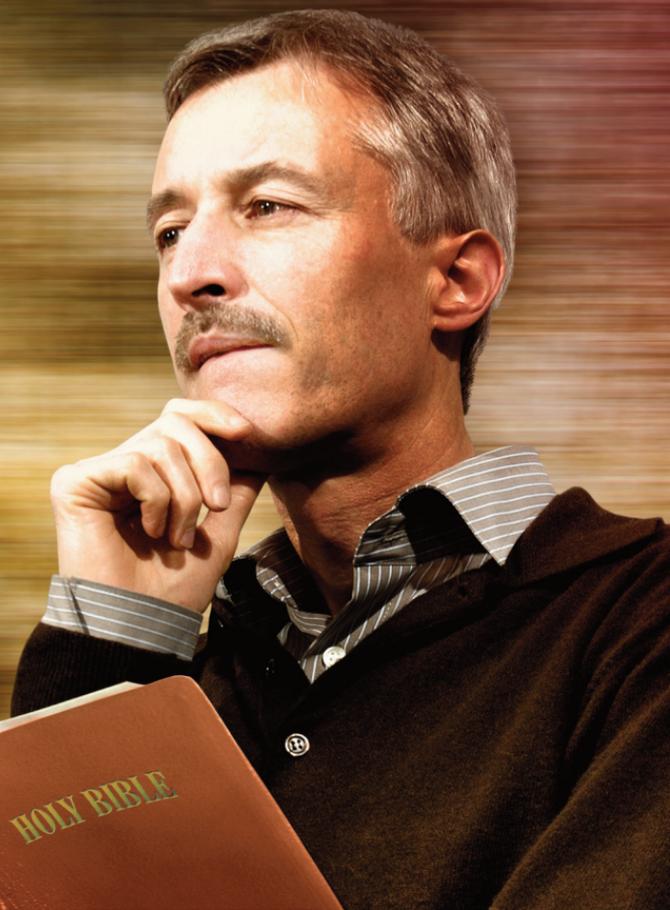




I THINK AS A MAN



HOLY BIBLE

I THINK AS A MAN

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I Think as a Man

For days the rain poured down in steady torrents. The reservoir rose higher and higher behind the thirty-five-year-old earthen dam. The murky waters swirled almost to its crest. Still the rain continued.

In the river valley below, the residents went about their daily business, wishing the rain would end, but giving it little further thought.

Then it happened. The earthen walls, trembling under the mounting pressure, cracked and then burst, releasing a surging, thunderous, ten-meter wall of gushing, foaming, water which raced relentlessly towards the valley, sweeping away everything that stood in its path.

Once spent, the torrent left thirty-nine people dead and forty-five seriously injured. Buildings and vehicles were completely destroyed.

As would be expected, the insurance companies described the tragedy as an “act of God.”

Of course, they were thinking as men.

Above the sweltering jungles of a south-sea island, a great volcano raised its mighty crown. It had recently been rumbling and smoking which caused the villagers to regard it with increasing apprehension. Then came the day when mighty explosions rent the air. Boiling lava flowed over the side and advanced inexorably towards the villages below. Houses were consumed in the flames, crops were wiped out,

and there was a heavy loss of livestock. The villagers themselves fled for their lives, finally taking to the steaming sea in canoes.

With sober and awed faces they told one another that God was angry with them and they must do something to appease Him.

Again, they were thinking as men.

A man who had always enjoyed wonderful health became seriously ill. Confined to a bed of suffering and pain in the hospital, his thoughts turned to God for comfort. He took up a bedside Bible and, opening it for the first time in his life, began to read.

Passing beyond the record of creation and the fall of Adam, he came to the story of the flood, where he read that God sent the waters on the earth to destroy those who would not obey Him. Then he read of the outpouring of fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues raining upon Egypt, and God commanding the Israelites to destroy the Amalekites—from the elderly down to the tender infant in arms.

It was too much. He closed the book declaring that he could neither love nor serve a God who manifested such cruelty as he saw pictured in those events.

How sad indeed that he read it all through the eyes of human understanding. He was familiar with the way we act, and he assumed that God behaved similarly.

Catastrophes are increasingly destroying life and property around the world. Often these calamities are regarded as being the work of a vengeful God venting His wrath on a people who do not obey, respect, or love Him.

This is attributing human behavior to God.

People are so familiar with the idea that an angry God is sending all these troubles on the earth that they do not even question it. They believe that He does this to correct their



disobedience, although it is obvious that such a strategy does not work. In fact, the more people are subjected to such treatment, the less they love God and the more rebellious they become. No one can truly love and serve God as long as they see Him behaving in such a capricious way.

A brief look through history will show that no ruler on earth ever won the love and loyalty of his subjects by inflicting upon them heavy punishments for disobedience. He may gain slavish service, but this is not the service of love. Therefore, if God were to apply the strategies that people use it would be self-defeating. Instead of loving and cheerful obedience, He would be rewarded at best with a servile loyalty and, at worst, with open and flagrant rebellion.

Another Way to Think

There is another altogether different, inspiringly beautiful, and refreshing way to think of God. This is revealed in the way Christ thought and spoke of God. When we learn to see God as Christ depicted Him, love, joy, and peace will spring up in our heart. We will see God as a loving Father and not as a despotic ruler.

When Christ came to this earth, He had a number of missions to accomplish. One of the most important of these was to expose the lies regarding His Father's character by showing us how He really is. And He invites us all to see, think, and speak of God as He does, and not as we habitually do.

In His ministry on earth, Christ revealed God so fully, that all that we can know or need to know about the Father was revealed in the life and character of His Son. Yet despite the wonderful revelation that Christ gave of His Father, this aspect of His ministry is little known and recognized. Not even the disciples of Christ realized this, as can be seen in the words of Philip: "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." *John* 14:8.

Christ was greatly disappointed by this request, for it revealed that the purpose of His mission was not even discerned by the ones who were nearest to Him—the very ones who should have seen this first.

"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?"'" *John* 14:9.

In His words to Philip, Christ affirmed that if the disciples had seen Him and His wonderful character of love, then they had already seen the Father. For Jesus did not come merely to declare what the Father is like, He also came to reveal Him to us.

But in order to give an accurate picture of the Father, Jesus had to be a perfect and complete reproduction of the Father. And this He indeed was. In fact, quite some time before this conversation with Philip took place, Christ had already informed the disciples that His life was the perfect reflection of the Father's and that He did only what the Father did.

“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. 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.’”
John 5:19, 20.

In this statement Christ pointed out that He not only did the things which the Father did, but He did them in the same way as the Father did them. The methods, principles of operation, and procedures of Christ were exactly the same as those of the Father.

Many have read the records of the Old Testament and have seen God as a wrathful, vengeful Being who thought nothing of pouring fire down on the helpless heads of those who would not repent, as in the case of the Sodomites. Then they have read the story of Christ and, confronted with a Being very different from the God they saw in the Old Testament, have concluded that the characters of God and Christ are different. They see Christ as being gentle, loving, kind, forgiving, humble, patient, and as One who never once retaliated against His enemies. Irrespective of how brutally they treated Him, how unkindly they rejected Him, how mercilessly they harassed Him, and how shamelessly they lied about Him, Christ responded by doing only good to them in return. And when invited to destroy His rejecters, He did not even so much as lift a finger to do so.

To say that the Father and the Son have different characters is to think and speak as a man, for this is not the way Christ spoke. With absolute authority and finality, He confirmed that He and His Father were of the same character and did exactly the same works in precisely the same way.

The life and teachings of Christ are the measure by which every concept of God must be tested. Regardless of how generally accepted they are, our ideas of God must be measured by the standard of the life of Christ. Then, when we see that any of them differ from the way in which Christ presented God, we should discard them. We need to do this even though we might not understand every detail of why they are wrong. When we do so, we will gain correct views of the character and ways of God which, in turn, will bring blessings and benefits beyond estimation.

A Faulty Interpretation

Although it is beyond the scope of this booklet to explore every wrong idea about the character of God that has been drawn from the Old Testament, we will consider one event which is typical of many.

Israel had been in Egyptian captivity for centuries when God finally spoke to Moses from the burning bush and told him to lead His people to the Promised Land. The instructions He gave to Moses were very explicit.

“So the LORD said to Moses: ‘See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.

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. 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 7:1–5*.

The story continues with Moses and Aaron going in before the king and demanding the release of the Israelites. Pharaoh’s flat refusal was followed by one devastating plague after another until, battered and beaten, the king was glad to let them go. It is a well-known story.

Most people, thinking as men do, have come to conclude that in this situation God acted in the following way:

As the all-powerful ruler of the universe, God decided that the Israelites should be released. He therefore ordered Moses to command the king to free them; with the threat of direct reprisals should he refuse. The monarch did refuse, so God struck him hard by making the Nile and the waters throughout the land undrinkable. Then God paused, to give the defiant ruler time to acquiesce. When he refused to obey, the Lord struck him again. This procedure was repeated until the king was finally crushed into submission and had no choice but to release the Israelites.

Now, let us compare this view of God with another picture.

In certain cities of the world, such as Chicago, U.S.A., there are powerful criminal organizations, like the mafia, who see themselves as the controllers of the metropolis. These groups demand “payments” from people whenever it suits them. For example, they may go to a businessman and announce their demands, intimating that they are the real power in that area, and making it clear that if he refuses to comply, they will hit him hard. The man, either because he has principles or has not yet learned the power of the bosses, refuses. Then they hit him. They might smash his shop

windows, blow up his car, or something worse. Then they give him time to reconsider. Should he persist in his refusal, they will hit him again and again, until he is finally battered into submission. Not only do they gain what they wanted from this man, but the incident also gives them an opportunity of demonstrating their power and intimidating other people in the city.

Although these methods are very effective, the “obedience” obtained does not emanate from love and appreciation of the gangland chiefs. On the contrary, they are hated and despised for their methods; they are obeyed from fear and only because there is no other choice.

The Crucial Question

This raises the question, “What then is the difference between the methods of these criminals and the methods God is supposed to have used in the land of Egypt?” We are not speaking here of motives or character, but about the methods used by the one and attributed to the other.

The answer is of course, that there is no difference whatsoever. If we adhere to the common understanding of God’s behavior in Egypt, then we must conclude that the ways of God are identical to those who live by robbery and oppression.

When I put this proposition to a very well-educated person, he quickly replied that the methods used by God were indeed the same as those used in the criminal world, but that God had a very different purpose. In other words, whereas the bosses used these tactics to further their own selfish ends, the Lord did it for the sake of others. This is to

argue that the end justifies the means; that the methods used by the criminals were wrong because they were done from selfish motives, while God's use of the same procedures was right because He did it from a righteous motive.

But the Scriptures do not support this reasoning. God denies that His ways are the same as our ways. In fact, He assures us that they are quite different.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” *Isaiah* 55:8, 9.

If God acted in Egypt as He is generally understood to have done, then His ways are no different from those of the very worst of criminals. Furthermore, it would make God a liar in the light of the above statement. But God is no liar. He is the truth and speaks only the truth, and therefore this must be a misunderstanding of His behavior in Egypt.

Apart from this text from *Isaiah*, the life and teachings of Christ also cast doubt on the popular interpretation of God's actions in Egypt. Nowhere, in the entire life of Christ, do we find Him using force to secure His aim. Yet the Saviour declared that He did only what the Father did, and in the same way that the Father did. Therefore, it would be necessary to find an example from Scripture where Christ gained His ends by the use of force to support the view that God uses force. The only incident however which might be construed to demonstrate this is the cleansing of the temple. While some may argue that Christ threatened the moneychangers with the whip, we will soon see that His actions bore a very different message.

Human Love versus Divine Love

Given that the witness of Jesus lends no support to the popular view of God's behavior in Egypt, and also given that God Himself has testified that His ways are not the ways of humans, there must be another view of God's actions in Egypt. And there is—a view that is in perfect harmony with the Scriptures and the witness of Jesus.

The Bible testifies that "God is love." *1 John 4:8*.

This scripture does not merely say that God loves, even though this is true, but explicitly states that He is love. And it is because He is love that He loves. He is infinite, boundless, endless, and unlimited, and therefore His love is infinite too. This means that there is no point where the boundary or limit of that love can be found. And this will never change, because it is also written that with Him there "is no variation, or shadow of turning." *James 1:17*.

Human love is finite, or limited. We love others as long as they love us. When the love shown to us by others begins to die then our love usually fades away too. In fact, it often changes to the point where intense love becomes an equally intense hatred. But this is not the case with God. His ways are different from our ways, and no matter how much we may reject God, despise Him, war against Him, insult Him, or separate from Him, His love for us never changes in the least degree.

One great difference between divine and human love is that God loves us not because of what we are, but because of what He is. People, on the other hand, do not love because of what they are, but because of what the other person is. This notion is planted in our minds from childhood when our parents conveyed to us that if we were good, they would

love us, but if we are naughty, then that love will be withdrawn. We soon learnt to practice this ourselves with our playmates. If we like the behavior of another child, then we will return their love, but if the same child does not do what we want him to, our love is withdrawn. The deciding factor is the lovability of our friend, not our capacity to love. This same attitude and practice is carried on into adulthood and marriage, with the sad result that many spouses become estranged because they no longer meet each other's desires and expectations.

Because we tend to judge God by our own experiences and imagine He is like us ("You thought that I was altogether like you." *Psalms* 50:21), we presume He loves us only as long as we do what He wants. But divine love is very different from this. God's love toward us does not alter one jot, no matter how disobedient and unlovely we may become. What does change, however, is our relationship to God, for the very act of disobedience is also an act of separation. This departure on our part should not be confused with a withdrawal of love on His part. A wonderful example of this is when Christ prayed for the forgiveness of His persecutors while He was being nailed to the cross.

Love Gifts

Infinite love is infinite selflessness. It is always manifested in giving. Therefore, when the Lord made the heavens and the earth He did not do it for Himself. He did it for the creatures that He made. He did it for you, for me, and for every other person who has ever lived. So let us look at the needs of a human being at the time of creation.

When God created the human family He knew that the

love-gift of life was, in itself, not enough. Imagine being given a life, but no home to live in. We are told that in the beginning, “the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” *Genesis* 1:2. Imagine being left to drift eternally through space with nothing to see, no one to communicate with, and nothing to do. Who would want to live like that?

It would be more like a living death than life!

God wisely created the love-gift of a perfect home before He gave us life. And more than this, He also provided us with infinite possibilities for development and achievement. This He did by endowing both humans and the earth with the necessary powers. These include physical, intellectual, and spiritual powers, and also the mighty forces in nature, such as the sun, electricity, and the force of gravity.

Inherent in these powers lies a potential problem. Although God gave them only for the blessing and happiness of the human family, they also contain the possibility of fearful destruction. This lies within the very nature of power. It is self-evident that power can either be a blessing or bring destruction, as is demonstrated every day.

Infinite wisdom did not overlook this problem, and infinite love did not leave it unsolved. God could have programmed the human mind so that it would automatically choose only the safe way to handle power. But the infinite mind of God would not adopt such draconian measures to protect us from the misuse of power, as this would have deprived us of the ability to choose and therefore of the power to think. It would have limited, constrained, and prevented the highest and richest fulfillments of our desires and ambitions. It would have restricted us to a puppet-like level that is even lower than the animal kingdom.

If God had given us the opportunity of selecting a solution, this is not the one we would have chosen. Today, many

people would rather die than give up their freedom to choose. More than one organization has adopted the slogan, "Freedom or Death."

God's solution had to provide protection from any misuse of power, and at the same time allow us to choose and to think. So, He established a set of perfect laws covering every possible aspect of our physical, mental, moral, material, scientific, and spiritual existence. These laws were another love-gift which God, in His infinite wisdom and love, gave to the human family.

Laws and Laws

It is a grave tragedy when people only acknowledge some of the laws that God gave, while ignoring or rejecting others. For example, there is a ready willingness to recognize and utilize law in the natural and the scientific field. Universities, governments and businesses spend millions of dollars on research each year so that they can take greater advantage of the powers in the universe, which all act according to physical laws.

A strict adherence to physical law also forms an important part of training for many professions. An airline pilot, for instance, must comply with endless regulations, and any breaches swiftly attract severe disciplinary action or prompt dismissal. Airline operations are conducted according to these laws in order to protect the lives of their employees and passengers. Everyone knows and accepts this.

But those laws which deal with our relationship to God are regarded by many people as being an invention of God—not to protect us, but to enforce our worship of Him.

As long as we maintain this view we will never see the true character of God, nor enjoy real fellowship with Him. Therefore, if we want to experience the fulfillment and happiness that God has planned for us, we need first to correct these distorted ideas.

The problems we have in understanding God's moral law stem from our own character. While we are only too willing to restrain others, we tend to excuse ourselves from the same obligations. We want laws that protect us from others, but not those which protect others from us. However, God's law is designed to provide each of us with the same impartial and perfect protection. It never favors one to the disadvantage of another.

In fact, there is not a single commandment made by God for His own exaltation, interest, or blessing. To some this may seem hard to believe, because we operate on the principle that the possession of great power gives us the opportunity to enjoy freedom at the expense of others. We therefore erroneously conclude that God will use His infinite power to exalt Himself and satisfy His own ambitious desires.

But God is not human. His ways are the opposite of ours. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." *Isaiah* 55:8, 9.

God Upholds the World

Let us consider, for example, the first commandment. "You shall have no other gods before Me." *Exodus* 20:3. How readily this is interpreted to be an order from

God ensuring that His position is fully revered so that He is accorded the respect and worship He regards as being His due. The command is seen as being made for God's benefit and not for ours.

But God gave this commandment for our sake alone. He does not need it Himself, for selfless love does not even think of protecting itself. And if we consider our situation for a moment, we will see how much we need to keep that command in mind.

Not only is God the Creator of the heavens and the earth, but moment by moment He also personally guides and sustains all these mighty orbs and powers in their correct courses. "He regulates the universe by the mighty power of his command." *Hebrews 1:3 (The Living Bible)*. He alone can do this. Should He cease to do this work at any moment, instant destruction would be the only possible outcome. Therefore, it is vitally important that God should not be displaced from His position in command of the sun. Some may object that we do not have the power to remove God from this role. But while we cannot physically do this, there is another way whereby human beings can displace Him. It can be done because God never forces His presence where it is not desired.

When we show by our stubborn rebellion that we feel no need of God and therefore desire Him to leave us to manage our own affairs, God does not argue with us. He finally accepts our insistent demands and leaves us alone, as requested. The rejecters of His love and mercy then find themselves under the dominion of powers which have passed out of God's control. For example, if the sun were to pass totally out of God's control it might simply fade out, explode, veer off into outer space, or plunge into a collision with the earth. In all these cases, life on this planet would immediately become extinct.

The biblical record of the flood presents us with such a picture, as does the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, which was much more locally confined. This was also the situation that developed in Egypt.

Moses' Rod

Joseph's life in Egypt had revealed the love and the power of God as He worked for the Egyptians' salvation. The mighty Pharaoh had obeyed God's instructions given through this young Israelite, and this resulted in Egypt becoming the most powerful nation on earth. Unfortunately, this prosperity led the Egyptians to forget God. Year after year, despite the continued love and care of God, the nation fell further and further away from Him. Little by little, Egypt moved closer to the point of no return. Finally they rejected God completely, forcing Him to let go His control of the mighty powers of nature and leave Egypt to its fate. But our infinitely loving God would not permit this to happen without giving them a clear warning of the coming danger. So He sent Moses to Pharaoh to give a demonstration of the Father's role in the coming catastrophes.

Moses stood in the presence of Pharaoh as God's representative. The rod in his hand symbolized the powers that God had placed within nature and humanity. In the same way that Moses held and guided that staff, so God held and controlled those powers of nature. When the rod left the prophet's hand, it changed into a serpent, the well-known symbol of Satan, the destroyer.

God first sent Moses to entreat the haughty Pharaoh to set Israel free. This was a loving invitation to repentance

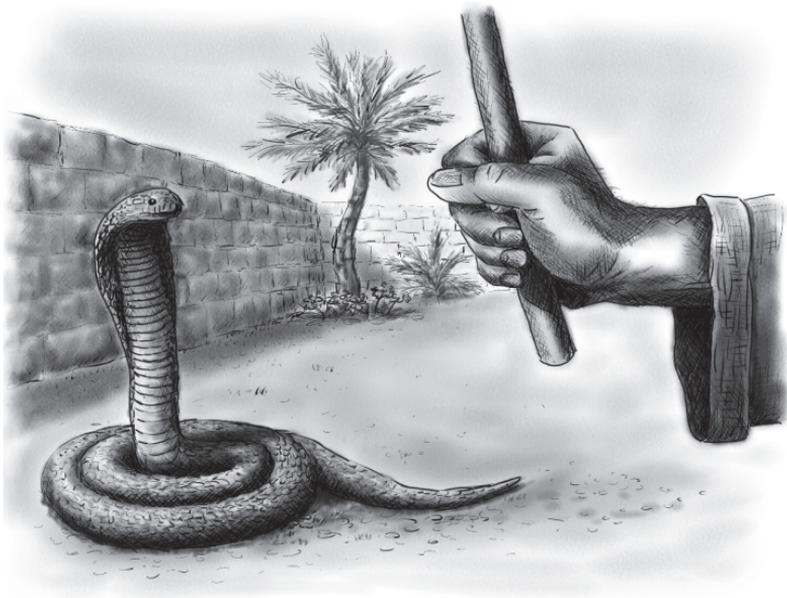
and obedience. The disaster which threatened the land was foretold in conjunction with this invitation, so as to emphasize the need for urgent obedience. If Pharaoh rejected this offer, the floodgates of woe would burst upon Egypt, and they would lose the power to keep their prized slaves.

As a part of God's plan to save the Egyptians and release His people, Pharaoh had to be shown what God's role in this situation was. It had to be demonstrated that the troubles about to descend upon Egypt did not come from God, but were the inevitable consequences of casting aside His law. The enacted parable of the rod and the serpent plainly demonstrated this. However, in order for God's plan of mercy to be successful, it was necessary for the king to act in harmony with what God revealed to him.

The lesson was as clear as it is simple—as long as the rod remained in Moses' hand it was perfectly safe. But as soon as the rod left his hands, and therefore his control, it became a deadly snake. It remained so until Moses took hold of it and it became a harmless rod once more.

The truth could not have been stated more unmistakably. But unfortunately, Pharaoh chose not to accept God's message of mercy. What God was actually saying could be summarized as follows:

“Pharaoh, mighty king of Egypt, despite your increasing apostasy I have held back the forces of nature that would destroy you. For the sake of you and your subjects I have continued to hold the rod of power in My hand and keep it under My control. As a result, the destroyer has not visited your land. You have enjoyed wonderful prosperity and blessing and have become the most powerful nation on the earth. But daily you are separating further from Me; disobeying the very laws I gave in love to preserve you. You have forced the gap of separation between us to widen and deepen until I retain only the most tenuous hold on the powers in nature.



I plead with you to repent of your rebellion against Me and show that you are willing to obey My laws by letting the Israelites go. Then I will be able to keep these destructive forces in check. I do not wish to see you shattered and destroyed by the fearful suffering your defiance will bring upon yourself and your people. However, if you refuse to repent and continue holding My people in bondage, the last faint, controlling grip I have on the powers of nature will be broken. As they pass out of My hands they will become powers of terrible destruction. But even then, if you repent I will reach forth and take control of them again. Then they will cease to be destroyers and become a rod of blessing.”

With what marvelous love and yearning did God appeal to the stubborn heart of the rebellious king! And with what pride and disdain did the monarch refuse the offer that

came from the infinite heart of unchangeable love. But instead of submitting to His Creator, Pharaoh called in the magicians of his realm, and they cast their rods to the ground. It appeared as if their rods were turned into serpents as well. Furthermore, the magicians' serpents looked as though they would easily consume the serpent of Moses.

So what was the monarch's response? He declared that he did not for a moment need the God of the Hebrews to hold the powers of nature in control. He believed that he was well able to live fully independent of God. Let Him release the rod. Let it turn into a serpent of destruction. The king confidently believed he had more than sufficient power at his command to cope with any powers that God would release from His control.

This is still the attitude of human beings today. When troubles and catastrophes threaten we trust in ourselves and turn to our own resources to cope with them. If God is thought of at all, it is usually only as a last resort, and once the crisis has passed He is as quickly forgotten. But in reality we cannot manage the powers that God no longer controls and directs. When mighty hurricanes sweep in from the oceans, flooding the land, and tearing buildings apart, there is absolutely nothing we can do to stop them. They run their full course of destruction unimpeded. So with earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and other catastrophes—we can neither resist nor contain them.

Nor could the serpents of Pharaoh handle Moses' serpent. It quickly devoured all Pharaoh's serpents and remained as vigorous and dangerous as ever.

God's message could not have been conveyed more clearly. Nor could the king of Egypt have rejected it more fully. He maintained the attitude he had previously expressed: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go." *Exodus* 5:2.

The next day Moses, with the rod in his hand, indicated exactly where the presence of God would first be withdrawn. As with the following plagues, the king was informed explicitly of what was about to happen so that he would know that it was not a mere coincidence.

During the falling of the plagues, God lovingly kept the door of mercy open. He repeatedly showed that he could again take control of the forces afflicting the Egyptians if they repented and gave Him His rightful position. Pharaoh realized that neither he nor his magicians had any power to control those powers of destruction. When the pressure was on, Pharaoh made great promises and pleaded that the plague be taken away. In response, God immediately reached down and mercifully took up the serpent by the tail, whereupon it instantly became a rod again. Sadly, as soon as the trouble passed, Pharaoh's self-confidence returned and he turned his back on his promises to God.

Many people act in much the same way today. When brought face to face with death through forces beyond their control, people will often, in the terror of the moment, call upon God for deliverance and make remarkable promises of obedience. But as soon as the trouble has passed, they disregard all their promises and revert to their old ways again. The following true story clearly illustrates this point.

In 1846, a light steamer was carrying passengers from Portland, Maine, along the coast to Boston, Massachusetts, in the U.S.A. when a fierce storm broke over the ship, threatening the lives of the people on board. A passenger described the scene in these words:

"We were in great peril. The boat rolled fearfully, and the waves dashed into the cabin windows. There was great fear in the ladies' cabin. Many were confessing their sins and crying on God for mercy. Some were calling on the Virgin Mary to keep them, while others were making solemn vows to God

that if they reached land they would devote their lives to His service. It was a scene of terror and confusion ...

“Through the mercy of God we were all landed safe. But some of the passengers who manifested much fear in the storm made no reference to it, only to make light of their fears. One who had solemnly promised that if she were preserved to see land she would be a Christian, mockingly cried out as she left the boat: ‘Glory to God, I am glad to step on land again!’ I asked her to go back a few hours, and remember her vows to God. She turned from me with a sneer.

“I was forcibly reminded of a deathbed repentance. Some serve themselves and Satan all their lives, and then as sickness subdues them, and a fearful uncertainty is before them, they manifest some sorrow for sin, and perhaps say they are willing to die, and their friends make themselves believe that they have been truly converted and fitted for heaven. But if these should recover, they would be as rebellious as ever.” *Testimonies for the Church* 1:80.3–81.3.

So it was with that powerful Egyptian king. When the



pressure was upon him, he appeared to repent, but after it was lifted, he showed that there had been no genuine turning away from sin or heartbroken sorrow. Each superficial acknowledgment of sin, given only to escape further calamity, had an adverse effect on his mind and character, hardening his heart and rendering him less and less capable of truly surrendering to God. As Pharaoh progressively rejected the invitation to repent, God's control of the forces surrounding the nation diminished proportionately. Each plague became increasingly destructive until the tenth scourge, when the firstborn lay dead. Pharaoh's power was finally broken, his land devastated, and he could no longer hold the Israelites as slaves.

It was not because God was controlling the chastising elements that those afflictions befell Egypt. It was only when the control had passed out of God's merciful hands that each calamity arose.

This is totally contrary to the way humans operate. Take for instance the criminal kings of Chicago. In their case, it is only when the weapons of destruction are in their hands and under their control, that their victims experience pain and suffering. But with God this is never the case. As long as He holds the forces of nature in His hand, they are completely under His control, and can never be destroyers.

In the light of all this evidence about what God really did in Egypt, it is surprising that the records of that event are so misunderstood. Despite the great care God took to demonstrate what was about to happen in Egypt, Satan has blinded people's eyes to its true meaning. He has managed to portray God as a tyrant and destroyer. But God never assumes these roles, and neither is He a liar. He did exactly what He said He would do in Egypt. Unlike humans, He does not use force to achieve His ends.

But it is not only the witnesses from the Old Testament

that testify of God's loving character. In the New Testament times Christ gave a personal demonstration and declaration of His Father's character and methods. And when His persecutors related to Him exactly as Pharaoh did to God, Christ responded precisely as His Father had done.

When He was reviled, taunted, scourged, spat on, loaded with a cruel cross on His back, and finally nailed upon it, Christ did not retaliate in any way. He did not reach out and grasp the powers of nature to destroy His persecutors, as He could easily have done. Instead, His only response was to cry out with unutterable love and pity, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." *Luke 23:34.*

Why Not Earlier?

To believe that God forced the Egyptians into subjection so as to effect the release of His people is to level a terrible indictment against the Lord. It is to charge Him with deliberately and callously leaving the Jews to suffer for centuries when He could have released them long before.

When human beings possess great power, and can exercise it to execute their will, they can do whatever they wish whenever they choose. Many suppose that this is how God uses His omnipotent power. But if this were so, He must be accused of permitting the Israelites to remain in slavery when He could have released them at any time. For centuries they were ground down in cruel bondage, and therefore all their suffering and misery would have to be accounted to God for failing to exert His mighty power to set them free. God cannot be a God of love and at the same time behave in such a way.

The truth is, God never solves problems by the use of force. And the timing for the Israelites' release was not determined by God's own personal choice, but by the effects of

the Egyptians' deepening apostasy. This brought about a separation from God which released increasingly destructive powers upon them until they were no longer able to retain their slaves. Then, and only then, could the Israelites go free. When these principles are understood, no problem will be seen in the fact that the Israelites were left in servitude for so long, tragic though it was.

God never deviates from His ways for He knows that the use of force is self-defeating. Had it been His principle to rule by force, He would have stamped rebellion out of existence as soon as it manifested itself on earth. And then 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, as well as all who are determined to cling to it. Then the Lord will be free to make the new heavens and the new earth, with no danger of their ever becoming defiled again.

The Cleansing of the Temple

Soon after beginning His public ministry, Christ cleansed the temple of the buyers and sellers. (See *John 2:13–22*.) His soul was stirred to the depths by what He saw in the temple, and after “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 changers’ money and overturned the tables.” *John 2:15*.

This story can be as easily misinterpreted as the story of the plagues on Egypt, and it usually is. As a rule, it is generally concluded that Christ actually threatened to whip those men, and would have done so if they had not obeyed

Him. But if this were so, what difference would there have been between His behavior and that of the gang leaders in the criminal world? How could He possibly claim that “just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts”? *Isaiah* 55:9.

These are valid questions and require that another look be taken at this incident to see what really happened. The cleansing of the temple is the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament story in ancient Egypt. What God did to Pharaoh, Christ did to the money-changers. It is another demonstration of how God holds and controls the powers of nature. The setting and the actions differ, but God’s message is the same. The rod of Moses and the whip of Jesus symbolize the same thing. The most significant difference between the two stories lies in the fact that Moses allowed the rod to pass out of his hands and control, whereas Christ did not lose His grip or control over the whip.

In both cases, the specific events correlated exactly with the actions of Moses and Christ. Egypt suffered the immediate calamities that Moses predicted whenever he released the rod from his hand. But in the temple, Christ retained His control over the whip. It never left His hand for a moment, thus giving the Jews the assurance that there was still time to repent. And indeed, no great disasters overtook them during His earthly sojourn. But Christ’s action was a warning of the danger to which their unheeding apostasy would eventually lead them. It would compel Him to release His hold of the whip, and then they would suffer the same fate as the Egyptians.

It is a well-known fact that the Jews, as a people, refused to repent. They turned their backs utterly and defiantly upon God, and the whip, or rod, became a serpent, as seen in the total destruction and slaughter in Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Christ did not strike the Jews with the whip. That was not His purpose in raising it up. Although it hung threateningly over them, it never touched them as long as it was in Christ's hand. The message to the Jews was that they should repent, so that God could retain His hold and they could be saved from the impending destruction.

When we carefully compare the actions of God in Egypt and those of Christ in the temple, it becomes apparent that Christ spoke the truth when He said that He did everything the Father did, exactly as He did it.

The Testimony of the Cross

The cross of Christ presents a complete revelation of both God and Satan and their respective principles of operation. The outcome of the struggle waged at the cross permitted nothing short of total commitment by both parties, for it was a winner-takes-all contest. Nothing could be, or was, held in reserve on either side.

The disguise worn by Satan to conceal his real identity was stripped away, as was the mask he had placed on the name and character of God to misrepresent Him before the universe. From that titanic struggle, the evil one emerged to be seen for what he really was—a being who is so utterly devoted to the service of self, that he would even sacrifice the life of the One who had made him and who had given him all he had in order to further his own interests. Satan exhibited the spirit which he had already placed in, and manifested through, the criminal minds of the earth. The way he treated Christ is an example of how he treats all who do not serve him.

How deeply grateful we can be that this is not the char-

acter of God. Well might we shiver with terror if it was. God and Christ are motivated by another principle altogether—that of self-sacrificing, loving service. They serve all others no matter what the cost of sacrifice to Themselves. They do not make an example of those who do not obey Them. Instead, They make an example of Themselves showing that, far from demanding and taking people’s lives, They give Their own.

Christ’s garment is indeed dipped in blood—but it His own. Satan also has a garment dipped in blood—the blood of others. How diametrically opposed the two are. The ways of Satan can be seen in the ways of human beings, but none of his principles and procedures can be found in the life of Christ or His Father.

The way in which Christ died is absolute proof that God does not destroy the sinner: In the Garden of Eden, our first parents chose to go their own way. They disobeyed the law of love, and in so doing exposed themselves to the fatal results of the broken law. They would have died on that very day, as God had said, but for one thing: the instant they transgressed, Christ stepped in between the living and the dead and said: “Let the punishment fall on Me.”

When Christ came to this earth, He came to bear, on our behalf, the punishment which would otherwise have fallen on every one of us. This is an important point: Christ came to bear the full penalty of what each of us will finally suffer unless we personally accept His sacrifice for ourselves.

The commonly accepted concept of how the wicked will finally be destroyed is that God, whose patience has become exhausted, uses His omnipotent power to wipe out the disobedient from the universe. This theory teaches that the actual death stroke is administered by God. If that is true, then this is the way Christ had to perish for He had to die as we do. If our death is execution at the hands of

God, then the Father must have executed His Son. Fortunately, there is no mystery surrounding the death of Christ. It happened in full public view, and it is apparent that the Father did not come down to the cross and personally execute His dearly beloved, only-begotten Son. This is not the way Christ died.

There is another view of this event, and that is that the sinner separates himself from God. As a result of this separation God is no longer able to maintain control of the forces in and around the sinner, and he is destroyed by his own sinfulness. If that is true, then this is the way in which Christ died.

God has not left us in any doubt about the matter, for Christ Himself testified to what happened. In His final moments, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" *Matthew 27:46*. There is no indication here that God was drawing near with slaughter weapons in His hands! Rather, He was departing from Christ just as He departs from every unrepentant sinner. Christ Himself was not a sinner of course, but having accepted the weight of the sins of the world, He stood in the place of every sinner. So truly did He take our sins upon Him that it was as if He had committed every one Himself. It was this weight of woe which separated Him from His Father and left Him totally at the mercy of the destroyer.

The Egyptians, the Sodomites, the antediluvians and every other person who has suffered the death penalty all died in exactly the same way. And at the end of the millennium, it is sin that will obliterate those who have turned down the offer of deliverance from its power.

Higher, Holier Concepts

God is love. His character, His law, is love. Every act of creation, every plan made, and every step taken in the work of redemption, is an expression of that unfathomable, selfless love which pervades every aspect of God and His behavior.

God's ways are unchangeable. With Him there "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." *James* 1:17. The better His immutable principles are understood, the more warmly and deeply will they be appreciated. That love, perceived and received, will flood the soul with light and beauty. Responses will be generated that harmonize with the thoughts of the Eternal One. The recipient will become part of that circle of life and beauty which everlastingly emanates from the throne of the Omnipotent. The way will be opened to become a living channel through which that stream of life and love will reach others, and through them to still others. The great privilege of entering into the joy of their Lord is experienced. To dwell in the light which floods forth from the Eternal is happiness without equal, joy beyond comparison.

Many imagine that this is some future reward for the faithful. But it can be experienced now, before the return of Christ and the establishment of His eternal kingdom of glory. For the true children of God, heaven begins here. The love of God dwells in their hearts and the character of God is expressed through their lives. Day by day they learn to think and speak of God as Christ did, when He walked the earth as His Father's representative.

It is a great tragedy that, since the fall, human minds have been deceived into holding the most serious misconceptions of the character of their loving heavenly Father.

This is actually the cause of the multiplied sorrows and sufferings which have overtaken the human family, because the tendency of the children is to copy the behavior of their parents. So, when God our Father is seen as a Being who uses the power at His disposal to enforce obedience and worship, His earthly children feel justified in copying this example and oppressing their fellow men. Such tyranny produces countermeasures to resist and overcome these pressures, and these in turn inevitably lead to murders, wars, terrorism, and a thousand other woes. Obsessed with the protection of their own life and property and the achievement of their ambitions, people will pursue these objectives irrespective of the cost to others. They trust themselves, and not their loving Father whom they see as an oppressive tyrant.

But if we would cease to think as men, and instead seek to understand the true character of God, we would be motivated to copy the selfless, loving Pattern revealed in His Son. Our chief concern would then be, not to serve self but to serve others no matter what the cost to ourselves. If this was the spirit that possessed every individual, as it did Christ, there would be no more oppression, murder, war, or any such thing.

The time has come to think no more as a man, but as Christ, whose spotless life has shown us the Father as He really is. When we catch this vision of God, the treasures of salvation and redemption will be opened to our mind. Our hearts will be made glad for:

**“This is eternal life, that they may know You,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ
whom You have sent.”**

John 17:3.

Whenever we are confronted with an accident, loss, human suffering, catastrophe, or even war, we start to think in a certain way. We may feel threatened, deeply affected, or indignant. And in each case, our thoughts are formed by our concept of what part a higher power—God—plays in these events.

Is the omnipotent God angry and punishing humanity for their disobedience? Is His patience at an end and He is using His power to put an abrupt end to their godless practices? Or has He simply lost control of the situation?

This booklet presents a very different approach. The old question, “Why does God permit such things to happen?” is taken up and considered in a new light. Although not every aspect is dealt with in this short publication, it does provide an introduction to this important theme. Another book, entitled *Behold Your God*, deals with the various aspects of this question in much greater depth.

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