race, so at the end of the one thousand years He will call forth the fires in the earth as His weapons which He has reserved for the final destruction, not only of successive generations since the flood, but the antediluvian race who perished by the flood.

In the original flood, water also poured down from above. Likewise it is to be expected that fire will rain down from the heavens. The great source of this would be the sun, as from our study of the principles, we know that it does not come from God personally.

When God's presence was withdrawn from the earth in Noah's day, both the sun and the moon were affected. Therefore, when God's presence is again withdrawn in the same way at the close of the millennium, the sun will again be affected. In its final stages of decay resulting from the effects of sin in this earth, it could well erupt in great explosions, projecting streams of fire far out into the solar system and onto this earth. If this is so, then fire from above would mingle with the fire from beneath, exactly as the waters did when this earth was flooded. The whole earth will be enveloped in a sea of flame on which the Holy City will ride as did the ark. Within it, the ransomed will be safe and secure until the destruction is completed.

In this final annihilation, the wicked do not all take the same time to perish. There is a direct relationship between the extent to which they have sinned and the length of time they suffer.

Early Writings, p. 294-295:

I saw that some were quickly destroyed, while others suffered longer. They were punished according to the deeds done in the body. Some were many days consuming, and just as long as there was a portion of them unconsumed, all the sense of suffering remained. Said the angel, "The worm of life shall not die; their fire shall not be quenched as long as there is the least particle for it to prey upon."

Satan and his angels suffered long. Satan bore not only the weight and punishment of his own sins, but also of the sins of the redeemed host, which had been placed upon him; and he must also suffer for the ruin of souls which he had caused. Then I saw that Satan and all the wicked host were consumed, and the justice of God was satisfied; and all the angelic host, and all the redeemed saints, with a loud voice said, "Amen!"

The question immediately arises as to how the wicked could suffer exactly according to what they deserve unless some intelligence calculates the measure of their individual punishments and so controls events that they will be kept alive until the full punishment has been exacted. On the surface, it seems that God, being the only one with the power to either estimate the deserved chastisement or to control its administration, must surely be the one who executes the sinners in the end.

Anyone who understands and accepts the principles laid down so far will recognize that there must be another answer. This not yet being revealed, does not force us to accept any answer, only because the true answer is missing. One thing must be very clear, and it is that God does not execute the sinner, now, or in the past, or ever. It is sin which does that.

To understand how sin can do this and selectively punish one more than another, requires knowledge of laws which as yet are beyond our ken. One thing we do know however, is that the more sinful a person is, the more desperately he struggles to live in the face of death. The true child of God does not fight the Grim Reaper. He knows his time has come and that his life is safe in the

hands of God. But not so with the rebel against God's laws and government. He resists with all the strength he has and is able to prolong his life beyond its natural span.

No one has been so great a sinner as Satan, and no one will fight the inroads of death with greater determination than he. Thus he will prolong his life far beyond that point where he would have died if he had resigned himself to his fate. In so doing he will extend his suffering until he has suffered for all the sins he has committed and caused others to commit. Finally it will be all over and the...

Early Writings, p. 295:

...fire which had consumed the wicked, [will burn] up the rubbish and [purify] the earth.

The deadly experiment will be ended, and it will be demonstrated eternally that through it all, God did not change. When sin entered, it changed angels, men, the animals, and the operations of nature, but it did not change God. Nothing was introduced into His ways after the coming of sin which was not there before. He never destroyed before sin entered, never executed, never punished, and never forced. The entry of sin did not cause Him to begin doing any of these things in order to solve the problems sin imposed upon Him.

Satan and evil angels did their utmost to provoke Him to anger and arise to sweep away the rebellious inhabitants of the earth, but He would not be provoked, angered, insulted, or hurt. He emerges from the whole test as immaculate as He entered it.

Satan has not been able to sustain a single point against Him, and it is shown that the way of the cross—the power of self-sacrificing love, which serves no matter what the cost to the server—is stronger than all the ways of force combined.

A Never-Ending Study

This book is not the last word on the character of God. No book written could ever be, either in this life or in the coming immortal

era, for the knowledge of God, which is life eternal, will unfold without respite throughout eternity. God is infinite. There is no edge, no limit, no point where it can be said that there is no more. God has no beginning and He has no ending.

The redeemed will spend the coming eternity studying into the wonderful depths, breadths, and heights of the character of the Infinite. The mental, physical, and spiritual energies and attendant capacities of these people will far surpass the capabilities of earthbound students by at least twenty to one. In the original creation, Adam and his wife possessed twenty times the vital force possessed by us today.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 138-139:

God endowed man with so great vital force that he has withstood the accumulation of disease brought upon the race in consequence of perverted habits, and has continued for six thousand years. This fact of itself is enough to evidence to us the strength and electrical energy that God gave to man at his creation. It took more than two thousand years of crime and indulgence of base passions to bring bodily disease upon the race to any great extent. If Adam, at his creation, had not been endowed with twenty times as much vital force as men now have, the race, with their present habits of living in violation of natural law, would have become extinct.

In eternity, eager students will possess at least twenty times the vital energy possessed today and will be under the direct tutelage of Christ. For instance, it would be impossible to conceive of the enormous amount of light gathered by such in the first million years of their celestial sojourn. That in turn will be but the beginning of what will be learned as successive millions of years roll by devoted to the continued contemplation of God's character of love. The knowledge of God as presented in this book is small by comparison. But it is a start and a very necessary and vital one too.

It is important that the hungry seeker after God realize that what he has read in this book is just the beginning, for thereby he

will be encouraged to press on, ever reaching for the richer and more beautiful revelations of God yet to come. He will be impressed to immerse himself in the contemplation of the life of Jesus Christ, the complete and perfect revelation of the Infinite One.

Every contact with the throbbing, spiritual vitality of that life, with its marvelous consistency, tenderness, saving power, and other blessed qualities, will generate an even greater desire to know and experience more of its elevating power. The things of this world will wane in interest and value until they have no drawing influence at all.

The benefit to be gained is not limited to acquiring information. Vital and basic as this is, the point is character development. There is no possibility of coming in contact with God without being dramatically changed in nature. Consciously and unconsciously, the patterns of behavior, the attitudes, spirit, and every aspect of the life will be purified, vitalized, and enriched.

Contributions of loving, self-sacrificing service will be rendered which will initiate streams of blessing, the radiating influence of which will penetrate beyond the confines of this life into the eternity beyond. Neither men nor angels can reach to a higher attainment than to know God.

Jeremiah 9

²³ Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches;

²⁴ But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says the Lord.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled the world and gloried in the power by which he did it. Other men have been rich almost beyond computation. This is their glory and honor, but all the power in which a man could ever find his boasted satisfaction, all the wealth, charg-

ing him with glowing pride, that this world could ever give, can never compare to the riches contained in knowing God.

Search for this treasure. Dig deeply, earnestly, relentlessly, until the golden veins are opened wide and the greatest riches in the universe become your possession. Here is true value, which, if possessed, will bring all other treasures in its train. Those who have it are rich; the remainder are impoverished. Furthermore, this is a treasure available to all.

But, while on one hand, the searching out of God's character is urged, on the other a warning must be sounded against certain dangers inherent in such a quest. There are a number of different ways in which study of the Scriptures can be undertaken, but only one of them is correct. Unless this method is understood and carefully adhered to, then the more time that is spent with the Word of God, the further the student will be from the real truth. Therefore, it would be better to do no study at all, than to conduct it along incorrect lines of interpretation.

This book purposes to set the learner on the right track; to clear away the tragic misconceptions of God which Satan has foisted on the human family to its hurt; to open to view God as He really is, and thus introduce the blessings which are awaiting those who dig deeply into the mines of truth.

It is stressed that this is only an introduction to the subject. Not all has been written which might have been. Volumes could be written on the role of the cross as the revelation of our Heavenly Father's character. Still more could and should be written on the life and teachings of Christ, demonstrating the perfection of each word and act as the manifestation of the Omnipotent One. As time goes by, no doubt other volumes will follow this one, taking up these precious themes.

No attempt has been made to examine every incident in the Bible from the standpoint of God's character. There is no necessity to do so. Once the application of divine principles has been applied in several cases, anyone who has grasped the point will

have less or even no difficulty in understanding other cases. There will always be one or two which defy solution, the simple reason being that God desires our spiritual education to come to the place where we will learn to trust Him in the unknown on the basis of what we have learned in the known.

Learn to expect that seeming contradictions will manifest themselves as the study progresses. After one problem is solved, another will arise. This is a normal development. Some claim that they have never found anything in the Bible which sounded contradictory, but this only admits that they have never really studied it. No one who has dug deeply has failed to be confronted with what appeared to be insoluble problems.

But if the student is aware that this is normal rather than abnormal and if faith has attended his research, then he will rest in the comfort of knowing that there are no real contradictions in God's Word but only beautiful harmonies, even if they are not seen as such at the moment.

Train the mind not to think of God as if He were a man. Glaringly evident in every false concept of God's character, is the disposition to see God operating according to the same procedures as men. There is no greater stumbling block than this in the way of a correct comprehension of God. It must firstly be recognized as such after which it will take protracted effort in retraining the thinking to automatically recognize that God works along lines that are opposite from man's way of working.

As a gift to every creature there is nothing which God desires more than for them to have the knowledge of His character of righteousness.

When consideration is given to the magnitude of the task of understanding the Infinite, discouragement might well possess the soul. But be assured that there is nothing God is more anxious to supply than this knowledge, not only as a store of precious information but more importantly as a personal experience. He longs that the same character which is in Him be in every one of

His creatures as well, for only then is it possible for all to enter into the blessed fellowship which makes heaven to be heaven.

Therefore, every moment the blessed assurance is to accompany the spiritual wayfarer that the full resources of heaven are devoted to unfolding these things to his eager mind. With pitying tenderness God stoops low to unveil these mysteries to our dull human senses and is grieved when we learn so little so slowly. Before those who will press forward with unabated determination are possibilities beyond the outreach of our imaginations and aspirations.

Higher and still higher the Lord will personally elevate the mind until it is overwhelmed with the revelation of divine things. Sweeter and sweeter will be the love implanted within the heart, more and more intense the spirit of self-sacrificing service, and more exalted and profound the response of praise and joy.

Earthly things will appear in their true light with luster dimmed and attractiveness gone. Sin will no longer masquerade in garments of light but will be exposed for what it is—a hideous, deceptive, and unwanted perversion of all things good and true. There will be no more glorying in power and riches but rather a joy in the possession of the knowledge of God, the greatest power and riches of all.

When God has a people upon this earth equipped with this, then He will have the instrumentalities whereby He will move the world. It is for this reason that the loud cry under the power of the latter rain cannot come until such qualifications are possessed by a living church.

God desires to dispense to that church the very best gifts heaven can bestow, that its members in turn may render the finest saving service possible to the desperately needy and perishing millions of earth's population. God's people have long professed to desire nothing more than the outpouring of the latter rain whereby the work can be finished and the way prepared for Christ's return. To such then comes the challenge of the truth

that this can never be accomplished until the knowledge of God's character firstly fills them and subsequently lightens the whole earth with its glory.

That which is retarding the finishing of God's work in the earth today is the failure of His church to know from His Word and by their own experience the truth of His character. While His children enjoy the comforts of this life, making little real effort to penetrate the mysteries of infinite love which have been revealed and are for them to understand, sin continues to trample the oppressed on its missions of death and destruction.

Men of God, it is time to arise to the full stature of God's plan, to measure up to the exacting demands of this climactic hour. God offers the equipment. It is for each to accept and use it. For six thousand years now our loving Heavenly Father has been earnestly entreating His people to learn of Him that they might embark on their appointed mission and the earth be delivered from its oppression.

The question before this generation is whether they will respond by advancing to a full commitment, or will they, having made a good beginning, fall short as have all the other movements which have gone before. It is a question to be faced and answered by each.

If this volume achieves nothing more than to alert men to the realization of these issues and stir them to a profound and total consecration of every faculty and power to the devoted study and experience of the character of God, then its writing will have been worthwhile.

Appendix: The Background Story

Story of the Development of the “Character of God” Message

This explanation was given by Fred Wright in 1974 at the Arizona Camp-Meeting, on Sunday, September 15, in the middle of a study on that theme. I’ve added a few explanatory notes in square brackets.

I MIGHT pause a moment here to just discuss the story of how I came to understand these great truths. Because they’re not new to me so far as the basic concept is concerned.

Twenty two years ago [that would be around 1952], before I learned this message [Fred is referring to the 1888 gospel message], and I was still back in the Seventh-day Adventist church, the Sabbath School Lessons began on the subject of “The Origin of Evil” in this particular quarter. And I was a Sabbath School teacher.

In the book *Early Writings* in that wonderful chapter “The Advent Movement Illustrated,” in the first paragraph, Sister White describes the churches of God as being bound together by cords, and in those churches there were scattered individuals who did have a connection with heaven, even though the message of the first angel, or the everlasting gospel in verity, had not yet reached them. They were still God’s faithful people. And while back in that situation still, it says

Early Writings, p. 240:

Beams of light from Jesus, like rays from the sun, were imparted to them. An angel bade me look carefully, and I saw an angel watching over every one of those who had a ray of light.

As I was a teacher in the Sabbath School class back in those days, I found myself being deeply absorbed in the principles involved in the beginning of the great controversy. I found myself reading with unusual interest the step-by-step development of Satan’s thinking, the way in which God worked to respond to that, until I came to understand the legal problems involved in this great controversy, because they *are* legal problems. It was a ques-

tion of the structure of one organization, namely God's organization, over the structure of another organization, which was Satan's substitute organization. It wasn't a battle over the Sabbath, the state of the dead, or those things, although, of course, those things are very, very closely involved and related to this problem.

So I remember teaching the Sabbath School class, and we all gained a great blessing from this understanding. I then recognized that God submitted the proving of His word against the word of Satan, to the demonstration of these two things, working themselves out side-by-side, according to their own individual merits. And that seemed to me a very, very fair proposition on God's part; God's declaration being that His word, and His works would stand any test whatsoever, and could stand upon their own merit without the interposition of special advantageous physical power. Well my soul really thrilled to see that.

Then a few weeks later, we came to the story of the flood. And as I read this, things just didn't seem to agree with the concepts I had learned back there in the beginning of the great controversy. It looked now, as I read the story of the flood, as if God and Christ looked down with increasing anxiety on the way in which things were working out, because down here upon the earth, who was winning all the battles? Satan was. Who was getting the multitudes? Satan was. And things were going on and on until Satan was getting the vote of the entire world, but for these few people, the eight of them, and they were shaky enough weren't they?

Noah, of course, was very solid and firm, and his elder son Shem too. But what about Ham? He showed right after the flood the weakness of his character. And it looked, as I read the story, as usually understood, that God was saying to his Son:

“Well, our plan isn't working out too well down there. Satan is getting the advantage, he's getting the lead, and we've just got to step in and halt this drift. Because if we don't, then Satan will have everybody, and our cause will be lost.”

So, exercising their superior, their mighty creative physical power, God stepped down, wiped out all of Satan's people, kept just his own alive, and made a fresh start.

That didn't seem to me like fair play. And if God had acted that way, it would not have been fair play either, would it? God had subjected the whole thing to a fair test, that is, that His word and His works must stand upon their own merit, against Satan's word and against Satan's work.

And so I saw a very definite clash of concepts between what God agreed to in the first case, and what He appeared to do down there at the flood. Believe me, I was deeply perplexed about this, and not content until I found the answers. And so I went to God most earnestly, and asked him to reveal to me a consistent picture in this whole arrangement, or this whole battle, as it was fought back there at that time.

I'll never forget, as long as I live, the day when the answers came through to me. I was working alone on an extension to the Stanmore Church in Sydney. I was bricklaying there on an extra room at the back. No one was helping me, I was working alone. And as I laid bricks, I thought about this problem. I'd lay one brick and think about it, and I don't know how straight the wall was, because my mind was on other things!

Finally lunch time came, and I sat down to eat lunch still thinking and praying about this problem, and then suddenly there came to mind certain things I'd learned back in College, about how the flood had actually come, and I suddenly saw that God had not sent the flood as man would send the flood. Instead, God had worked hard to save them from that disaster, and that disaster came, not because God sent it, but because God could not prevent it.

Certainly, of course, He had the physical power to prevent it. God has the physical power to do anything. But while God has

the physical power to do certain things, He still cannot do those things because of His nature.

To illustrate: let's think of a Christian young mother who has had a very fine upbringing, a country upbringing, shall we say. And she has a very deep and natural affection for her firstborn child. She loves that child with the intensity of a mother-love. Now think very carefully. Does that mother have the physical power to destroy that fragile babe? Certainly. But could she do it? Impossible.

And so God had the physical power to bring the flood. But could He do it? He couldn't, because it was against His character. But at the same time, He couldn't prevent it, because that would be against His character too.

So twenty two years ago, that principle began to unfold to my mind, and twenty two years ago I came to learn that God was not a destroyer. And then this message followed, and somehow those concepts remained more or less in the background. They didn't seem to surface as something very important for this point of time.

And as you know, year after year, as I've come to camp meetings, we have not taken up that subject. Maybe one or two of you might remember my discussing it more or less in conversation, but never particularly as a matter of a message for this particular moment and this particular hour.

Well, last year, somehow I had a very definite compulsion to put those thoughts into print, and of course many of you have read those thoughts in the subject entitled, "Does God Destroy?" But even then, I didn't think it was a very large or a very consequential subject to even preach about.

I went to the German camp meeting, and I had no thought nor intention of actually giving those studies at the German camp meeting. But before I got there, there was a brother in Europe who reads English quite well, as well as German. And this brother

had become deeply disturbed by the thoughts presented in this particular series. So much so, that he thought I was in very, very deep error.

And so before the camp meeting convened, he asked to have an interview with me, and for three hours he read to me a long list of statements, and told me, flatly and plainly, that my concept in regard to this was totally wrong, and if I was going to present this at the camp meeting, then he was going to go home straight away. That's how strongly he felt about it.

Of course Europeans do have very, very strong feelings about their convictions. They don't have that more desirable attitude that would say:

“Well, let's wait and see, and study this very carefully and pray about it, and maybe we have some wrong ideas and conceptions about the matter.”

Well, he did go home before the week was out, and took the family with him, which was very disappointing and sorrowful to us. And I'm still working with this family and hope that they will yet see this light. The rest of the European believers are rejoicing in it, because after camp was over, I spent some time up in some of the other cities, and studied with the larger groups over there. They really came to rejoice in these great truths, as we are here, and as the folk did over there in Arkansas.

But when this brother took such an attitude against this particular presentation, then I went, as I always do, to the Lord, and made it a very, very special matter of prayer, asking God to enlighten my mind to reconcile all these apparently impossible statements. Like the one that God said to Moses, “tell the Levites to slay all those idolaters,” and when Elijah took the priests down to the brook and slew them, and when they stoned the Sabbath-breakers, and they stoned Achan, and these various other problems that we have already discussed in the past.

And as I was searching for an answer, I came across certain statements in the book *Selected Messages* in regard to the wrath of God being poured upon Christ. And then I read in *The Great Controversy* that the mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries. And suddenly this subject leaped into my mind to a position of major consequence.

And I suddenly saw that we had come to that place where, facing as we do the last great conflict, when, as we read here a moment ago, the character of Satan will stand fully developed in all his followers, and the character of God in all of His followers, that through the followers of God there would be given to the world that lightening of the whole earth with the glory of God. And I saw as I'd never seen before, that unless we, as God's people in this hour, have stripped away from our minds all those old wrong concepts and ideas about God, those ideas of thinking of God as if he was another man like ourselves; unless those were stripped away from our minds, we would enter the final conflict unfitted for that all important work which must then be done.

And so it seems very significant to me that this great truth should be more or less dormant in our teaching over twenty two years of understanding of it, not of course as fully as we now understand it. But at this very time, when we've had the background that we have, that this message can come in with a significance that it does come in.

And so as we've been seeing then, there will be but two classes down at the end of time. Every character will be fully developed, and all will show whether they've shown the side of loyalty or that of rebellion.

And I'd like to say, that I'm very impressed personally with the fact that God seems to know best just when to bring to us this particular truth and that particular truth, so we can learn things in their right order and at the right time, for the right time.

After all, who is preparing the people for this last great work? Am I doing it, or is God doing it? God is doing it. He is the teacher, and like a good teacher, a perfect teacher, He chooses the lessons that we must learn today, or in this particular camp meeting or in the next particular camp meeting, and so on down the line.

So, we then have come to a most significant step in our understanding and in our experience.



Appendix: "Does God Destroy?"

An Editorial

News Review, August 1974

This article was an explanation by Fred Wright of how the message on God's character was received when it was first presented, and how the difficult questions were resolved.

AS OUR readers know, there recently ended a series of studies in the *Messenger* under this title. The series brought a very definite response from many of you around the world. In fact, I think that more people wrote on their reactions to this series than any other which has appeared in print in this way. Of the many letters received, the greater majority expressed deep thankfulness for a richer, deeper, higher and broader concept of the character of God.

One or two letters, however, expressed the existence of problems in reconciling the principles set forth in this series with certain statements to be found especially in the Old Testament and Spirit of Prophecy comments on these Old Testament statements. But I must say the attitude in these letters was very good. It was clear that much light had been seen but that the answer was not yet complete.

There have been several folk who have told me very directly, pointedly and flatly that the position taken in this series is quite wrong. Again, I would say that the spirit in which these thoughts were so openly expressed was frank but not hostile, and I can appreciate the attitude of a person who can tell me clearly how he or she feels without telling all the rest of the world first and without being hateful about it.

These few words, then, describe the reaction to this series, the existence of which varied reactions calls for further comment to update all on developments since this series was written.

The problem in the minds of some exists because there are so many statements, especially in the Old Testament, which, taken

exactly as they appear to read, would say that there comes a point of time when God does stretch forth His righteous hand and strikes the sinner down. These statements, it is argued, negate the arguments laid down in the series. This is the problem. We have what appears to be two different presentations of God's character in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy which appear to contradict each other.

This problem is not new to us. We have rejoiced that the light of God in this message is ever shining with greater and still greater clarity. It never stands still. But there is a pattern to the coming of a new understanding of the light which is repeated every time that fresh light is given to us. We would do well to recognize this pattern and to act in reference to it.

Firstly, the Lord opens our minds to the great principles of the fresh light to be understood by us. He does not refer our minds to a long list of proof statements for this message is not built in this way. Instead, He opens to our minds the great principles involved, from which understanding we come to certain great conclusions in regard to the message.

The majority of the believers see the principles at once. Others have some problems, but bring their questions with an open, honest and inquiring mind. Then there are always the one or two who come up with a very long list of statements which, they claim, deny altogether the positions being developed. This has been the reaction in every single case with NO exceptions.

How do I respond to this situation? In the first case I frankly admit that, at this stage, I am not able to answer or explain how all these statements fit into the principles so far revealed. I also acknowledge that the statements cannot be ignored. They are God's Word to us and must be understood as they read.

To make sure we have not been mistaken, I then, in conjunction with others, very carefully restudy the whole position to see if we could have been misled. Always so far, in so doing, we have only

been the more definitely confirmed. Then we have rested in faith while we waited for God, who gave us the light in the first case, to give us the answers to the statements in the second case. Without fail, He has always done this.

He has done it so clearly that the statements which appeared to deny the truth have come to confirm it still more strongly. Tragically, there have always been the one or two who, unwilling as were our forefathers at Minneapolis, to surrender preconceived ideas and opinions, have been unable to see the fullness of the truth. The result has been that they have gone out from us to walk no more with us forever.

We could give many examples of this had we time and space to retrace the history of this movement. But we will take one in some detail and will make reference to others.

Early in our history we came to understand the great principles surrounding the nature of Christ seeing quite clearly that those who deny that Christ came in the same flesh and blood as we, are Antichrist. We, likewise, saw that the SDA church had come to the place where she denied this and therefore was Antichrist or Babylon.

We spoke forth these great principles and the majority of believers plainly saw, accepted and followed the light by stepping out separately from this great apostasy. Others had some problems which they brought to us in open-hearted honesty.

Then there were the two or three who emphatically declared I was wrong and brought a very long list of Spirit of Prophecy statements to prove it. With these statements we are quite familiar today. They are those which declare that anyone who calls the SDA church Babylon and who call people out of her are not sent from God but from the devil.

These are strong statements indeed. We were calling, as we still do, the SDA church Babylon, and we encourage people to leave her. Therefore the statement seemed to be written especially to

condemn ourselves. We could not and did not ignore the statements, but carefully reviewed our position. It was clear enough that the SDA church did deny Christ's full humanity and therefore was Antichrist.

We went to the Lord for further light, out of which came the great studies from *Romans* 9 and 11. The statements were now clearly understood and served to support rather than deny our position. Tragically, some of the folk who had been leaning so heavily on the statements could not understand and refused to take this next step, even though they had accepted all the light given so far.

So it was again on the question of the Revival and the Reformation. In fact, here we had to wait the longest for the answers, but they came. Once again the truths already revealed stood, and the movement took its greatest step forward. So it was on other points as well.

Now we come to this higher, grander, deeper and broader revelation of the character of God. Again the pattern is being repeated with exact precision.

In the depths of the Dark Ages, the mystery of iniquity gave to God the very character of Satan. From this erroneous concept the Lord has been delivering us through the light of the Reformation truths and then through the great advent message.

But only by the people who are to possess the fullness of righteousness will the character of God be fully revealed in these last days. Therefore, as we approach the last great conflict it is clear that more light must come on the nature of the character of God.

In these studies on *Does God Destroy*, the Lord has been opening to us those larger concepts. Most, with me, have thrilled to see things thus. Others have come with honest-hearted problems. There are the few who have rejected these concepts because of the many statements which they have assembled.

Again, I have admitted quite honestly and candidly that I did not have the answers to all those statements. Again, I have carefully reviewed the principles of this theme. Again, I have found the principles undeniable. Again, I have asked the Lord for clear answers on these statements and this time, far sooner than I expected, the answers have come with thrilling clarity. I pray most earnestly that the eyes of all will be opened to really see these wonderful things.

There is not space to give these answers in this tiny *News Review*. But they will be shared with you all as opportunity permits. In the meantime let living faith in God's leadership of this movement give us the patience of the saints to wait until we can see and understand God's light on this question.

However, I will take just a little space to indicate how the answers came. As I was searching, more or less at random, I read statements to the effect that the fullness of the wrath of God fell upon Christ on Calvary. Then I read that:

The Great Controversy, p. 652:

The mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries.

Thus I can know, and each believer can know that at the cross we will find the answer to this problem. There we see exactly how God will deal with the hopelessly lost sinner, for this is the position in which Christ stood at that time. There we see *how* the justice of God is meted out. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1166; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1103.

The Great Controversy, p. 343:

The principles of God's dealing with men are ever the same.

He declares:

Malachi 3

⁶ I am the Lord I change not.

Therefore, God would not treat Christ on the cross, who had there become sin for us and thus stood exactly in the position of

the most sinful man, differently from any other sinful man. In other words, if we would understand the mystery of the outpouring of the wrath and the justice of God, we must understand this in the light of the cross of Calvary.

As I saw this, my understanding was wonderfully enlarged so that I saw the character of God with a beauty such as I had never seen it before. Then the problems of the Old Testament dealings of God began to disappear. Now I know we have not been misled, nor have we been misleading. God is guiding and will do so until the end.

May the Lord fully open our minds to see all the truth as it is in Jesus.

