



Agape

A Revelation of the Father's
Character of Love

Adrian Ebens

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Dedicated to my fellow elders,
precious brothers in the narrow way:
Craig Jacobson, Eddie Perez, Craig Jones,
Colin Nicolson, and Gavin Devlin.

Special thanks to my wife Lorelle,
Danutasn Brown, Tony and Anna Pace,
Gary Hullquist, and Frank Klin.

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Foreword

It is a well-researched fact that children adopt many, if not all, of the traits of their parents. Through the process of observation and interaction the characteristics of father and mother, good or bad, are usually reflected in the life of the child. It is the law of inheritance.

The world is full of violence and brutality even as it calls for increased security. The spirit of aggression towards threats, real or perceived, often leads to a process of justification for the destruction of human life.

Deep inside every one of us is the desire for peace, tranquillity and the assurance of being loved. How can the human race move closer to this ideal? With all our advances in technology our world is moving deeper and deeper into selfishness and violence.

The life of Christ who walked the earth 2000 years ago offers for us a model of selfless, agape love that has brought peace to countless millions. For many people this beautiful model of living is subdued and even destroyed by many of the stories recorded in the pages of the Bible detailing the interactions of God with men throughout human history.

God at times appears to be extremely violent and genocidal commanding not only the death of enemy soldiers but also their infant children. The Bible expresses with frightening regularity that He is angry and filled with fury. Beyond this the death of the cross is for many tainted with the thought that God demands death for those who transgress Him.

These views of God are prominent in most of the world's religions including atheism, whose more recent rise to prominence in the French revolution was paved through the slaughter of many thousands of people.

For those who have interest in the Word of God, the disparity between the descriptions of God in the Bible and the life of Christ have made some of the claims of Christ very hard to resolve. Yet in a poignant moment in talking to one of His followers Jesus said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father."

How could this be possible? Could it be true that God is truly merciful, gracious and kind as revealed in the life of Jesus? At the very heart of the

law of God is the commandment that states “you shall not kill.” Is this a reflection of the character of God? Or is it a case of certain rules for a lower order of beings and a completely different set of rules for those in power, i.e. God? What kind of effect does this have on leaders who would pattern themselves on such a model? Would it produce leaders that act the same way once in power?

In this volume is found the culmination of a sixteen year search for light on these questions. The journey began when I was reminiscing about the birth of my first son. I thought on the moment I first held him in my arms and the deep sense of love I felt for him. To have a taste of such divine emotions brought me into an encounter with God that impressed upon me the thought that the feelings I had for my son were an expression of God’s love for His Son, and consequently His love for all His earth-born children.

The journey has been long and at times exhausting. The Bible has on occasion seemed to make it impossible to reconcile the apparent contradictions it presented before me.

I share with you here the conclusion of this research. Through it I have been led to several countries to meet with other searchers on this same quest, and what a blessing it has been for all of us.

I testify to you that God is indeed love. He is not a person of violence. He is not intimidating us with the threat of roasting His wayward children in hell for eternity as millions believe.

I realise that many are not convinced, but I simply invite you to take this journey and see for yourself and discover the fact that God is love.

1. Revelation of the Father

God is love are the words penned by the apostle John after his intimate connection with Jesus while working here on earth. 1 John 4:16. As John sat on the side of a hill listening to Him preach, as he watched Him open the eyes of the blind, as He rebuked those doing wrong with tears in His eyes, John comprehended the real mission of Jesus.

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. John 1:18

The picture of God as revealed in the life of Jesus came in stark contrast to what men previously understood God to be like. As Jesus and His disciples were passing by a blind man they questioned Him:

...Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?
John 9:2

Their question revealed that men perceived God as a cruel dictator inflicting punishment on those who disobey Him. The rise and fall of world empires until the time of Christ were forged through bloodshed and ruled with an iron fist, reflecting human perceptions of the divine character as ruthless and revengeful.

There were witnesses proclaiming a different message. The beauty of nature, the vibrant array of flowers with their sweet perfume, the melodious birds that filled the air with their songs, and the majestic trees

of living green all bore witness to the truth of a wondrous Creator and a loving Father. The fervent and dedicated love of parents for their children, and the caring intimate bonds of husband and wife also spoke of the tender heart of the Creator.

Fifteen hundred years earlier Moses, seeking to understand his maker, requested God to reveal His glory.

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, **and proclaimed the name of the LORD.** (5) And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Exodus 34:5-6

Yet despite these and many other evidences the prevailing view that existed was that God is harsh and severe and would eagerly punish those who offended Him.

Why did this view prevail? Because Satan had cast doubt upon the love of God from the very beginning.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: (5) For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. Genesis 3:4-5

Satan convinced Adam and Eve that God did not have their best interest at heart. He convinced them that God could not be trusted. In telling Adam and Eve that they would not die in eating the fruit, he opened the way for God's warning, given in love, to be understood very differently.

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Genesis 2:17

If eating from the tree would not kill Adam and Eve then what would kill them? The only conclusion to be drawn was that it must be God, and when Adam next heard the voice of God in the garden we see the fruit of such thinking.

And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. Genesis 3:10

Why was Adam afraid of God? Because he feared death and that God would kill them for their disobedience. It was this fear of death through the idea that God would kill them that kept them in bondage to Satan. But God sought to:

...deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Hebrews 2:15

Satan suggested to our first parents that God was an executioner who would kill those who transgress Him and that He was a liar in telling them that eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge would kill them. Yet these were the very attributes of Satan, himself. In speaking to the Pharisees Jesus describes these attributes through their actions.

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. John 8:44

Through these deceptions Satan has enslaved the world; he has misrepresented the character of God in order to keep them from Him. The Son of God came from heaven to reveal the true character of His Father; He came to remove the dark clouds of misapprehension and show what the Father is really like. When one of the disciples made the request, "Show us the Father," Jesus answered:

Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? John 14:8-9

In describing His earthly mission Jesus said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. Luke 4:18.

With sacred imagination we behold the face of the widow of Nain when Jesus interrupted the funeral train and raised her son to life again. Our hearts are touched as we behold the story of Jairus and the joy that replaced his agony when Jesus raised his daughter to life again. Jesus

would pass through whole villages, and not one sick person would remain. He fed the 5000 on the hillside out of His compassion for them, and He told them of the Father's love for them.

So inviting was the presence of Jesus that mothers would bring their children to Him so He could bless them. In all His actions the glory of the Father was revealed. In every word He uttered, the layers of darkness that had bound the world in slavery were dispelled by the light of His glory. Jesus did not use the power of positive thinking or flattery; He would always speak the truth in love and was not afraid to expose falsehood and unbelief. Yet tears were in His voice as He rebuked those in error. He only lived for others and every soul was of infinite value to Him.

The character of Christ on earth reveals to us the character of God. Christ said I do nothing of myself. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. 2 Corinthians 5:19. The whole of the Father's character was revealed in His Son. Jesus on earth revealed to humanity the express image of the Father.

For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. (50) And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak." John 12:49-50 (NKJV)

While in earnest prayer to His Father, Jesus said these words:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (4) **I have glorified thee on the earth:** I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. (5) And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. (6) **I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world:** thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. John 17:3-6

Jesus tells us that He glorified the Father on earth. The glory of the Father is His character, and this is what Jesus revealed to us in His earthly ministry. He tells His Father also that He manifested the Father's name or character to the disciples that were with Him. This is why Jesus could say

with confidence to Philip that if you have seen me you have seen the Father. Philip did not have to witness all of the work of Jesus across all of human history to know what the Father was like. In just over three years Jesus showed us in every aspect what the Father is like.

The supreme revelation of this love was revealed upon the cross.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. (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. (11) Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 1 John 4:9-11

If Jesus had fallen victim to Satan's temptation He then would have been lost forever, and the whole human race would have been lost as a result. The heavenly Father did not lend His Son to the world for simply thirty three years, He *gave* Him to us. There was a risk that all could be lost, and yet the Father in His great love for the world was willing to give up His only begotten Son that He might save us.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Romans 8:32

This risk is revealed in the prayer of Jesus to His Father in the garden. There was a concern He would not endure the test; yet He trusted the will of His Father regardless of the cost.

And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. Matthew 26:39

How can we comprehend the breadth of that love? What words can express the wonder of the Love of God? Adam had not been willing to give up that which was most precious to Him, but the Father was. He spared not His own Son.

Jesus silently took the beating, mocking and ridicule of the mob that delighted in His suffering. He faithfully tried to carry His cross until the weight was too great for Him. He asked John to care for His mother while He was on the cross and asked His Father to forgive those who were killing Him.

Never had the universe witnessed such amazing love as this. The character of the Father blazed forth from His Son in glorious light. Truly the Father loves His enemies and forgives those who seek to destroy Him. All this was manifested in the character of the Son of God. Through death the Son of God revealed the murderer that Satan was and revealed the actions of the serpent. Upon the cross the murderer and the murdered were fully revealed. The spirit that moved Cain to kill his brother Abel was manifested in full light upon the cross, and the heavenly universe could see fully for the first time what a liar and a murderer that Satan was. His influence in heaven fell like lightning, and there was found no place for him in heaven any more in the hearts of the angels.

At the beginning of this journey we want to be able to obtain the correct pair of glasses to read the stories of the Bible. In the light of the cross of Calvary the attributes of God that have filled us with fear in the Old Testament become beautiful and attractive. Mercy, tenderness and parental love are seen to blend with holiness, justice and power. Through the lens of the stories from the New Testament we can begin to see the truth of the acts of judgment in the Old Testament. This is the object of this series – to show that the life of Jesus on earth is the same yesterday today and forever and that this is exactly what our Father is like.

2. How Do You Read?

Jesus was the most amazing teacher. When the officers sent by the church leaders to arrest Jesus were asked to explain why they had not brought Him, they could only answer:

...Never man spake like this man. John 7:46

Despite this fact the New Testament records that most people had trouble understanding Him.

Speaking to the Jews about His death and resurrection He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They thought He was speaking about the physical temple in Jerusalem, but He was speaking about the temple of His own body. Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again; Nicodemus thought Jesus was speaking about physical birth but Jesus was talking about spiritual birth. When Jesus offered the woman at the well living water she thought He meant physical water when He meant spiritual water. Again, Jesus warned the disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees; they thought He was speaking about physical bread. But Jesus said unto them:

How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Matthew 16:11

When Jesus fed the 5000 He began to teach them about the meaning of this miracle He performed. He explained to them that the bread was a symbol of His life upon which the world needed to meditate and consider. He told them:

Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. John 6:54

These words astounded His listeners. They murmured saying, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" Many of those who were interested in His ministry turned away from Him and followed Him no more.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. (11) He came unto his own, and his own received him not. John 1:10-11

All these things were a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah:

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? (2) For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. (3) **He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:** and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Isaiah 53:1-3

The natural reaction of the human heart to the Son of God is to reject Him and His teaching.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:14

When the natural man reads the Word of God he does not understand it. The Bible tells us:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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. Isaiah 55:8-9

Unless we are born again by the Spirit of God and come to the Bible humbly asking for guidance we will misunderstand what the Word of God is saying.

And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. 1 Corinthians 8:2

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: James 1:19

He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him. Proverbs 18:13

It is very easy to answer a matter before it is heard. Consider the following example:

And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. (36) Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. Luke 22:35-36

But later He seems to change His mind?

Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Matthew 26:52

Did Jesus tell His disciples to buy a sword, and then when Peter uses it he is rebuked? Did Peter use it on the wrong occasion? If so, did Jesus tell him when it should be used and when it shouldn't? The words, "all those who take the sword will perish with it," appear to be fairly universal. If that were not enough we add to this a further dimension:

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Ephesians 6:17

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. Revelation 1:16

The Bible uses the word *sword* to refer to the Word of God. How do we know when to apply this understanding and when to understand a literal sword? Consider again the example of fire.

And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. 2 Kings 1:10

And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, (52) And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. (53) And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. (54) And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? (55) But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. (56) For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Luke 9:51-56

In rebuking the disciples was Jesus also rebuking Elijah? Was it simply that they did not know the right time to call down fire? Again the words of Jesus are fairly universal. He states that He did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them. Does this only apply to when He was here on earth, but He would destroy men's lives afterwards?

These are some of the many questions that begin to arise when one reads the Bible. It brings before us a crucial question that Jesus put to a lawyer who questioned Him.

He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? Luke 10:26

Jesus didn't just ask the man what are you reading but *how* are you reading it? What are the principles that you are using to read the Word of

God? This is an important question that needs an answer if we are to harmonise all these apparently contradictory passages.

In the early 19th century a man who was to spearhead one of the largest revivals in North America was grappling with this very question. In his earlier life William Miller had given up on the Bible, concluding it to be full of contradictions. Yet after witnessing an amazing American defeat of the British forces that the British should have won easily, he was convinced that a greater power than man was at work, and he came back to reconsider the Bible. This was quite a humbling thing for him to do, because he had taunted several Christians concerning the apparent contradictions in the Bible that they were not able to answer. When he renewed his interest in the Bible he was faced with the very arguments that he had put to others.

“Soon after his renunciation of Deism, in conversing with a friend respecting the hope of a glorious eternity through the merits and intercessions of Christ, he was asked how he knew there was such a Saviour. He replied, "It is revealed in the Bible." - "How do you know the Bible is true?" was the response, with a reiteration of his former arguments on the contradictions and mysticisms in which he had claimed it was shrouded. Mr. Miller felt such taunts in their full force. He was at first perplexed; but, on reflection, he considered that if the Bible is a revelation of God, it must be consistent with itself; all its parts must harmonize, must have been given for man's instruction, and, consequently, must be adapted to his understanding. He, therefore, said, "Give me time, and I will harmonize all those apparent contradictions to my own satisfaction, or I will be a Deist still." He then devoted himself to the prayerful reading of the Word. He laid aside all commentaries, and used the marginal references and his Concordance as his only helps. He saw that he must distinguish between the Bible and all the peculiar and partisan interpretations of it. The Bible was older than them all, must be above them all; and he placed it there. He saw that it must correct all interpretations; and, in correcting them, its own pure light would shine without the mists which traditional belief had involved it in. He resolved to lay aside all preconceived opinions, and to receive, with child-like simplicity, the natural and obvious meaning of Scripture.” Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (1853) p 68.

This is exactly what he did. During a period of two years he studied the Bible from cover to cover.

"I determined to lay aside all my prepossessions, to thoroughly compare Scripture with Scripture, and to pursue its study in a regular and methodical manner. I commenced with Genesis, and read verse by verse, proceeding no faster than the meaning of the several passages should be so unfolded as to leave me free from embarrassment respecting any mysticisms or contradictions. Whenever I found anything obscure, my practice was to compare it with all collateral passages; and, by the help of Cruden, I examined all the texts of Scripture in which were found any of the prominent words contained in any obscure portion. Then, by letting every word have its proper bearing on the subject of the text, if my view of it harmonized with every collateral passage in the Bible, it ceased to be a difficulty. In this way I pursued the study of the Bible, in my first perusal of it, for about two years, and was fully satisfied that it is its own interpreter. Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (1853) p 69.

During this time he developed a system of rules by which he was able to harmonise all the contradictions that he had formerly faced. Here is a summary of the rules that he used:

1. Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible.
2. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by a diligent application and study.
3. Nothing revealed in Scriptures can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering.
4. To understand doctrine, bring all the Scriptures together on the subject you wish to know; then let every word have its proper influence; and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in error.
5. Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on a teacher to expound to me, and he should guess at its meaning, or desire to have it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his guessing, desire, creed or wisdom, is my rule, and not the Bible.

6. If a word makes good sense as it stands, and does no violence to the simple laws of nature, it is to be understood literally; if not, figuratively.
7. The most important rule of all is, that you must have faith. It must be a faith that requires a sacrifice, and, if tried, would give up the dearest object on earth, the world and all its desires, character, living, occupation, friends, home, comforts and worldly honours. If any of these should hinder our believing any part of God's word, it would show our faith to be vain. Nor can we ever believe so long as one of these motives lies lurking in our hearts. We must believe that God will never forfeit his word; and we can have confidence that He who takes notice of the sparrow's fall, and numbers the hairs of our head, will guard the translation of his own word, and throw a barrier around it, and prevent those who sincerely trust in God, and put implicit confidence in his word, from erring far from the truth.

These rules of interpretation provided the tools to develop a message the led to one of the greatest revivals the world has ever seen.

We note carefully that in order to understand a teaching we need to take all the Scripture we can find on it and bring it together before we form our conclusion. Every word is to have its proper place and influence. This is something that is not easy for many people because we want to get answers quickly, but it takes effort and discipline to search out all the passages on a subject. Take for instance the Greek word *monogenes* translated as *begotten* in John 3:16. Many people believe this word means unique, but what does the Bible say for itself?

...behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, Luke 7:12	Only born child
For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. Luke 8:42	Only born child
And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child. Luke 9:38	Only born child

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John 1:14	Only born child
No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. John 1:18	Only born child
For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16	Only born child
He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. John 3:18	Only born child
By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Hebrews 11:17	Only born child to his true and legitimate wife.
In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 1 John 4:9	Only born child

There are only five people mentioned in the New Testament as *monogenes* or only begotten. Five texts refer to Jesus as the Son of God. There is one reference to Isaac and then the other references apply to only born children that Jesus healed. In the cases of the other children where the word is used the meaning is plain that it means the only born child. In respect to Isaac we know he was not the only child of Abraham but he was the only born child of Sarah who received the promises with Abraham. When we put all these texts together we see that this word when applied to Jesus must mean the same thing, the only born child of the Father.

Added to this is the rule listed as number six above which states that we should take the literal meaning of the text unless it does violence to nature. It does no violence to Scripture to understand that Jesus is the only born Son of the Father. So through this process we can establish the

meaning of the word *monogenes* without seeking a definition from a commentary or someone else. The Bible, itself, is its own expositor.

We will need to carefully apply these rules as we seek to harmonise the life of Jesus with the many violent stories of the Old Testament. It will take earnest effort to prove true the claim of the Bible: that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Hebrews 13:8. Therefore, if He changes not, then during His ministry on earth He was the perfect revelation of His Father.

3. The Death of the Cross

The mission of the Son of God on earth was to reveal the character of His Father. How precious to read about the loving and tender Saviour lifting the burdens, healing the diseases, and touching the hearts of men, women, and children. Mothers earnestly desired to bring their children to Him that He might touch them and bless them. Never had the world witnessed such selfless, caring love. With every passing hour the picture of His Father was being restored to Edenic beauty. For so many people the first face they saw was that of Jesus as He opened their eyes; the first voice they heard was the melodic sound of the Son of God full of grace and truth.

The overwhelming picture that Jesus painted for us was a perfect match for the words spoken to Moses nearly 1500 years earlier.

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. (6) And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth...
Exodus 34:5-6

Yet the life of Jesus was painted upon a canvas stained with blood. As the twelve year old Jesus stood in the temple and watched the lamb being slain, He knew this was His destiny. When the Baptist proclaimed Him to the world, it was with the title of “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin

of the world.” John 1:29. The wages of sin must be paid, justice must be served as the Scriptures say.

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (25) Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (26) To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Romans 3:24-26

Did God require the cross? Was this His punishment for the transgressor of His law? These questions are vitally important. If the wrath of God was satisfied in the death of His own Son and this death was something that God Himself had determined, then ultimately the beautiful picture painted by Jesus concerning His Father is stained with the blood of an innocent child. The words of Christ, “It is finished,” would not complete the picture of a wonderful Father, but rather it would forever enshrine the belief that God demanded death to satisfy His anger against sin. This would make Him the author of death and the instigator of violent retaliation.

The prophet Isaiah spoke about the cross of Christ 700 years beforehand and he revealed our human response to it.

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? (2) For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. (3) **He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.** (4) **Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.** (5) But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:1-5

When Christ came to save humanity our natural collective response was to reject Him. He came to offer us eternal life, but the natural human reaction was to despise this offer.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. (5) And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. John 1:4-5

The Son of God was carrying our sins upon Him, and yet our response to Him was to believe that He was being smitten by God. The words stricken and smitten mean to beat, to strike and violently kill. But it was not God who violently struck the death blow to His Son on the cross; this is what man believes, but it is not true. So what caused the death of the Son of God upon the cross? The pattern was set in the very beginning when Adam was asked if he had eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? (10) And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. (11) And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? (12) And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. Genesis 3:9-12

Adam never asked for mercy or forgiveness. His sin had blinded his perception to such an extent that he never thought to ask for it. Instead of accepting his guilt and asking for mercy he placed the blame upon God for creating Eve who then tempted him. He imagined God to be harsh and punishing in nature, and so the true character of God was hidden from him in this falsehood. In the story of Cain we can see this same principle in operation.

And Cain said to the Lord, My wickedness is more than that I deserve forgiveness (for); Genesis 4:13 (Wycliffe Translation, See also Luther 1912 Translation)

Cain refused to repent because he believed that God would not forgive him. This is the power of sin over the human race; it is the sin of believing that God cannot forgive our sins. Even the prodigal son does not ask for forgiveness but rather seeks to pay for his deeds himself through work.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, (19) And am no more worthy

to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.
Luke 15:18-19

The only way for man to repent is for the Spirit of Christ to be given as a gift to enable us to reach forth our hands and ask for and receive forgiveness.

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, **for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.**
Acts 5:30-31

When Adam sinned he became hostile towards God. His heart was at war with Him, for we read:

The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. (7) **The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God;** it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.
Romans 8:6-7 (NIV)

In order for God to give Adam the ability to repent and ask for forgiveness, He sent the Spirit of His Son into the heart of Adam that Adam might cry "Abba Father." Only the Spirit of Jesus in Adam could give him grace to give this cry.

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Galatians 4:6

In coming to Adam while he was utterly unreceptive, Christ was forced to endure hostility in the heart of Adam in order to give him grace. This animosity pierces the heart of Christ and causes Him terrible suffering.

For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. (9) In all their affliction he was afflicted, and **the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.** Isaiah 63:8-9

It is therefore in this sense that Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Revelation 13:8. In order to give men the desire and will to ask for mercy and forgiveness, Jesus must suffer the agony of

human rejection and hatred. He is despised and rejected of men and a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Every time men and women resist the appeal of Christ to the heart, the rejection pierces Him to the depth of His love for their soul. Every manifestation of evil from human hearts causes Christ indescribable sorrow both for perpetrator and victim. From this perspective indeed Christ was despised and rejected of men in the days when Isaiah wrote those words seven hundred years before Christ appeared on the earth. Therefore today He carries the same grief as a cross upon His shoulders in order to give humanity more time to turn from their cruel and harsh ways and learn the truth about His Father.

As the human race determined not to believe that God could forgive, this is the price that Christ had to pay in order to redeem the human race. In order to take our place He had to die as men die. This death is one in which the sinner believes that God will not forgive him. The lie that God cannot forgive is what gives Satan the power of death. Therefore, it is only through death that Christ could defeat Satan.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through **death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;**
Hebrews 2:14

The death of the cross is the death that sin demands – not God. Once someone crosses the line into sin it becomes impossible to come back, as all perception of mercy and grace are gone, and the only possible outcome is death. When man looks into the perfect law of God as a mirror and seeks to attribute death to God, the reflection immediately comes back onto man and destroys him.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, **he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;** James 1:23 (NKJV)

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Matthew 7:2

When Adam took the fruit of the tree he chose to believe that God did not have his best interest at heart. He chose to believe the serpent, that God was a selfish liar. These thoughts, projected onto the perfect mirror of the law, came straight back to him and judged him as he perceived. His false

conception of God completely withered his hand that would have, and should have reached out for mercy and grace. It was impossible for him to come back from this position. Death must be the result, for this is the sentence that he himself had determined.

In order to reveal these principles to the world, Christ came that He might reveal the cross to us and that we might discern the true nature of sin. Jesus spoke the words of a man laden with sin:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Matthew 27:46

God did not forsake His Son at all. Yet as Christ was carrying our sins upon Himself, He died as the man who cannot be forgiven for this is the *will* of man – the man who, when his sins are pressed upon him, thinks he can't be forgiven or hasn't come to an assurance of forgiveness will *feel* forsaken by God. In these words of Christ we see the curse of sin upon Him, the curse expressed by Cain.

Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a **fugitive** and a vagabond in the earth... Genesis 4:14

The word *fugitive* can mean to stagger and shake. Christ demonstrates that He carried the curse of Cain. He felt that God's face was hidden and He shook under the sense of our guilt. The Scripture reveals what hides the Father's face.

Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. Psalm 69:7

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. Isaiah 59:2

Burdened with sins Christ cries out:

For troubles without number surround me; **my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see.** They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me. Psalm 40:12 (NIV)

With reference to the Father we read:

For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. Psalm 22:24

The shame of our sins covered the face of Jesus so He could not see the Father's face. He faced death as every sinner will face death at the conclusion of the great controversy. Christ felt the coals of fire in His soul.

The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented [confronted] me. (6) In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. (7) Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. (8) There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. Psalm 18:5-8

Christ suffered the death of the wicked. A fire came forth from the midst of Christ and devoured Him. Our sins upon Christ caused Him to suffer as Satan and all the wicked will suffer in the end.

Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee... Ezekiel 28:18

As our substitute Christ's sanctuary or body temple was defiled by the multitude of our iniquities. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. The terrible death that Satan will die has already been experienced by Christ on the cross. The heart of Christ exploded from the fire brought forth from the midst of Him and there came forth water and blood. Christ died in the fires of a living hell and this is exactly how the wicked will die. I pause and reflect with amazement that just as the Father never left His Son but suffered with Him through His death on the cross so also our Father and Saviour will be right there with the wicked suffering with them in those flames of hell. The Scripture tells us:

In all their affliction he was afflicted... Isaiah 63:9

No father can rejoice at the loss of a child, it is agony for him and so our Father and His Son will suffer again the agonies of the cross with the wicked in their death. As the righteous stand upon the walls of Zion and see those they have loved in those flames, the Saviour will have to carry them through that cross and it will take a thousand years to prepare them for that event. Like Mary and the disciples when beholding the Son of God on the cross wept in agony, so too will the righteous be pierced by the eternal loss of their loved ones who refused the grace of God. Only then are we told that God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Revelation 21:4

This occurs after the death of the wicked in Revelation 20:

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. (14) And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (15) And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:13-15

As Christ rose from the grave of His suffering 2000 years ago He will also be raised from His agony of losing billions of His children who spat upon Him, despised Him and refused His loving mercy. And as Christ is raised up by the blessing of the Father we also shall be raised up with Him to enter into the new earth without one shadow of sorrow remaining.

Coming back to the suffering of Christ on the cross we want to notice something. We observe that although Christ was in the very depths of despair when He felt completely alone and isolated, by faith He asked the Father to forgive those killing Him.

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do... Luke 23:34

The death of the cross unmasks Satan's lie that God cannot forgive us. We see that God willingly gave up His Son to our human perception of justice. He allowed Him to die without hope, in order that once we see He had

risen from the grave, we might then choose to believe that we can indeed be forgiven of our sins and receive the blessed hope of newness of life. The Spirit of the Son of God comes into our hearts and lifts our spiritually withered hand to take hold of the mercy of God.

How wonderful to know that God did not demand death. He does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the death penalty. Our Father willingly allowed His Son to show us the end result of those who refuse to believe in the mercy of God. He did not kill His Son to avenge His wrath, rather He gave up His Son to our wrath that through this death we might see the love of God.

The warning that God gave in the garden that in the day Adam should eat of the tree of knowledge he would surely die, was not a threat to kill him; it was a warning of the judgment that man would bring against himself by choosing to believe that God is selfish, and therefore, He would not forgive. It is a beautiful truth that only Christ who alone understood the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of God, knew that it was possible to ask God for mercy and forgiveness. Matthew 11:27. It is therefore clear that the Son of God is the one reaching into the hearts of men to give them courage to believe they can be forgiven.

How wonderful is the revelation of the cross. Let us not continue to consider Christ “smitten of God and afflicted” but rather that He is “despised and rejected of men” – smitten and afflicted through a wrong understanding of the character of God. God did not demand death as a penalty for sin; death is rather the sure result of believing that God will not forgive.

4. My Beloved Son

There was a long pause as they both held each other. The intensity of emotion runs deep, but they both know the time has come. From the days of eternity Father and Son had been in close communion with each other, and now that communion was soon to be broken. The Son of God is to embark on the earthly part of His mission to save His human sons and daughters. Both Father and Son understand the risks and the cost involved, but love drives them on.

For a brief moment, the Father and Son look into the future and watch the mission unfold. The scorn, the rejection, the hatred, the spitting, the kicking, the lash, and the nails all pale into nothingness compared to that one horrid moment in time when heaven and earth stand still and behold the separation of Father and Son. The Son sees millennia of guilt, suffering, rebellion and worthlessness rolled upon Him as He shakes like a leaf, ripped and torn by the sense of sin that hides His Father's face.

Turning from these future scenes, Father and Son embrace – how can the Father give Him up to this destiny? Before the foundation of the world the Father had wrestled with the possibility of the failure of this mission and the risk of losing His Son to the power of sin. The Son of God would take human nature upon Himself providing a window of opportunity for His arch rival, Satan, to overpower Him. Before the beginning there was no certainty of success. The Father placed Himself in a position where He might lose His Son forever in an effort to save us. The great compassion of the Father inherited by His Son was manifested in the Son's appeal to His

Father to let Him come to earth to save us. Would the Father let His Son do it? Would He let Him take that risk?

The depth of the Father's love for us is measured by His love for His Son and the risk taken to save us. We catch a picture of the Father's love when He spoke at His Son's baptism.

And lo there came a voice from heaven saying: this is that my dear son, in whom is my delight. Matthew 3:17 (Tyndale)

The Father delights in His Son. There is no greater treasure in the life of the Father beside His Son. In speaking of His birth in heaven the Son of God exclaimed:

Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: (26) While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. (27) When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: (28) When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: (29) When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: (30) Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Proverbs 8:25-30

We picture the tender arm of the Father upon the shoulder of His Son as they communed together in the formation of the universe. God created all things through His Son, and it was a delight to the Father to see His Son exercise the powers and intellect that He had given Him.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, (2) Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by 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... Hebrews 1:1-3a

The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. John 3:35

So close was the relationship between Father and Son that Christ could say:

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Matthew 11:27

As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: John 10:15

For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. John 5:20

As Judah expressed to Joseph concerning their father Jacob's love for his son Benjamin, so we can see that the life of the heavenly Father was "bound up in the lad's (Christ's) life." Genesis 44:30. As any loving parent knows, there is nothing you would not do for the love, nurture and protection of your child. Such is the love of the Father for His Son. It is in this context that we can contemplate the greatest text in Scripture:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

The two letter word "so" speaks to us of a love that cannot be fully comprehended. As the Father listened to the pleading of His Son to save us, the Father went through the horror of a great darkness for which no created being can ever truly appreciate. After a tremendous struggle the Father in love to His Son and us granted the Son's request to save the human race. Such amazing love, such incredible, wondrous love – this shall be our theme throughout eternity.

As we indicated previously, the sufferings of Christ were not restricted to His mission on earth. As soon as there was sin there was a Saviour. It was the Spirit of Jesus that had sustained the holy pair in Eden. When they partook of the fruit according to the suggestion of Satan inhabiting the serpent, Christ was crushed by their rejection of Him and His Father. After all they had been given, their selfish ingratitude caused Christ terrible pain as any parent knows when their children turn from them. Yet Christ did not forsake them. The only way they could have life was for Him to stay

with them by His Spirit and continue to give them life all the while they were trampling on His Father's law and character.

Every time an Israelite committed sin they were to bring a lamb as an offering.

'If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty, (28) or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. (29) And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering. ... and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a sweet aroma to the LORD. So the priest shall make atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him. (32) 'If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish. (33) Then he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill it as a sin offering at the place where they kill the burnt offering. Leviticus 4:27-29, 31-33 (NKJV)

This process reveals the sad truth that every sin causes suffering for the Son of God. From the first sin until the present day, Christ suffers the agony of rejection and a deep sorrow for what His lost children do to each other on the earth. Each sin causes Him to be crucified afresh and put to an open shame. Hebrews 6:6. This level of suffering is beyond our comprehension; it seems utterly impossible to us that the sufferings of Christ are not simply forty eight hours, leading up to and including the cross, or even thirty three years on earth, but actually six thousand years of constant suffering and rejection. If it were possible for us to grasp all of this suffering as it reaches into the heart of the Father, we would truly see the suffering of the Father is no less than that of His Son, for every parent suffers when their children suffer.

... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:19 (NKJV)

Can we but dimly perceive the suffering of the Father as He was intently watching the world's treatment of His Son? Can we imagine the tearing at the Father's heart when His Son asked Him:

..."O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Matthew 26:39

We might draw some comfort in knowing that the suffering of Christ only took place two thousand years ago, but right now Christ is suffering for all the children that Satan has snared in child sex trafficking; He suffers for all the homeless and starving children, made such through the selfishness of man; for all the victims of domestic violence and rape; for all the millions caught in drug and alcohol abuse; for the hundreds of people every day that seek to take their own lives—Christ feels it all and so does the Father. This suffering is not restricted to the victims of cruelty but also the perpetrators. The Spirit of Christ seeks to save the abusers of others by convicting them of their sin. The guilt that is felt is sent not to condemn them but to save them from hardening their hearts and losing their souls. The guilt that is felt is sent to rescue, not simply to damn. As the soul shuts out the guilt with alcohol or drugs or anything to stop the mind thinking about what has been done, so Christ is despised, rejected and silenced. This is happening in billions of souls every day, as they turn from selfless love upon this cross, a sight too brilliant and bright to behold.

At this point we might be tempted to cry like the Pharisees:

..."You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." (41) Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, (42) "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. Matthew 27:40-42 (NKJV)

We see the true response in the life of Mary Magdalene. She comprehended what Christ was to suffer on the cross for her, and she believed that through His actions she was forgiven. Her gratitude overflowed through the rich current of perfume that came from the alabaster box made for a King.

Yet the question must be asked: if God is so powerful then why does He allow Himself and His Son to be subjected to so much suffering and pain? Secondly, why doesn't He step in and simply stop all of this suffering? This is the subject of our next chapter. For now behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, and wonder at the love and forbearance

of our heavenly Father to endure this suffering for the past six thousand years. Indeed, God SO loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

5. Love Your Enemies

When John the Baptist presented Jesus as the Messiah, the hope of a renewed national greatness revived. Thoughts of a conqueror like Judas Maccabees who threw off the yoke of the Seleucid Empire stirred the energies of Jewish nationalism as they considered their current plight under the iron fist of Rome. As large crowds began to gather around this new teacher and they saw the demonstration of His power through healing the sick, the sense of anticipation began to grow.

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. (24) Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. (25) Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. Matthew 4:23-25 (NKJV)

After Jesus had ordained the twelve disciples, Jesus went with them to the seaside. The crowds began to gather, some to listen and others to be healed. As the crowd grew larger Jesus led them back up the mountainside where He began to speak. The blessings that poured forth from His lips were unlike anything that humanity had heard. He began His discourse with statements such as:

Blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful and blessed are the peacemakers. Matthew 5:5,7,9. Rather than heap praise upon valiant men who skilfully wield their swords for the cause of truth, He spoke blessing upon those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake and who endure being reviled and mistreated for His sake. Matthew 5:10,11. He spoke not the words of an avenging General rallying his troops for war, but rather the meekness, gentleness, and love of His Father that He desired to be seen in all of His followers.

These words spoken by Christ were not only taught by Him but lived out in every detail of His earthly life. His compassion, mercy, and patience for all men were ever on display. At the close of His ministry His patience under mockery, beating and death revealed not one thread of threat, retaliation, or revenge. What He taught that day revealed exactly who He was and as the representative of His Father, He revealed what God is like. It is vital to understand that Jesus was not telling us to do something that He does not do Himself, that because He is divine He uses different rules for us than for Himself. No. It is because He *is* divine that He Himself lives exactly the way in which He spoke to us on that mountain.

The words of Jesus cut deep into Jewish pride and ambition, and as these words are universally spoken to all humanity they also cut deep into all human pride and ambition. We discover the truth that the goodness of God glimpsed by sinful man leads him to repentance and reveals to him the meaning of the opening words of Jesus in His sermon – blessed are the poor in spirit and blessed are they that mourn because of their selfish pride and ambition.

The Son of God cuts deeper and still deeper into the human problem as He continues speaking:

Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: (22) but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the **hell of fire**. Matthew 5:21-22 (RV)

Jesus is expanding the words that were given to Moses centuries earlier. He is not taking one jot or tittle from the law but rather magnifying it and making it glorious with light.

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. (18) Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.
Leviticus 19:17-18 (RV)

Who has not felt angry towards someone who mistreats us? Who has not had thoughts of getting even with those who may have belittled or humiliated us? Who has been able to completely avoid bearing a grudge against anyone at any time? Later the apostle John expanding on the words of Jesus penned these words:

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 1 John 3:15 (NKJV)

What kind of a kingdom is this that Jesus speaks of? Having hatred for someone means that you are a murderer worthy of death? What is the “hell of fire” or hell fire in Matthew 5:22 that Jesus speaks about in this regard? Ask Cain as he cried out in anguish – my iniquity is greater than can be forgiven! – Genesis 4:13 (Wycliffe). Ask Jesus as He hung upon the cross carrying the guilt of all human hatred, revenge, and selfishness; ask Him about the “hell of fire” that comes on those who live this way.

Has someone close to you really deeply hurt you? Have you felt anger towards them? Have you struggled to stop thinking about how much they have wounded you and how much you want to see them brought to justice? Isn't this a living hell? Don't such thoughts burn in our hearts? How then does the heart respond to thoughts in our minds about actually wishing a person was dead? How does the Spirit of Jesus, which sticks closer than a brother, feel when we entertain thoughts of wishing other people were dead? Maybe we know that wishing them dead is wrong and we simply wish never to see them again. Yet isn't this simply different coloured fruit from the same tree? How does Jesus suffer in this hell fire when we allow such thoughts to rule us?

The words of Christ are a direct attack on the norms of how human beings relate to each other. The call to meekness, humility and patience in the face of abuse and mistreatment demands of its listener much more than he can give, and this is the intention. As Jesus says:

They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.
Mark 2:17

Jesus continues with razor precision in this kingly speech, to prepare human hearts to receive His grace. In one sentence He exposes the selfishness of every man:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: (28) But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. Matthew 5:27-28

Any man who is honest with himself knows that these words speak directly to the core of his problem and condemn him completely. Christ declares the problem to be *self*, that the individual's heart needs to be reformed. God aims to implant a new principle in man, a principle he does not have and cannot have of himself. God offers us the faith of Christ, "the kingdom of heaven within you," which once received then "all things become new." The man of faith's life and actions are simply an expression of that principle, the blessings of which begin inwardly and then flow outward to those around him, no matter what government or culture he is in. The world thinks that God would act from the outside first and work inward. Man thinks that God would reform the world first, overthrowing the wicked and thereby establishing a nation of the worthy. But the plan of beginning at the outside and trying to work inward, has always failed and always will fail. Once again what Jesus calls for is impossible for man, but with God and His grace in Christ all things are possible.

If there could be anyone who believes in his heart that he has never done anything wrong, the following words from Jesus shatter that possibility except through recognition of sinfulness and acceptance of the cross.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: (39) But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever

shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. (40) And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. (41) And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. (42) Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. (43) Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. (44) But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; (45) That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? (47) And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? (48) Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:38-48

Have you ever had someone rush upon you completely unprovoked and strike you? Jesus says turn the other cheek. The list of things called for here are completely out of the realm of human possibility to be maintained throughout the life of a person, and yet this is what Jesus reveals to us as the credentials of His kingdom. How can it be possible to love your enemies? Love those who want to kill you? Love those who want to harm you and love those who constantly are seeking to do you hurt? Jesus asks us to love them? For what purpose?

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.”

Did you catch that? If you are meek, merciful, gentle and patient and you love your enemies then you reveal that you are a child of your heavenly Father. What does that mean? It means that this is what the Father is like! If He makes the sun to shine on the evil and the good, then as His children we will shine our love on the evil and the good because this is what our heavenly Father is like. This is the greatest of sermons ever preached because it speaks of the greatest most wonderful Being existing in the universe, our heavenly Father. He is being revealed to us through our most precious Saviour, the Son of the Living God, who knows exactly what He is like. There is no other Being in the entire universe who knows what the Father is like and in this sermon we see the Father's character revealed to us.

The sealing point of this reality is in the final words of chapter five of Matthew.

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

This proves to us that everything Jesus has spoken in this sermon is a revelation of His character of love. These words speak to us about how our Father deals with situations. The book of Luke sums up the word *perfection* which Matthew uses in this way:

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Luke 6:36

So perfection is found in mercy. The question which must be asked is: If God loves His enemies and revealed to us through His Son that He is willing to lay down His life for those who hate Him, then why does the Bible appear to teach that God hates His enemies with a perfect hatred and in the heat of His anger He is willing, for the sake of saving the righteous, to obliterate the wicked by calling down fire and brimstone upon them, just to watch them die in shrieks of terrified agony?

This is the question that we must turn to next as there are several stories in the Old Testament which *seem* to show that God is willing to love His enemies to a point, but then releases all of His built up anger in a fiery burst that blasts them from the face of the earth. Some suggest this is a necessary reminder that we should not trifle with God and that even He has limits that if we cross, we will pay with our very lives in the most excruciating manner. How we reconcile the perfection of the Father about which Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount with the stories we read in the Old Testament is the object of the rest of this book. For most people there is a giant disconnect between Jesus in the Gospels and God in the Old Testament, yet strangely enough it was Moses who was asked to write those words in Leviticus to love your neighbour and not hold any grudges against him.

This same disconnect was also there for those who heard Jesus 2000 years ago. For those who believed that the kingdom Jesus described is that of God and represented His character, Jesus's words and ministry were a savour of life unto life. For those who could not let go of their ambitions in this world and believed that Jesus didn't accurately portray the character

of God, nor of how God's kingdom should be, the seeds were there to hate Jesus because to them He was an imposter. They had never known the God that Jesus described. Therefore they could not see Jesus as the Son of the God that they worshipped. If what Jesus said was true, then either they had never known the true God or their God had changed His ways.

Is God true to His word when He says:

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Malachi 3:6

Is the God of the Gospels the same as the God of Moses, Abraham and Noah? Is Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever? Hebrews 13:8. These are the questions that demand a verdict. In the mean-time, let us rejoice in the revelation of the Father that Jesus gave to us on that mountainside and be encouraged that with Christ we can not only love our friends but also our enemies.

6. Fire from Heaven

As the disciples spent time with Jesus, they marvelled at His words and works. The brightness of the kingdom He had proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount was still seeking to penetrate the darkened recesses of their minds. Still tainted with the desire for earthly greatness, the disciples turned their thoughts to the positions they might occupy in the kingdom of heaven. This naturally led to another discussion:

Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. Luke 9:46

Why did their thoughts turn towards self-importance? They were excited about the power of God manifested in Jesus, but they did not yet embrace His cross. They were afraid to ask Him the meaning of the cross because it suggested that it might disappoint their hopes.

And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, (44) Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. (45) But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying. Luke 9:43-45

Jesus perceived their thoughts for greatness and took a little child and folded His arms around him and told them:

Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great. Luke 9:48

The innocent child had no desires for national greatness. In his simplicity of understanding he simply responded to the warm and tender touch of the Master. This was the definition of greatness in His kingdom – a simple, abiding, trusting love for the Master. The disciples' innocence had been taken away by the ambition and disappointments of life, but Jesus had come to give them back the innocence of childhood combined with the wisdom of years.

In their connection with Jesus the disciples came to love Him. Every day they saw His compassion and love for the people and heard the wonderful things He shared about His Father. One day after a long period of labour Jesus sent His disciples into a Samaritan village to seek lodging for the night.

And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, (52) And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. (53) And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51-53

When the disciples saw how the Samaritans treated their master they were indignant at their lack of hospitality. In the heat of their emotion they revealed the depth of the darkness that exists in human hearts:

And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? Luke 9:54

It would appear they had Biblical justification for their murderous plan to burn up the Samaritans. They mentioned the story of Elijah who had called down fire from heaven on some who had determined to harm him. Armed with this story the disciples felt fully justified in calling for the death of these ungrateful Samaritans. The answer Jesus gave would have come as quite a shock.

But he turned, and **rebuked** them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. (56) For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Luke 9:55-56

These words reveal the heart of the mission and character of Jesus. Jesus is not a destroyer but rather the Saviour. At the same time it would appear that Christ not only rebuked the disciples but also the actions of Elijah.

Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. (10) And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. 2 Kings 1:9-10

A surface reading of this story would seem to indicate that although Jesus came to the earth to save men's lives, God in the Old Testament was very willing to burn men alive for daring to capture His prophet. Did Jesus only rebuke the hatred of the disciples for wanting to destroy the Samaritans or was Jesus also rebuking the actions of Elijah as well? The answer Jesus gives to the disciples concerning His mission would indicate that the rebuke was also for Elijah. How could Jesus rebuke the disciples saying that His mission was to save men and then explain that in certain instances He would destroy men? If this were the case, Jesus would have told them that now is not the time for these things or that we should pray for them a little longer first. Jesus gives no indication of delayed retribution. He only speaks of saving people's lives as opposed to destroying them.

This statement by Jesus in the King James Version appears to be quite an embarrassment for many of the modern translations of the Bible because these words are simply not there.

But Jesus turned and rebuked them. (56) Then he and his disciples went to another village. Luke 9:55-56 (NIV)

But he turned, and rebuked them. (56) And they went to another village. Luke 9:55-56 (RV)

Having this omission within these various translations has tremendous ramifications for understanding the character of God. One very big question that must be raised is this: Who brought fire down from heaven on those men? We need to rewind a little in the story of Elijah to something important that God showed him after his great victory on Mt Carmel.

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: (12) and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.
1 Kings 19:11-12

What was the point that God wanted to make to Elijah? The same principle expressed elsewhere in Scripture:

This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.
Zechariah 4:6

God was telling Elijah that He does not use force to compel men to obey and advance His kingdom but rather it is His still small voice that works in the hearts of men to turn them towards truth. It is contradictory for God to tell Elijah He is not in the fire and then turn around and burn up 102 men for seeking to capture Elijah. It was 102 men because the fire came down twice on two sets of 50 men and their leaders. It is true that God sent a fire to consume the sacrifice upon the altar but this fire was not sent to destroy men's lives but to save them. When Elijah called fire to come down from heaven on these men he had already been shown that God was not in a fire to compel or force men to comply. The grovelling submission of the third captain of 50 men was not the submission God was seeking.

And again he sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight. 2 Kings 1:13

Did this man kneel in reverence before the God of Elijah because he loved Him and wanted to worship? Certainly not! He was terrified that he was going to die and was begging for his life. If this type of worship was acceptable to God then Jesus could have called down fire on a few Pharisees and a few Romans, and everyone would have been worshipping Him instantly – not out of love for Him, but rather through fear. Therefore it was not God who was in that fire that consumed those men. How then do we account for what happened there?

Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of the hill. And he spake unto him, O man of God, the king hath said, Come down. (10) And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.
2 Kings 1:9-10

The captain and his men were under the authority of the king of Israel who had sent for help from Baalzebub, the god of Ekron. The god of Ekron was a false god inspired by Satan. In seeking help from this god, he was opening himself up to the jurisdiction of Satan.

Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? Romans 6:16

Even though these men representing the king had placed themselves under the jurisdiction of Satan, the captain still recognized Elijah as a man of God. All Israel remembered what had happened at Mt Carmel when they saw that God was with Elijah. If the captain believed Elijah was a man of God why did Elijah seek a sign to validate it? We discover the answer a little later in the chapter:

And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: **be not afraid of him**. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king. 2 Kings 1:15

Elijah was told not to be afraid. Why was Elijah afraid? The problem stems back to just after the events of Mt Carmel.

And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. 1 Kings 18:40

Before Elijah slew the prophets of Baal he had stood fearlessly before the king and all his men. Previous to this, Elijah had been hunted for over three years after fearlessly going in before the king to tell him there would be no rain. There is no mention that Elijah was afraid through all of these experiences. It was only after Elijah had killed all the prophets of Baal *with the sword* that he became afraid.

Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. (3) And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. 1 Kings 19:2-3

It would appear that there is a reverse principle related to the golden rule and it goes like this. “What wrong things you do to others you will fear they will be done to you.” This was certainly the experience of Cain.

And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear. (14) Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the ground; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth; **and it shall come to pass, that whosoever findeth me shall slay me.** Genesis 4:13-14

After Elijah had escaped the hands of the wicked Jezebel he said something strange.

But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. 1 Kings 19:4

Elijah ran for his life but then asks God to take away his life. Why not just let Jezebel kill him? Then he adds the mournful words “for I am no better than my fathers.” What did he mean by this? His confession to God a little later on reveals the motive.

And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? (10) And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.
1 Kings 19:9-10

Elijah pours out to God his disappointment and frustration at the failures of Israel, and the murder of the prophets of God with the sword. Elijah had hoped the nation would rally to his side and assist him in reforming the kingdom. When Jezebel threatened him, he had hoped that everyone would stand with him to defeat her purpose but he was left alone. It seemed everything was in vain. Also his motivation for the killing of the prophets of Baal is revealed. They had killed the prophets of God with the sword. The punishment for idolatry given in the law of Moses was death by stoning, not killing them with the sword. We will address the punishment of stoning in another chapter, but the point is that Elijah did not follow the process outlined in the Scriptures for dealing with idolatry. This reveals that although Elijah desired to honour the true God, he went about it the wrong way. This connects us back to the story of the disciples. They loved and honoured their master, but their love was subverted by Satan when things did not go as they wished and the spirit of revenge was revealed. Therefore it was fitting that the disciples in their spirit connect to the story of Elijah because it reflected a similar spirit. We are reminded that:

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours... James 5:17 (NKJV)

Elijah knew that the prophets of Baal were worthy of death, but his manner of dealing with this matter caused him to move in a way that was not in God's order. This is proven through his sudden fear of death which he had not experienced before. This fear was still with Elijah when he was approached by all the soldiers. As Elijah had killed with the sword he feared that he would die by the sword. Although the captain had no doubt Elijah was a man of God, Elijah himself was wrestling with his fear of death and if he were still no better than his fathers. Satan capitalised on Elijah's doubt, prompting him to express it by saying:

If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. 2 Kings 1:10

It is similar to these words uttered by Satan:

If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Matthew 4:3

The use of divine power to reassure a person of their standing with God is a lack of faith. We are to believe by faith that we are children of God by what God has already told us. How were the 50 men benefited by this display of power? How did this help them believe what they had already confessed about Elijah being a man of God? The one who was uncertain about this was Elijah. This uncertainty caused Elijah to forget that God was not in the fire, and he was overcome by Satan's suggestion to call down fire on these men. Do we have evidence that Satan can bring fire from heaven and burn people up?

And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.... (16) While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Job 1:12,16

There are some questions that still remain. If Satan deceived Elijah through his self-doubt how could it be possible that in the very next chapter Elijah could be translated to heaven? It seems absurd to think that making such a big mistake near the end of his earthly life should be rewarded with a direct passage to heaven and eternal life. When we consider John the Baptist he actually doubted that Jesus was the Messiah right before his death.

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, (3) And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Matthew 11:2-3

The Bible does not tell us how John responded. But by the way that Jesus spoke about John it seems evident that John overcame his doubts and was prepared for martyrdom. Jesus did say:

And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.
Matthew 11:14

We are also told:

He [John] will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah,...
Luke 1:17

John the Baptist did a mighty work for God and then had a major crisis of faith which he overcame, resulting in him being prepared for death. This is in the same spirit as Elijah who did a great work for God and then had a major crisis of faith toward the end of his ministry. Elijah overcame his self-doubt that caused a fiery death for a hundred men, and was translated. This is a precious lesson for all of us, that the just shall live by faith and not upon the merits of what they have done. The translation of Elijah after such a major failure gives all of us great hope that we also can be translated after seeing how weak and helpless we are. Let us rejoice that salvation is in the merits of Christ alone, not in the supposed works of superhero prophets who can destroy others in the name of God while defending themselves.

The other question that needs to be considered is why did God allow these men to be destroyed by Satan with fire? As these men were servants of the king of Israel who had given himself over to Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, these men had no defence against the destroyer. As Satan was enabled to have access to these men, he needed to be able to kill them in a way that would indicate that God did it. It was almost the perfect deception; do the deed and convince the world that God did it. The fears of Elijah were exploited by Satan to give him the alibi that he needed. This plan has been very successful because most people believe that God burned up those men, but thankfully Jesus tells us that this is not His Spirit. He is the Saviour and not the destroyer.

How wonderful to know that our precious Saviour who took that little child into His arms and revealed to us the greatness of His kingdom, is a Saviour in whom we can rest assured. He won't harm us in any way, because Jesus is the Shepherd, not the Butcher; He leads His sheep beside the still waters and does not torture them to death. Yet there is more on the subject of fire we need to consider before we can be certain that our Father in heaven is truly someone in whom we need have no fear.

7. Harden Not Your Hearts

In chapter three we considered the death of the cross and the amazing love it displayed. In chapter four we viewed the depth of tenderness in the Father and Son relationship. These two truths give us an important foundation upon which to understand the character of God and the nature of His kingdom. Chapter nine of Luke provides us an excellent narrative that shows what happens when we resist the cross. It gives us a picture of how men allow themselves to desire God to burn people alive in retribution for their sins believing this is in harmony with His character.

Luke 9:18-20 Matt 16:13-17 Mark 8:27-29	Father and Son relationship revealed	Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ of God. Matthew records that Peter stated He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus tells Peter that this knowledge is a spiritual revelation from the Father and no man can learn this himself apart from God showing it to him.
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<p>Luke 9:21-22 Matt 16:21-23 Mark 8:31-33</p>	<p>First warning of the cross.</p>	<p>Jesus gives first warning about the human hatred for the submissive Son of God and how He will be killed. Peter reacts strongly to this and states emphatically that this is not going to happen! Peter refuses to allow his ambitions for greatness to be crucified. This is a denial of the cross. Jesus rebukes the spirit of Satan that inspired Peter's comment.</p>
	<p>First hardening</p>	<p>There is no record of Peter or the disciples responding to the coming cross and how they might prepare. This begins to harden the hearts of the disciples to the sufferings of Christ and His cross.</p>
<p>Luke 9:23-27 Matt 16:24-28 Mark 8:34-38</p>	<p>Call to take up the cross of self-denial</p>	<p>Jesus warns the disciples that their worldly ambitions must be laid down if they wish to follow Him. There is no worldly honour in the path He is treading. There is only self-denial and service to others.</p>
<p>Luke 9:28-36 Matt 17:1-8 Mark 9:1-6</p>	<p>Father commands them to hear His Son.</p>	<p>In mercy the Father reveals the glory of His Son and urges them to listen to what He is saying. The previous refusal of the cross means the disciples do not have perfect love and so they fear greatly the voice from heaven. Fear hath torment. "He that feareth is not made perfect in love." 1 John 4:18.</p>
<p>Luke 9:37-42 Matt 17:14-21 Mark 9:14-29</p>	<p>Unbelief is manifested</p>	<p>The refusal to accept the cross begins to reveal itself in unbelief. The disciples can't cast out the demon because their hearts are still influenced by their desire for greatness. Jesus labels their lack of faith as a warning.</p>
<p>Luke 9:44-45 Matt 17:22-23 Mark 9:31-32</p>	<p>Second warning of the cross. Heart hardens even more.</p>	<p>In love Jesus again tells of the cross in order to help them give up their cherished ambition but again they reject this call to repentance and simply enter into sorrow about what He is saying. Their hearts harden even more as a result.</p>

<p>Luke 9:46-48 Matt 18:1 Mark 9:33-38</p>	<p>Selfish ambition grows</p>	<p>The disciples open the door to Satan who tempts them to discuss which of them is the greatest among them. Jesus responds by placing a small child among them and warns them that unless they become like this child they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.</p>
<p>Luke 9:49-50 Mark 9:38-39</p>	<p>Spirit of dominance appears.</p>	<p>Since the disciples were seeking for the greatest position they did not want anyone else to take that position and so exercised a spirit of force towards their perceived competitors.</p>
<p>Luke 9:51-54</p>	<p>Spirit of murder appears and justified through Scripture.</p>	<p>In refusing the cross of self-denial the disciples' hearts were taken over by a spirit of pride leading to control and then murder. The hardening of their hearts led them to see nothing wrong with killing people in the name of God.</p>

The disciples did not wish to accept the warnings of Jesus about His impending death at the cruel hands of the nation's leaders. They had pinned all their ambition for national greatness upon Him; they had perceived Christ not as He was but as they wanted Him to be. Their aspiration was for Christ to be Barabbas¹, and the reality of the cross crucified their dreams and turned them to dust. They chose not to embrace the cross and begin to comprehend the tremendous relational suffering that Christ experiences each and every day in seeing almost everyone reject and despise His message, mission, and His person as the representative of the Father. Instead, they chose to ignore this suffering which in turn hardened their hearts.

¹ Barabbas was a political leader at the time of Christ who advocated overthrowing the Roman control of Israel. He advocated violence to achieve this goal and claimed to be a messianic figure. His name Barabbas means "son of the father" and was the complete counterfeit of Christ who is the true Son of the Father.

When at the baptism of Jesus, the heavenly Father announced to the world His deep affection for His Son; a door was opened to truly comprehend the love, tenderness, and sensitivity of God and His Son. It is this sensitivity that causes Them to bear this terrible cross of agony through self-denial. Each day Their hearts are torn by human selfishness, pride, and indulgence. The freedom loving character of God allows men to continue to despise and reject Him for years and He never retaliates. He allows their hearts to harden and sadly watches them destroying themselves while ever seeking to stop them from doing this. The disciples were invited to begin to comprehend the brightness of this love, but the cross was not what they wanted and, as Israel had told Moses to cover the brightness of His face, the disciples put a veil over their hearts to prevent the truth from softening them.

When Cain and Abel watched the death of the lamb, Cain put a veil over his heart to obscure the meaning of the suffering, and thus the lamb actually became a catalyst to harden his heart which prepared him to murder his brother. As Abel beheld the lamb he trembled as he contemplated its implications. He thought of the Lamb of God broken for us and he wept with a broken heart. The same sacrificial lamb yielded totally opposite results in the two men.

Such is the light of the cross. The light is so bright that we must either fall on the Rock and be broken or resist and become as hard as a rock and consequently crushed by our own guilt when we are finally faced with the truth of the love of God.

These principles are critical for us to understand the stories of the Bible correctly. Unless we can accept the tender love of the Father for His Son our hearts cannot be truly softened to interpret God's judgments. A loving father would never burn his children alive, pouring molten brimstone on them as they shriek in dying agony. To believe that God could do this is simply to not understand the relationship of the Father and His Son and the grace that pours forth from them to the universe. To not understand the cross causes men to forget the agony He goes through when being despised, hated, and rejected; yet He refuses to give up on those who reject Him. He leaves His heart open to the very last, hoping that sinners will turn to Him. If in the end they reject and turn completely away from Him, every rejection causes Him immense pain. It is a pain that we as

sinners recoil from in sorrow, anger, and disgust. We would never allow someone to do this to us over and over again. Leaving His heart open to rejection is the true cross of the Father manifested in His Son.

The power and mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries concerning the judgments of God. Wherever we see judgments falling upon men in Scripture we must interpret them in the light of the cross for this is the place where mercy and justice kiss each other. The Scriptures tell us:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: Galatians 3:13

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:5

Jesus has paid the wages and suffered the curse of sin. He died the death of those who at the end of time refuse salvation and choose rather to die. If Jesus died a death different than the death at the end of time then He did not pay the wages of sin. The question then is, Did Jesus suffer the fires of hell? If the final death of the wicked has them burn in the flames of hell and Jesus did not pay that price, then He did not pay the penalty for sin. Did Jesus experience fire on the cross? Notice how Paul connects doing good to those who don't deserve it to coals of fire to the soul.

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Romans 12:20

When the children of Israel saw the glory of God at Mt Sinai it appeared to them as devouring fire.

And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. Exodus 24:17

When the selfless love of God is revealed to a selfish person, the sense of guilt they experience burns in the heart so greatly that it causes physical pain. The experience of Jesus on the cross is prophesied in several Psalms.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? Psalm 22:1

I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. (3) **My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned:** then spake I with my tongue, Psalm 39:2-3

The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. (5) The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. (6) In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. (7) Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. (8) **There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.** Psalm 18:4-8

The wages of sin is death. What actually brings about that death is the guilt that sinners experience when they are confronted with how evil they are. The only way that evil is exposed is when God's character is revealed in contrast. When the character of God is revealed it is as a devouring fire to the wicked because, as the sinner perceives the purity, selflessness, and grace of God in comparison to their selfish, evil nature, the sense of guilt is as coals of fire in their hearts. At the coming of Christ the wicked will be destroyed by the brightness of the coming of Christ.

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: 2 Thessalonians 2:8

Christ is the brightness of the Father's glory, Hebrews 1:3 and the Father's glory is His character. Exodus 33:18; 34:6,7. The loveliness and beauty of Christ's character will be fully revealed at His coming and this revelation will be a fire that is joy to the righteous and death to the wicked.

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: Revelation 14:10

The word for brimstone is *theion* which comes from Theos meaning God and carries the meaning of divine incense. It also means *flashing*. When we look at incense in the sanctuary described in heaven we notice the connection to fire.

And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and **there was given unto him much incense**, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. (4) And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. (5) **And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar**, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. Revelation 8:3-5

The incense represents the divine presence of God that is like fire. This is what is meant by the brimstone. Again we see this in Isaiah:

Behold, the name [character] of the LORD cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and **his tongue as a devouring fire**: (28) And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err... (30) And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, **and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones...** (33) For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; **the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.** Isaiah 30:27-28,30,33

Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, **I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.** Jeremiah 5:14

..for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Song of Solomon 8:6

God's love is a fire and for the righteous the burning of that love in the heart is beautiful. This is what the disciples experienced on the day of Pentecost.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. (3) **And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire**, and it sat upon each of them. Acts 2:2-3

The Scriptures tell us clearly there will be those who can live in this fire of God's character; the righteous who will burn forever in the fire of God's love, for God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:29. While the wicked are crushed by the guilt of their sins, those who trust in the merits of Christ have their hearts burning with love and gratitude.

The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. **Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?** (15) He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; Isaiah 33:14-15

At the end of time the sinner will receive his wages, and who pays these wages?

For the wages of sin is death... Romans 6:23

Sin pays the wages. It is the crushing weight of guilt and the realisation of knowing that whilst through all their lives the sinner was rejecting the pleadings of the Spirit of Christ, he was daily piercing Christ with his harsh words and vile attitudes towards others. When the sinner realises all that he has done to Christ through his life, his own sense of justice will demand death. Like Cain the sinner will cry, "My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven."

This whole experience was carried by Christ on the cross. He suffered the fires of hell. He was made sin for us and felt the crushing weight of sin upon Him as He exhausted the curse. What He experienced on the cross is what the wicked will experience at the end of time.

And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. (10) And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Revelation 20:9-10

Again the Scriptures tell us how Satan will die:

Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore **will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee**, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. Ezekiel 28:18

This text gives the clear sequence of how this takes place:

1. Satan defiled himself by the multitude of his iniquity and trafficking those sins to others.
2. The next word **therefore** gives the resulting consequence.
3. *I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee* – the fire of guilt. How does God bring this forth? The revelation of His character of love as transcribed in the law.
4. *And IT shall devour thee*. So it is the fire coming forth from within Satan born of his guilt from iniquity that will devour him.
5. **AND** then Satan is brought to ashes upon the ground **after** he has been devoured.

Satan can't avoid seeing all the evil that he is and all the evil he has done while in the presence of God. The loving purity and holiness of God is so selfless it brings complete and utter self-condemnation that comes forth from the heart as a burning fire. This process devours Satan. After he is devoured and is dead he is turned to ashes upon the ground through cleansing fire.

The destruction of the wicked is described in the historical book of 2nd Esdras in the following manner:

And this my Son shall rebuke the wicked inventions of those nations, which for their wicked life are fallen into the tempest; (38) And shall lay before them their evil thoughts, and the torments wherewith they shall begin to be tormented, which are like unto a flame: and he shall destroy

them without labour by the law which is like unto me.
2 Esdras 13:37-38

The law that causes the wicked such torment is indeed a fiery law yet it was given in love. Our Saviour did not come to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him. The law is a law of love but the wicked feel condemned by it because it is a reflection of the character of God.

And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went **a fiery law for them.** (3)
Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words.
Deuteronomy 33:2-3

What about the fact that the Bible tells us that the wicked shall be turned to ashes?

And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts. Malachi 4:3

When sin has finally paid its wages to the wicked through the curse of guilt that falls upon them as they behold the purity of God's beautiful character their dead bodies will lay upon the earth. Only then will the bodies of the wicked be turned to ashes.

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? 2 Peter 3:12

There are many who describe the final death of the wicked like putting down a diseased dog that puts other lives in danger; therefore, the animal must be put down. The problem with this analogy is that the owner of the dog does not light a slow burning fire that burns the dog for several days while it is still alive, causing it to shriek and howl in agony before it finally dies. This idea comes from a hardened heart. Our Father in heaven would never do something like this. Once you know the love of God, it is simply not possible to charge Him with the slow torture and personal slaughter of billions of His children. The reason why this idea is almost universally

accepted and taught in the Christian world is because of a refusal to allow the reality of the cross to enter the heart. The heart in turn hardens to the truth of the sensitive and tender nature of God, and as it was with the disciples, there enters the idea of God sending down fire and physically burning people alive.

Let us learn the lesson from the disciples and notice the command of the Father when His Son was transfigured – “Hear Him!” Let us listen to His pleading voice as He sets a precious little child in our midst and holds that child close to His chest and tells us “unless you become as an innocent child you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” Harden not your hearts as did the Israelites who begged Moses to put a veil over his face when the gospel was revealed to them.

Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. (11) So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. (12) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. (13) But exhort one another daily, while it is called **To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.** (14) For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; (15) While it is said, **To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.**
Hebrews 3:10-15

If you choose not to accept the self-denial of the cross you are in danger of hardening your heart while reading the Bible in a callous manner and attributing to God the pain and death of millions of people through human history. Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart.

8. Why Command Stoning Sinners?

The resistance of the disciples to the self-denying cross caused them to desire the killing of the disrespectful Samaritans. The same resistance, residing in the hearts of the Jewish leaders, caused them to want to kill Jesus. The Jews invested plenty of energy in seeking to trap Christ in His words and actions in order that they might declare Him an imposter and have Him killed. One of the many traps set for Jesus is described in John's gospel:

And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. (3) And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, (4) They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. (5) Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

John 8:2-5

To the Pharisees it seemed like the perfect trap. If Jesus seeks to save the woman from death they can accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He condemns her to death they can accuse Him to the Roman Governor as a seditious. Jesus had already said that He did not come to destroy the law or the prophets and that not one jot of the law was to be altered. Moses did write in the law:

And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. Leviticus 20:10

Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you. Deuteronomy 22:24

This woman was caught in the very act of adultery. According to the law she deserved to be stoned to death. The woman was now thrown at the very feet of the Law-giver that He might give His sentence. It is important to remember that the Son of God is the one who gave the law on Mt Sinai.

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and **it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.** Galatians 3:19

For there is one God, and **one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;** 1 Timothy 2:5

Jesus, as the Word of God, was the one who spoke the instructions "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Now that the woman was at His feet, the accusers of the woman waited to see what He would do. Jesus stooped down and began to write, apparently ignoring them. Then He spoke to them saying:

He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. John 8:7

This statement is very interesting and explodes the paradigm that the Pharisees were operating from. This was not apparently in realm of their thinking. Yet Jesus was only expressing the same principle given to Moses in regard to another stoning case where a man blasphemed God.

And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the

name of the LORD, shall be put to death. (17) And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death. Leviticus 24:16-17

Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy. Leviticus 19:2

What is going on here? The person who blasphemes must be put to death by stoning but anyone who kills another man must be put to death. If a person stones to death another person then isn't he killing another man? Wouldn't he then qualify to be put to death also? Could this be connected to the thought Jesus was making saying that only a person who is holy and without sin has the credentials to put someone else to death. Jesus is the only person that is without sin and so what did He do?

When Jesus wrote in the dust on the temple floor He was giving the true spiritual application of what was written in the law. If a man suspected that his wife had committed adultery, he could bring her before the priest to enact the law concerning jealousy.

And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD: (17) And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; **and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle** the priest shall take, and put it into the water: (18) And the priest shall set the woman before the LORD, and uncover the woman's head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the jealousy offering: and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causeth the curse: (19) And the priest shall charge her by an oath, and say unto the woman, If no man have lain with thee, and if thou hast not gone aside to uncleanness with another instead of thy husband, be thou free from this bitter water that causeth the curse: (20) But if thou hast gone aside to another instead of thy husband, and if thou be defiled, and some man have lain with thee beside thine husband: (21) Then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman, The LORD make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the LORD doth make thy thigh to rot, and thy belly to swell; (22) And this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot: And the woman shall say, Amen, amen. (23) **And the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall blot them out with the bitter water:** Numbers 5:16-23

These men who had caught this woman in the very act of adultery had enticed her and taken advantage of her. As Jesus wrote in the dust of the floor, the Holy Spirit (symbolized by water) brought conviction to the men that caused their belly to swell and their thigh to rot through the conviction of sin. They were jealous of Christ and it was eating them up. As the psalmist says:

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. Psalm 32:3

Rather than confess their sins and be forgiven, these men went away in silence carrying their guilt which caused their bones to wax old.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? (11) She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. John 8:10-11

And if the woman be not defiled, but be clean; then she shall be free, and shall conceive seed. Numbers 5:28

Jesus forgave this woman of her sin; He blotted out the writing of her sin with the bitter water which He was to drink on the cross, and so she was no longer defiled. She was able to go free and the true seed was conceived in her; she revealed the Spirit of Jesus in her heart.

When Jesus told the Pharisees "He that is without sin let him cast the first stone," He pronounced the sentence of death over her. He did not try to squash the charge against her. He secured the charge, and the woman would have felt certain she was going to die. Through writing on the ground Jesus reminded the Pharisees that they were not without sin, and they left. When all the woman's accusers left, the Law-giver asked her where her accusers were. She indicated they had left, and so her case was fully in the hands of the Law-giver. He stated "neither do I condemn you," go and sin no more. The Law-giver showed us how He always intended to use the law to give mercy. If He had acquitted the woman she would not have needed mercy, so He pronounced the sentence in order to give mercy. That is the entire purpose of the law. The law intends to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Galatians 3:24.

How terribly sad to think that the Jewish leaders actually believed that it was the will of God that this woman should be stoned to death. We don't want to gloss over the reality of this issue. If the Romans were not in control and these men were free to apply the law as they wished they could have taken up stones and killed this woman. This was actually carried out in the case of Stephen.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, (58) And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. (59) And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Acts 7:57-59

These men believed in a God who determined to punish sinners by stoning them to death. Can we imagine this poor young woman struck in the side of the head with a large rock and falling to the ground in terror? When the saga finished there would have been laying on the ground a mangled and bloodied corpse as a warning to all that God is not to be trifled with; if you sin you will pay with your life. Does that image fill you with a deep sense of love for such a God? Would you want to rejoice always in the presence of such a Being who squashes sinners like worthless insects?

Why then does the law of Moses command that people be stoned to death? The law reflects the character of God. If God commanded this law then does this not mean that He wanted it put in there to be carried out when required? There is a very important principle we need to consider here as expressed by Jesus.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. (2) For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Matthew 7:1-2

Our Father in heaven has established a system that will allow people to be judged according to their own judgment. Let us examine where stoning originally came from. This is the first mention of stoning in the Bible.

And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, **and will they not stone us?** Exodus 8:26

Stoning was an Egyptian practice. This is how Egyptians dealt with transgression against their gods. One of the reasons why Israel wished to go into the wilderness to sacrifice is because the animals they would sacrifice were worshipped as gods by the Egyptians. It is very probable that Pharaoh was well aware that if the Israelites would sacrifice in the land, it would stir up the Egyptians to stone them. That the Israelites adopted this practice is evident in what they wished to do to Moses.

And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. Exodus 17:4

When Caleb and Joshua pleaded with the people that they could go up and take the land of Canaan, the response from the people was to stone them.

If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. (9) Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not. (10) **But all the congregation bade stone them with stones.** And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. Numbers 14:8-10

If God had not intervened, they would have done it. So why would God allow this Egyptian practice of stoning into the laws for Israel?

Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. (25) **Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live;** Ezekiel 20:24-25

These statutes and judgments concerning stoning were not good, and were the penalties that were annexed or added to the law, which punished transgression. It is certainly not a good thing to be stoned to death! These punishments were in accordance with their own ideas of judgment for transgression and reflected their own thinking and ways that they had learned from the Egyptians. As Jesus explains:

For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. (22)
And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow:
Luke 19:21-22

The Israelites believed that God was an austere person. When they saw His glory it was to them as a devouring fire.

And the sight of the glory of the LORD was **like devouring fire** on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel.
Exodus 24:17

Remember that it was the Israelites themselves that took up the practice of stoning to deal with transgression. When Israel determined to stone Moses in Exodus 17:4, they revealed a spirit of judgment without mercy. The Bible says:

For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. James 2:13

Since the Israelites showed no mercy in their judgment, this judgment process was reflected back to them. They chose to believe that God wanted to kill them in the desert, and they wanted to kill Moses by stoning. God is not mocked for as the Israelites sowed this seed they reaped the harvest. Out of their own mouths Israel sentenced themselves to death in the wilderness according to their own beliefs about God.

Israel repeatedly expressed their fears that God would kill them in the wilderness:

And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, **hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?** wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Exodus 14:11

And the children of Israel said unto them, **Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt,** when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Exodus 16:3

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! (3) **And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey?** were it not better for us to return into Egypt? Numbers 14:2-3

So according to their own judgment they received judgment:

And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, (27) How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. (28) Say unto them, **As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:** (29) Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me... Numbers 14:26-29

In the time of Christ we see the Pharisees were cornered by their own system of judgment which their forefathers received from the Egyptians. It reveals the constant fear that the Israelites lived under and the bondage it created.

The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? (5) And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? (6) **But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us:** for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. (7) And they answered, that they could not tell whence *it was*. Luke 20:4-7

It is evident that although the Israelites had left Egypt, Egypt had not left them. The Pharisees lived in a world of condemnation, anger, and revenge, possessing all the attributes of Pharaoh, the slave master. This spirit was the fruit of how they perceived the character of God. In essence, the god they worshipped was the same as Pharaoh. When the Israelite nation was formed God allowed their thoughts to be placed in the law. But how could it be possible that God would allow His law to be tainted with the wicked thoughts of men? It is because the purpose of the law is to bring conviction of sin in order that He might then give mercy.

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: Romans 5:20

Our Father in heaven could allow any form of punishment to be added to His law because whatever death would be prescribed was only for the purpose of giving mercy to those who asked for it. We remember what the Scriptures say of God's character:

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful and gracious**, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth... Exodus 34:6

O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for **his mercy endureth for ever**. Psalm 107:1

God is always merciful and it is always His desire to show mercy. Mercy only ceases when men refuse to believe it and desire condemnation. It is men who force mercy to cease, and they hide themselves from it because they want to believe that God is like them. They want to believe that God turns against people and exterminates them when they no longer please Him. If this were true then it cannot be said that the mercy of God endureth forever. We remember that the man who judges without mercy receives no mercy because this is what he himself has determined. This is why the man who blasphemed God was stoned to death without mercy.

And the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan:) (12) And they put him in ward, that the mind of the LORD might be shewed them. (13) And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (14) Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him. Leviticus 24:11-14

The Lord gave the sentence of death that Israel themselves had determined through their association with punishment for blaspheming the Egyptian gods. Our Father wanted this man to be convicted that his sin was grievous and that he was indeed worthy of death, but only for the purpose of giving him mercy. We know this is true because of the words of the Law-giver Himself:

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. Matthew 12:31

Jesus said every sin could be forgiven except one – the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works on our conscience and pleads with us to repent and ask for mercy. A man who persistently refuses to listen to this Voice asking him to repent will not ask for mercy, and therefore, he will be judged according to the punishments that his own people have devised. If only the man in Leviticus 24 had asked for mercy it would have been given to him. He blasphemed the Holy Spirit that pled with him to repent because our Father is not willing that any should perish. Sadly he shut out that voice and therefore died according to his belief that God would not forgive him.

How many of us would take up stones and bash our children to death for their unrepented sins and willingly smash them to a bloodied mess on the ground? The thought is so awful it can't be put into words. Yet millions of people believe that this is what our heavenly Father required of the Israelites. How many people have gone to their graves hating this God whom they thought desired people to be stoned to death? Many Christians today are thanking God that in the New Testament things have changed, but this in no way changes the fact that they still believe God was like this in the Old Testament. Once again we are reminded that Jesus said He did not come to take away any part of the law. The law still stands, but as we have learned, our Father never ever desires to put any person to death. He only desires mercy for everyone.

I pray you will open your heart to our heavenly Father. He loves you so much. He has never ever wanted to hurt you or put you to death for your sins. He only wants us to see that our sins are destroying us and that we can ask for mercy at any time. When you know that God is *not* angry with you and He really does love you then you can run to Him and confess all your sins and know He will forgive all of them. Like Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery – “neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.”

Sadly those who refuse the truth that God truly loves them and is always willing to show mercy, will receive no mercy; because they believe in a

God that shows no mercy for sinners, and so they give up the hope of forgiveness. Like Cain they cry – “My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven.”

For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: (30) They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. (31) Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. (32) For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.
Proverbs 1:29-32

Listen to the Word of God and believe what it says:

The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Jeremiah 31:3

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Isaiah 1:18

...and he shall blot them out with the bitter water. Numbers 5:23

9. The Law as a Mirror

As we look at the stories of Jesus in the Gospels we are beholding the Father. Jesus said to Philip, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father." John 14:9. There is an important story in the Gospels that highlights an aspect of the character of our Father that is often completely misunderstood. Jesus spent almost His entire ministry within the territories of the Jewish nation. On this rare occasion the Saviour chose to travel into the pagan region of Phoenicia.

The deep seated pride and prejudice of the Jews held the hearts of the disciples and blinded their eyes to their participation in the national sin of racism and spiritual bigotry. Israel was called to be a light to the Gentiles; however, they turned this privilege to darkness through their disdain of their disadvantaged neighbours.

A woman living in this region, along with many in her community, had heard of this Jewish teacher who could heal people. Her daughter was "vexed with a devil" and she had vainly sought her gods to help her daughter but to no avail. She wondered if this Jewish teacher could help her. She determined to plead her case with Jesus while holding doubts as to what this Jew could, or would, do for her.

The heartfelt cry of this poor mother reached the ear of the Saviour.

Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. Matthew 15:22

As the self-sacrificing Son of God, His heart was full of compassion. He had come especially to this region to help her, yet what Jesus does next reveals something very important about the character of God.

But he answered her not a word. Matthew 15:23

His reason for doing this is immediately apparent in the very next sentence.

And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. Matthew 15:23

If Jesus had immediately granted her request, the hardness of the disciples would not have been revealed. Therefore the Saviour remained silent to see how they would respond. They interpreted His silence as a confirmation of their own racial prejudice. At the same time His silence tested the doubts that this foreign woman had concerning this Jewish teacher. We see the actions of Jesus act as a mirror to reveal what is in the hearts of those around Him.

Other examples of this include when Jesus “made as though he would have gone further” when he walked with the two to Emmaus. Luke 24:28. And when Jesus came “walking on the sea, and would have passed by them.” Mark 6:48.

As we have learned, the disciples were resisting the call to carry their personal cross in the face of the world’s rejection of the Son of God. This blinded them to many things Jesus was trying to tell them. As they were hearers of the law in this respect it caused them to perceive Jesus in the following manner:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, **he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror**; (24) for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. James 1:22-24

The disciples had responded to Christ’s call to the new kingdom, but their hearts were not submitted to the principles of self-denial, nor to the rejection of their beloved Messiah by their nation. This made them hearers of the law coming from the mouth of Jesus. When Jesus was silent

towards the foreign woman they saw their own natural face in Him and interpreted His action as racial intolerance. They were projecting onto Him their own attitudes and desires which resulted in their asking Jesus in front of this poor woman to send her away. How crushing this must have been for the woman to hear them speak like this. Her anguish for her daughter must have welled up inside her as she turned to hear what Jesus would say.

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Matthew 15:24

This answer tested everyone to see whether they were truly listening. The Saviour was introduced by John the Baptist with these words:

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away **the sin of the world**.
John 1:29

Jesus was the Saviour of the whole world, not only of the physical Jews. This truth had been discerned by the Samaritan woman at the well and those who came out from the city:

And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. John 4:42

Jesus was the Saviour of the world but His kingdom was certainly not of the world:

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.
John 18:36

The term *Israel* is a reference to all those who would accept the gift of Salvation. As the apostle Paul later described it:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: (29) But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.
Romans 2:28-29

The Saviour was speaking to them about His spiritual kingdom of the heart. In coming to Jesus, this woman was responding to the call of the Spirit. She revealed that she was, indeed, of the house of Israel. Not the Israel of the flesh, but the Israel of the Spirit. The name Israel was given to Jacob for the overcoming faith he manifested in wrestling with the angel in his desperation. Now this woman would demonstrate that she, indeed, was a true Israelite overcomer.

Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.
Matthew 15:25

The faith of the woman does not yield. She holds on in faith. The Saviour is eager to help her but the test is not yet over.

But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread,
and to cast it to dogs. Matthew 15:26

Here the word *but* does not necessarily mean that He was countering her appeal. The Greek word *de* can also mean *and* in the form of a continuation of thought. Jesus was now asking her to decide if she truly was an Israelite. His statement is framed in such a way as to test the racial prejudice of the disciples as well as her own doubts about this Jewish teacher. The woman might have said, "Lord, I am one of your children and I believe that you will help me." This is the highest answer she could have given. Yet her answer is amazing in that although she calls herself a dog, she still hangs on in faith.

And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall
from their masters' table. Matthew 15:27

Even though she thought Jesus was calling her a dog she held on still believing that Jesus would help her, making her a true overcoming Israelite. This woman's love for her daughter and her response to the drawing of the Spirit gave her the victory of faith.

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be
it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from
that very hour. Matthew 15:28

This answer rebuked the disciples. They were hearing the words of Jesus with their natural hearts and were projecting onto Him their racial

prejudice. When Jesus answered the woman's request they were shocked and their perception of Jesus was shattered. At this point they must either consider the actions of Jesus a mystery or begin to question their racial hatred.

Jesus has the title in Scripture of "*the Wisdom of God.*" 1 Corinthians 1:24. This wisdom that comes from His Father allows Him to interact with humanity and reveal what is in their hearts without direct confrontation, which would only produce resistance. Why didn't Jesus just tell them, "You have a racial hatred problem and you need to get over it"? This would have achieved nothing. Instead, Jesus speaks in a way that allows His words to act like a mirror and reveal what is in the heart.

Once you understand this principle, you can read the Scripture as a doer of the law and not simply a hearer beholding your own natural face. The test that Jesus gave to the disciples faces every reader of the Bible. Things are expressed in Scripture to reveal what is in the heart of the reader. As the disciples read into the actions of Jesus their own racial prejudice, many read Scriptures describing God through natural human understanding rather than according to God's true character. The following text sounds like God is forgetting about His people and turning His back on them.

I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; **I will shew them the back**, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.
Jeremiah 18:17

We use the term turning our back on people to indicate our rejection of them. Notice the context of how God turns His back in this text:

And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: (23) And I will take away mine hand, and **thou shalt see my back parts**: but my face shall not be seen. Exodus 33:22-23

In this context God shows His back to shield Moses from the complete glory of His character. The love of God for His children is so great, so selfless and caring that when a sinner fully sees this love, it instantly brings a crushing sense of self-condemnation and guilt.

Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up; Jeremiah 18:15

Israel had forgotten the Lord and turned into other paths. The Lord hid His glory and turned His back so they would not be completely destroyed. He also turned His back that they might not see His suffering and grief at seeing His children reap what they had sown.

I gave my back to the smiters... Isaiah 50:6

The actions of Israel were hurting our Saviour. Their idolatry hurt Him greatly. "In all their affliction He was afflicted and He carried them and bare them all the days of old." Isaiah 63:9. So He gave His back to their smiting. This phrase can be understood as the Lord being wounded for the transgressions of His people in their rejection of Him and also the shielding of His people from the full glory of His character so they would not be fully crushed by their guilt. The natural heart will read the text as God simply rejecting His people because that is exactly how a human being would naturally react and when we read the Bible naturally that is what we understand. Thankfully God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9.

Let us give another example of how the Word of God acts like a mirror to the soul. In Numbers 13 we read the following:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (2) Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them. Numbers 13:1-2

Yet we read in Deuteronomy 1:22

Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged. (22) And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come. (23) And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe: Deuteronomy 1:21-23

The passage in Numbers 13 does not provide the full context of what happened. It simply presents God's command to spy out the land. The two passages presented like this in Scripture provide a little test for the reader. If the reader holds in his heart a desire to disprove the Bible, these two texts can be placed side by side and used to prove the Bible contradicts itself. The contradictions that exist within the reader are projected onto the Bible. The doer of the law would quickly see that the command to go up and possess the land meant that there was no need to spy out the land and that the request to spy revealed a lack of faith. God responds to the request with a commandment according to their desires. The fearful report that the majority of the spies bring back reveal the unbelief that existed in their hearts which prompted the request to spy out the land. So the Bible is written in a way that a person who lives in contradiction will be able to read the Bible and find the contradictions he is looking for to support his claims. The doer of the law holds on in faith and seeks to resolve the apparent conflict and harmonise the Scripture.

Let us consider the story of David's numbering Israel.

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.
2 Samuel 24:1

Now compare this with 1 Chronicles 21:1

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. 1 Chronicles 21:1

Once again there appears, on the surface, a contradiction. This is similar to when Jesus had been presented as the Saviour of the world and then said to the woman, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." We are tested when we read these passages. In a future chapter we will go into more detail concerning the anger of the Lord. For now we will focus simply on reading the Hebrew words in the light of the life of Jesus Christ. This numbering of Israel resulted in the death of 70,000 men.

So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men. 2 Samuel 24:15

Some translations suggest that God was so angry with Israel that He created a pretext to wipe out thousands of people:

The LORD's anger burned against Israel. He stirred up David against them. He said, "Go! Count the men of Israel and Judah."
2 Samuel 24:1 (NIV)

When we read that God's anger burned against Israel what picture does this create in your mind? Do we imagine someone with a red face pacing up and down, ready to explode in rage? Is it possible that the translators were reading the Hebrew words according to their natural understanding? What is amazing about the variation of meaning in Hebrew words is that the reader or translator will determine the variant. With some words the variants of meaning change significantly the meaning of what is read. If you look at the word *anger* and *kindled* in 2 Samuel 24:1 they can be translated as *suffering* and *grieved*. The word *moved* has a meaning *to seduce*, so we might read the text as follows.

And again the suffering of the LORD was grieved for Israel, and David was seduced to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. 2 Samuel 24:1

This then is in harmony with 1 Chronicles 21:1 which says Satan stood up against David. Why was David seduced? It was because Israel had grieved away the Spirit of God. God's anger is described in the Bible as allowing evil angels to have greater control.

He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending [releasing] evil angels among them.
Psalm 78:49

Again the word *sending* can be translated as *releasing*. God's wrath is defined as finally allowing His people to push Him away, which lets Satan stand up and take control of the situation. Our precious Father loves His children, and our Saviour is our Shepherd who cares tirelessly for His sheep. When His people continue to ignore and reject His appeals, finally He must allow them to have their own desires. Israel desired national greatness under David. The Spirit of the Lord pled with them not to seek after these things, but the same spirit that wanted a king now wanted to expand the empire. So the Lord allowed Satan to seduce David into numbering the people.

Most Bible translators choose to interpret the Hebrew word *aph* as *anger* in 2 Samuel 24:1. Whereas in Exodus 34:6 the same word attached to the word for *long* is translated as follows:

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, [H639 *aph*] and abundant in goodness and truth, Exodus 34:6

The Lord has allowed this Hebrew word *aph* to act as a mirror in our soul. We can read it as *anger* or *suffering*. This is because the Hebrew word means *nostril* or *rapid breathing through the nose*. Rapid breathing can be from *anger* or *extreme grief*. When Jesus told the disciples that He must suffer many things at the hands of the leaders, they did not want to hear it. So we find in many places people would rather think of God as *angry* at those who sin against Him than see Him as a *suffering* and *broken-hearted* Father. If they allowed themselves to see this it would bring deep conviction to stop hurting our Father. Seeing Him as *angry* allows many people to justify their sinning. Just as the disciples interpreted Jesus' silence as *racial intolerance* many Bible translators, and therefore, readers, read their own feelings towards injustice into God's character.

One final example to consider:

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. 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 (NKJV)

If someone was looking for evidence to show that God kills people this would appear to be a very simple case. It says that God killed Saul. This text is a mirror. The hearer of the law will see his own natural face in this text. Saul had been greatly favoured by God and Saul rebelled against Him. The natural man would have feelings of *revenge* in such a case as this and judge Saul worthy of being killed. On the other hand the natural man may have similar *rebellious* feelings towards authority and reading this text as God directly killing Saul provides evidence to prove authority is *harsh* and *unreasonable*. For those who read the Bible through the character of Jesus, they will seek for more answers to explain this verse that God

actually killed Saul. In this case the answer is only 10 verses earlier in the same chapter.

And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was wounded of the archers. (4) Then said Saul to his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.
1 Chronicles 10:3-4

Saul committed suicide. Saul had turned away from God and this meant that God was not able to protect him as He would have desired to do. Saul was unprotected in battle and events played out that Saul ended his own life. This provides context to the verses.

There is an important lesson here for the readers of the Bible. If you are certain that Jesus' mission on earth is the revelation of the Father and you comprehend the sufferings of Christ through the daily rejection He experiences by the human race, then like the Syrophenician woman we will hang on in faith believing that He is truly merciful even when it appears that He is not. This is the law acting as a mirror to our souls to bring out what is in our hearts in order that we might repent of projecting our desires and inclinations onto Christ and His Father.

...be it unto thee even as thou wilt. Matthew 15:28

10. Putting the Fear of God into You

And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, (14) And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: (15) And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; (16) And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. (17) And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. John 2:13-17

And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; (46) Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. Luke 19:45-46

The Passover was designed to teach sinners the amazing love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. The leaders of Israel had turned this into an opportunity to enrich themselves at the expense of the people. A sacrifice was required of each family and in order to purchase a lamb one had to exchange local currency for the temple shekel. This exchange of money provided a means for overpricing the purchase of sacrificial animals. The poor and vulnerable found it much harder to obtain the needed sacrifice which left them feeling cheated by the very men who were meant to teach them the abounding grace of God.

As Jesus surveyed the scene of the temple His heart was grieved. If this practice went unchallenged it would lead millions to a Christless grave without salvation because the truth of the gospel was being turned into selfish greed. Here we are introduced to an aspect of the character of God that is easily misunderstood. God deeply loved the men who were doing these evil deeds as much as He loved those being cheated by the priests. In order to reach these leaders they needed to be confronted with their sinful course in order to save them. This is the formula that redemption follows:

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: Romans 5:20

The angry exchanges and sharp dealing in the temple were a reflection of the condition of the hearts of the men leading the nation. If they did not repent of these deeds they would die.

The Saviour of the world has power to read the souls of men. As the Father knows the number of hairs on every head, so He knows intimately the thoughts of every man. As Divinity flashes through humanity, Christ reads the innermost secrets of all around Him. This was a moment of judgment; those in the presence of Jesus became aware that the Saviour could read every detail of their souls. For the wicked this was a most terrifying experience. The action of picking up the whip of cords was not to strike the people and physically harm them, but to impress upon them the sinfulness of what they were doing. No person was killed, no person wounded, but the items with which they traded were struck down as a warning that these things were destroying them.

The Saviour was convicting them of sin, not to destroy them but to save them. He desired for them to see their danger, repent, and be saved. When the Spirit of God searched their hearts it was to encourage them to turn from their sin and ask for forgiveness for their wicked deeds. Instead, the people fled from His presence choosing to hang onto their sins rather than forsake them. They were driven from the temple because of their refusal to repent. If they had repented they would have received grace and peace of mind allowing them to remain in His presence. While many fled from Christ, others remained and listened to Him teach.

And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him... Luke 19:47

If Jesus was full of anger and aggression towards the people, no one would have remained; all would have fled. Those who were humbly repentant did not need to leave for they felt no condemnation in His presence.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Romans 8:1

Sadly the priests and rulers refused to allow the Spirit of God to cleanse their hearts. The physical temple represented the heart of the nation. The temple could have been cleansed by tears of repentance, but instead it was cleansed by the terrified wicked fleeing His presence. The Spirit was coming close to them in judgment to save them, but the closer the Spirit came the more panicked they became.

And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts. Malachi 3:5

Our natural thoughts when reading this verse is to think that God is going to cut down and destroy the wicked in His anger. Again the Word of God acts as a mirror. The text says, "I will come near to you in judgment." Our Father wants to come close to us and reason with us about our sins. To come into the presence of One so selfless and loving leaves no options but to repent or flee from the light. It is not possible to be passive in the presence of God. Those who cling to their sins run for what they think is their lives, but they show that in fact they love death and are fleeing from life.

The cleansing of the temple reflects the scenes that took place in heaven when Lucifer and his angels rebelled against God. The Spirit of God convicted them of their wrong course, but sadly they refused to accept forgiveness. Notice the two ways this event is expressed in Scripture:

And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Jude 1:6

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; 2 Peter 2:4

How do you read these verses? In Jude it tells us that the angels left their home in heaven. In 2 Peter 2:4 it tells us that God spared not the angels that sinned but cast them down to hell and darkness.

When the Son of God came close to them in judgment representing His Father, they could not bear being in His presence. Christ, who is Michael the Archangel, wrestled with these angels pleading with them to turn to the light, repent of their designs, and return to the Father.

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, (8) And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. Revelation 12:7-8

The war in heaven centred on Lucifer seeking to traffic His merchandise in the temple of God.

By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Ezekiel 28:16

Once again the Bible speaks to us as a mirror. It reveals what is in our hearts. When it says, "I will destroy thee O covering cherub," we are challenged to judge how this will take place. If Lucifer had acknowledged his wrong doing before committing himself to war against the government of God, he would have been saved. The effort of the Son of God to cleanse his soul temple brought the issue to a head, and when Christ reached out to him to convict him of his error, he refused, hardened his heart and fell completely into sin. The actions of Christ gave Lucifer the platform to reject the light and destroy himself. In this process the Bible indicates that God began the process that will lead to the destruction of Lucifer. This is the same as when the Scripture says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. God reached out to Pharaoh to repent but the choice of the king was to harden his heart. Is it the actions of the sun that harden the clay, or is it the ingredients in the clay reacting to the sunlight, making it go hard?

Satan and His angels were not flung out of heaven. Satan was cast out through His refusal to respond to the convicting Spirit of God and desiring to escape His presence. The same process took place in the temple when Jesus cleansed it. He showed the people their error, He convicted them of their sin, the Spirit came close to them and appealed to them to repent, but they refused. This refusal placed many of them in chains of darkness like the fallen angels. When the Spirit makes a direct effort to reach the soul and it is firmly refused, darkness immediately rushes in and enslaves the soul. Thankfully, some who fled from Christ that day were still able to repent, but for others that day was the beginning of their destruction; and it can be said that Christ destroyed them through seeking to save them.

With this knowledge we can read several passages of Scripture with a better understanding of what it means when people were seized with fear in the presence of God.

I will send my fear before thee, and will **destroy** [H2000] all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. (28) And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.
Exodus 23:27-28

The Hebrew word that the King James translates as *destroy* has these variants of meaning:

H2000 – Hamam: to move noisily, confuse, make a noise, discomfit, break, consume, crush, destroy, trouble, vex

The fear that God would put into many of these nations would be exactly as Jesus did when He cleansed the temple the second time. Many of these nations around Israel had filled up their cup of iniquity, and they were at the point of final decision. The fear that God put into them was His conviction of their sins. The Spirit of God came close to them in judgment. Sadly they refused, and this discomfited, vexed and confused them. The refusal of the Jews to accept the mercy of Jesus left them to eventually be destroyed by Rome. The refusal of these surrounding nations to repent of their sins left them exposed to the sword of Israel. We will examine the sword of Israel in a future chapter but for now we see that the fear of the Lord that came on these nations was the Spirit of God seeking to convict them of their sin and causing them to repent as a last effort to save them.

The reaching out to save them resulted in their hearts hardening, and thus they chose death rather than life. The convictions of sin were like hornets in the soul. These nations kicked against the pricks of conscience and ran from the presence of God into the arms of Satan, the destroyer, and they perished.

And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and **troubled** [H2000] the host of the Egyptians, (25) And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians. Exodus 14:24-25

At the Red Sea, the Lord troubled the Egyptians. It is the same word as mentioned that God would put fear on the nations in Exodus 23:27.

The Egyptians were just as much loved by God as the Israelites. When the Lord erected the pillar of fire to prevent them from attacking the Israelites they should have seen in this a warning to go home. They were frightened by this, but they refused to repent. When they chased the Israelites the Lord sent His angels to take off their chariot wheels to slow them down and to prevent them from going any further. In their stubborn refusal to submit they drove deep into the waters and drowned when the waters came together. There is no evidence that God lured them into the waters to kill them. He did everything possible to prevent them from taking this action.

And the space in which we came from Kadeshbarnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them. (15) For indeed the hand of the LORD was against them, to **destroy** [H2000] them from among the host, until they were consumed. Deuteronomy 2:14-15

The Israelites were invited to go up and take the land of Canaan, but they were afraid of the giants in the land and they refused to trust God. When God then told them they could not go into the Promised Land because of unbelief and would die in the wilderness, they rebelled again and determined to go and fight. After being beaten by their enemies they blamed Moses for everything and wanted to kill him. The people were

constantly saying that God wanted to kill them in the wilderness and as they judged so they received. God allowed these things to happen in the hope they would see their error and repent and ask forgiveness. For 40 years the Lord sent His Spirit to plead with them to humble themselves and repent of their sin. If they had repented it would not have mattered if they had died in the wilderness; they would have obtained eternal life.

Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:
Hebrews 4:6

How sad that all those Israelites refused to enter into the rest that is in Christ and know their sins were forgiven. Instead they hardened themselves against the pleading of the Spirit, died in the wilderness, and lost eternal life. So did the Lord destroy them? He did in as much as the sun hardens clay. His continual pleading hardened their hearts through their persistent refusal, and so they were destroyed.

When the Saviour comes to you through a deep conviction of sin, do not turn in fear and harden your heart. Believe that your Father freely forgives and cleanses of sin and enjoy the peace and freedom of forgiveness. Enjoy the peace of heaven in your soul temple and rejoice that He is willing to cleanse it for His glory and by His glory.

In these last days a message is going to the world telling us to “fear God and give glory to Him.” Revelation 14:7. When we allow the Spirit of God to convict us of our sins and don’t resist His appeals, we will be blessed and begin to understand wisdom, for we read:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. Proverbs 9:10

11. The Anger of the Lord

Within a week before Christ was hung upon the cross He was riding a donkey into Jerusalem surrounded by a great multitude.

And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. (9) And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. Matthew 21:8-9

To the disciples it appeared that their long held aspirations were coming to pass; finally their Master was being recognised by the adoring multitudes. But right in the middle of this crescendo of praise we read:

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, (42) Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. Luke 19:41-42

As Jesus looked over the city and contemplated all that this nation had done in rebellion against His Father, and what would happen to them less than forty years from that day, He began to weep. This was not a gentle tear in the eye; it was the release of an intense, irrepressible sorrow that burst forth with great sobs of agony. One of the words that the Lord used to describe the character of God is *longsuffering*.

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, [H639 aph] and abundant in goodness and truth... Exodus 34:6

This word has the following meanings:

properly the nose or nostril; hence the face, and occasionally a person; also (**from the rapid breathing in passion**) ire: - anger (-gry), + before, countenance, face, + forbearing, forehead, + [long-] **suffering**, nose, **nostril**, snout, X worthy, wrath.

But unto Hannah he gave a worthy [H639 aph] portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb. 1 Samuel 1:5

It makes no sense to say that Hannah was given an angry portion because he loved Hannah. As the *Gesenius Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* expresses it:

Probably with sorrow in mind; since words which signify anger are sometimes applied to sorrow.

The burning tears of Jesus were a result of His great heart of love for His children. Did this include anger? Yes; anger at what sin had done to His beloved children and it is expressed in a deep grief of burning tears.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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. Isaiah 55:8-9

When we read about the Lord's anger in the Bible are we sure we understand it correctly? Once again we look at the life of Jesus to see the way in which He expresses anger.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. (15) Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (16) Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! (17) Ye fools and blind: for

whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?
Matthew 23:14-17

Jesus certainly sounds angry in these verses. The woes that Jesus proclaims continue for a number of verses and then we read something very important:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Matthew 23:37

Jesus loved these poor, deluded Jewish leaders. He wanted to gather them under His protection. He speaks in the tender language of a hen gathering her young. It is such a touching picture of the Saviour's love. His anger is an expression of His deep heartfelt sorrow that He had manifested in sobs only shortly before this. In the language of Matthew 23 we see revealed the anger of God.

If ever there was a point at which it might be justified to call down fire from heaven it was now. These leaders were causing the loss of the whole Jewish nation. They were standing in the way of the people and corrupting the pure teachings of the Scripture. Surely this would be a place to cut them off in order for the truth to reach the masses. Jesus raises no sword, nor calls down fire from heaven but says these words:

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. Matthew 23:38

Here is the culmination of the anger of God. The Son of God pronounces that the protection of the nation has been removed. It is after this point that Satan is able to take full control of the Jewish leaders who shortly after succeed in their murderous plans to kill Jesus. We note carefully that when Jesus pronounced that the house of Israel was left desolate He prepared the path for His own death, not the deaths of those who opposed Him. When the restraining Spirit of God left the priests and rulers there was nothing to prevent them from killing Jesus. Satan could now take control, and within forty years he was able to completely destroy the city where over a million Jews were put to death by the Romans.

Here is the definition of God's anger expressed another way:

He unleashed against them his hot anger, his wrath, indignation and hostility-- a band of destroying angels. Psalm 78:49 (NIV)

Who is the destroyer?

And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. 1 Corinthians 10:10 (NIV)

The word for destroying angel in Greek means *venomous serpent*.

They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer) Revelation 9:11

The destroyer is Satan. When people persist in rejecting Christ and make it very clear they want nothing to do with Him, in sobs of agony Christ grieves for His lost children and lets them have the master of their choosing. When this takes place the hedge of protection that is placed around every person is broken down.

Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? (10) **Hast not thou made an hedge about him**, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. Job 1:9-10

The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. Psalm 34:7

He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Ecclesiastes 10:8

What are the things that lead to the hedge of protection being broken down?

Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: (9) That this is a **[1]** rebellious people, **[2]** lying children, **[3]** children that **will not hear the law of the LORD**: (10) **[4]** Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, **Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits**: (11) Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from

before us. (12) Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, [5] Because ye **despise this word**, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon: (13) Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. (14) And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water *withal* out of the pit. Isaiah 30:8-14

There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; [1] they have **devoured souls; they have taken the treasure** and precious things; they have **made her many widows** in the midst thereof. (26) [2] Her priests have **violated my law**, and have [3] **profaned mine holy things**: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and [4] have **hid their eyes from my sabbaths**, and I am profaned among them. (27) [5] Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get **dishonest gain**. (28) And [6] her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and **divining lies** unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken. (29) [7] The people of the land **have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy**: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. (30) And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. (31) **Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: *their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD.*** Ezekiel 22:25-31

These are the key points that create a gap in the wall:

1. Taking advantage of people for personal gain
2. Violating the law, rebellion
3. Profaning holy things, mixing sacred and common
4. Hiding their eyes from the Sabbaths
5. Leaders are involved in dishonest gain
6. Prophetic leaders tell lies

7. Oppress the poor and needy

When God's children break the commandments of God and refuse to repent and continue to do wicked things, eventually God is placed in a position where He can no longer protect them. This causes Him terrible grief. He does not want to surrender His children, but Satan accuses them before God and demands the right to have them. This grief and sorrow is the anger of God. It is the rapid breathing through the nose from deep sorrow. The list described in Ezekiel 22:25-31 has similar grievances to those mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 23. In the time of Ezekiel the hedge was removed and Israel was taken captive by Babylon. In the days of Christ the hedge was removed, and the Romans came and destroyed Jerusalem.

Seven Key Points at Issue that Created the Breach

Ezekiel 22:25-31	Matthew 23
1. Taking advantage of people for personal gain.	Matt 23:25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.
2. Violating the law.	Matt 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law , judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.
3. Profaning holy things. Mixing sacred and common.	Matt 23:16-20 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! (17) Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? ... (19) Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? (20) Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.
4. Hiding their eyes from the Sabbaths.	Matt 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne , and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.
5. Leaders are involved in	Matt 23:16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but

dishonest gain.	whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!
6. Prophetic leaders tell lies.	Matt 23:28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.
7. Oppress the poor and needy.	Matt 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses , and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

Let's consider some examples where people break down this hedge of protection.

And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. (7)
 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. (8)
 And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah to this day. 2 Samuel 6:6-8

The words *the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah* invite us to judge the character of God. As we have stated previously, the words *anger* and *kindled* can be translated as *suffering* and *grief*. Uzzah acted in a way that he knew was not right. He had placed himself in a position where he could not be protected. The Spirit of the Lord grieved for Uzzah. The Lord did not want to leave him, but his transgression placed him where the Lord had to allow a breach in the protection. The text says that *the Lord made a breach upon Uzzah*. It caused the Lord much grief to have to step back from Uzzah, but Uzzah had chosen a path of rebellion and the Lord had to honour his choice. It was not God who struck Uzzah down with His own hand. Uzzah's rebellion caused the breach in protection.

One of the possible indicators of the discontent in the heart of Uzzah is found earlier in the chapter.

And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. (4) And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. 2 Samuel 6:3-4

Uzzah is listed first of the two sons of Abinadab but Ahio the younger brother is mentioned as leading the ark instead of his older brother. Was Uzzah filled with a jealousy of sibling rivalry? Was there hatred in his heart for his brother? A secondary problem that caused the hedge to be broken was placing the ark on a cart with oxen. Moses had indicated that the ark must be carried by the priests.

At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD Deuteronomy 10:8

And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. Joshua 3:3

This secondary breach was not sufficient to take the hedge from anyone but Uzzah so there was likely something in the heart of Uzzah that caused the protection to be removed.

So how do you read? Do you read the Lord's character as burning anger that caused Him to smash Uzzah to the ground, or do you see a tender Father in grief who finally resigns Himself to Uzzah's choice to follow a path of rebellion. Each of us must choose how we read this. Our Father in heaven has allowed the variants of meaning to provide a mirror into our soul so that we can decide for ourselves what character we see in the text. Do we see a character like ours? Do we see an impulsive angry person who strikes to the ground those who make mistakes or do we see a grieving Father forced to accept Uzzah's decision to embrace the spirit of Satan and be given to his rightful master – the destroyer?

And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. Leviticus 26:25

In many places in Scripture we read of the anger of the Lord being kindled and sword, famine, and pestilence falling upon people. As the text we just read tells us, the people are delivered into the hand of the enemy. The anger that is kindled is the sorrowful grief that our Father endures when His erring children persist in rebelling which results in the breaking of His commandments designed for their protection.

Shall we listen carefully to the voice of our Father today?

Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God. (2) Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD. (3) If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; (4) Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. (5) And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. (6) And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. Leviticus 26:1-6

If we joyfully submit ourselves to the commandments of God and choose to believe that our Father wishes to bless us then we can enjoy the protection of the angels of the Lord.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (2) I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. (3) Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. (4) He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Psalm 91:1-4

May we not cause our Father and Lord Jesus grief and pain through our disobedience. He desires to protect us and care for us. If we rebel and choose the spirit of the enemy, eventually that enemy must be allowed to have control of our lives. It is not fair for someone to be continually protected by someone they don't want to be with.

The destruction of Jerusalem is a foreshadow of the end of the world. As the Jewish nation rejected the Son of God two thousand years ago, so today the Son of God is despised and rejected of men. The Lord of the Sabbath is spat upon through the rejection of His day of worship. Immorality and greed abound such that eventually Christ in agonising sobs will say to the world, "Your house is left unto you desolate." Then the winds of strife which are the fallen angels will be completely released to destroy the earth. May we cling to our Saviour and trust in His grace to be part of that number that keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.

12. Putting the Sword in its Place

In the stillness of the night upon Olivet, our beloved Saviour was pleading before His Father.

O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. Matthew 26:39

The full weight of human guilt rested upon the Son of Man. So great was His struggle that He sweat great drops of blood. The Glory of the Father in its all-consuming purity confronted the darkness of sin that the Lamb of God had taken upon Himself. He shook like a leaf knowing how hateful to His Father were the sins that He carried. In the words of the prophet it was said:

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. Zechariah 13:7

The sword at this moment was the sword of the Spirit. As Christ took hold of this sword for our sakes it sapped His life forces. When a man sweats blood he is at the point of death. Only the strengthening hand of God His Father enabled Him to come forth from the garden to face the sword of Rome lifted by the hands of the Jewish leaders.

When the temple guards came with Judas to arrest Jesus, Peter arose in the spirit of Judas Maccabees² and all his forefathers who had lifted a sword in defence of those things they treasured. Jesus had told Peter that He had not come to destroy men's lives but to save them, yet to Peter a dead Jesus meant the end of all his hopes. Sadly, his raised sword was more for his desires than for those of Christ.

Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.
John 18:10

When Jesus healed Malchus, He distanced Himself from the use of a physical sword to defend Himself and the truth. Then He said:

Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. (53) Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? (54) But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? Matthew 26:52-54

The words of Jesus have both a spiritual and physical meaning. When a man takes hold of the Word of God, that Word will put his old life to death that he might be raised to newness of life in Christ Jesus. At the same time it means that those who raise the physical sword will die by that same sword. Jesus leaves for us a vital lesson that we should trust in prayer and the care of our Father's angels and not in the sword to save us. Let the example of the Saviour be a clear message to us. Jesus never struck, wounded or killed anyone. Our Saviour has left this example that we should follow it.

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: (22) Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: (23) Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: 1 Peter 2:21-23

² Judas Maccabeus was a Jewish priest and a son of the priest Mattathias. He led the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire (167–160 BCE).

The great challenge that we must address in the light of the life of Jesus is how do we account for all the Old Testament stories filled with the violence of Israel hacking to death their enemies with swords? When Israel left Egypt the Lord told them how He would deal with the nations around them.

I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy [discomfort, disturb, vex] all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs [stiffen their necks] unto thee. (28) **And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite,** from before thee. (29) I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. (30) By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land. Exodus 23:27-30

If the Israelites had remained faithful to God the land of Canaan would have been cleansed as Jesus cleansed the temple. The Spirit of God would have convicted these nations of their sin, then in their discomfort, they would have either fled or they would have confessed, repented, and joined themselves to Israel and learned to follow Israel's God. We highlight the point that the verse says the nations would be driven out, not butchered to death.

If God wanted His people to kill their enemies He would have encouraged Moses to do more of what he had done when he killed the Egyptian. Instead He sent Moses into the desert for forty years to care for sheep. Moses already had all the training of a mighty General as the grandson of Pharaoh. Why did God allow this highly skilled General to go into the desert to care for sheep? It was to teach Moses how to care for people. The lessons are there for those who wish to learn them. God never intended Israel to take the land of Canaan by warfare.

In delivering Israel from Egypt He intended for them to become acquainted with Him and learn to trust Him. While living in Egypt the Israelites were surrounded by the spirit of tyranny. In the example of the Hebrew children being thrown into the river and their harsh experience of servitude in Egypt many were influenced by the notion that God was a tyrant Who could turn against them at any time and slay them. We see this fear expressed from the beginning:

And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Exodus 14:11

This fear goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden when Satan convinced Adam and Eve that when God had said they would surely die it would be He Who would come to kill them.

And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. Genesis 3:10

In accusing Moses Israel hid their fear of the God they perceived. Yet it was clearly evident that Moses had not brought the people out by his own power. Satan was tempting them to think that God wanted to kill them in the wilderness. This temptation was only possible because of their false understanding of the character of God. This fear continues to grow for the Israelites.

And the children of Israel said unto them, **Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt**, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Exodus 16:3

The Israelites expressed their fear of God and openly stated they wished that they had died by the hand of God in Egypt rather than endure their current situation. They clearly did not trust God, and their minds were blinded by Satan as to God's true character.

In the very next chapter of Exodus the Israelites manifest even further their perverted ideas of God:

And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? (4) And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. Exodus 17:3-4

They continue to complain and accuse Moses and, therefore, God of wanting to kill them. Their idolatrous view of a violent God begins to translate into threats to kill Moses. By beholding this false idea of a violent

God they are changed into that image and plot violent acts against the man that God had used to save them from Egypt.

The continual murmuring, complaining and distrust of God places Him in a position where He is less able to protect them. They are choosing Satan as their master, and Satan is demanding access to destroy them. We see the connection between the complaints about water and the attack of the Amalekites as follows:

And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not? (8) **Then** came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. Exodus 17:7-8

The chiding of the children of Israel opened a door for Satan to stir up the Amalekites to attack them. This would not have happened if Israel had trusted the Lord. The Amalekites would have been too afraid to touch them. There is no evidence that Israel repented of their sin against God. They had a false view of God as a tyrant intent on killing them. There is no evidence of gratefulness in receiving the water. There is no apology to Moses or any statement of thanks to him for pleading for the water. Nothing is recorded to indicate this. The Israelites had threatened to kill Moses. Can we imagine how much this would have hurt Moses? He could have stayed in the calm realm of his desert home looking after his family and caring for his flocks. He may also have felt the base ingratitude they were showing to God. It would have been a real trial for Moses. Then within this frame of mind he receives word that the Amalekites are attacking and picking off the weak. What happens next is pivotal. It is a decision made under pressure and discouraging circumstances.

And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. Exodus 17:9

It does not say, "And the Lord commanded Moses." It does not say that Moses went into the sanctuary and pled with the Lord. It just says that Moses told Joshua to go and fight. As I picture the scene of Moses walking towards Joshua everything goes into slow motion, and my thoughts divert to the time when a man in the lineage of Moses raised a sword against those who had insulted his family.

And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. (26) And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out. (27) The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. (28) They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field, (29) And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house. Genesis 34:25-29

Truly, Jacob could lament that his descendants would stink in the eyes of the Canaanites and Perizzites. Jacob's sons had taken up the sword and thus the sword would follow them down the generations. Do we witness the effects of the children of Levi telling the story of their father who rose up in behalf of his sister to slay the Shechemites? Would some of the children of Levi be tempted to be proud of what their father had done in protecting his sister? Would not Satan suggest to them that Levi was justified in his actions as self-defence? Would this narrative be easier to tell than to mention that your father was a cold blooded killer and be required to carry the shame of this down through the generations? All of this history is now walking in the footsteps of Moses towards Joshua.

Had forty years in the wilderness released Moses from the temptation to protect his people through his own decisions? Had Moses possibly learned that Amalek had already slain some of the weak in the camp? Just before the time of his death Moses recalled:

Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; (18) How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it. Deut. 25:17-19

Did all of this come together as Satan had designed to make Israel stink in the eyes of the world? Did he lead Israel to once again take up the sword,

and thus the character of God has been misrepresented down through the ages of time? Was not this action a manifestation of the god that Israel had imagined? If this imagined god could not even get them water when it was needed how would he be in the least bit concerned about their dying at the hands of the Amalekites?

In the story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and the 250 princes we see how this fear of a God who wants to kill them in the wilderness drives them to seek leadership other than Moses and Aaron. Then, when they came up to the borders of Canaan, the ten spies gave an evil report of the land because they were not able to believe God loved them and only sought good for them. They ignored all of His protection and care and focused on anything even remotely negative, not trusting that God had the wisdom and pure intention of using trial to purify them. Satan could easily tempt them on these things because they believed in a God who wanted to kill them and could change His mood at any time. Every time Satan was allowed to break through the hedge of protection and harm the Israelites he would tell them that God was directly punishing them with His own hand. How sad it must have been for God to have His people willingly believe such lies about Him.

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! (3) **And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey?** were it not better for us to return into Egypt? Numbers 14:2-3

Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, **and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;** (23) Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: Numbers 14:22-23

When Israel was told they could not go up to possess the land because of their sin, they rebelled again and determined to go up and fight, but God had not commanded them to fight. Then after forty years had passed and a whole generation had gone to their death, they came again up to the border. The sins of the fathers were still in the mouths of their children:

And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. Numbers 21:5

Satan had been working on Moses all this time encouraging him to give up on these miserable wretches. God had tested Moses on this point for his own sake, and thankfully Moses had responded to the Spirit of Christ and asked God to pardon the people which He graciously did. Yet, now seeing that Israel was even worse than before, he gave into temptation.

And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? (11) And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. Numbers 20:10-11

Moses giving in to this temptation gave Satan greater access to the minds of the Israelites. Moses had prayed for them and stood between them and Satan in so many ways. Yet this step gave Satan the advantage. Satan rejoiced to be able to take Aaron's life as a result of this failure.

Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Numbers 20:24

With greater access to the minds of the Israelites, Satan induced them to make a bargain with God – the God they imagined who loved to kill people. They had been attacked by another tribe for their sins, and now in their desperation they made a vow:

And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners. (2) **And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.** (3) **And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel,** and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah. Numbers 21:1-3

God did not ask the Israelites to slaughter their enemies; their false view of God caused them to believe that He would desire them to make such a bloodthirsty vow. This would gain His approval, and He would help them. It says that God hearkened unto their voice. Why did God hearken unto their voice? Would this not only cement them in the idea that God desired them to kill their enemies? The answer is found in the parable of the talents:

And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: (21) For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. (22) And he saith unto him, **Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant.** Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? Luke 19:20-23

The lazy servant imagined the Lord to be an austere person. According to this belief he received judgment. As the Scripture says:

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. (13) For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. James 2:12-13

God allowed the man who had a false view of Him to be judged according to his own ideas. How does God do this?

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Galatians 6:7

Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. Exodus 34:7

At the time that Israel made a vow to God to slaughter the Canaanite king they were ruled by the spirit of Satan. They had murmured and complained against God and rebelled against Him at every opportunity. God warned them and encouraged them to follow His commandments:

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Deuteronomy 4:1

All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers. Deuteronomy 8:1

Yet Israel refused to obey God, and Satan was enabled to control their desires for judgment without mercy. God gave to them what they desired even though it was not His plan. He also gave to the heathen nations what they feared; as they were no longer protected. Satan used Israel to slaughter the Canaanites. In doing this he would lead millions to their death through a false understanding of the character of God, namely one who murders and slaughters people.

We do obtain glimpses of God's plan to deal with the enemies of Israel without weapons in verses like these:

And ye went over Jordan, and came unto Jericho: and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand. (12) And I sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; **but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow.** Joshua 24:11-12

And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. (16) To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. (17) Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you. (18) And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD. (19) And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the

LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high. (20) And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. (21) **And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.** (22) And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set [delivered up] ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. (23) For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. 2 Chronicles 20:15-23

Israel was enabled to take the land of Canaan by warfare, but it was not what God had originally intended. Since Israel had constantly feared that God was trying to kill them and they doubted His loving care, Satan was enabled to seduce them into vowing to God to slaughter the Canaanites and other heathen nations. Israel was granted to be victorious in battle, but Satan won the war against God's character. Israel was defeated by their victory and enslaved to a false view of God.

In these last days we are granted the opportunity to see the character of God as it truly is. In the face of Jesus Christ we can begin to uncover the true desires of our heavenly Father. How many people did Jesus kill with the sword? How many did He burn with fire? How many children did He impale with a spear? Absolutely none! For all those who entertain ideas that God came to destroy men's lives remember the words of Jesus:

But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. (56) For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Luke 9:55-56

The sword that Jesus uses is the sword that comes out of His mouth. His sword is His Word.

And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. Revelation 1:16.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. Luke 22:36

...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Ephesians 6:17

The follower of Christ will follow His example. Christ never used a physical sword. How then do we explain this verse?

And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough. Luke 22:38

Jesus had told the disciples two verses earlier “he that has no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.” When the disciples produced two physical swords they had not sold their garments to obtain them. The statement of Jesus was to the individual. Each man was to sell his garment to buy a sword. What about the rest of the disciples and the commandment to sell your garment? What is the garment that Jesus wanted the disciples to sell?

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. (4) And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, **Take away the filthy garments from him.** And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. Zechariah 3:3-4

Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: **if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight**, that I should not

be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.
John 18:36

Jesus told Pilate that His servants would not fight in the manner of the world. The disciples needed their hearts cleansed in order to rightly divide the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15. We also notice that when the disciples showed Jesus the two swords that He said "it is enough." If He felt that two swords were enough then He would have said "they are enough," for they had more than one sword. If for some reason Jesus was saying two swords are enough the question is enough for what? Would they always have to travel together with the two swords so they always had them? Were these enough swords to defend against the Romans or temple guards? This idea makes no sense at all. When Jesus said "it is enough" in the singular He meant that it is enough of that kind of talking. The producing of the two swords revealed the very garment they needed to sell in order to have the true sword of God's Word to preach the gospel of peace. This is how He told His disciples to respond to those who opposed them:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: (39) But I say unto you, That ye **resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.** (40) And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. (41) And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. (42) Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. (43) Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. (44) **But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;** (45) That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:38-45

Will Satan defeat you in the victory of Israel over Canaan with the sword, or will you see our merciful Father letting men have their own wishes and following their own course to its completion. Choose you this day whom you will serve; as for me and my house we will serve the ever merciful God who will by no means clear iniquity but let the wheat and tares come to harvest that every man's heart will be revealed.

How is it possible to fulfil these things with a sword or gun in your hand to protect yourself? Is it not time to put the sword back in its place? Let it rust, and trust our Father to send His angels to care for us. The conquest of Canaan by Israel was performed by the sword because most of them did not trust the Lord to drive the Canaanites out through the fear of God. All of their grumbling, complaining, and fear that God wanted to kill them in the wilderness meant that instead of being a light to the Gentiles, the sin of the nations around Israel was punished by the sin of Israel. As the commandments say:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; Exodus 20:5

Many of the Israelites hated God because they feared He would kill them in the desert. The sins of their forefathers were continued, and so the history of Israel is soaked in blood. Do not let the victories of Israel with the sword defeat your understanding of the character of God as revealed in Jesus. Do not let a group of grumbling, complaining slaves determine for you what God is like. Let us keep all of the commandments of God including the one that says, "Thou shalt not kill."

13. The Crown of Thorns

The trial and death of Christ confronts us with the wretchedness of human nature. The men and women who took part in the humiliation, beating, and death of Christ were simply a manifestation of the spirit of humanity that has despised and rejected the Spirit of Christ from the fall of man. The cords that bound Jesus, the rods with which He was beaten, the wood and nails for the cross upon which He was crucified were all things that He Himself had created. We read:

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. John 1:3

The crown of thorns placed upon His head was highly significant and contained a deep spiritual truth. When Adam fell into sin the thorns that came as a result were a manifestation of the curse brought by sin.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: **cursed is the ground for thy sake**; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; (18) **Thorns also and thistles** shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; Genesis 3:17-18

Why did the curse fall upon the ground? What was the relationship between man and the earth?

And the LORD **God formed man of the dust of the ground**, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Genesis 2:7

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and **let them have dominion over** the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, **and over all the earth**, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. Genesis 1:26

God formed man from the earth and He gave man dominion over the earth. This fact reveals that there is an intimate connection between man and the earth. The things done by man have a direct effect on the earth. The curse that fell upon Adam was immediately reflected in the thorns and thistles it produced. The ground was cursed for man's sake, that he might discern in the convulsions of nature an index to the level of wickedness that exists in human society, and therefore it might serve as a warning of danger.

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. (7) For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. Matthew 24:6-7

There is a causal relationship between the wars and conflicts of men, and the convulsions and wars in nature. As conflicts and depravity in society increase so the disasters in nature increase; thus nature is a barometer of the level of rebellion in man. When the breezes of nature, designed to cool and comfort men, turn to hurricanes; or when rain that is designed to bring life cause rivers to break their banks bringing death and destruction, then we see evidence of the same rebellion that exists in the hearts of men manifested in the calamities of nature.

The causal relationship between man and nature means that as the rebellion of the human race increases so will the rebellion of wind, fire, and flood. As men break the commandments of God with greater zeal, so the earth will break the laws of nature and reflect back to men their own rebellion. As the spirit of rebellion in men rises up against Christ and they seek to kill the One who has dominion over them, so nature will rise up in rebellion against mankind and seek to kill him. As men roam the earth and

devour others with their tongues and their swords, so the beasts of the field will roam the earth and devour them in like manner. As a man sows so shall he also reap. On the other hand, the earth will not be at war with the man who is at peace with God, and not in rebellion against Him.

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: (18) For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. (19) He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. (20) In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword. (21) Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. (22) At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. (23) For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. (24) And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin. Job 5:17-24

As Christ hung upon the cross, the sun refused to shine, the earth shook and lightning bolts fell from heaven. Nature was in sympathy with its Author, the Son of God. At the same time, while He carries the sins of the world and the crown of thorns, nature appears to seek to kill Him.

Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. (8) There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it... (13) The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. (14) Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. (15) Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. Psalm 18:7-8,13-15.

The convulsions of nature at the death of Christ on the cross give us clues as to how nature reflects the rebellion of man. The innocence of Jesus caused nature to be in sympathy with Him; yet, as our sin bearer, nature was piercing Him with its crown of thorns. The lightning bolts from heaven seemed to indicate the displeasure of heaven itself. In this relationship between man and nature we might discover the reasons for the flood. The Bible says of those who lived before the flood:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, (2) **That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.** (3) And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. (4) There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. (5) **And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.** (6) And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. Gen 6:1-6

The Bible says that the imagination of the thoughts of men were only evil continually. Men filled with lust and a thirst for power practiced every kind of abomination imaginable. The unrestrained wickedness of man was having a greater and greater effect on the earth. The rebellion of men against the law of God was being fed directly into the machinery of nature.

In mercy God warned the world through Noah that a flood was coming upon the earth. As man had morally destroyed themselves, so this destruction would be manifested in the earth.

The earth also was corrupt [H7843] before God, and the earth was filled with violence. (12) And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; [H7843] for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. (13) And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; **for the earth is filled with violence through them**; and, behold, I will destroy [H7843] them with the earth. Genesis 6:11-13

When God looked upon the earth He saw that men had completely corrupted themselves. The same Hebrew word for *corrupt* in Genesis 6:11 is used in Genesis 6:13 as *destroy*. In these verses we are challenged once again to ask how we read these passages. Now, one can conclude that God decided to destroy all but eight of the inhabitants of the earth because of their depravity, thereby bringing the wickedness to an end. Conversely you can see that God knew that the corruption of men would eventually be reflected in the earth and this corruption would destroy the

world. As men lived to excess and rebelled against the law of God, so the earth would begin to exceed its boundaries and rebel against men.

The Bible says that God saw that the earth was filled with violence. Most Christians believe that God would respond to the violence of man by becoming violent Himself, and kill all of them in a violent flood. How sad to believe that God would become violent like men in order to subdue their violence. How much violence is found in the Son of God who is the express image of His Father?

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because **he had done no violence**, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Isaiah 53:9

Where is the violence coming from?

By the multitude of thy [Satan's] merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: Ezekiel 28:16

Scripture says that evil shall slay the wicked. Psalm 34:21. The laws of nature do not require God to be violent with men. The Scriptures give us an indication of how these laws were established in the beginning.

Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? **who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth?** Proverbs 30:4

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. (5) Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? (6) Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; (7) When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (8) Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? (9) **When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it, (10) And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, (11) And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?** Job 38:4-11

Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, (23) **Which I have reserved against the time of**

trouble, against the day of battle and war? (24) By what way is the light parted, which scattereth the east wind upon the earth? (25) **Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder;** (26) To cause it to rain on the earth, where no man is; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man; (27) To satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth? Job 38:22-27

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. (4) The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. (5) The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. (6) He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. (7) **The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire.** (8) The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness; the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. (9) The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory. (10) The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever. (11) **The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.** Psalm 29:3-11

The voice of the Lord upon the elements of nature speaks of these set laws in nature. These laws that were designed to bless and support men and would reflect his submissive, obedient spirit to God were turned into a weapon against men to destroy them. In the same way that men take the pure juice of the grape and corrupt it to produce alcohol causing death and destruction, so men with their corrupted minds pollute the earth and turn nature into a weapon of destruction against themselves. Idolatry, blasphemy, murder, theft, covetousness, and all the sins spoken against within the Ten Commandments, statutes, and judgments will bring a curse upon the earth.

Through Moses the Israelites were also warned that the earth would react to their perverted morality.

After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Leviticus 18:3

The Lord warned Israel not to engage in adultery, incest, sodomy, homosexuality, and other perverted lusts. If they committed these acts the land would surely react.

Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: (25) And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, **and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.** Leviticus 18:24-25

The perverted sexual appetites of men have an influence on the earth. The prolonged exposure of the earth to these abominations causes the earth to become violently ill, and it will vomit out the inhabitants of the earth who do these things.

The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. (5) The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. (6) **Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left.** Isaiah 24:4-6

These verses show clearly the path of destruction and how the breaking of the law of God causes the earth to be defiled and react. The prophet Isaiah records that the transgressions of men cause the curse to devour the earth, burning up its inhabitants. The former destruction of the earth by water in the flood and the future destruction of the earth by fire are linked to the lusts of men in the following way:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after 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 willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: (6) **Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:** (7) But the heavens and the earth, which are now, **by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.** 2 Peter 3:3-7

The flood was caused by the lusts and evil imaginations of men. The same process will occur when the earth is devoured by fire. As men burned in their lusts for one another in the days of Sodom, so the city was burned with fire so that few men were left. In fact there were only three people who escaped that doomed city.

The destruction of Sodom is a warning to us of what will happen at the end of time.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, **giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh**, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Jude 1:7

Sodom and Gomorrha were giving themselves over to fornication and immorality. Paul describes the wickedness of the Sodomites as the men of that city wanted to sexually abuse the visitors that came into the home of Lot.

And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, **burned in their lust one toward another**; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. Romans 1:27

The burning lust of the men of Sodom, which was a complete violation of the law of God, caused the earth and nature to react in a convulsive way vomiting out the inhabitants so that few men were left. The Lord moved upon the heart of Abraham to plead for the city of Sodom that somehow He might spare both city and inhabitants from the inevitable results of their burning lusts. Christ carried the weight of their lusts in order to hold back the forces of nature whilst He gave the people of Sodom time to repent. The same thing had happened in the time of the flood. Before the flood, the Lord restrained the forces of nature as long as He possibly could to give the people time to choose to repent and be saved.

In that tarrying all creation groaned and travailed under the weight of man's sinfulness, and this brings us back to the reality of the cross and the crown of thorns.

...Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 1 Cor. 1:24

It is through this power that Christ upholds the world.

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and **upholding all things by the word of his power**, Hebrews 1:3

For by him [Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be **thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him**: Colossians 1:16

Since Jesus upholds all things by His power, the spirit of rebellion in man which impacts this created world is like a continual crown of thorns for Him, piercing Him daily as He does all in His power to hold back the effects of man's vile nature from corrupting and destroying the earth. In this context we discover that it is the suffering of Christ on behalf of man that is holding back the four winds of strife.

And 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, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. Revelation 7:1

The only reason the angels can hold these winds is because Christ takes the full force of the wickedness of man upon Himself, thus delaying the impact of rebellion on nature and the earth. When a society completely revolts against the Spirit of Christ there is no-one left to stand in the gap and absorb the rebellious spirit of man to prevent strife manifesting itself in nature.

The world as we know it is completely polluted with wickedness. The internet is filled with pornography, and people are everywhere watching movies filled with immorality and violence. The amount of crime, war, and violence that dominate our news headlines hints at all the instability that should be directly translated into the physical elements of nature originally placed under our dominion.

At this present time the world should be vomiting out its inhabitants. The reason that it is not is because the Lamb of God is **still** wearing the crown of thorns; He is **still** despised and rejected; He is **still** pierced by the harsh words and wicked imaginations of men. Yet He absorbs as much of this as

possible in order that we might have more time to realise these things and repent.

The next time you walk in the forest or beside a peaceful river or lake, know for certain that the tranquillity that you experience is because our beloved Saviour is carrying the weight of man's rebellion. In carrying this weight He prevents the effects of rebellion as much as possible from exploding into earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and disasters. The fact that these are disasters increasing means that the wickedness in man is growing. When Christ is almost universally rejected the four winds will be released onto the earth and then nature will reflect the fury of man.

This is the reason why the Bible says:

Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; Genesis 19:24

The power that sustains the elements of nature comes from Christ because He upholds all of creation. This power placed in nature follows set laws established by our Father in heaven. These laws were designed to reflect the peace and harmony that should have existed in the hearts of men as they fellowshiped with their Creator. The earth would have been filled with lush forests filled with incredible fruits, nuts and seeds, and the colour of life would have been revealed everywhere in the beauty of holiness. These same laws are turned to death and destruction when men live in rebellion, and the power that causes these things is the power of Christ abiding by immutable laws. This explains the symbolism of the rod turned into a serpent, but we will address this in another chapter.

The great flood of the earth and the fire that fell upon Sodom were not arbitrary acts of God in retaliation for man's wickedness. These events were held back by Christ as long as possible to give men the chance to repent and see their danger. Though these laws were fixed and given for the blessing of mankind, Christ has been placed in a position to carry the negative effects of the reverse working of this law. The very moment Christ died 2000 years ago we immediately notice the effects on the earth:

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, **saw the earthquake**, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. Matthew 27:54

When the second beast of Revelation 13 causes all men to worship the first beast and causes all to receive a mark in their foreheads or in their hands, Christ once again will be crucified through the rejection of His commandments. The four winds will be released onto the earth, and the rebellious spirit of man will be like burning coals in the heart of the earth, and the earth will raise itself up in a spirit of violence and destroy itself and its inhabitants. Only those who have learned where the secret place of the Most High is and dwell under the shadow of the Almighty, through the keeping of the commandments of God by the faith of Jesus, will be shielded from these terrible things. A thousand shall fall at their side and ten thousand at their right hand but death will not come near their dwelling (Psalm 91:7) because they are at peace with God and, therefore, also with the earth.

Jesus could sleep peacefully in a boat surrounded by a storm because the earth was not at war with Him. Over the centuries there have been many times when the wind and waves were ready to sweep away His followers, but He rises and says to the elements, "Peace be still." I urge you to flee with the angels from the city of Sodom and come into the Ark of safety. Now is the time to repent and to ask for the Spirit of Jesus that we might cease to have hearts in rebellion against God, which causes the earth to be in rebellion against us.

Thank you Lord Jesus for wearing the crown of thorns for all these many years, and holding back the winds of strife – the winds that stir the souls of men in rebellion and wickedness and must eventually reap their harvest in the earth. May we turn from our wicked ways, cease from breaking your everlasting covenant and learn to keep your commandments, statutes, and judgments so that peace once again may reign on the earth.

14. The Power of Death

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, **He gave up His spirit.** John 19:30 (NKJV)

And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, Into your hands I commit my Spirit." **Having said this, He breathed His last.** Luke 23:46 (NKJV)

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us.** Romans 5:8

When Jesus hung His head and died, the universe, including those on earth who had witnessed the events leading to His death, beheld the most powerful demonstration of the Father's love for the human race. Despite all the mocking, spitting, hitting, and whipping Jesus never retaliated. He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." While Jesus was dying in agony, He thought of His earthly mother Mary and asked John to take care of her. He forgave the penitent thief and promised him eternal life. After witnessing these events a Roman soldier confessed:

Truly this man was the Son of God. Mark 15:39

Such patient, enduring, amazing love! Our Saviour had patiently endured the most cruel, unjust, violent manifestation of human hatred inspired by demons. Satan had stirred up the hatred of the Jewish leaders, priests, and the mob. In their actions we behold the character of Satan. Violent, hateful, deceitful, merciless, and cruel to the very end, Satan was fully

revealed for who he was. In the story of the cross we see fully revealed the character of God in Christ, and the character of Satan in men. In yielding Himself up to die our Lord Jesus defeated the one who had hated Him from the beginning of the controversy. In speaking of Satan, Jesus said to the Pharisees:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. **He was a murderer from the beginning**, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: **for he is a liar, and the father of it.** John 8:44

Through the capture of Christ at night, and the farce of a trial with the conflicting witnesses standing to condemn Christ, we see the deceptive, lying spirit of Satan. In the mocking and beating we see his cruelty and heartlessness. In the crucifixion we see the extremes of his violence. Through death Christ defeated Satan. As the Scriptures tell us:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that **through death he might destroy him that had the power of death**, that is, the devil; Hebrews 2:14

The Bible teaches that Satan has the power of death. This raises a critical question in understanding the character of God. How is it possible for Satan to have the power of death when it is God who told Adam and Eve:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Gen. 2:17

Did God threaten to kill Adam and Eve if they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? The Bible makes it clear what kills the sinner.

For the wages of sin is death... Romans 6:23

Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. Psalm 34:21

But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: **all they that hate me love death.** Proverbs 8:36

Death is the result of sin. It is the guilt of acting in a selfish, violent, and hateful manner against our loving Father in heaven that will kill the sinner. The Bible tells us that Christ not only has life, but He is life.

Jesus saith unto him, **I am** the way, the truth, and **the life**: John 14:6

Jesus said unto her, **I am the resurrection, and the life**: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: John 11:25

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the **Word of life**; (2) (**For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;**)
1 John 1:1-2

We need to pay careful attention to the words of Jesus. He not only *has* life, but He *is* life. If Jesus is life then He can have no connection to death. If Jesus *is* life then it is not possible for Him to *cause* death. Let us note carefully how Jesus expresses this:

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

It is the thief that kills, but it is Christ who gives life. If Christ administered death to those who transgress His Father's law, then Christ has both the power of life and death. By this we mean that life and death proceed from Him. But this is a complete contradiction, and that is why the Bible tells us that Satan has the power of death. Satan could not have the power of death if Christ used His power to kill people. This would mean that Christ would have the power of death. But the Bible clearly says that Satan has the power of death. Death is also directly linked to darkness:

Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; Job 10:21

Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; Psalm 107:10

Conversely, we read of Christ:

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. John 1:4

We are told that in Christ was life. It does not say life and death. This life that Christ has is the light of men. So light and life are bound together, and so are darkness and death. The message that Jesus came to proclaim to the world is this:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.** 1 John 1:5

There is no darkness in God which means there is no death in Him, and that leads us to logically conclude that God is not the author of death; neither does He have the power of death. All He can do is grant men the freedom to destroy themselves if they choose. The Bible calls death the enemy, which means it is *from* the enemy.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. 1 Corinthians 15:26

Death is an enemy and this is why Christ has already abolished death.

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (10) But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, **who hath abolished death**, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: 2 Timothy 1:9-10

In Christ there is no death that is why Jesus told Martha:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? John 11:26

How is it possible for the person who believes in Jesus never to die? People die all the time. Notice how Jesus referred to death:

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, **Our friend Lazarus sleepeth**; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. John 11:11

He said unto them, Give place: **for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth.** And they laughed him to scorn. Matthew 9:24

There is only one person in all of history that has died according to this definition.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should **taste death for every man**. Hebrews 2:9

If every man who is now in the grave has tasted death himself, what would be the purpose of Jesus tasting death for every man unless He died that death of final separation that the wicked experience at the end of the 1000 years?

Jesus is the only person to have actually died. The rest of those who have lived are sleeping in the grave. Everyone is going to be resurrected either to eternal life or to partake in the second death, or the second time that death occurs in the history of the universe. When Jesus cried “into thy hands I commit my spirit” while carrying the sins of the whole world, He shattered the power of death. He completely abolished the need for anyone to die. So at this very time the Bible tells us that death is already abolished. The only reason people will die at the end of time is because they refuse to accept the life that exists in Christ. You can’t abolish death and then at a later time cause death. This is completely impossible.

At the time when the wicked are finally destroyed the Bible says:

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death Revelation 20:14

It is often expressed that the lake of fire *is hell*, but the Bible tells us that hell is *cast into* the lake of fire along with death. What is the lake of fire? It is exactly the same experience that Jesus suffered on the cross. Our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:29. The purity of His character and the selflessness of His love when revealed to the sinner shows them the terrible guilt for their selfishness. The light burns into the darkness and because the wicked refuse to accept mercy, like Cain they all cry out “My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven” and are crushed by their own guilt. Thus evil slays the wicked and the wages of sin is death. Psalm 34:21, Romans 6:23.

If God and His Son kill people then they have death in Their Spirit. If this were true death could never be destroyed and it would not be considered an enemy. Again we need to state that Christ does not simply *have* eternal life, He *is* eternal life. You can't *be* eternal life and have death in your character at the same time, it is simply not possible!

Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?
James 3:11

We consider another vital point on this question.

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

As we behold the glory or character of the Lord we will be changed into the same image. As God and His Son are life, beholding them and knowing them means we will have life.

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. John 17:3

This means that if we read the Old Testament stories of the Bible believing that God kills people, then by beholding this as the character of God, it will become part of our character. Now think about this from another perspective. The Bible tells us:

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**: Colossians 1:27

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, **but Christ liveth in me**: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

If Christ is dwelling in you by His Spirit and you believe that Christ kills people as part of His character, then you will have the spirit of a killer dwelling in you. But since Christ is eternal life it is not possible to have Christ and the spirit of a killer dwelling in you at the same time.

This is one of the reasons why men die; it is because they worship a God who kills people. If you believe that God has stained His hands in the death of hundreds of thousands of people and will put to death billions of people in the future then the light of God's character is swallowed up by death, and death is understood to be reigning on the throne of the universe. If you worship a God like this and you behold a God like this day after day, this type of worship will kill you. Why? By beholding we become changed into the same image. 2 Corinthians 3:18.

The only way for God to destroy death was to reveal to men what was in their hearts towards the Son of God. When Jesus came to earth the natural hatred that exists in all men for Christ was revealed. In the cross we see how easily Satan can move the hearts of men to violence and murder. Through the death of the cross Christ revealed the character of Satan and gave to the world a chance to see how wicked the human race really is. As we look upon the cross we are confronted with our humanity, and through the Spirit of Christ we are offered the ability to receive His selfless, loving, gentle Spirit.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Matthew 11:29

Jesus is meek and lowly. Jesus loves His enemies. Jesus prays for those who hate Him, and He asks His Father to forgive those who persecute Him. This is a life-giving Spirit. This is life eternal.

But what about texts in the Bible that appear to tell us that God does kill people? Let us remember to read the Old Testament through the lens of the life of Christ. Reading the Bible outside of the life of Christ will indeed bring death. The reason for this, as we have stated, is that if you worship a God who kills people then you are worshipping a God of death, and by beholding this you will die. This is the symbolism found in the command for the Israelites not to climb Mt Sinai.

And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: (13) There shall not an hand touch it, but **he shall surely be stoned, or shot through**; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live:

when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.
Exodus 19:12-13

Only through the mediator could they speak to God. Moses represented Christ as our mediator. Moses could ascend the mountain without dying because He had an understanding of the character of God. As he came down from the mountain his face shone with the light of God's glory or character. If we read the Old Testament without having the life of Christ as a mediator then we will be overwhelmed or "shot through" with false ideas about God and that will ultimately kill us.

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. Deuteronomy 32:39

Without looking through the life of Christ we might read this as:

I kill some people and others I save alive.

Knowing that Jesus never killed anybody while on earth we are encouraged to keep searching to understand what this means. First we notice how *kill* and *make alive* are joined together:

I kill, *and* I make alive;

The word kill is directly connected to the word make alive. So the action of killing is followed by being made alive. The next clue is contained in the next part of the text:

I kill, and I make alive;
I wound, and I heal:

This is a common form of writing in Hebrew. It is called parallelism. The first part and second part are expressing the same idea but in different ways to give a clearer picture of the meaning. The principle of wounding and healing is directly connected to the work of the gospel. In order to be born again we must die to our old life. In order to be healed we must be wounded by the law which reveals our sins to us. There can be no resurrection into newness of life without death to the old life. Paul shows us the meaning of Deuteronomy 32:39 when he says:

...for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. 2 Corinthians 3:6

God kills the old man through the law but raises the new man to life through the Spirit. So this statement by Moses in Deuteronomy 32:39 is a gospel reference to the work of the Spirit of God to save us so that no one can take us out of His hand.

If we search the Bible for other examples of where this sequence of Hebrew words occurs we find another place that defines this phrase "I kill and I make alive."

The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. 1 Samuel 2:6

The first part of the verse is restated a second time, but in another way to explain the meaning. The use of the colon in the Kings James also is telling us that what comes after the colon is a definition of what has just been expressed.

The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

So this term is a reference to the resurrection power of Christ who is the resurrection and the life and not the author of death. This verse is a jubilation prayer of Hannah when she had triumphed. She continues:

The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. (8) He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them. 1 Samuel 2:7-8

Each time the context of the first action is followed by the second action. Hannah was brought low by the inability to have a child while being taunted by the other wife who was bearing children. This experience killed her old nature, but as she trusted in the Lord and the promised child came she was made alive again. She had been poor in spirit, but now she was rich. Job also speaks about this.

If a man **die**, shall he **live** again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Job 14:14

Job is speaking about the resurrection using the same two Hebrew words found in Deuteronomy 32:39. When Naaman comes to the king of Israel asking for healing, the king used this expression from Deuteronomy 32:39

And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, **Am I God, to kill and to make alive**, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.
2 Kings 5:7

Naaman was under the sentence of death due to his leprosy. The king of Israel exclaimed in effect, “Does this man think I can raise people from the dead?!”

So when we apply the principles of reading the Old Testament through the lens of the life of Jesus and we apply Miller’s rules of looking through the Bible for where the same phrase occurs, then the Bible will reveal to us what it means. When Moses wrote “I kill and I make alive” Christ was telling Moses that He is the Resurrection and the Life! A revelation of the same gospel is found in the New Testament. When we know this truth, nothing can take us out of the hands of our Father in heaven. Is this the way you are reading this text, or do you still read this as God saying to you, *I kill some people and others I save*. How do you read?

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;
Deuteronomy 30:15

How wonderful to know that Jesus is eternal life. He is the Life-giver and the restorer, and as we know He is the exact image of the Father. There is no darkness or death in the Father. Christ revealed this to us while on earth because He never killed anyone and kept all of His Father’s commandments. So who do you worship?

If the God you serve has the spirit of death in him then he is not the God of Jesus Christ as revealed in the gospel. In Satan is death and evil, and in Christ is life and good. Choose you this day whom you will serve.

He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; John 14:9

So who do you worship? It’s completely up to you.

15. My Father's Commandments

The book of Psalms speaks to us of the love of Christ for His Father's commandments. Before the Saviour came to earth He said:

Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,
(8) I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.
Psalm 40:7-8

The Son of God gives to us a divine demonstration of His Father's law. Both His love for the commandments and His daily example while here on earth show us what the law looks like in living vibrant colour. Further to this, the life of Jesus is not simply a demonstration of the law of His Father, it is His very life which dwells in the hearts of all those who serve Him.

The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. Proverbs 13:14

Jesus is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24) and the beginning of His wisdom is His deep reverence and love for His Father and His commandments.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. Proverbs 9:10

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole *duty* of man. Ecclesiastes 12:13

The only way we can fear or reverence God and keep His commandments is to have the Spirit of the Son of God abiding in us. He is the fountain of all who keep the Father's commandments. All those who have faith in Christ receive His commandment keeping through the Spirit. It is not possible to keep the law of God without having the Spirit of Christ.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: Romans 3:21-22

Paul tells us that the righteousness of God is manifested in Jesus Christ and freely given to us without any need on our part to seek to please God through our efforts. Everything is given to us by faith.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, **even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law:** for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. Galatians 2:16

When we accept that Jesus truly is the Son of God and believe in that name, then we receive His faith in the Father and all of His keeping of the law. What a wonderful gift we receive in Christ! The keeping of the law is freely available to us through the gift of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, (23) Meekness, temperance: **against such there is no law.** Galatians 5:22-23

Through the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ we read in the Psalms how the Son of God speaks of the law of God.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (2) **But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.** (3) **And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,** that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. Psalm 1:1-3

Through the Spirit of Christ, the law is a mighty fountain of living water. This is the symbolism expressed in the water that came forth from the rock that was struck.

Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.
Exodus 17:6

Horeb is the same place as Mt Sinai. The water therefore was flowing forth from the same place the law was given. So in Christ the law is not a dead letter but a living reality. When we receive Christ we receive the following sentiment in the gift of His Spirit.

O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Psalm 119:97

This statement is from the longest chapter in the Bible, a chapter that is all about how wonderful the law is. The simple truth is that the law of God is a transcript of His character. The Son of God loves the law simply because He loves His Father. When you compare descriptions of the law and the descriptions of God’s character you find they are exactly the same.

God’s Character		God’s Law	
1. Spiritual	John 4:24	1. Spiritual	Romans 7:14
2. Love	1 John 4:8	2. Love	Matt. 22:37-40
3. Truth	John 14:6	3. Truth	Psalms 119:142
4. Righteous	1 Cor. 1:30	4. Righteous	Psalms 119:144,172
5. Holy	Isa. 6:3	5. Holy	Romans 7:12
6. Perfect	Matt 5:48	6. Perfect	Psalms 19:7
7. Good	Luke 18:19	7. Good	Romans 7:12
8. Just	Deut. 32:4	8. Just	Romans 7:12
9. Pure	1 John 3:3	9. Pure	Psalms 19:8
10. Unchanging	James 1:17	10. Unchanging	Matt. 5:18

11. Stands Forever	Ps. 90:2	11. Stands Forever	Psalms 111:7,8
12. The Way	John 14:6	12. The Way	Malachi 2:7-9
13. Great	Ps. 48:1	13. Great	Hosea 8:12
14. Cleanses	Matt. 8:3	14. Clean	Ezekiel 22:26

As we examine the commandments we discover that they are all about preserving relationships; both our relationship with God and with each other.

God's Character	
1. I brought you out of bondage. You will have no other god's besides Me	Redeemer, Saviour, only God, <i>relational</i>
2. You shall not make any carved image	You can't have a relationship with wood, or a false idea
3. You will not take the name of God in vain	Integrity, transparency, <i>relational</i>
4. Remember the Sabbath for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth	Creator, source of life, <i>relational</i>
5. Honour father and mother	Family/ <i>relational</i> focus, paternal
6. You shall not kill	Life is precious, <i>relationships</i> are forever, I am the source of life
7. You shall not commit adultery	Valid intimate <i>relationships</i> are forever
8. You shall not steal	Spiritual/ <i>relational</i> , not material focus
9. You shall not lie	Integrity, transparency, <i>relational</i>
10. You shall not covet	Creator, source of life, <i>relational</i>

1. The first commandment tells us that God brought Israel out of the slavery of Egypt, which tells us that this God is a Redeemer and a Saviour. When He asks me to have no other gods but Him, it tells me that He wants a close friendship with me.

2. The second commandment tells me that God wants a heart-to-heart *relationship*. The worship of idols is not heart-to-heart worship. Neither is idolatry spiritual worship, meaning a connection of spirit with spirit, mind with mind. Idolatry is an objectification; it is a connection to an object that has no life and/or an idea that is not true.
3. The third commandment tells me that God is transparent in His *relationships*. If we enter into a *relationship* with him, He does not want us to pretend in the *relationship* thus rendering it useless or vain.
4. The fourth commandment is very special because it tells us that God is the fountain of life, that He created everything. This commandment has a very big impact on our perception of Him and greatly influences our manner towards Him. It is significant to note that the Sabbath commandment has the most amount of words of any of the commandments.
5. The fifth commandment is also special because it tells us how God's life flows through earthly channels. This command promises us long life if we honour our parents. It indicates specifically that our parents reveal to us something very special about God and in honouring them, we honour Him.
6. The sixth commandment tells us that God sees life as precious. It also tells us that God wants *relationships* to last forever.
7. The seventh commandment tells us that some *relationships* are dangerous and in respect to God, is a reflection of the first commandment to have no other gods. It is a reminder that God is our *life source*.
8. The eighth commandment tells us that God will provide our needs, that He will take care of us. It also tells us that God is not focused on things, but on *relationships*.
9. The ninth commandment is a reflection of the third. God wants transparency and integrity in *relationships*. A false witness destroys the *identity* of one or both parties and destroys communication.
10. The tenth commandment in respect to God, reminds us that He is the fountain of life. We will want for nothing when we believe this. It also tells us again of the *relational*-spiritual mind of God. Commandments 5-9 all can be seen and displayed, but this commandment is an issue of the heart. It is invisible. So this

commandment is critical in understanding the nature of God's kingdom.

So in summary the Ten Commandments tell us that God is:

1. The fountain of life
2. He is the Creator
3. He is our Redeemer
4. He wants true heart-to-heart *relationships*
5. He cares for us as a Father and supplies all our needs.

In his first epistle John tells us that God is love, and that the law as a reflection of His character is also love:

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (5) But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.
1 John 2:4-5

Jesus expressed it this way:

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. (10) **If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.** (11) These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. (12) **This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.**
John 15:9-12

Jesus:

- Has no other gods before His Father because He loves His Father
- does not worship false gods or make images because He loves His Father
- does not take His name or character in vain because He fully reflects the character of the Father
- delights in the Sabbath communion with His Father
- honours His Father
- does not kill because He is the resurrection and the life
- does not commit adultery because He seeks no relationship that is invalid to Him

- does not steal because He trusts in the inheritance given Him by His Father
- does not lie because lying destroys the integrity of relationships
- does not covet because He rests in His Father's provision.

Most people would have no question in regard to nine of these Ten Commandments. The problem for many is with the sixth commandment – thou shalt not kill. What do we do with stories like Joshua meeting the Captain of the Lord's Host?

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? (14) And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? Joshua 5:13-14

When Joshua was putting to death the inhabitants of Canaan it seems to many that these actions are encouraged and led by the Son of God before whom Joshua knelt and worshipped. Stories like the destruction of the Assyrian army are put forward as proof that indeed the Son of God kills people for the sake of preserving His chosen ones.

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. 2 Kings 19:35

We will address the story of the Assyrian army in another chapter. The fact before us is that when Jesus came to earth and lived amongst us He never killed anyone. We began this series with the thought that the life of Jesus Christ on earth is the full revelation of the Father. As Jesus told Philip:

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? John 14:9

Jesus told Philip that He was revealing the entire character of His Father to the disciples. In one of His prayers Jesus said:

I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. John 17:6

In Scripture *name* means *character* and Jesus indicates that He revealed this character to the disciples – those given Him out of the world.

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. John 17:4

Jesus is the express image of the Father's glory (Hebrews 1:3) and this glory or character He has revealed on earth. This means that the life of Jesus on earth is the complete expression of the Ten Commandments which is a transcript of the character of God. Jesus killed no one while on earth and this is included in His statement that He has kept His Father's commandments. This is the clearest confirmation that God does not kill people. It is written in His law and demonstrated by His Son while on earth.

One of the many implications of this truth is that it does truly require us to love our enemies. If there could exist people that are considered by God to be so wicked that He must kill them, then this provides men an opportunity to judge for themselves people whom they deem worthy of death. This completely short circuits the need to love our enemies. Instead we can simply judge them as wicked people that God will destroy, or when required have his "servants" to act as an agent of God to do the destroying. Therefore the belief that God kills people is the very mechanism used by men to avoid the need to love their enemies. As Jesus explains the law of God asks us to love God and love all men.

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? (26) He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? (27) And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. (28) And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. (29) But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? Luke 10:25-29

When the lawyer was placed under conviction to love all his neighbours including those he currently hated, he did what most people do and that is to seek to redefine the meaning of the key words. The word he wanted to clarify was the word *neighbour*. In the same way many people in order to avoid the conviction of the sixth commandment seek to redefine the word *kill*. Even though Jesus defines for us the meaning of the word by His earthly life, there remains attempts to change the intent of this law. The following reflects a common understanding:

There are two different Hebrew words (*ratsakh*, *mut*) and two Greek words (*phoneuo*, *apokteino*) for “murder” and “killing.” One means “to put to death,” and the other means “to murder.” **The latter one is the one prohibited by the Ten Commandments, not the former.** In fact, *ratsakh* has a broader definition than the English word “murder.” *Ratsakh* also covers deaths due to carelessness or neglect **but is never used when describing killing during wartime. That is why most modern translations render the sixth commandment “You shall not murder” rather than “You shall not kill.”** However, a very large issue can arise depending on which translation one studies. The ever-popular King James Version renders the verse as “Thou shalt not kill,” therefore opening the door to misinterpreting the verse altogether. **If the intended meaning of “Thou shalt not kill” was just that—no killing—it would render all of the God-endorsed bloodletting done by the nation of Israel a violation of God’s own commandment (Deuteronomy 20).** But God does not break His own commandments, **so, clearly, the verse does not call for a complete moratorium on the taking of another human life.**
<https://www.gotquestions.org/you-shall-not-murder.html>

A careful examination of the Scripture reveals that this argument is false. Firstly, within the very explanation the writer acknowledges that *ratsach* which is the word translated “kill” in the King James Version, not only means murder but also accidental death which we call manslaughter. This is not murder.

But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait, (23) Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm: (24) Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to

these judgments: (25) And the congregation shall deliver the slayer [H7523 Ratsach] out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil. Numbers 35:22-25

That the slayer [Ratsach H7523] might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live: Deuteronomy 4:42

Secondly, God did command that people who commit *ratsach* should face the same thing.

Whoso killeth any person, the murderer [ratsach H7523] shall be put to death [ratsach H7523] by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die. Numbers 35:30

How could it be possible that God could command things that the Ten Commandments forbids? In short, God could command any form of death in the Scriptures because God seeks to secure the sentence of death in order to give mercy; not to kill people. We addressed this point in chapter 9 – *The Law as a Mirror*.

Thirdly, the word *muth* [H4191] in Scripture is used to describe murder, and assassination. Saul desired to unlawfully murder David:

And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill [muth H4191] David. (2) But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: [muth H4191] now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself: 1 Sam 19:1-2

Saul ordered the unlawful murder of the priesthood:

And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the LORD. (18) And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon

the priests, and slew [muth H4191] on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. 1 Samuel 22:17-18

The assassination of Isbosheth:

For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bedchamber, and they smote him, and slew [muth H4191] him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night. 2 Samuel 4:7

Absalom orders the unlawful murder of his half-brother Amnon:

Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill [muth H4191] him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. 2 Samuel 13:28

Athaliah murders all the king's sons except Joash:

But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain; [muth H4191] and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. 2 Kings 11:2

Notice the translation in the New King James:

But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being murdered; [muth H4191] and they hid him and his nurse in the bedroom, from Athaliah, so that he was not killed. 2 Kings 11:2 (NKJV)

Another assassination using the word *muth* and the translation in the NIV:

But Pekah the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, conspired against him, and smote [nakah H5221] him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house, with Argob and Arich, and with him fifty men of the Gileadites: and he killed [muth H4191] him, and reigned in his room. 2 Kings 15:25 (KJV)

One of his chief officers, Pekah son of Remaliah, conspired against him. Taking fifty men of Gilead with him, he assassinated[H5221] Pekahiah, along with Argob and Arieah, in the citadel of the royal palace at Samaria. So Pekah killed [muth H4191] Pekahiah and succeeded him as king. 2 Kings 15:25 (NIV)

If *muth* is only used to judicially kill someone righteously then is it possible for the wicked to so called righteously slay a person?

The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay [muth H4191] him. Psalm 37:32

Because that he [the wicked] remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay [muth H4191]the broken in heart. (17) As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. Psalm 109:16-17

So the word *muth* can indeed be used to mean murder and assassination and the word *ratsach* can be used for accidental death. This proves false the claim that *muth* is somehow only for righteous killing and *ratsach* for murder.

Lastly, regardless of how this is defined both murder and judicial killing employ lethal force. Is the use of force part of God's kingdom? Jesus explained clearly in the Sermon on the Mount and through all the actions of His life that He does not use lethal force.

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. Matthew 5:39

What answer can be given to the person who says to the Lord, "I followed your example in the Old Testament when I put this evil doer to death." Shall it be said to such a person, "You followed the wrong example, that part of Scripture is not for you to follow." Can you see that it makes things very difficult? It is time to put the *muth* argument to death and believe the truth that thou shalt not kill means thou shalt not take life.

The earthly life of Jesus reveals for us the correct interpretation of the commandment "thou shalt not kill." Jesus never killed anybody. The Ten

Commandments are a law of love and love does not use force to defend itself. The commandments themselves tell us how sinners are punished.

...I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; Exodus 20:5

The wicked will indeed die; they will be punished by their own deeds. As we have indicated previously this will occur by allowing Satan to have access into their lives to the point where he destroys them, or by the earth itself reflecting back to men their rebellion and destroying them.

How wonderful to know that our Father in heaven is just like Jesus when He was on earth! What a joy to understand that Jesus has shown us the complete definition of the Ten Commandments in all its practical reality, including what it means to follow the command "Thou shalt not kill." Jesus never killed anyone and this example is the only possible way for us to truly learn to love our enemies as He taught us.

16. Rich Man and Lazarus in the Mirror

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is proof positive to the majority of Christians that God will torment and burn sinners in hell. The language seems clear and Jesus Himself is speaking the parable.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; (23) And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; **for I am tormented in this flame.** (25) But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. Luke 16:22-25

When this story is added to a number of other texts in Scripture the conclusion appears totally inescapable that God will appropriately burn and torment people in hell based on their level of sinfulness.

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. Matthew 18:8

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: Matthew 25:41

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: (11) And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Revelation 14:10-11

The hearer of the Word of God will read these verses and naturally infer that God will punish sinners with a sustained and indescribable agony. The person who has carefully studied the Gospels and considered the life of Jesus will be left with many questions that will prompt him to look deeper into the Bible to explain these passages.

Those who have anger in their hearts towards anyone or wish harm on any person will find satisfaction in the few verses above to justify their own spirit of revenge, because apparently God takes vengeance on His enemies. Additionally, those who judge themselves harshly and feel convinced they are worthy to die for their sins will also be satisfied with these texts. Yet we must go deeper than this. Rather than embrace full forgiveness of their sins and see the love of God, these texts are expressed in outwardly reverent tones to support an inward belief that God is tyrannical and harsh. They give their body to be burned but they have not love.

One of the most important reasons the majority of people read these texts as God taking vengeance and punishing His enemies is the human tendency towards scapegoating. This practice commenced with Adam when he blamed Eve for the reason he took the fruit. It is the unrighteous act of attempting to place guilt on another in order to bring peace and harmony to an individual or a community of people in crisis. The high priest Caiaphas did this to Christ.

Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. John 11:50

The religious leaders of Israel had a crisis. Their sins were being exposed and they needed to divert the attention of the people to the “unlawful” practices of Christ; therefore they presented Him as being at war with Moses and thus a sinner worthy of death. In the jealous minds of the Pharisees, Christ made a mock atonement, not in the sense of the gospel but by using the pliable Pilate to make Christ a scapegoat for them. They tried to silence the voice of conscience not through self-surrender but through attempting to remove the living witness that troubled them. Their attributes of anger and hatred towards Christ were self-sanctified by projecting them onto God and presenting Christ as smitten of God and afflicted.

When Christians rise up in apparent righteous indignation, proclaiming to the world that God is going to wipe out the rebellion of sinful people in triumphant tones of supposed “holy anger,” there is the very real probability that this form of personal atonement will be similar to that of Caiaphas. It finds self-righteousness through the self-satisfaction of seeing others less worthy than themselves being tortured and put to death.

In the case of Christ this atonement for the Jewish leaders was directed at a righteous man. It was a similar case to that of Cain and Abel. Abel troubled the conscience of Cain and his appeals to Cain made Cain feel sinful. In order to find personal atonement Cain sacrificed his brother and put him to death. In the case of Christ the Jewish leaders silenced the voice of Him who troubled their conscience, as well as putting to death the two thieves whom they perceived less worthy than themselves.

Many Christians can find a false atonement in the satisfaction of knowing that robbers, thieves, and all immoral people will be burned in hell while they go merrily to heaven. They may also use this carnal logic to silence the voice of conscience in the righteous life of another believer. The concept of atonement is muddled between Christ ostensibly taking their guilt and those deemed wicked receiving the punishment we deem them worthy of. The strange fire of this gospel can only superficially calm the troubled conscience of its sins.

Returning to our story, the first point we must mention is that a complete reading of the Bible shows us that people are not conscious when they die.

For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Ecclesiastes 9:5

The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence. Psalm 115:17

As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: (12) So man lieth down, and **riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.** Job 14:11-12

But the **day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;** in the which **the heavens shall pass away with a great noise,** and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 2 Peter 3:10

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh **shall burn them up,** saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. (2) But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. (3) And ye shall tread down the wicked; **for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.** Malachi 4:1-3

For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, **so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.** Obadiah 1:16

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day... (34) For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, (35) until I make thy foes thy footstool. Acts 2:29,34-35

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Revelation 21:4

The Bible teaches that men do not go to heaven or hell when they die. They remain in the grave until the heavens be no more which 2 Peter 3:10 tells us is at the coming of Christ. How then is it possible for Jesus to be teaching a story that seems to contradict the rest of the Bible? As it turns out this story Jesus told was a commonly held view to the Jews since they had been influenced by the Greeks a number of centuries earlier.

Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber explain that “it is probably better to see the story not as revealing details of life after death, but rather as giving a different twist to commonly held views about after life.” Edward William Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, page 149.

“The story carries clear echoes of well-known folk tales, to which Jesus is giving a fresh and startling twist.” N.T Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, page 255.

This is a critical principle to understand. Jesus uses common stories, believed by His audience, in order to teach them important truth.

Goldenhuyts concludes that Jesus “related this parable not in order to satisfy our curiosity about life after death but to emphasize vividly the tremendous seriousness of life on this side of the grave.” Edward William Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, page 149.

As we discussed in chapter 9, Christ uses a mirror to reflect back to man his own thinking. He does this partly to speak to men in ways that they understand but also to test what is in their heart. The person who is obedient to the Word of God and led by the Spirit will discern the spiritual meaning of the words of Jesus while the person in the flesh will apparently have his own ideas confirmed. As Jesus said to Nicodemus:

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? (10) Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? (11) Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. (12) If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? John 3:9-12

The mirror that Jesus uses in the book of John grows more and more difficult to understand until a person either accepts his thinking is wrong or walks away from Jesus.

Text	Comment
<p>John 2:19-21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. (20) Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? (21) But he spake of the temple of his body.</p>	<p>Jesus speaks of His body, the living temple, but they understand the physical temple in the city.</p>
<p>John 3:3-4 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (4) Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?</p>	<p>Jesus speaks of spiritual birth and Nicodemus thinks He means a physical birth.</p>
<p>John 4:13-15 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: (14) But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (15) The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.</p>	<p>Jesus speaks of spiritual water and the woman thinks He speaks of physical water.</p>
<p>John 5:17-18 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. (18) Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.</p>	<p>Jesus speaks of spiritual work and the Jews think He means physical work. They intentionally cling to an incorrect understanding which allows them to reject and desire to kill Jesus.</p>

<p>John 6:51-52,60,66 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (52) The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?... (60) Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?... (66) From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.</p>	<p>Jesus speaks of spiritual bread and drink while many people turned and rejected Jesus according to their own understanding of what He said.</p>
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This process in the book of John reveals the increasing use of the mirror that is operating in the ministry of Jesus. We see the language of Jesus in John chapter six becomes emphatic about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Jesus had clearly explained the symbols He was using in John 6:35. He was inviting them to come to Him and feed on His words to satisfy their hunger for spiritual food; to believe on Him as the sent of God to quench their thirst for spiritual comfort and divine acceptance. The people's refusal to actually listen to what He says causes them to reject Him. This process fully reveals what is in their unconverted hearts. It shows that they intentionally are willing to misunderstand Him in order to justify rejecting Him and overthrow all the evidence given to show that He is the true Messiah.

In the case of the mirror that Jesus uses in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, it goes deeper than simply the understanding of the physical or spiritual. Jesus actually uses ideas that the people believe in order to teach them something important. The Jews began to demand of Jesus a sign of His authority. They were hardening their hearts against Him. The urgency of the situation required Jesus to explain to them the life and death reality they were facing. He spoke to them with a story they understood. Thus He reflected back to them their own thinking. This was needed because of the hardness of their hearts.

Those today who read this story with a belief that those they consider criminal should be made to suffer torment will easily justify their hatred of others. Some will question – why would Jesus do this? Why would He say things that can be easily misconstrued?

The first work of the gospel is to convict people of sin. This conviction of sin often makes manifest what is hid in our hearts. Luke 8:17, Mark 4:22, Luke 12:2. This is the purpose of the divine mirror of the law, for we all have sin that we are unconscious of, don't accept, repress, or don't understand the full significance of. The revelation of sin in the minds of men requires the fullest efforts of the Wisdom of God.

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: John 16:8

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4)
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
Matthew 5:3-4

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Romans 3:19

We recall the story of the foreign woman from Canaan who asked Jesus to heal her daughter. His initial silence acts as a mirror to bring out of the disciples their wrong attitudes towards foreigners. The divine mirror reflects back our thoughts and motives. Christ as the Word of God speaks to us in a way that discerns our thinking and desires.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

When people use some statements of Jesus to prove that God tortures and burns people alive, in actuality it reveals what they really think about Him. When other statements are introduced to show that Christ is not

violent and does not kill people, and yet He claims to be exactly like His Father, then we are placed in a position where we have to make a choice.

When the foreign woman who asked Jesus to heal her daughter heard Him say, "It is not right to take the children's food and give it to dogs," she had to make a choice right then. Will she take what He said to reject Him? Or will she take what she has learned of His character to hold on in faith believing He will help her? This is the divine work of the gospel to bring us to a decision point about the character of our Father.

The fruit from the study of Scripture and the walk with Christ is not cognitive dissonance for the sincere and humble student who holds on in faith for answers, even if centuries of traditional dogma loom dreadfully over him. When I read the story of the rich man in the flame and Jesus talking about God destroying both body and soul in hell, I made the decision to seek and harmonise these with other statements, such as to love your enemies, and you shall not kill. We have addressed aspects of the death of the wicked previously, but now let us bring together passages that speak of fire in relation to God.

And the angel of the **LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush**: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. Exodus 3:2

And the sight of the **glory of the LORD** was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. Exodus 24:17

Behold, the **name of the LORD cometh from far**, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and **his tongue as a devouring fire**: Isaiah 30:27

The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. **Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?** who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? (15) **He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly**; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; Isaiah 33:14-15

For our **God is a consuming fire**. Hebrews 12:29

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. (3) And **there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.** (4) **And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost,** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:2-4

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing **thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.** Romans 12:20

On the day of Pentecost the apostles were clothed in the fire of the Spirit of God. They were aglow with the fire but were not consumed just like the burning bush in the time of Moses. The question asked in Isaiah 33:14 is: Who will dwell with devouring fire and everlasting burning? It is the righteous that will burn forever in the flame of God's love. When the love of God is fully revealed at the end of time, when all the wicked see exactly what God has done for them and all His efforts to save them, the guilt and shame of their rejection of Him will be as coals of fire on their heads. It is their wickedness that crushes them – not the hand of God. The fire is only selfless love, and when that love is revealed it instantly brings self-reproach and deep anguish. Is the reason that God has power to destroy body and soul in hell is simply because He is so loving, merciful, and caring?

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (29) Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. (30) But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Matthew 10:28-31

Verse 28 in light of verse 29-31 does not seem connected. At first Jesus tells us to fear Him which is able to destroy body and soul in hell and then He tells us of the Father's tender care for us and not to be afraid. If God is the person directly torturing people in hell, using literal fire that melts

their skin, then how can He say in verse 31 “don’t be afraid” without a contradiction?

Jesus uses verse 28 to speak the thoughts of men in a mirror. He is reflecting our natural thoughts about God back to us. For the person reading who is full of sin and wickedness, he should be afraid when he sees how different his character is to that of God and how much he has tortured Christ with his own selfishness.

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. James 1:15

Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. Psalm 34:21

It is sin that causes death – not God. It is through the acute realization of how deeply our heavenly Father cares for the sparrow and numbers the hairs of our heads, how truly He thinks of us in a loving way all the time, that we will be destroyed utterly. The full realization of this will cause terrible guilt for the sinner and he will be overwhelmed and undone. Only in this way does Matthew 10:28 and Matthew 10:29-31 make sense side by side.

The thought is sometimes expressed that since God reveals His character, and He knows that it will kill the wicked, that He is somehow responsible for their death. The very fact that He reveals Himself would make Him a killer. This makes as much sense as a doctor who is requested to turn off the life support system for a terminally ill patient to be considered a killer, or somehow responsible for their death. In order for humanity to have open fellowship with God, particularly in eternity, God must reveal who He truly is. We remember also that the wicked at the end of time surround the city of the New Jerusalem and wish to take it, which means as they approach the city they have murder, jealousy, and theft in their hearts.

And they [Satan and the Wicked] went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire [of selfless love like the day of Pentecost] came down from God

out of heaven, and [the crushing guilt of selfishness] devoured them.
Revelation 20:9

When human selfishness approaches such selflessness, the crushing guilt of self-condemnation makes certain the death of the wicked.

Whenever we read the Bible the mirror is before us. It reflects back to us how we think and then we have to make an eternal choice.

To the pure You show Yourself pure, but to the wicked You show Yourself hostile. Psalm 18:26 (NLT)

When the angel called to Abraham and prevented him from taking the life of his son Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham suddenly had a choice as to whether he would change the picture he had of God. The command to slay his son was the reflection of his own thoughts, and it seemed absolutely certain that his son must die. We all have to come to that point of decision. May we hear the words *lay not your hands on the lad* and realise that God is not the author of death. “Sin offering and burnt offering I have not required.” Psalm 40:6.

So what then was the purpose of Jesus in telling this story? It is found in His concluding remark.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. Luke 16:31

Christ impressed upon them the importance of the decisions we make this side of the grave, and that we need to listen carefully to the writings of Moses and the prophets in making those decisions.

17. Smiting Angels

The angels of God played a significant role in the life of Jesus on earth. The angel Gabriel announced to Mary her privilege to give birth to the Messiah. The angels sang as they welcomed His birth. At a critical point right before His crucifixion an angel came to strengthen Jesus for the task. Luke 22:43. An angel was sent by the Father to call Jesus forth from the grave and they announced to His dejected followers that He was risen from the dead. The angels were critical to the ministry of Jesus and all of their work was based upon the character of Christ for we read:

Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. (50) Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. (51) And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.
John 1:49-51

The work of the angels is carried out upon the character and work of Christ because all that they do is based upon the Son of man. The Bible says:

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Hebrews 1:14

The angels of God love to serve our Father and Lord Jesus. They also love to serve by protecting and encouraging us.

The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. Psalm 34:7

They are filled with the Spirit of God and sing the praises of God and His Son.

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, (12) saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" Revelation 5:11-12

The angels are deeply interested in the gospel and the plan of salvation.

Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. 1 Peter 1:12

They delight to bring peace to the earth and good will towards us.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, (14) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Luke 2:13-14

They excel in strength and are completely obedient to God and keep all His commandments.

Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Psalm 103:20

Our Father commands His holy angels to protect us from Satan and his destroying angels as we discovered in chapter eleven about the anger of the Lord. As the holy angels are filled with the Spirit of Christ, they keep the commandments of the Father. Though the holy angels do not kill people, they do use their power to restrain the forces of evil and to move and destroy inanimate objects. There are some passages of Scripture that

suggest otherwise and this is what we want to consider in this chapter. If you search the words *angel* and *smote* in the Scriptures you will find four Bible stories mentioned.

1. Numbers 22. Balaam and the donkey. Balaam smote the donkey who saw an angel.
2. 2 Samuel 24. David numbering Israel and 70,000 people smitten by the angel of the Lord.
3. 2 Kings 19:35 and Isaiah 37:36. Assyrian Army of 185,000 men smitten by the angel of the Lord.
4. Acts 12:24. Angel of the Lord smote Herod for his sin.

In the first story the angel did not smite anyone but rather Balaam smote the donkey after it stopped for fear of the angel. The angel was standing before Balaam with a sword.

And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way.
Numbers 22:23

The threatening posture of the angel with a sword in hand does suggest that he was prepared to do Balaam harm and this thought appears to be further strengthened by the other stories in our list.

In the next story, David seeks to number his forces in an act of pride to rank Israel among the nations and the result was the death of 70,000 Israelites.

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.
2 Samuel 24:1

So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men. (16) And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite. 2 Samuel 24:15-16

A first reading of this story suggests something quite frightening. In pride, the king numbers the people and then God apparently sends an angel to kill 70,000 people and then repents of the evil done and relents on killing more people. What is even more strange is that 2 Samuel 24:1 actually appears to say that God Himself moved David to number Israel suggesting that God Himself was responsible for what happened next. For any person who believes that “God is love,” the question has to be asked “What on earth is this story about?” You will remember in chapter nine we looked at how the law operates as a mirror to our souls and these stories about smiting angels provide a perfect test to see whether we will read the Scriptures in the light of the character of Jesus or project our own human characteristics onto God.

Although the next story about the destruction of the Assyrian army involves the death of more people, it is apparently easier to live with because this nation wanted to kill God’s people and were some of the cruellest characters on earth. The Assyrians skinned people alive and impaled them on spikes. Such violent behaviour against the followers of God may subdue for many the question of the use of deadly violence by the angels of the Lord.

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. 2 Kings 19:35

A supposed plain reading of these statements strongly suggests that the angels of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. It seems perfectly logical that when an evil menace is seeking to kill God’s people then these soldiers should be put to death for their murderous designs. The final story in our list relates to Herod. He seems like the most suitable candidate to be put to death considering all the deeds he had done.

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. (22) And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. (23) And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. Acts 12:21-23

Herod had killed James the brother of John and then planned to kill Peter. It is clear that it was a good angel who smote Herod. It is also clear that this was a retributive punishment from the Almighty. Retribution is repayment or compensation for deeds done. It would be extremely tempting to cease our search at this point and form a conclusion that indeed God sends His good angels to put wicked people to death. Although the first story has complications the other two stories concerning the Assyrians and Herod appear unmistakable and to question this thought is unthinkable for most people.

In this book we have presented the thought that it is through the lens of the life of Christ that we must approach all the other stories of the Bible. If a person does not take this decision then it is most likely they will cease their search here and conclude the righteous angels of God do kill people.

In chapter two of this book we mentioned the rules of William Miller that require of us to take everything that the Scripture says on a subject to form our conclusion. It encourages us to study more deeply to harmonise Scripture when it appears there are contradictions. It is worthy of note that there is no record of angels killing people during the ministry of Jesus on earth. How does this reconcile with the stories of the smiting angels? Let us begin with the story of where David numbered Israel. How do we understand the following verse? How did God move David to number Israel?

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.
2 Samuel 24:1

If we compare this with the same story in another place, we read as follows:

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. 1 Chronicles 21:1

If we *only* read 2 Samuel 24:1 and demanded a plain reading of this text then we must say that God Himself led David into doing this in order that 70,000 Israelites might be killed. Does this not invite us to question how this idea fits with a God who claims to be love?

In the search to answer that question we discover 1 Chronicles 21:1 which reveals that Satan was allowed to tempt David to number Israel. We are then invited to harmonise the two accounts. Do we conclude that God and Satan worked together to cause the destruction of these Israelites? Once again we are invited to dig deeper to find the solution. This process tests the hearts of men to see if they really believe that God is a loving Father, a reluctant judge, or a ruthless tyrant. Those who see grace in the eyes of the Lord will continue to study until they can harmonise the accounts, others simply believe the contradiction and state that God is loving even while doing these things.

Earlier in the history of Israel, the request had been made to have a king like the other nations. Israel wanted to be like everyone else.

And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. 1 Samuel 8:5

This request reflected the desire for national greatness. Yet this request actually was a rejection of God.

And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. 1 Samuel 8:7

The whole principle of kingship was a rejection of the leadership of God. While Saul started well as the king of Israel, his character weaknesses soon became apparent and he did not advance the kingdom ambitions of Israel very far. On the other hand, David conquered all the enemies of Israel and under his leadership the nation prospered and grew greatly. Satan tempted David to compare the current prosperity of the nation with the past to flatter him. The Lord sent a message of appeal to David through his General, Joab, but Satan succeeded in seducing David into numbering Israel.

And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: **but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?** 2 Samuel 24:3

The Lord allowed this to happen and did not prevent Satan's temptations upon David. The failure resulted in pestilence falling upon Israel.

So the LORD sent [H5414] a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men. 2 Samuel 24:15

The Hebrew word for *sent* is actually *nathan* which means to *give* and sometimes *give up*. Notice carefully the following verse in relation to pestilence as related to the covenant of God.

And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered [H5414] into the hand of the enemy. Leviticus 26:25

Here *nathan* is translated *delivered*. Note carefully the last part of the verse. The word *and* is supplied and could easily read:

I will send the pestilence among you; ye shall be delivered [H5414] into the hand of the enemy.

This means that when the pestilence comes this is because they have been handed over to the enemy.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (2) I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. (3) **Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.** Psalm 91:1-3

It is Satan who destroyed these people. The alternative is that God allowed Satan to tempt David and Israel and lead them into sin, and then God turns around and smashes 70,000 people. This position is not consistent. Satan stood up and was able to tempt David because David was not working according to God's will. When David succumbed to this temptation, it gave Satan greater access to Israel and he took advantage of the situation to bring pestilence among them. Yet this does not explain the part about the angel that smote the Israelites.

And when the angel stretched out [H7971 send away, loose] his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed [H7483 cast off, lose] the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite. (17) And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house. 2 Samuel 24:16-17

Satan is the agent that brought the pestilence but what is this sword that the angel of the Lord stretched out over Jerusalem? What is the sword that the Son of God uses?

And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. (17) And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: Revelation 1:16-17

We see the reaction of the apostle John when he saw the countenance of the Son of God and the sword that came out of His mouth. What was that sword?

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

For those 70,000 people who faced the wrath of the destroyer, the Spirit of God came to them with deep conviction of sin in order that they might repent. The work of this deep conviction is urgent because if they refuse to heed the work of the Spirit they will be completely unsheltered and face Satan the destroyer. Like the people at the cleansing of the temple, they rush from His presence. In the case of the 70,000 they rush from the presence of Jesus straight into the waiting arms of Satan who cuts them down with the pestilence. They could have repented of their sins and asked God to forgive them but they ran from His presence and death was the result.

This process is exactly the same as what God said He would do to the Canaanites.

I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. (28) And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. Exod 23:27-28

The sending of the fear is the conviction of sin that causes terror to the wicked. The hornets are the pricks of the guilty conscience tormented with guilt. These pricks drive them out of the presence of God and into the hands of the enemy. But if they had repented and become as little children they might have been saved. Not everyone left the temple and yet all felt the sword.

So we see in the story of the numbering of Israel that in a last effort to reach those falling into the hands of Satan, the Spirit of God came to them and desired to cleanse their hearts of sin that they might be saved. When they refused, Jesus uttered the sad words “Your house is left unto you desolate.” The word for *sword* in Hebrew actually means *drought* and when the soul completely resisted Christ, He was compelled to leave them to the hand of Satan because they refused Him entrance.

Consider also that Satan controlled the hearts of these people. Christ was seeking one final time to reach them. Satan was determined not to lose his prey and when the human heart refused Christ’s entrance, Satan sought to secure these souls by taking their lives rather than run the risk of them repenting of their sins. We do not know the exact details of the case but the principles are not hard to follow.

The charge is raised, “You are spiritualising the texts of Scripture.” The Bible uses the word *sword* and we should take it literally. Firstly, it was pestilence that killed the people. They did not die by a physical sword from the angel. Secondly we are required to bring everything we can together and then form our conclusion. Note carefully rule 11 of William Miller on this point.

How to know when a word is used figuratively. If it makes good sense as it stands, *and does no violence to the simple laws of nature*, then it must be understood literally, if not, figuratively.

As the people perished from pestilence, the sword mentioned as being in the hand of the angel must have had another purpose. The Bible tells us in several places about the sword that Christ uses, and that sword is the Word of God. We have described how the angel smote the people with the sword and yet they died of pestilence. How the angel of the Lord smite them? The sword was the Word of God convicting the people. They refused to die to self through this sword and so the Spirit of God left them and the destroyer took their lives. So what about the 185,000 Assyrian soldiers?

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. 2 Kings 19:35

Note carefully that it says the angel of the Lord smote them and in the morning they were found dead. It does not say that the angel of the Lord struck them with a weapon of force causing them to die instantly. If we return to the New Testament we note something interesting.

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. (3) His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: (4) And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. Matthew 28:2-4

The mere sight of an angel caused the men to shake and become as dead men. This phenomenon happened to righteous men like Daniel and John.

And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. (8) Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Daniel 10:7-8

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: Revelation 1:17

In the case of John, it was Jesus that he saw in vision. The pure and holy nature of the angels exposes the sinful nature of men in the same way as

Jesus and the Father. In chapter 10 we looked at what happens when we come into the presence of God:

And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts. Malachi 3:5

Our natural thoughts when reading this verse is to think that God is going to cut down and destroy the wicked in His anger. Again the Word of God acts as a mirror. The text says, "I will come near to you in judgment." Our Father wants to come close to us and reason with us about our sins. To come into the presence of One so selfless and loving leaves no options but to repent or flee from the light. It is not possible to be passive in the presence of God. Those who cling to their sins run for what they think is their lives, but they show that in fact they love death and are fleeing from life.

So pure is the nature of the holy angels that the mere revelation of their presence will strike terror into the hearts of men rendering them prostrate and immobilised. As we continue to read the story in Daniel chapter 10 we see that Daniel had to be strengthened to endure the presence of the holy angel.

Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. (10) **And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands.** (11) And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, **I stood trembling.** (12) Then said he unto me, **Fear not, Daniel:** for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.... (15) And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb. (16) And, behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no

strength. (17) For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. (18) Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, (19) And said, **O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened,** and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me. Daniel 10:9-12,15-19

The angel had to reassure Daniel that he was greatly loved twice and that he did not need to fear. There is no recorded sin in the life of Daniel and still this is the reaction of a good man to the presence of a righteous angel. The angel wished him no harm and assured him of the love of God and yet Daniel trembled and quaked with fear to the point of having no strength, and this was after weeks of prayer and fasting. If this experience should happen to a righteous man then what would happen to wicked men? If Daniel had prolonged exposure to the angel without being strengthened, it is possible he could have died even though the intent of the angel was only love towards him.

The question that must be asked is what caused the terrible fear in Daniel leading to loss of strength? It was his sinful nature coming in contact with the purity of the presence of the angel of God. The pure selfless loving character of God is a devouring fire to sinful human beings.

And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. Exodus 24:17

Did the Assyrian soldiers die of fright in seeing the angel? It is possible. Were the soldiers immobilised by the presence of the angel leaving them prostrate with fear and then Satan took their lives in anger for their weakness? We are not told. We are simply told that the soldiers encountered the angel and in the morning they were dead. If you read this story through the lens of the character of Jesus you know that the angel had no desire to kill them. When Jesus cleansed the temple, men ran in fear but anyone could have turned in repentance and pled with God to forgive them for their wickedness. In the presence of the angel, the soldiers had a brief moment to discover the depth of their wickedness. The angel may have confronted them with their sins to encourage them to repent of their design and save them but they refused and thus were left

to the mercy of Satan. We can't say with any certainty but we do know that the angels of God are filled with the character of Jesus and Jesus never killed anyone.

We know that at the Second Coming the wicked are destroyed by the brightness of the coming of Christ. This means a revelation of the character of Christ that causes terrible torment in the sinner. The torment comes because the sinner refuses to repent. Their hearts fail them for fear. A description of this process is recorded in the book of 2nd Esdras from the Apocrypha.

But only I saw that he sent out of his mouth as it had been a blast of fire, and out of his lips a flaming breath, and out of his tongue he cast out sparks and tempests. (11) And they were all mixed together; the blast of fire, the flaming breath, and the great tempest; and fell with violence upon the multitude which was prepared to fight, and burned them up every one, so that upon a sudden of an innumerable multitude nothing was to be perceived, but only dust and smell of smoke: when I saw this I was afraid. 2 Esdras 13:10-11

Shew me now yet the interpretation of this dream. 2 Esdras 13:15

And an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as thou sawest them, willing to come, and to overcome him by fighting. (35) But he shall stand upon the top of the mount Sion. (36) And Sion shall come, and shall be shewed to all men, being prepared and builded, like as thou sawest the hill graven without hands. (37) And this my Son shall rebuke the wicked inventions of those nations, which for their wicked life are fallen into the tempest; (38) And shall lay before them their evil thoughts, and the torments wherewith they shall begin to be tormented, which are like unto a flame: and he shall destroy them without labour by the law which is like unto me. 2 Esdras 13:34-38

The smiting of the Assyrians by the angel of the Lord indicates that this is the Word of God convicting these men of their sins. It fell like a great tempest upon them and their refusal to repent caused them pain.

And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. (10) And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they

gnawed their tongues for pain, (11) And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. Revelation 16:9-11

They were destroyed “without labour by the law which is” the transcript of the character of God. Is this not the same fire that devoured Aaron’s two sons Nadab and Abihu when they brought strange fire into the sanctuary? Even though fire from the LORD consumed them they were carried out in their clothes.

And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. (3) Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. (4) And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. (5) **So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp;** as Moses had said. Leviticus 10:2-5

Again another way that we know that this smiting is the conviction of sin is by the way this word is used as follows:

And it came to pass afterward, that **David's heart smote** [H5221] him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. 1 Samuel 24:5

And David's heart smote [H5221] him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. 2 Samuel 24:10

This is the same word as in 2 Kings 19:35

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD **went out, and smote** [H5221] in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. 2 Kings 19:35

Our last story in the list is the death of Herod.

And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. Acts 12:23

From our previous examples this story is simple to explain. Herod transgressed the law and broke the everlasting covenant. The Word of God deeply convicted him of his sinful behaviour in order to bring him to repentance. The conviction caused him agony of mind but he refused repentance. This refusal gave Satan access to kill him with disease. Herod was given over to the enemy because he broke the covenant.

And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, **I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.** Leviticus 26:25

Christ brought upon Herod the sword of His Word. Herod refused to repent and so he was “delivered into the hand of the enemy” who brought pestilence upon him. What was the difference in the stroke that Herod experienced compared to Peter? Peter walking in the power of Pentecost had a clear conscience, Herod did not. Peter was kept in prison for preaching the name of Jesus and was awaiting execution. When the angel woke Peter he was not full of fear at the presence of the angel. Herod experienced something far different. For him it thundered.

Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. (29) **The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him.** John 12:28-29

The smiting which could have been as a still small voice was like thunder to Herod and it terrified him to death. The angels have no inclination to kill men; they know the wickedness in men revealed by their purity is enough to kill without any motive on their part. Angels move amongst men constantly shielding men from their full presence to protect them. How gracious they are to us!

We see that the angel that smites people resulting in death occurs when the Word of God convicts people of sin. The torment of one’s own sinfulness causes agony of mind. The presence of pestilence indicates that

the Spirit of God has been removed and the destroyer has done his work as God ceases to protect those who refuse to repent. It is sin that punishes sin. The angels of God are filled with the Spirit of Jesus. They keep the Father's commandments and they do not wield a physical sword. They are mighty in the Word of God and filled with the righteousness of Jesus. Their purity, love, and holiness are a terror to the wickedness of sinners and their holiness strikes terror into the hearts of the unrighteous. Their holiness is their chief power, yet they also have power to hold in check the forces of the wicked one.

Therefore the righteous angels have tremendous power. When they are commanded to loose their arms, and step back from their work of protection, they allow the full force of Satan's fury to be released. Though they do not wish to do this, they will do it when they are commanded. This can only occur when a person refuses to heed the warning of God and persist in breaking His commandments. After years of long suffering finally the Spirit of God driven back relents and allows the sinner to have the master they have chosen.

How blessed we are to have their protection and guidance. At times they reveal their presence to prevent men from their deeds of evil, but men who are determined to follow their course of sin would rather die in terror than repent and be saved. Such is the wickedness of the human heart. We have nothing to fear from the angels of God, there is no possibility of them turning from our protectors to our killers, they are always ascending and descending upon the Son of man who never killed anyone.

18. Plain Statements

Before moving on to address more examples in the Bible of what appears to be God supposedly killing people, we need to revisit and apply some of the principles we have established previously.

It is extremely simple to take isolated portions of the Bible and put them together to build a case that destroys the truth that God truly is loving, gentle, and kind. It has often been said to me, "You say that God does not kill people but the Bible plainly tells you that He does." I will list a range of texts used to prove this. When you line them up they appear to present a compelling case for many people.

And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.
Genesis 6:7

Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; Genesis 19:24

But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him. Genesis 38:7 (NKJV)

And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also. Genesis 38:10 (NKJV)

And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem. Exodus 13:15 (NKJV)

And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. (27) And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. (28) And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. Exodus 14:26-28

And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: (10) Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. Exodus 32:9-10

And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. (28) And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. Exodus 32:27-28

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. (2) And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Leviticus 10:1-2

And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. Numbers 11:1

And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. Numbers 25:4

And they warred against the Midianites, just as the LORD commanded Moses, and they killed all the males. Numbers 31:7

And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Deuteronomy 7:2

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. Deuteronomy 32:39

So the LORD routed them before Israel, killed them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, chased them along the road that goes to Beth Horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah. (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 the children of Israel killed with the sword. Joshua 10:10-11

Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. (3) Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.' 1 Samuel 15:2-3

We could list several more texts like this. There are many stories in the Old Testament that seem to read very plainly but all of the stories combined are nothing compared to the mass slaughter of humanity described in the New Testament.

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, (8) And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. (9) And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of

heaven, and devoured them. (10) And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.
Revelation 20:7-10

It states that the wicked will be as the sand of the sea? How many grains of sand are there on a sea shore? We might propose a conservative figure of 100 Billion people apparently all shrieking and howling in the worst kind of agony. This makes the Old Testament narratives seem like kindergarten fables in comparison.

Many Christians, in some strange form of triumph, read these passages and proclaim that it proves that the God they “*worship*” inflicts horrendous agony on billions and billions of people for rebelling against Him by roasting them alive for good measure.

Admittedly the texts that speak of God seemingly commanding the hacking to death of little babies are strategically overlooked or avoided except for the most hardened and callous individuals who somehow manage to defend this murderous behaviour as godly.

What they consider as proof triumphant actually proves to be their greatest defeat.

Who could rationally conceive of living eternally in the presence and offering worship on bended knee to such a horrendous being, while truly trying to convince yourself that you should never feel desperately afraid that you also might be killed one day?

If the correct reading of these stories means that God sends sheets of flames from Himself directly onto the wicked, while all the righteous simply watch the proceedings like a movie from the walls of Zion hearing the shrieking and howling of the damned, then realistically would the righteous really rejoice when all their loved ones who rejected the truth are all burned alive (whether briefly or perpetually) without any mercy?

Is there some sort of righteous satisfaction that the God you worship not only kills your wayward family members but tortures them first and slowly destroys them in the most unimaginable horror?

I suppose some might say that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes and remove the former things from their memory.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Revelation 21:4

Is this eternal bliss to be desired of, or is it the destroying of evidence by a character that is unimaginably cruel and vicious?

There is something very unsettling about this picture for any rational person that has experienced the joys of love within marriage, or cradled a baby in their arms, or snuggled into the loving embrace of a parent, or even those whom have cared for their precious animals like a horse, dog, or cat.

The use of these texts in this manner is often accompanied with the assertion that we must take the Bible as it reads or that we must read it literally and accept these plain statements as proof that God will kill the wicked.

It is absolutely true that we must take the *Bible* as it reads, and taking the Bible as it reads means taking *all* of the Bible and not simply parts of the Bible that will suit the argument that we are seeking to make.

As we learned in chapter two we must take all of the texts on a subject and put them together. Those who come to the conclusion that God directly kills people are not reading all of the Bible, but rather the parts of the Bible that agree with their position. If you read the entire Bible you will be placed in many positions where things simply don't initially seem to fit together. Consider the following:

Gentle, meek, and loving	Vengeful, hateful, and destroying
Matt 26:52 Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.	Deut 32:40-41 For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. (41) If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me.

<p>Luke 9:56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.</p> <p>Isa 11:9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.</p>	<p>Gen 6:7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.</p>
<p>Matt 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;</p>	<p>Psa 18:40 Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me.</p> <p>Psa 143:12 And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.</p>
<p>Exo 20:13 Thou shalt not kill.</p> <p>2 Cor 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.</p>	<p>Gen 38:7 (NKJV) But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him.</p> <p>Eccl 3:3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;</p>
<p>1 John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.</p>	<p>Mal 1:2-3 I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, (3) And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.</p>

<p>Psa 100:5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.</p> <p>1 Chron 16:34 O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.</p>	<p>Isa 9:17 Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows:</p>
<p>Isa 27:4 Fury is not in me: who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.</p>	<p>Job 20:23 When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain it upon him while he is eating.</p>

If you read the Bible carefully apparent contradictions will soon begin to appear.

At the point of apparent contradiction you must either choose to ignore the portions of the Bible that don't seem to agree with what you already understand or you must humbly kneel before God and ask Him to teach you how to read the Bible and harmonise these apparent contradictions.

The question is why did God write the Bible in this way? Why could it not have been written in a simpler way than it has been? The unconverted man is naturally proud. He is also naturally hostile towards God even though he may not be aware of it.

For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. Romans 8:7 (NLT)

This natural hostility will cause him to read the Bible in a way that reveals God as harsh and tyrannical. Such a man may profess to love God and honour him, but this natural hostility is not willing to overcome these apparent contradictions; instead it will choose to read all the texts that reveal God as a killer to then say, in a meek voice when required, that we must accept what the Bible says.

Yet such a man in reality does not accept all that the Bible says. This man accepts what he wants to accept and ignores those parts that present God in a different light. In this way we discover the truth that:

...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.
James 4:6

How does this work?

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: [mirror] James 1:23

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Matthew 7:2

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. Romans 2:1

When man reads the Bible and ignores the passages that speak of a completely loving God and chooses to settle on the passages that apparently speak of God directly killing people, he reveals his own character. Such a man, similarly to Satan, places his own attributes onto God and reveals his enmity towards God.

These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Psalm 50:21

God has inspired the Bible to be written in a way to reveal the character of man. The blasphemous nature of man is always seeking to make God in his image. He projects his nature and judgment onto God and so the Bible has been very carefully designed to create a mirror back into the souls of men.

When an unconverted man reads the Bible, he instantly sees his own face in the actions of God. The man that has confessed his sins and knows there is nothing good in him instead looks to the precious character of Jesus, and then when he reads the Bible he sees a very different picture of God. The character of Christ revealed to men on earth changes the reflection in the mirror of the Bible and the serpent's scales fall from his eyes and he sees what is truly so precious that it enraptures the heart.

The natural man reads the parts of Scripture that agree with his thinking and simply ignores the rest, or he notes the surface-level contradictions and rejects the Bible completely.

The spiritual man reads all the Scripture and is humbled by the apparent contradictions. He then acknowledges his inability to fully comprehend God's word and pleads for help to understand the Bible. When he becomes teachable then the Bible will begin to reveal the beauty of the character of God. It takes much prayer with humility to assemble the pieces together as God intended. This has certainly been my experience and the experience of others. I have pled with the Lord when reading some passages that I cannot harmonise in my mind. I kneel down and ask my Father to help me and show me the truth. It is such a joy when the truth is revealed after earnest prayer.

As we consider the following stories we will not simply take one or two texts to form a conclusion but we must gather all the texts on a subject and bring them together so that they all harmonise.

We shall also remember the principles of the mirror. In chapter 9 we learned through the story of the woman who asked Jesus to heal her daughter that Jesus carefully frames His language to allow His hearers to project their own judgment onto Him.

The racial prejudice of the disciples was more fully revealed through the mirror that Jesus used in order to help them see their error when He granted the woman's request. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus we learned that Jesus will use the prevailing folklore and thinking of His listeners to teach important truths. These ideas are not His ideas, but He used them to teach the things He wanted them and also us to understand. This is a critical principle to comprehend when reading Scripture. Jesus can use language and expressions that are not His own and if a person is not seeking to harmonise the entire Bible these passages can be used to confirm the false ideas of the reader. Once again it is a mirror at work.

Let's summarise some key principles before we move on.

1. Take all passages on a subject don't simply select what you want.
2. Come humbly to Scripture asking for wisdom.
3. Read the Bible through the life of Jesus on earth.
4. Always keep the principles of the mirror in mind. The Bible can express ideas held by men to convey Biblical truth. Scripture can also be stated in a way that it can be read both in the flesh and the in the Spirit. The reader will determine how it is read.

19. Wounded by Our Transgressions

It would have been a scene of unimaginable horror. The people and animals were running for their lives in absolute terror.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.

(12) And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.
Genesis 7:11-12

The story of the worldwide flood is troubling to many. Would God truly drown millions of people because His mercy is exhausted and the crushing hand of judgment will no longer be restrained? Would a loving God do such a thing? For many this is a perplexing mystery.

When dealing with the question of God's judgments we must keep the death of the cross always before us because the cross reveals how the judgment of God works. The death of the cross is the key to understanding all judgment in the Bible. Jesus carried the sins of men, and the weight of the guilt of sin crushed out His life assisted by the murderous desires of those seeking to kill Him. It was sin that killed Christ and it is sin that kills all men. The problem is that many people think that it is God's wrath that demanded the death of Christ. This is prophesied in Isaiah.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (4) Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. Isaiah 53:3-4

If we consider Christ to be stricken by God on the cross then all the stories in the Bible that reveal judgment against sinners will be seen as God smiting them. Let us consider the story of the flood carefully.

A man politely walks into the grocery store and informs the owner that a very real threat exists towards his business. "There is certain destruction coming upon your business and your family," he says. "Nothing can stop this destruction except that you come under our protection," he continues. "We have provided an Ark of Safety for those who acknowledge us as the only true protectors of freedom." The man informs him that he has come on a mission of mercy to save the shop owner from certain destruction. By turning to the help of this man and providing him support, the shop owner will be spared this coming destruction that will fall upon all the shop owners who refuse to accept this protection. The man gently puts his hand on the shoulder of the shop owner and pleads with him to give careful consideration to this offer of "mercy." "We would not want any harm to come to you or your family. We would be very sad about it." So the man urges him to accept the merciful terms of protection.

If the man is offering protection from another threat separate from himself then he would be engaged in the criminal offense called a protection racket. If the threat of destruction would actually be carried out by the same group this man represented, then this would be the criminal offense called an extortion racket. It is the coercive practice of manipulating a person's will through intimidation or threats with some type of pressure being applied.

Is it possible for the person giving a genuine message of mercy to also represent the one threatening destruction, applying pressure on the hearers of the message, and carrying out destruction on those who refuse to accept mercy?

Is the story of the flood in the Bible actually a worldwide extortion racket? Does the God of the Bible provide protection to those who do what He wants and then kills all those who refuse to support Him?

And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy [H7843] them with the earth. (14) Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. Genesis 6:13-14

The Bible says that the earth was full of violence. Does it make any sense to violently destroy people using the reason that they are violent? Would this not be considered hypocritical?

If we look at the word *destroy* in Hebrew it means:

H7843: A primitive root; to *decay*, that is, (causatively) *ruin* (literally or figuratively): - batter, cast off, corrupt (-er, thing), destroy (-er, -uction), lose, mar, perish, spill, spoiler, X utterly, waste (-r).

This same word is used in the verses just prior to verse thirteen:

The earth also was corrupt [H7843] before God, and the earth was filled with violence. (12) And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; [H7843] for all flesh had corrupted [H7843] his way upon the earth. Genesis 6:11-12

If we apply the English word *destroy*, which is what the translators used for the same Hebrew word in Gen 6:13, it reads as follows:

The earth also was *destroyed* before God, and the earth was filled with violence. (12) And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was *destroyed*; for all flesh had *destroyed* his way upon the earth. Genesis 6:11-12

The reason that the earth was considered destroyed was because man had corrupted or destroyed his way of thinking; he had become full of violence. At this time the world was fully manifesting the mind of Satan. The Scriptures tell us the source of this violence:

By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: Ezekiel 28:16

This is in complete contrast to Christ who, the Scripture says, does no violence:

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; **because he had done no violence**, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Isaiah 53:9

In speaking of the King's Son, the psalmist declared:

He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight. Psalm 72:14

So the Son of God does no violence, and those He redeems He saves from engaging in violence and from being treated violently. Satan is filled with violence and he filled the world with this spirit. What is the main point at issue that causes Satan to have a spirit of violence?

And again, when he [God the Father] bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. Hebrews 1:6

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; (9) And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Matthew 4:8-9

Satan was jealous of Christ. He wanted to be worshipped as Christ was, but Satan was a created being while Christ was the divine Son of God. The difference was infinite, yet still Satan coveted to hold the position of Christ. This is what sowed the seeds of violence in his heart against Christ. The hatred of Satan became so great towards Christ that he planned to kill the Son of God from the very beginning. The crucifixion of Christ revealed to the universe the true intentions of Satan before the creation of this world.

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. **He was a murderer from the beginning**, and abode not in the truth... John 8:44

Satan's murderous design is what fuelled his spirit of violence. When Adam and Eve fell into sin they became like Satan in nature. The Spirit of

Christ that had been in them was pierced and crushed like teeth grinding seed. It is the Spirit of Christ in man that gives him life. He is the light which lights every man coming into the world, John 1:9. If Christ left Adam completely then he would die. The Spirit of Christ in Adam was crushed yet Christ did not withdraw himself, though it caused him agony to stay. From the continual suffering of Christ, the rock, came forth the spiritual water to keep Adam alive. This is why Paul says:

Always bearing about in the body **the dying of the Lord Jesus**, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.
2 Corinthians 4:10

If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing **they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.** Hebrews 6:6

Adam and Eve were made in the image of God. Satan hated this image and wanted to destroy it. Every act of violence in men towards men is a revelation of the spirit of Satan at war with the Spirit of Christ. This thought at first is hard to comprehend but clearly revealed in Scripture. Once it is understood, it completely changes the way we understand violence described in the Bible and what is taking place. The idea of men killing their own kind is totally insane until you understand that Satan seeks to pierce Christ through his ability to move men to violence against each other.

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Matthew 25:40

This point is critical to understand. All violence is inspired by a spirit that is fuelled by envy and hatred for the Son of God. Therefore all violence including self-violence and suicide is a partaking of this hatred towards Christ even if the original reason is wholly unknown to the individual. Expressions of hatred towards our neighbour and acts of violence towards our enemies and ourselves are fuelled by Satan's hatred towards Christ. This is the origin of all violence and hatred.

All of the violence described in Genesis six is a manifestation of Satan's hatred for Christ channelled through men and women. As Christ is the only source of life the final result of all such hatred can only be self-destruction.

This spirit of violence in man was revealed in the first death in the garden being a lamb. The killing of this animal reflected the violent nature of Adam. Through this sacrifice God was reflecting to Adam the seed that now resided within him. This seed of violence soon exploded in Cain when he killed Abel.

The only way for man to continue to live was for Christ to continue to supply the power of His life to the human race. This is why Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Revelation 13:8. Christ has been wounded by our transgressions from the very beginning; He has been bruised by our iniquities from the inception of sin. In order for man to live, Christ had to continue to carry each person despite this satanically inspired hatred.

In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and **carried them all the days of old**. Isaiah 63:9

These thoughts utterly change the way we understand the cross of Christ, the manifestation of violence and therefore the character of God. Every time a person is beaten, raped, or murdered it is evidence of Satan seeking to pierce and wound Christ. Every act of self-indulgence that leads to disease and death of self or others is also a manifestation of Satan's fanatical obsession with extracting as much pain as possible from Christ. It is a hatred that is incomprehensibly cruel.

The true extent of the cross extends from the entrance of sin into the universe till the present day. Every being that works at cross purposes with God is at war with the life that exists within himself for that life comes from Christ. This is the secret of the self-destructive nature of men. It is Satan's war against Christ. Now let us carefully consider the mirror in the following text.

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. Romans 1:18-19 (NKJV)

The word *wrath* in Greek simply means *desire* and comes from a root word that means to reach out after. It can be translated passion as well as wrath

and anger. The word for *against* can mean *over* or *upon* and even *towards*. We will translate this verse with these thoughts in mind with yet one more point for consideration. Jesus said I am the truth. John 14:6. Therefore the suppression of truth is the suppression of Christ.

For the *desire* of God is revealed from heaven *upon or towards* all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress *Christ* in unrighteousness. Because that which maybe known of God is revealed in them, for God has shown it to them. Romans 1:18-19 *adapted*

Every day God sends forth the Spirit of His Son that it might abide in our hearts. Some drown out the voice, others in their efforts to resist seek out those in whom that Spirit dwells and persecutes them. In every person alive on this planet Christ is being despised and rejected of men. Today He is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Every day Christ denies Himself, takes up His cross, and gives us His life. In this is seen the desire of God towards us. He reaches out to us every day with a passionate desire and yet most of the world suppress the voice of conscience and drown out the conviction.

The wickedness of men projects their own spirit of wrath onto God. Men's angered resistance of His love is projected back onto God as the aggressor. Human attributes are placed upon Him and thus Christ is seen as smitten of God and afflicted, but Christ was wounded by our transgressions and not the supposed wrath of God. And what does God say to His people, those who claim to follow Him?

But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people. Romans 10:21

It is in the light of the cross that we can begin to understand the terrors of not only the flood but also the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world. Satan's hatred of Christ is manifested in His desire to ultimately kill everyone because in every person Christ has given His life. He willingly lays down His life in every man that they might receive His power to live. Christ can't dwell where sin is cherished but the crushing of His Spirit yields power for the soul to live even as the water that streamed from His side when He died on the physical cross.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 1 Peter 5:8

In Chapter 13 we talked about the effect that the spirit of man has on the earth. When men suppress Christ and express Satan's hatred of Christ by acting violently towards each other the earth begins to reflect this back to man through the laws of nature. As men were drowning out the voice of Christ in their souls, nature would respond to drown out the souls of men. As the Lord surveyed the wickedness of the world He indicated there would be a limit.

And the LORD said, **My spirit shall not always strive with man**, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. Genesis 6:3

The limit was the amount of time that the Spirit of God would strive with man to save him. The Spirit of Christ was pleading day and night with His wayward children. He appealed to them and reached out to them day after day. Yet we recall how men reacted to this striving of the Spirit.

For the wrath [desire] of God is revealed from heaven against [upon or towards] all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [hold down or suppress] the truth [Christ] in unrighteousness; Romans 1:18

The antediluvians were drowning out the voice of conscience. Daily they rejected that gentle, appealing voice, and they continued headlong into their wicked course. This suppression of the Spirit of Christ was like holding Him down in an effort to drown Him. As His Spirit was vexed from day to day, Christ often felt overwhelmed.

But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned [overturned, given over] to be their enemy, and he fought [strove] against them. Isaiah 63:10

As men drew nearer to destruction the pleading of Christ became more urgent and His voice became to them the sound of the enemy. His witness against them was treated with scorn and hatred.

My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long? (4) Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake. (5) For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee

thanks? (6) I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. (7) Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies. (8) Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. Psalm 6:3-8

The sufferings of Christ could not be hidden. If men would refuse to accept the cross of Christ then the inanimate rocks would cry out to bear witness to the sufferings of their Creator. As Christ is the Creator of this world so the physical world responds to His suffering.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. Romans 8:22

Many of the Psalms reveal the experience of Christ for the simple reason that the Spirit of Christ was in the hearts of those who wrote all the Scriptures, including the Psalms.

Of which salvation **the prophets have enquired and searched diligently**, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: (11) Searching what, or what manner of time **the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify**, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. 1 Peter 1:10-11

In Psalms 18 we have revealed the sufferings of Christ on the cross in the context of a flood.

The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. (5) The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. Psalm 18:4-5

Some descriptions in Psalms 18 speak in the language of the flood while others speak of devouring fire suggesting the events of Sodom and Gomorrah and the final end of the wicked. As Christ strove with men to turn from wickedness He was overwhelmed by the flood of their ungodly behaviour:

And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. Genesis 6:6

The antediluvians were putting Christ to an open shame. His soul was tortured and grieved by their wickedness and finally He cried out upon this antediluvian cross – I thirst! The Spirit of God ceased to plead with man. Having been driven back for hundreds of years, the Father finally accepted their decision.

Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? (16) Which were cut down out of time, **whose foundation was overflown with a flood:** (17) **Which said unto God, Depart from us:** and what can the Almighty do for them? (18) **Yet he filled their houses with good things:** but the counsel of the wicked is far from me. Job 22:15-18

The Father was driven away by men. Yet Christ must remain with men and suffer with them in the decisions they make otherwise they would have died immediately and God would have been blamed for it. So as the thunder and lightning began to roll in upon the Antediluvians Christ was there with them. He suffered with them and carried them all to the very last. He is Emmanuel – God with us. The flood is a revelation of the cross yet we consider Him smitten of God and afflicted.

Inanimate nature could not be prevented from preaching the gospel through the events of the flood. Notice the connections between the story of the flood and the cross in these passages:

1. Calling/Crying Out.

The sorrows of death compassed me, and **the floods of ungodly men made me afraid.** (5) The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. (6) **In my distress I called upon the LORD,** and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. Psalm 18:4-6

And about the ninth hour **Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Matthew 27:46

2. The Earth Shakes.

Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. [grieved] Psalm 18:7

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; **and the earth did quake**, and the rocks rent; Matt 27:51

3. Darkness.

He bowed the heavens also, and came down: **and darkness was under his feet.** [Thou shalt bruise his heel] Psalm 18:9

He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. Psalm 18:11

Now from the sixth hour **there was darkness over all the land** unto the ninth hour. Matthew 27:45

4. Channels of Water and Foundations Revealed.

Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. Psalm 18:15

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of **the great deep broken up**, and the windows of heaven were opened. Genesis 7:11

5. Face Hidden and Feeling Forsaken.

For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. (8) **In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment;** but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. (9) **For this is as the waters of Noah unto me:** for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. Isaiah 54:7-9

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. (46) And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?** Matthew 27:45-46

6. Salvation.

He sent from above, he took me, **he drew me out of many waters.**
Psalm 18:16

And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged; (2) The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, **and the rain from heaven was restrained;** (3) And **the waters returned from off the earth continually:** and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. Genesis 8:1-3

Nature testified of what had happened to its Creator. As Christ is the light which lights every man that comes into the world, His suffering was manifested in the lives of all those who perished in the flood.

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. (7) He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Ps. 33:6-7

It is through the power of Christ that the heavens were made. His voice speaks into all creation. It is by the Word of Christ that the waters were gathered together and laid up in storehouses in the earth. When the antediluvians finally and completely rejected Christ, His voice was silenced and the power that held the waters in their storehouses broke loose as the natural elements were handed over to the principles of chaos.

It was not Satan who caused the release of the waters, but in stirring up the people to resist Christ to the point that He sorrowfully accepted their decision; the effect was that creation no longer heard the tender voice of its Master who called constantly to them – “Peace be still.” The waters then reflected the turbulence of Satan and wicked men. Satan himself was made to endure the warring elements as the enormity of the cross of Christ was revealed in the waters of the flood. The convulsions of the deep were a manifestation of the broken heart of Christ. The waters pouring down from the heavens were testimony of His tears (Psalm 119:136) that He had shed for the fallen children of Adam. The antediluvians refused to acknowledge the sufferings of Christ, but nature testified to the sufferings of its Author and reflected His sorrow and death. Satan had caused this

destruction by pressing the antediluvians to reject Christ and His Spirit. When that rejection was complete, then nature bore witness to that rejection while at the same time reflecting the impress of the spirit of chaos.

We remember that as no person can live unless Christ be with them, so Christ was exposed to the terror and sorrow of every person that perished in the flood. In all their affliction He was afflicted. He carried and He bore them all the days of their life. As He witnessed the death of each of His wayward children He was pierced with such a deep sorrow. In each soul that gasped out in terror, Christ felt their agony and longed to save them but He could not. Just as when He was on the cross dying in despair, He also felt their utter despair and desperation when they died.

In order to obscure this cross of Christ Christians today say that God punished the wicked in His wrath. The violence of that deluge is attributed to Him as the one who put all these sinners to death. It is certainly true that the power of God was used to break up the earth and cause the flood just as the power of God was in the Roman soldiers that nailed Jesus to the cross. Did God nail His Son to the cross? Was it His violence that put Him to death? No, a thousand times no! It was the power of God in the hands of the serpent striking at the heel of Christ.

Consider the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD when women ate their own children and so many were crucified there was no space left to erect more crosses. Similar events are described in the book of Lamentations.

They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field. (10) The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people. (11) The LORD hath accomplished his fury; he hath poured out his fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion, and it hath devoured the foundations thereof. (12) The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem. (13) For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her, Lamentations 4:9-13

In verse 11 is mentioned the fury of the Lord and continues on to speak of His anger, which as we know from chapter 11 of this book can mean grief. Verse 12 tells us of the shock of the reality of the adversary and enemy entering Jerusalem. Verse 13 speaks of the slaying of the “just in her midst.” Who is the just one that was slain?

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, 1 Peter 3:18

The city of Jerusalem was the city of peace and Christ was her spiritual leader. In complete and intense grief the Father had His face hidden by the sins of the prophets and priests. This allowed Satan the adversary to enter the city and Christ the Just One was slain in her midst. In the same manner the blood of Christ was shed when God’s people were taken and destroyed in the days of Jeremiah and Daniel. The same occurs in each destruction of God’s people; Christ suffers with them and carries the cross.

Can you see the flood through the lens of the cross? Can you see Christ suffering in Sodom? Can you see Christ in agony through the death of the first born in Egypt and the destructions of Jerusalem? Can you see Calvary in the violent destruction of every person? Only in the cross of Christ can you see the judgments of the Bible as a revelation of the amazing love of God. When we can grasp the source of violence manifested through men and nature as a revelation of Satan’s hatred towards Christ, we then can begin to appreciate the mysterious symbol of the serpent upon the pole. When the serpent is discerned in the context of the cross, then the sting of the serpent in regard to the character of God can truly be healed.

20. Serpent Exposed by the Cross

Satan is the author of suffering, disease, and death. We established the fact that Christ gives life to every man and is close to every person that lives on this earth. Every act of violence that men manifest towards themselves or others causes Christ terrible suffering. Satan has masterfully concealed his violence towards Christ in the destruction of men by convincing humanity that God is the aggressor and all of the epic descriptions of judgment in the Bible are to be attributed to Him.

During an evening interview with Nicodemus, Jesus explains to him one of the most profound truths ever to be uttered. It is a revelation of the cross that is breath taking and yet it is a truth almost universally hidden.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: John 3:14

The story Jesus was referring to is found in Numbers 21. The children of Israel were murmuring and complaining against God and Moses. The spirit of complaint caused a break in the hedge of protection.

He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Ecclesiastes 10:8

This break in the hedge allowed the dangers of the desert that God had protected them from to manifest. Soon poisonous serpents began to bite

the people, and with the deadly effect of the fiery venom, they cried out to Moses to help them.

And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. (6) And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. (7) Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. (8) And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. (9) And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. Numbers 21:5-9

When you read this story please remember the mirror when it says:

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

The Hebrew word *sent* can also mean *loose* or *give up* or *forsake*. When the people accused God, He was pushed back in protecting them from the serpents. He had protected them all this time but because the people turned against God He was prevented from continuing to protect them. The Bible tells us how the serpents came.

Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. (10) Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. 1 Corinthians 10:9-10

The Hebrew word *destroyer* means *ruiner* or *venomous serpent* in verse 10. Paul is connecting the word *serpent* in verse 9 to the word *destroyer* in verse 10. Satan is the destroyer.

Their king is the angel from the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon—the Destroyer. Revelation 9:11 (NLT)

When the people made a breach in the hedge of protection through their rebellion, Satan was enabled to come in and immediately begin to kill the people. The fact that Bible translators used the word *sent* in describing the release of the serpents provides the perfect divine mirror for people when they read the story. The idea of God sending serpents to kill people is a reflection of what men think about Him. Those who have looked into the life of Jesus as a picture of the Father will immediately look for an answer to explain this otherwise shocking situation. Would God send in terrible snakes to kill people for their complaints? This is so different to the character of Jesus. My search in the Bible led me to 1 Corinthians 10:9,10 which speaks of this story and provides the clue that they were killed by the destroyer. Revelation 9:11 tells us the destroyer is the angel from the bottomless pit. Then we notice the word *sent* can have a range of meanings and so the text is brought into harmony when we are willing to investigate.

The most puzzling question in the story is why God would ask Moses to make a fiery serpent and put it on a pole and tell the people to look at it to be healed? This seems very strange. The serpent in the Bible is a symbol of Satan.

And the great dragon was cast out, **that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan**, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Revelation 12:9

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3

How is it possible that looking upon a serpent lifted up on a pole could bring healing to the person that is bitten? What is the message that God was seeking to teach them? This brings us back to the night when Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus. Did Christ compare Himself to the serpent?

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: John 3:14

Jesus compares the lifting up of the serpent to Him being lifted up upon the cross. Most Christians understand the process of being healed by looking to Jesus who has died on the cross for them.

When a sinner under the curse of sin looks to Christ and sees that Christ took the curse for him, it creates a deep sense of gratitude that transforms the heart and character. This brings healing from the curse of sin caused by the temptations of Satan, which are like snake bites that bring disease and death.

Why is a raised serpent on a pole being used as a symbol of healing? Would it not make more sense to make an image of a lamb and raise this on the pole? How can Christ be identified with a symbol of Satan?

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. 2 Corinthians 5:21

The crucifixion of Jesus revealed the full character of Satan. The cross of Christ reveals both the self-destructive end result of what will happen to unrepentant sinners, while at the same time uncovering the true character of Satan as a violent murderer. In order for all to see Satan manifest his wicked spirit, the power that belongs to Christ was allowed to be used by Satan through his control of the men that tortured and killed Christ. For God to allow His Son to be given over to such violent torture and death reveals an agape love beyond human comprehension. The cross brings to light the tragic end result of sin in the sinner and the true character of Satan.

On the cross Jesus cried out “My God why have you forsaken me?” This is the condition of the sinner who feels the guilty weight of his sin. In this agony of mind, the sinner who is deeply convicted of their sin feels a terrible sense of judgment in their soul. It feels to the sinner that God is breathing fire upon them, yet it is actually self-condemnation and guilt in the presence of pure selfless love that creates this situation.

This is the complexity of the cross. It reveals the violent character of Satan and the natural consequence of a sinful life but it feels as if God, in terrible wrath, is the one heaping torment on the sinner. God’s loving face is hidden away in the darkness of guilt and all that is felt is the terrible horror of the overwhelming shame of sin. We see the two sided nature of the cross in the life of Cain. The Wycliffe translation expresses the two aspects of this.

And Cain said to the Lord, My wickedness is more than that I deserve forgiveness (for); (And Cain said to the Lord, My punishment is more than that I can bear;) (14) lo! today thou castest me out from the face of the earth; and I shall be hid from thy face... Genesis 4:13-14 (Wycliffe Translation).

Cain feels his own self-condemnation which is the natural consequence of his sin. He feels that his sin is so great that it cannot be forgiven. Yet at the same time there is an expression of casting this back onto God to make Him responsible for these consequences. These are the two sides of judgment and therefore the two aspects of the cross.

1. Guilt and self-condemnation without hope of forgiveness.
2. Projecting blame onto God and making Him the aggressor in judgment.

It is in this context that when we see acts of violence in the Bible, it is actually revealing the character of Satan but it has the sense that it is God pouring down intense wrath upon the sinner. From the sinner's point of view, judgment always feels like God is the tyrannical aggressor.

And the sight of the glory [character] of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel.
Exodus 24:17

As indicated in the previous chapter, in order for Satan to express his violence, Christ must deny Himself and carry a cross of suffering in seeing His children suffer. This suffering reveals the character of Satan. The problem is that men feel that it is God who is destroying them because their guilty conscience convicts them that they are worthy to die.

Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. Romans 1:32

Yet when we see Christ lifted up in the correct cross context, we see the serpent revealed and realize it is not God who is destroying but Satan. This heals the human heart of its resistance to the Father thinking that He was the one doing the killing. The symbolism is deeply profound and takes time to truly appreciate, but the truth remains that when you see the

serpent in the violent judgments of Scripture you can be healed of your resistance to God. You can be truly reconciled to Him and have your fear cast out.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18

With these principles in mind we are now ready to consider the use of the rod that was turned to a serpent during the ten plagues.

And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. (3) And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. (4) And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: (5) That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. Exodus 4:2-5

A rod or staff is a symbol of power. In kingly terms this is called a Sceptre. Christ, the Son of God has a Sceptre.

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Hebrews 1:8

Christ is also referred to as this Sceptre.

I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and **a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel**, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. Numbers 24:17

Christ is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24) and is at the right hand of God (Hebrews 1:3). He is referred to as God's right hand or what we would call "His right hand man."

Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. Exodus 15:6

God tells Moses that he will represent God and Aaron will be his spokesman. Exodus 4:16. When Moses released the rod and it fell to the

ground, the power that is in Christ became serpent-like. Christ is the power of God. When God said to Satan “Behold, all that he hath is in thy power;” (Job 1:12) God was dropping His rod to the ground. The rod is Christ whose power in humanity and creation is surrendered to Satan to serve Satan’s purpose, even as Satan inspired the Roman soldiers to compel Christ to carry the cross to the hill of Calvary.

The minds of the Roman soldiers were controlled by Satan, yet the breath by which they lived is the life that lights every man that comes into the world. The power of Christ in the souls of men is used by Satan to nail Him to the cross. Just stop and ponder that for a moment. The single image of a Roman soldier with hammer held high and driving a spike into those precious hands of the Saviour holds the key to the plagues of Egypt and all the power of destruction manifested on the earth. Here is the rod that falls to the ground:

And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. Mark 14:35

Where ever men fall to the ground under a destructive force, there is the rod that falls to the ground and becomes a serpent.

And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. Mark 9:20

Therefore we can see that wherever we see the suffering of men we see:

In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. Isaiah 63:9

The truth is that if God was able to use force He could simply end the life of those who choose to follow Satan so that the power of God in Christ could not be used by Satan to do destructive things. Yet in order to give to every man the freedom to choose, Christ must allow His power in men to be used by Satan when men determine to rebel against God and His commandments. How does Satan use this power? All men not under the control of God are under the control of Satan. When under his control he moves men to destroy one another. When the minds of men come under

the control of Satan the power of life given to them by Christ is made to serve the purposes of Satan. Therefore God's power is turned into a serpent when it is removed from His hand.

When we read about the great wars of history, where millions of men have gone to their death in the most violent manner, the power of Christ given to men is used by Satan to do his work of destruction. In all this devastation God shows His love in yielding over His Son to reveal the violent principles of the serpent. Can we grasp the anguish of Christ as the breath that He breathes upon men was used in the days of Rome? Legions of young men filled with the breath of the Son stand ready to battle against each other. Two armies filled with the life of Christ are driven by Satan to clash against each other slashing with swords, spears, knives, and arrows. As each young man gasps his last breath, Christ is there feeling a deep sorrow as these souls die with bloodlust in their hearts and hands. The power of Christ is turned into a serpent when men choose to take themselves out of the hand of God. But in order for Satan's violent kingdom to be revealed, Christ must deny Himself and allow Himself to be pierced with sorrow in seeing His life breath being used to do such wicked and brutal things. In every act of violence Christ is pierced because He must deny Himself, take up the cross, and allow men to have the freedom to choose the destiny they desire for themselves.

Weigh carefully this point, it is critical to understand in order to see the healing power of the serpent on the pole. The self-denial of Christ in allowing His power to be used by Satan exposes Satan's true character. When Christ allowed His power to be used by Satan to murder Him the true violence of the serpent was revealed. The true cross opens a doorway for men to see that all violence finds its source in Satan. It opens to man the possibility to see that God truly loves His enemies. In Christ God was reconciling the world unto Himself and showed His loving selfless character. Yet in order for the serpent to be finally destroyed the power of Christ had to be restored into a rod.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: Exodus 4:4

What does the tail represent?

The ancient and honourable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. Isaiah 9:15

The tail of the serpent contains the lies with which he has deceived the world about the character of God. Satan has convinced the world that God killed His Son in violent wrath.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. Isaiah 53:4

In order for the power of the serpent to be broken the lies that Satan has told in regard to the character of God must be revealed. When Jesus spoke the words "It is finished," the question is what did He finish?

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. John 17:4

When Jesus said I have glorified you on earth He is saying I have revealed your true character on earth. Exodus 33:18; Exodus 34:5-7. When Jesus cried, "it is finished," He took the serpent by the tail: meaning He revealed the lies that Satan was telling about His Father's character as someone who is violent, and showed that it is Satan who is the true original murderer and destroyer.

It was in the light of this truth that the gospel had power to be preached across the world in such a short time during the life of the apostles.

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, **and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven;** whereof I Paul am made a minister; Colossians 1:23

The challenge remains that the view of the cross to the natural man looks like God punishing His Son to satisfy His anger towards us. This has made it easy for Satan to invent more lies especially through the rise of the man of sin to obscure the true power of the cross. This has allowed the serpent to come down from his exposure through the cross and once again hide in the dark and bite men from the shadows convincing them that God is the violent punishing one.

The Egyptians had plenty of opportunity to learn about the true God through Joseph. God gave Joseph wisdom to bless the Egyptians in preparing for the famine that came to Egypt and all the countries around them.

And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. Genesis 41:54

Pharaoh was warned in a dream of the seven years of famine that was coming. The providence of God placed Joseph where he could help prepare the people for the hardships of the impending drought. Genesis 41:25-36. Why was such a terrible drought being visited upon all these countries?

Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God. (2) Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD. (3) If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; (4) Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Leviticus 26:1-4

We remember from chapter 13 that God had created laws in nature to bless man.

The causal relationship between man and nature means that as the rebellion of the human race increases so will the rebellion of wind, fire and flood. As men break the commandments of God with greater zeal so the earth will break the laws of nature and reflect back to men their own rebellion. *Agape*, Chapter 13, page 116.

The Egyptians worshipped many idols along with the nations around them. They did not keep the Sabbath or reverence the Lord's sanctuary. When Moses came to Pharaoh and made request on behalf of the Lord, Pharaoh arrogantly questioned who is the Lord and defiantly said, "I don't know him." Now Pharaoh was not unmindful of Joseph. Egypt had been made wealthy through Joseph. So this was a refusal to recognise God.

Because that, **when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful;** but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (22) Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, (23) **And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.** Romans 1:21-23

They were not keeping the statutes and judgments because from the days of Nimrod many of the developing nations had defied the God of heaven and chose to rebel and do as they wished. The land of Egypt and Canaan were known as the land of Ham.

Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.
Psalm 105:23

Ham gave to his descendants a terrible inheritance by the vile crime that he did to his father Noah.

And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. (23) And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. (24) **And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.** (25) And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. Genesis 9:22-25

The fact that Noah knew his son had done something to him when he awoke indicates that Ham did more than simply look upon his father. When Israel came out of Egypt he told them not to follow the practices of the Canaanites and Egyptians.

After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Leviticus 18:3

What are the things that the Lord commanded Israel not to do that these nations were doing?

1. Incest. Leviticus 18:6-18

2. Sex during time of a woman's period. Leviticus 18:19
3. Adultery. Leviticus 18:20
4. Offering their children to idols. Leviticus 18:21
5. Homosexuality. Leviticus 18:22
6. Bestiality. Leviticus 18:24

All these sins are the inheritance of the sons of Ham. These violations of the law of God have a negative impact on nature for it is contrary to nature.

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: (25) Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. (26) For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: Romans 1:24-26

These sins, along with eating unclean food, blood, and more found in Leviticus, defile the earth causing it to languish.

The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. (5) The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. (6) Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left. Isaiah 24:4-6

Canaan and Egypt were transgressing God's commandments. The seven years of famine was a warning to these countries that the abominations they were practicing would result in greater convulsions of nature in the future. The Lord in mercy allowed Joseph to be taken to Egypt in order to acquaint them with the true God that the Egyptians might repent of their abominations and be spared of the destructive reactions of nature. In regard to sexual abominations this warning is given in the law.

And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. Leviticus 18:25

The abominations of Egypt and Canaan were preparing the land to vomit out its inhabitants. The rebellion of men against God would be reflected back to man through nature. Satan was pressing these nations into these sins in order to bring about the violent reactions of nature and then charge God as acting out His wrath destroying them in the process, while in fact the Lord desired to save Egypt and the other idolatrous nations. He was not willing for any of them to perish but they refused to listen to His counsel.

As we consider the plagues we must consider a very important verse.

For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom... Isaiah 43:3

The Bible speaks of the plagues in the language of the cross. A ransom was paid in order for Israel to be set free. There are many layers of symbolism in the plagues and we cannot address them all in this setting. Our focus will be the revelation of the cross through the plagues that fell upon Egypt.

And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Exodus 7:10

The miracle of the rod turning to a serpent is repeated before Pharaoh. This provides a lesson to Egypt that the power of the serpent is about to be released.

He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending **[releasing] evil angels among them.**
Psalm 78:49

In describing the events of the plagues the book of Psalms speaks of this release of the power of evil angels.

And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. (45) He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them. (46) He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust. (47) He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. (48) He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot

thunderbolts. (49) He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending [releasing] evil angels among them. (50) He made a way to his anger; [grief] he spared not their soul from death, but **gave their life over to the pestilence**; (51) And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham: Psalm 78:44-51

Most of the plagues are mentioned above in connection to the releasing of evil angels or angels of destruction. God gave them over to the pestilence because they had refused to acknowledge God or His commandments. The mention of the word pestilence indicates the violation of God's everlasting covenant.

And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge **the quarrel of my covenant**: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and **ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy**. Leviticus 26:25

It is not clear exactly how the evil angels were involved or how they made use of the laws of nature that were vomiting out the inhabitants. Yet it is these two elements – the laws of nature combined with the destructive work of evil angels that brought destruction on Egypt. Yet through this process of destruction God is also reaching out to them to cause them to repent of their sin and be saved. It must be remembered that all of the power manifested is coming from Christ for He is the power and wisdom of God. Yet Christ must carry His cross of suffering in allowing these acts of destruction to take place.

The power of Christ dwelt in all the souls of the Egyptians. The killing of any person involves the torture of the person of Christ. Can you imagine an Egyptian mother holding her dead son, bent over his lifeless form sobbing out her agony of spirit? Here Christ is also afflicted in her affliction, here the cross is raised and Christ is crucified afresh. When God allows Satan to take the power of His Son, He allows Satan to touch His own eye.

He made a way to his *anger*; [H639 nose, face] he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the *pestilence*; [H1698 – destroying] Psalm 78:50

This verse is describing the plagues of Egypt. It says God made a way to His face. His beloved Son is the delight of His life. In allowing the Egyptians to die at the hands of the destroyer, He allowed the agony and suffering of His Son; and so the Father stood alone in this darkness and wept for His Son during the plagues of Egypt and for all that His Son suffered.

The plagues are not random but are directed towards the gods the Egyptians served. The Egyptians, like all pagan worshippers, had to placate their gods and not displease them otherwise they would be punished. The plagues are reflected back to the Egyptians in the divine mirror. Their sense of guilt from their idolatrous abominations, murder of infants, cruelty of slavery, depraved appetites, and sexual perversion were now coming back to them in this mirror. The Nile River was worshipped under the god Hapi, a god of fertility.

The command to throw the Hebrew baby boys into the river 80 years earlier was possibly coming back to mirror their actions. At the same time the laws of nature carried by Christ were finally collapsing under the weight of their abominations. As the Son of God considered the future of Egypt He was weighed down in grief, and the river gives to us a symbol of what Christ would experience in the garden of Gethsemane when His sweat turned to blood and His body began to fall apart. It was the weight of sin that was doing the destroying in Christ and it was the self-defiling actions of the Egyptians that was destroying the Nile and everything in it.

The use of the rod is important.

And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and **he lifted up the rod, and smote 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. Exodus 7:20

Searching the use of the rod to smite elsewhere in Scripture is important.

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and **he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth**, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. Isaiah 11:4

The rod is a symbol of the Word of God and the breath of His mouth. When Christ hung upon the cross it was the guilt of sin in the face of the broken law that caused His soul to burn like fire. This principle of smiting occurs elsewhere in Scripture.

Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall **smite the judge of Israel** with a rod upon the cheek. Micah 5:1

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: **smite the shepherd**, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. Zechariah 13:7

Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt **smite the rock**, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. Exodus 17:6

Christ is the ruler of all nature. The wickedness of the Egyptians had defiled the earth and caused Christ to be pierced with the crown of thorns. The striking of the water reveals what the Egyptians were doing to Christ. Christ is the fountain of living water and they were striking Him and causing Him great suffering. God is revealing to the Egyptians the harm their condition is doing. This is the work of the law to reflect back to fallen man his sinful condition. Yet the whole world considers this simply as God destroying the water supply of Egypt. It considers Christ smitten of God and afflicted. When Christ was pierced there came out of His side blood and water and this is what we see in the Nile.

The second plague was a mirror from another goddess Hequet.

Hequet (Egyptian ḥqt, also ḥqyt "Heqtit") is an Egyptian goddess of fertility, identified with Hathor, represented in the form of a frog. [1] To the Egyptians, the frog was an ancient symbol of fertility, related to the annual flooding of the Nile... It has been proposed that her name is the origin of the name of Hecate, the Greek goddess of witchcraft. *Wikipedia.*

The fertility of Egypt had been destroyed by the Egyptians through their own abominations. The earth was vomiting them out and the frogs were a reflection of this vomiting out. God was allowing their worship to be reflected back to them in a mirror. Their fear of the gods was now being visited upon them. These are not random events but laws of nature reflecting back the thoughts of men. As Jesus tells us:

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Matthew 7:2

At the same time the symbol of the frog describes the principle of deception. We noted above that Hequet was connected to witchcraft. Satan was counterfeiting these manifestations in nature through his priests. Frogs are connected to evil spirits working miracles.

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. (14) **For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.** Revelation 16:13-14

And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, (14) **And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast;** saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. Revelation 13:13-14

The lying spirit of deception in the miracle of the serpents, and the first two plagues counterfeited by the priests prevented a spirit of repentance in the Egyptians, which ultimately sealed their doom. In a similar way a lying spirit was present in the trial of Christ to accuse Him falsely and thereby secure His doom on the cross.

The third plague was in relation to the dust of the earth. There were two gods connected to the soil; Horus, who was lord of the black soil, and Set, who was lord of the red desert land. The black fertile soil was used for

growing crops. The lice coming forth from the earth was a warning that the soil was in decay and waxing old like a garment.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, **and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in *like manner***. [lice] but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished. Isaiah 51:6

The Hebrew word *manner* is actually lice. It is a revelation of the earth waxing old. The curse of men's abominations weigh upon the heart of Christ. As it says in the Psalms:

Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. (3) **When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.** (4) For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. Psalm 32:2-4

The Son of God remained silent, giving to the Egyptians their freedom, but the weight He carried in seeking to preserve the earth from the defilement caused Him to groan.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. Romans 8:22

This groaning and travailing reflects the sufferings of Christ in the garden under the weight of sin. To the carnal man this plague was the wrath of Horus coming down on them, but to the spiritual man we see the decaying and languishing of the earth under the perversions of the Egyptians and the consequential sufferings of Christ.

The fourth plague was of various types of flies, insects, and possibly beetles as translated in Young's literal translation. This plague says that the land was completely destroyed by this plague.

And the LORD did so; and there came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted [ruined or destroyed] by reason of the swarm of flies. Exodus 8:24

The Hebrew word for corrupted is exactly the same word used for the destroyer mentioned in the last plague who slew the first born in Egypt. It is also the same word that is used to describe the world before the flood.

And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was **corrupt**; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. Genesis 6:12

This fourth plague was a manifestation of the defilement caused by the Egyptians. Pharaoh had denied the true God of heaven and did abominable things, and so the seeds he and his forefathers had sown were now manifesting:

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, [destroyed] **they have done abominable works**, there is none that doeth good. Psalm 14:1

There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. (12) They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (13) Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Romans 3:11-13

The Lord had been holding back these four winds of strife and seeking to say, "Peace be still," to the earth but finally the earth would vomit out the inhabitants.

The fifth plague was on the cattle, horses, camels, and donkeys. The Egyptians had no protection against the destroyer. If only Pharaoh had repented then the work of destroying angels through nature could have been prevented but it was not to be. The Lord had to give up the livestock to the destroyer. The Egyptians refused to come to the Lord and be saved, so Satan took more and more control of Egypt.

We know when Satan was allowed to, he brought boils upon Job, and this is what Satan did to the Egyptians in the sixth plague. How Christ must have suffered watching His dear children in agony through the boils, and how much anguish He must have suffered in allowing Satan to do these things. The fact that the plagues had moved from affecting the animals to boils on the bodies of men indicates that Satan had secured more control of the situation, just as he did with Job.

And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. (4) And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. (5) But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. (6) And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. (7) So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. Job 2:3-7

The boils manifested in the Egyptians may speak to the sufferings of Christ as He was nailed to His cross. It was an affliction of the flesh of man.

The suffering of the Egyptians was His suffering and their agony affected Him greatly, and yet He continued to allow Satan to manifest this power because these people refused to heed the appeal to turn and be saved. As Jesus said to the Pharisees, "How I wanted to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks but you would not!"

First the fish died, then the frogs, then the cattle, and now the boils on their very persons. Moses warned the Egyptians of each plague so they could take measures to turn away from the destroyer. They could turn from this biting serpent and look to the serpent upon the rod that is lifted up. In Christ being lifted up through this agony of the plagues, the serpent was exposed for who he is – the destroyer. Satan seeks to hide himself in the power of God and sends frogs to us to tell us it is God who does these things directly.

The Son of God was suffering terribly to see His own power being used upon the earth in such destructive and violent ways. His own laws in nature, that were designed to bless those who loved the Lord and kept His commandments, were now turned to be weapons of mass destruction. Satan and his angels were involved in some way to increase the level of destruction because Satan knew he could cause men to think that God was doing all this destructive work directly.

And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. Exodus 9:23

When Moses lifted up the rod to heaven, it was a symbol of the Son of God lifted up upon the cross. Christ, the power of God, was given over to Satan to use according to his will. God allowed a breach in His protection and the evil angels who delight in death and destruction hurled down these hail stones upon the land. Remember what Psalms says:

He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. (48) He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. (49) He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, **by sending evil angels among them**. Psalm 78:47-49

Hail is also mentioned in Psalms 18 which is speaking of the sufferings of Christ on the cross.

At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. Psalm 18:12

Notice it says that he “gave up” their cattle to the hail and the Hebrew word for *cast upon them* means to release or loose. We see the power of God given over to Satan and we stress the point that this can only be done through the torture and agony of Christ. Every time God allows Satan to destroy with His power, His Son is lifted up as it were upon the cross, but at the same time Satan is revealed as the destroyer for those looking into the mirror of the true gospel. During the plague of the hail we observe this detail:

And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was balled. Exodus 9:31

The barley was used for the first fruits offering. In the people killed by the hail, the first fruits were also destroyed. The Scripture says:

But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 1 Corinthians 15:23

The hail destroying the barley symbolises the battering of Christ, the first fruits. (“we esteemed Him smitten” Isaiah 53:4) The next plague involved locusts and we are told of the origin of locust plagues in Revelation.

And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. (3) **And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.** Revelation 9:2-3

This gives reference to the destroying power of Satan through his deceptions and this is what took place in this plague. Satan would gnaw down and remove any green shoots of hope in clinging to salvation. Satan was pressing Christ with the thoughts that all His work was in vain and that no one would appreciate it. He also provided the fierce temptation that His Father would forsake Him.

For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. (17) I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. (18) They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. Psalm 22:16-18

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, (40) And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. (41) Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, (42) He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. (43) He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. (44) The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Matthew 27:39-44

The ninth plague of darkness reflects to the Egyptians the wrath of the sun god Ra, but to the seeker of truth it speaks directly to the horrors of Christ upon the cross as He was completely surrounded by demons. At this point Satan knew that he could accomplish the ruin of Egypt; this mighty land that had learned so much from Israel in the past and whom God had so abundantly blessed. That sly grin that marks the face of the wicked one now emerges as he knows that Egypt is completely doomed. In that doom

is revealed the sufferings of Christ upon the cross and His agony of loss in seeing His Egyptian children destroyed by Satan. The darkness speaks directly to the events of the cross.

When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but **this is your hour, and the power of darkness.**
Luke 22:53

Now from the sixth hour **there was darkness over all the land** unto the ninth hour. Matthew 27:45

Does the ninth hour correlate in some way to the ninth plague? In any case this moment was the darkest for Christ and for the Egyptians. They both were terror struck by what was about to fall upon them. The darkness also speaks to the complete covering of the Father's face.

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.** 1 John 1:5

The darkness indicates Satan has taken full control of Egypt. All that remains is the death of the firstborn which is the final plague, and this is the culminating work of the destroyer. In their death is revealed Christ's own death. Christ would have willingly died in their place! But they chose the destroyer and now must face him. Yet mercifully, for all those in faith who placed the blood of the lamb on their doorposts, Satan would not be permitted to enter that house.

For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, **and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.** Exodus 12:23

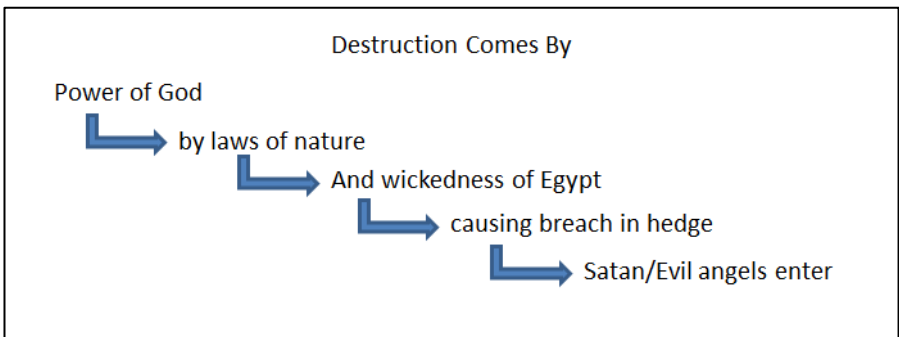
Again we remind ourselves – who is the destroyer?

Their king is the angel from the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon—the Destroyer. Revelation 9:11 (NLT).

Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. [venomous serpent] 1 Corinthians 10:10

By forcing God to withdraw His protection, the evil angels were unhindered in their work as far as He permits; and all the first born of Egypt die, a foreshadowing death of Christ. In the ten plagues of Egypt the cross of Christ was lifted high revealing that the power of God used to bring ruin wrought by the laws of nature in response to the wickedness of the Egyptians caused a breach in the hedge allowing Satan and his angels to enter and destroy. This destruction could only be done through the torture and suffering of Christ who was slain from the foundation of the world through every act of the destroyer upon men. Satan's hatred for the image of God found in man causes him to revel in delight to kill men when and where ever he can.

How Satan exulted in the ruin of Egypt and the suffering that he caused Christ and the Father. The right hand of God was turned to leprosy and His sceptre became a serpent. If we can see through the slime of the frogs, the lies Satan tells of these plagues, then we see the suffering of God and His Son, the cross of Christ is lifted up, and in that lifting up we see the serpent for what he is – a murderer and a liar from the beginning. John 8:44. The cross reveals to us the wickedness of Satan and the longsuffering of our God in allowing him to exercise his free choice at His own great expense.



Our perception that the plagues are of a God using force to compel Pharaoh to let Israel go exposes how callous the human heart is and how little is understood of the loving character of our Father in heaven. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance and accept the protection of His Sabbath, commandments, and statutes.

Let us turn away from all our sins, and come to Christ so that we will not crucify Him afresh by our sinful actions, but rather that we will be crucified in Him daily and be raised to newness of life through the power of His resurrection. Can we see in the plagues the preaching of the cross of Christ and His great suffering in knowing Satan would take advantage of the decisions of Egypt to destroy them? Do you see a tender picture of God that did all He could to save them?

“How deep the Father’s love for us. How vast beyond all measure. That He would give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure.”³

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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. Isaiah 55:8-9

³ Song by Stuart Townend, *How Deep the Father’s love for us*. 1990.

21. The Everlasting Covenant and the Ministration of Death

The Old Testament is replete with stories of extreme violence appearing to be both conducted by God's followers as well as executed directly by God Himself. We would not read many of these stories to our children for fear of frightening them. The Old Testament appears to be quite an embarrassment for a Christianity seeking to preach the love and mercy of God through the story of Jesus.

One of the ways that Christians have tried to address the violence seeming to come from God in the Old Testament is through an understanding of the Old and New Covenant. Many Christians teach that the Old Covenant relates only to the Old Testament or the period before Christ came to this earth and died on the cross. It was the era of the law where you must "obey and live," or disobey and die. There is also a sense that people in the Old Testament were really primitive in their mentality and could only understand the language of violence in dealing with crisis situations.

In contrast the New Testament is perceived as an era of grace. The love of God is now revealed in Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit that came at that time allows men to experience the gospel. Those in the Old Testament could only dream of a future reality of a gospel beyond their reach. Some readers of Scripture have perceived this as God trying to do things in one way only to see it fail, and then try a more loving approach. Others present the situation as God simply doing the best He could under

the circumstances until the Messiah would arrive. This only raises the question of why did it take so long for Christ to come into the world? Some reason that it would have been better to send Him earlier to introduce the loving approach sooner.



This approach to the Old and New Covenant present two opposing principles to the plan of salvation. The Old Covenant focuses on law enforcement while the New Covenant focuses on mercy. The placing of the two principles *in different eras of world history* ensures that the Covenants are understood as opposing each other. Whereas when these two principles are *placed together in a sequence within a person's personal experience* they reveal a beautifully divine process of restoration.

While this subject may seem a little tedious and irrelevant to the subject of God's character, when understood it will be seen that this issue plays a vital role in unlocking many passages that seem to indicate God as violent and cruel in His actions.

Let us take for example the situation of a person that has some level of abnormal bone growth. Upon visiting the doctor the patient is informed that the doctor must break the bone and reset it to grow in the right way. What if the doctor only did the first part of the healing process? What if he only broke the bone and then left it? The doctor would be considered a terribly incompetent physician. Consider another person visiting the dentist due to a growing sense of pain in his mouth. The dentist discovers a serious case of tooth decay. With the consent of the patient he begins to drill out the tooth to prepare it to be restored. Sometimes the patient can experience considerable pain in this process. What if the dentist only did the first part of the job? If he only drills out the decay and lets the patient go home, the unprotected tooth will only continue to cause pain. Thus the dentist will be considered negligent *because he only did the first half of the repair process*.

Let's see what is written in Scripture. Note carefully the use of the word *and* when underlined. This indicates both actions, the one before and after are done together in sequence not one *or* the other.

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: **I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal:** neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. Deuteronomy 32:39

The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. (7) The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. 1 Samuel 2:6-7

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; (4) A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; (5) A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; Ecclesiastes 3:3-5

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but [and] the spirit giveth life. 2 Corinthians 3:6

In each of these cases the Bible reveals a two-step process. Firstly there is a diagnosis of the extent of the problem and a revelation of how painful it is. Secondly there is provided the remedy and restoration. This is how the covenants work in every person's life. The verse in 2 Corinthians 3:6 links the process of the letter killing to the process of the Spirit giving life with the Greek word *de* [G1161] which can be translated as *and*. The Strong's Concordance explains that it is a primary particle that can be "adversative or continuative." The case of the two covenants is both adversative and continuative. The action of the first covenant is adversative to the second covenant because it exposes and breaks down, whereas the second covenant restores and builds up. It is continuative in the fact that the second covenant follows or continues on from the first. Let us look at this process as explained by Paul in the life of Abraham.

For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. (23) But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, (24) which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage,

which is Hagar— (25) for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— (26) but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. Galatians 4:22-26 (NKJV)

God promised to give Abraham a son. The problem was that Abraham had a lack of faith in God. He was not aware of how much of a problem he had until he and his wife were unable to produce a child. This experience was part of the diagnosis problem. The Lord allowed the delay of the child's birth to allow the lack of faith in Abraham and Sarah to be revealed. This process is critical for restoration to take place. The full extent of the problem must be revealed for total healing to be effected. Rather than wait upon the Lord, Abraham submitted to his wife's suggestion to take her handmaid to produce a child through her. Genesis 16:1-2.

At first when Ishmael was born to Hagar it seemed the perfect solution, but things quickly got complicated. The lack of faith in Abraham produced the seeds of conflict in his home. This conflict has continued to the present day in the hostile feelings between Jews and Muslims. This story reveals the extent of how lack of faith can have such terrible consequences. The Lord had to allow this to happen to reveal the lack of faith. The sad part is that in this process Sarah and Abraham hinted at the fact that the Lord was at fault for the delay in the fulfilling of the promise to give them a child.

And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, **the LORD hath restrained me from bearing:** I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. Genesis 16:2

And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. (16) And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. (17) **Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old?** and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? (18) **And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!** Genesis 17:15-18

All of these events were revealing the extent of the problem with Abraham and Sarah. Their lack of faith was slowly being revealed. Paul reveals that Abraham's connection to the two women, Sarah and Hagar, displays the truth of how the two covenants work. Abraham was married to both women. Hagar produced a child first but this caused Abraham so much pain to the point he was forced to send Hagar and his son away. The pain of this process showed Abraham the suffering that his lack of faith had caused. Then Abraham was able to move fully into the New Covenant experience. It was a two-step process with some overlap between the two covenants as there was a period when both sons were living in the same home. Through the test of offering up his son Isaac Abraham was finally able to pass through into the New Covenant. His faith in the Lord did not waver. The perfection of his faith brought in him the restoration that God desired from the beginning.

In order to do this work of restoration, the Lord had to allow the time process to expose Abraham's disease of lacking faith in order to heal him. The Lord allowed events to play out that *killed* Abraham's old way of thinking and *raised* him into the certainty of righteousness by faith.

In the previous two chapters we had discussed the principle of the mirror. The mirror is a tool used by dentists to show us problems that exist in our mouth. Doctors use x-ray as an instrument to show us problems that exist in places we cannot see visibly with the naked eye. The law of God acts as an instrument, a mirror to reveal the extent of our sin disease. This mirror is the tool that leads us to Christ if we accept the diagnosis.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Galatians 3:24

Sin is a problem that begins in the carnal mind. In order to fix this problem our Father in heaven must reveal to us our false thinking. This work is done through the law. The problem is that for most people this revelation of how bad we are causes them to project these revelations back onto God.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he **is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror**; (24) for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

(25) But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. James 1:22-25 (NKJV)

What does it mean to be a hearer of the word but not a doer? A perfect example of this is found in the story of the children of Israel when they came to Mt Sinai. God promised to do many things for them but they did not actually listen carefully. Rather than accepting what He promised them, the Israelites rather told God that *they* would do what *He* had said He would do for *them*.

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. (5) Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: (6) **And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.** These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. (7) And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. (8) **And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.** And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD. Exodus 19:4-8

God had actually said that He would give them grace to obey Him in spirit and in truth. Obedience simply meant to trust that God would make them kings and priests unto Him. Obedience was to be understood as not doing something for God but rather trusting that God was doing something for them. Sadly Israel turned God's promise around into something they could do for Him and thus earn merit for it.

This process is what the Bible formally calls the Old Covenant. This event showed in a formal way the inability of man to actually listen to God and trust what He says.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.(8) For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: (9) **Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of**

Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. (10) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: Hebrews 8:7-10

The Lord knew that Israel would not listen carefully to Him but rather Israel would try to do by themselves what He had promised to do for them. This is part of the schoolmaster process of bringing someone to Christ.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. Galatians 3:24-25

God knew Israel could not keep their promises to Him but He let them try so that when they failed they still had the choice to give up on their efforts, and trust Him to finish what He promised.

As we indicated earlier in the story of Abraham and Sarah, the problem we have as humans is that when the Lord begins to reveal to us our sinfulness our natural mind pushes the problem back onto Him. Sarah stated that the Lord had restrained her from having a baby. She suggested it was His fault as to why things were not working. When the Lord asked Adam if he ate of the fruit of the tree, Adam pushed the blame back onto God.

And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? (12) **And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.** Genesis 3:11-12

This problem of projecting onto God the faults we have drastically impacts the way we read and interpret the Bible. The Bible warns us of our carnal condition and reveals the thoughts and intents of our hearts that we are selfish, deceptive, destructive, and murderous.

As it is written, **There is none righteous, no, not one:** (11) **There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.** (12) They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (13) Their throat is an open sepulchre; **with their tongues they have used**

deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: (14) Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: (15) **Their feet are swift to shed blood**: (16) **Destruction and misery are in their ways**: (17) And the way of peace have they not known: (18) There is no fear of God before their eyes.
Romans 3:10-18

The reality of our nature has been gloriously contrasted to us in the life of Jesus. The love and mercy He showed to His enemies and His patient caring ministry completely condemns our selfishness. Rather than repent, the human heart projects these carnal attributes back onto God in order to justify its own sinfulness. As we quoted in James, the natural man reads the Word of God and sees his own natural face.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, **he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror**; James 1:23 (NKJV)

The Lord is acting like a doctor or dentist in how He is trying to show us the extent of the problem, but this is not enough for us, for we won't believe that the problem is terminal, or if we do, we think maybe there is another cure more palatable than that which He offers us, a temporal painkiller for the duration of our lives would be adequate for example. Yet there is no getting around the fact that sin never grants peace, for "there is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked", not for the flesh and not for the demon-possessed, and therefore God must allow us to experience the consequential sting of our sinful actions in order for us to realize this – that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin". Isaiah 48:22, Romans 14:23.

In distress to Himself He repeatedly watches man go through the Old Covenant motions of salvation by his own ways, pleading to us that we recognize that we can only deal with the problem by allowing Christ to work in our hearts. Still, we refuse to accept that the painful consequences are the outworking of the actions of our own carnal nature, which would be much worse were they not tempered by the gentle oversight of a loving Father who aims to make this chastisement work to our good. Instead, we are tempted to blame and accuse Him of having a harsh character in, from our corrupt perspective, mistreating us and arbitrarily allowing pain to fall upon us. Men have invented exceedingly clever ways of projecting onto God their own debased conduct. As the Scripture says:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? Jeremiah 17:9

These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; **thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself**: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Psalm 50:21

Sadly since the fall of humanity, our hearts by nature are deceitful and murderous. When the natural man reads the Bible he projects these evil attributes onto God. When God is perceived to be violent and tyrannical by the reader this serves to fully reveal and expand the seeds that already had existed in the reader's heart. As Paul explains:

But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. (9) For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. (10) And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. (11) For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. (12) Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. (13) Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. Romans 7:8-13

Men use the stories of the Old Testament that appear to say God destroys and kills people to validate their own murderous nature. The Bible is carefully written to allow men to fully reveal what is in their hearts. The life of Jesus on earth shows us exactly what God is like. Jesus never killed anyone, but rather than look into this perfect mirror of God's love, men choose to read the Old Testament as hearers of the word and they only see their own face on what they think is the face of God.

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. 2 Corinthians 3:18

The glory of the Lord *is* the full character of the Father as revealed in the life of Jesus on earth.

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. John 17:4

The glory of God is His character as He tells us.

And he said, I beseech thee, **shew me thy glory**... (34:5) And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. (6) **And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth...** Exodus 33:18; 34:5-6

When you read the Bible through the mirror of the glory, or character, of Jesus you see something completely different in the Old Testament than when you read it through the mirror of your natural heart. But how is it possible to see the glory of Christ the Lord in a mirror? We should see ourselves in the mirror shouldn't we? How do we see Christ?

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**: Colossians 1:27

When we come into the New Covenant, we are born again and Christ begins to be revealed in our hearts. This starts to change what we see reflected in the mirror. When we see Christ in the mirror our whole way of reading the Bible begins to change. As we mentioned in chapter 18 about plain statements, we immediately begin to see many apparent contradictions that at face value are not easily resolved. This is the evidence of a shifting process from the Old to the New Covenant experience. Our eyes begin to change in the way they read.

And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. (24) And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. (25) After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. Mark 8:23-25

At first we see men as trees walking, but as the Lord puts His hands upon our eyes we begin to see things as He sees them and what a beautiful picture is revealed!

The key to all this is that the work of the Old Covenant is critical in helping us seek for the true remedy in Christ. The Old Covenant through the law

shows us how bad we are in order that we will run to Christ and be healed in the New Covenant. These two processes are always together and occur in the life of every person who comes to the Lord. It is the same process today as it was for Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses.

The attempt to separate this two-step process presents God in the Old Testament as simply breaking bones and drilling teeth without any remedy for them. This makes God look harsh and cruel. Worse still is that the gospel people teach today is often simply believe in Jesus and don't worry about your deformed bones and rotten teeth. This gospel would have Jesus just fill your cavities without cleaning out the decay. This separation of the two steps within a person's life makes God look harsh in the Old Testament and soft and compromising in the New Testament.

The greatest casualty of not understanding this two-step process correctly is that when God allows things to develop to reveal sin in those He is seeking to save, these manifestations of sin are attributed to God as His desire.

Moreover the **law entered, that the offence might abound**. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: Romans 5:20

When the law enters our hearts and minds it causes the sin in men to abound and become more visible. Men are then invited to turn to Christ and receive the remedy.

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: John 16:8

The sinner convicted of sin is then enabled through faith to receive His righteousness – the righteousness of Christ which prepares the sinner for eternal judgment.

We now come to a critical point to understand this whole process. When a man is in his natural state of mind, the expressions of God towards him speak to what is in the heart of the man. God seeks to reveal the intents and motives of the heart of the man. God lovingly desires to expose those things which the man himself is not aware exist in himself.

And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; (12) When thou

tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. Genesis 4:11-12

In these verses God is revealing to Cain what is in him. Cain has brought a curse upon the earth through his sin. The murder he has committed has destroyed his sense of dignity and left him a fragmented man. These words were spoken not to destroy Cain but rather that Cain might realise his condition to turn to God and ask to receive forgiveness. How does Cain respond?

And Cain said unto the LORD, **My punishment is greater than I can bear.** (14) **Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth;** and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. Genesis 4:13-14

Sometimes God will issue commands that reflect the mind of the person in order for those thoughts to reveal what is in their hearts.

Rather than accept the diagnosis as a reality of his condition, Cain projects the blame back onto God. Cain refuses to repent for killing his brother and therefore cannot find peace. The guilt of murdering his brother rests on him day and night causing him to constantly be running in his mind as a fugitive. Sometimes God will issue commands that reflect the mind of the person in order for those thoughts to manifest in a decision, thus revealing what is in their hearts. When Israel wanted to spy out the land, God issued the command to go ahead and do it. The result was that 10 of the 12 spies came back with a faithless report.

...in the Old Covenant or natural state, the commands He issues that are in conflict with the life of Jesus on earth give evidence of the divine mirror in operation.

And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities

we shall come. (23) And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe: Deuteronomy 1:22-23

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (2) Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them. Numbers 13:1-2

The reason the men asked to spy out the land was because they lacked faith in God's word. The Lord wanted to help them see their lack of faith so He simply mirrored back to them their thoughts and issued their own command of what they already had in their heart: to search the land in preparation to take it by the force of their own hand.

We repeat the point that when God is dealing with men in the Old Covenant or natural state, the commands He issues that are in conflict with the life of Jesus on earth give evidence of the divine mirror in operation. They are the reflected thoughts of men in order to cause their sinfulness to abound. They are not the thoughts or desire of God. This is the point where most Bible readers are being confused and therefore deceived.

Take the case of Balaam. God tells Balaam not to go and curse Israel. At first Balaam obeys God but when Balak's men return promising him great honour, he starts to waver and tells the men to stay.

And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. (21) And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. Numbers 22:20-21

This command was a reflection of Balaam's desire to go. The Lord spoke back to him his desire in order that he might see himself. If we don't understand this covenant process the next verses makes no sense at all.

And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. Numbers 22:22

We recall the Hebrew word *anger* here can be translated as *grieved*. The Lord was grieved that Balaam chose to go with the men and sent his angel to warn him. Balaam appears to understand that he should return home but one little word betrays what is in his heart – if.

And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again. Numbers 22:34

Balaam knew that this was not the Lord's will. The whole episode with the donkey and the angel of the Lord clearly showed that what he was doing was wrong. He even acknowledged his sin, but he said, "IF you want me to go back then I will go back." The Lord must speak back to him in the mirror.

And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak. Numbers 22:35

The commands of God to Balaam to go are the reflection of his own thinking because Balaam is in the Old Covenant. When God sees men are determined to follow a certain course, He does not wish to restrict them against their own will.

But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction. Jeremiah 17:23

He gives them freedom to do as they wish. This allows the seed of sin to grow that sin might abound. When sin abounds the opportunity comes again to repent and choose the right way that grace might super-abound.

Consider again the example of when Israel asked for a king. God warned them against this but they were obstinate. So God gave them exactly a king according to *their* desire. It was not God's will to do this but in the mirror of their own desire He allowed them to have their earthly king.

In the time of Moses, God told Israel that the Canaanites would be driven out with hornets. There was no mention of killing and destroying them. Yet the Israelites revealed their murderous desires in Numbers 21.

And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners. (2) **And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.** (3) And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah. Numbers 21:1-3

God hearkened unto their desire to kill other nations, and so in the future the Lord would reflect back their murderous desires again and again in mirrored commands to slaughter their enemies that pleased their ears.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 2 Timothy 4:3

If you do not understand the two-step process of the covenants you will attribute the exposure of man's sinfulness to the character of God Himself!

If you do not understand the two-step process of the covenants you will attribute the exposure of man's sinfulness to the character of God Himself! This has been one of the greatest failures of men in reading the Scriptures over the centuries; a failure to unmask the natural propensity of man to project his spirit of murderous revenge onto the loving face of God.

Any person who confesses Christ as their Saviour must accept that they are guilty of the death of the Son of God. This truth reveals the fact that men by nature hate God and His Son. In an effort to justify this spirit of hatred men project their violent attributes onto God, and proclaim Him as the greatest killer of humanity, thus vindicating the spirit of murder they hold against those they choose to despise, and either secretly retain or openly confess their desire to see their enemies tortured and killed in the flames of hell.

At the present time a call to *fear* God and give glory to Him is beginning. In coming to a better understanding of God's true character, we are moved from the fear of a potentially vengeful Father, to a higher existence of love offering a greater reverence with a deeper repentance for having ever accused God wrongly.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18

A light is starting to arise and the glory of the Lord is now being revealed. When you begin to truly understand the process of the covenants in the plan of salvation, the dark clouds that were cast to surround and smear the character of God will be dispelled in the glorious light of His revelation.

With these principles outlined we now have the tools to examine some very violent stories in the Bible and see in them the patience, wisdom, justice, mercy, and love of God.

22. Moses the Meekest Man

(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.) Numbers 12:3

Raised in an age of perversion, slavery, human sacrifice, and war, this verse stands out as a beacon of light in a dark world. Moses was a very humble, gentle man. He revealed the selfless love of Christ in a way that few men have before or after him.

When he looked upon the wickedness of the people that he was called to lead from Egypt, and having endured their accusations against him along with their desire to kill him, notwithstanding Moses still prayed for them. While many readers may think that they should have been left to perish – however Moses prayed, “blot my name out of the book of life in their stead.”

And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. (32) Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. Exodus 32:31-32

It's easy to read this passage and quickly move on – but to offer up your eternal life for those who couldn't care less about you, or who hate you and even try to kill you? The only other created beings recorded to have had their face shining with the glory of God are the angels. This man had spent forty years in the desert caring for sheep, cradling the lambs in his

arms, leading them gently and protecting them from danger. At Sinai, he spent forty days alone in the presence of God communing with the most gracious, tender, loving Saviour of men. Moses understood the plan of salvation; he had earnestly requested to see God's glory and to him God revealed His character: merciful, gracious, and longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth. Moses bore long with the lies and insults levelled against him. He pleaded before God for the lives of the men that desired his position. Little wonder that our Father greatly desired to raise Moses from the grave and take him to heaven to continue that sweet fellowship, as well as to have him assist the ministry of Jesus in the work of salvation.

From this backdrop, coupled with the principles of the previous chapter, we venture into some very violent stories connected to the life of Moses.

Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. (27) And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. (28) **And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.** Exodus 32:26-28

It is four verses after this that Moses offers to yield up his eternal life if it should not be possible for the sin of Israel to be forgiven. Moses knew the great love and mercy of God, and yet in his mind he knows that the grievous sin they had committed was performed in complete defiance and wickedness before God. What was this wickedness? It was the worship of the Golden Calf, one of the gods of Egypt.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: (8) They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. Exodus 32:7-8

Only forty days earlier all Israel had pledged themselves to worship the true God promising to be loyal to Him. In less than six weeks they were dancing, drinking, and engaging in debauched revelry sacrificing to the useless gods of Egypt.

We need to step back in the story to get a broader sweep of the issues involved. Before the events of the plagues the Lord had promised seven things to the Israelites in fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These promises are recorded in Exodus 6:6-8:

1. *I will* bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and...
2. *I will* rid you out of their bondage, and...
3. *I will* redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: and...
4. *I will* take you to me for a people, and...
5. *I will* be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. and...
6. *I will* bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and...
7. *I will* give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.

This was an invitation to come into the everlasting covenant. All they had to do was accept and believe these promises. How did Israel respond?

And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: **but they hearkened not unto Moses** for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.
Exodus 6:9

They refused to listen or accept the offer. Why would you refuse such a wonderful offer as this! The answer lies in the words “for anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.” They blamed the Lord for their harsh situation and thus they refused to believe Him. But their slavery was attributable only to themselves. Many of them had forsaken the worship of the true God as evidenced by their worship of the Golden Calf. They had given up the Sabbath and all the protections connected to the commandments of God. This was completely their own fault. Yet rather than confess their sin and gratefully accept the offer, they chose instead to project their guilt upon God Himself. How wicked is the human heart! After being miraculously

delivered from all those centuries of bondage they stood defiantly, fully refusing to repent and accept the responsibility for this crisis.

God in his great mercy and love chose to deliver them, even though the vast majority refused to listen. Not until they stood on the opposite shores of the Red Sea and saw all of their persecutors dead on the seashore, did it begin to dawn on their clouded minds that they were really free. The physical slavery had been taken away, but the shackles of the mind still held firm. The murmuring and complaining began.

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: (3) And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Exodus 16:2-3

It is important to note here that the whole congregation murmured against Moses and Aaron. All of them from the first to the last complained about the decisions Moses and Aaron were making even though they could see the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night as tangible evidence of divine guidance.

This accusing spirit of murmuring is the spirit of Satan. He is the accuser of the brethren and this spirit ruled the entire congregation through the wilderness journey. We recall that none of the children of Israel had accepted the seven promises of God but chose rather to blame Him for their circumstances. These small tests were used of God to allow the Israelites to exercise faith, but instead they exposed the true feelings of their hearts to show their lack of gratitude and thankfulness. None of the Israelites were in the everlasting covenant and none of them were filled with the Spirit of Christ. This becomes more evident in the next chapter.

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. (2) **Wherefore the people did chide with Moses,** and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? (3) And the people thirsted there for water; and **the people murmured against**

Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?
(4) And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. Exodus 17:1-4

Rather than give thanks to Moses for letting God use him to lead them out of Egypt, the people accused him of wanting to kill them and therefore some of them thought to stone him to death.

There is no evidence to suggest that the children of Israel ever repented of their sins for these false accusations or their idolatry in Egypt. They were not filled with the Spirit of God, but rather filled with an accusing, pleasure seeking, and ease-loving spirit. It was in this state of mind that the children of Israel promised God to obey Him. They knew that Moses had not done all those miracles by his own power. Their accusations against Moses were only reflections of their original accusations against God found in Exodus 6:9 – they resented their slavery and blamed God for it. This resentment was in their hearts when they promised to do everything God had promised them.

The Lord knew they were not filled with His Spirit and they could not keep their promise. He took Moses into the mountain for forty days in order to let those seeds of resentment manifest. The Israelites did not know how long Moses was going to be on the mountain. They thought he might have died up there and their resentment came to life in the worship of the gods of Egypt.

The Levites, who were of the same tribe as Moses, did not participate in the worship of the Golden Calf. Without the subduing influence of the Spirit of God in their hearts the Levites could only think themselves superior to their brethren. There is no evidence the Levites were consecrated to God. They had murmured against Moses as detailed in Exodus 16. They had promised to obey God with everyone else and therefore were in the Old Covenant mindset. This is critical to understand because, as indicated in the previous chapter – when people are in the Old Covenant, God speaks back to them in the language of the thoughts in their own minds in order to cause sin to be more fully exposed to the sinner.

We need to stop and reflect at this point to ensure we read carefully *how* the judgment of God takes place. It is written directly into the commandments of God. It is the only manner in which God brings judgment upon people.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: (5) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, **visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;** (6) And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Exodus 20:4-6

When Moses asked God to reveal His glory to him the Lord says the same thing but slightly differently.

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. (6) And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, (7) **Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.** Exodus 34:5-7

What does it mean to visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children of them that hate me? Firstly, let us get clear that it comes on the generations that continue to hate God. To hate God is to resist His protection. So the visiting of iniquity is the consequences of sin that falls upon the sinner. The Bible tells us this many times.

The LORD is known by the judgment He executes; **The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.** Psalm 9:16

And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, **but I will recompense their way upon their head.** Ezekiel 9:10

We know that the Israelites were willing to use swords to fix situations. Before Israel came to Mt Sinai they had dealt with the Amalekites accordingly.

And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. (10) So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. (11) And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. (12) But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. (13) **And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.** Exodus 17:9-13

Whether Moses chose alone to fight the Amalekites or whether Moses was allowed by God to reflect back to the Israelites their own thinking we are not told. We do know that it was not God's intention for the children of Israel to kill anyone when taking the land of Canaan.

I will send My terror ahead of you and create panic among all the people whose lands you invade. I will make all your enemies turn and run. I will send terror ahead of you to drive out the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites. Exodus 23:27-28 (NLT)

If the Israelites had accepted the seven promises of God in the covenant they would have been filled with His Spirit. When the Spirit of God truly fills a person, this is what happens.

Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: (6) His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. (7) And I Daniel alone saw the vision: **for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves.** Daniel 10:5-7

This is the nature of the Spirit's divine assistance that would have helped them. They would not have needed to do anything. Their enemies either would have confessed their sins and repented, which is what they should have done, or they would have fled away.

Sadly Israel did not have this Spirit. They were filled with murmuring and complaining and this is why they had no power to cause their enemies to flee from them. What options were left to them? They did what they knew best, they picked up swords and began to kill people. There can be no sweet feeling while in close combat with another human being, no restfulness in watching him fall to the ground with a tortured look on his face, gasping for air, as he lay in a bloody mess, screaming in agony or even just silently breathing his last. You would never forget an image like that. Every man killing another man does not receive the peaceful Spirit of Christ; he receives the withering spirit of the vagabond-fugitive. Such a man has an unholy image imprinted in his mind; the horrible image of creating death through his own hand, causing carnage and bloodshed, where such death then cascades to impact: fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, sons, daughters, relatives, families, and communities.

The Bible tells us that Christ is holy and harmless and undefiled. Harmless means to cause no harm.

For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled,
separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;
Hebrews 7:26

It is not possible for the Spirit of Christ dwelling in a man to take or destroy life. Christ is the resurrection and the life. Death cannot exist in His immediate presence. He raises from the dead, He does not put to death. Men can only kill when they are in the Old Covenant mindset and in the flesh.

In order for God to show men what is in their hearts when they are in the Old Covenant, He will mirror back to them their thinking that sin might abound. He gives to them their desires in the mirror.

On the other hand when a man is in the New Covenant he sees something very different. This is what Moses did earlier in this chapter when the Lord tested him.

And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: (10) Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. (11) **And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?** Ex. 32:9-11

Moses was tempted to give up on the Israelites. Satan surely tempted him to let them go into oblivion and so the Lord tested Moses and reflected back those thoughts as a command.

In Moses, there were two seeds wrestling for the mastery even as Esau and Jacob wrestled in the womb of Rebecca. As Moses had beheld the sweet Spirit of God in the mountain and his face had shone with that light, he manifested this beautiful character and pled with God to spare the Israelites who had treated him so badly. He overcame the seed of the flesh and was victorious. *This same test now came to the Levites. They were in the flesh and not in the Spirit.* Their thoughts regarding those who had worshipped the Golden Calf and refused to repent were that they should die. Therefore *the Lord through Moses reflects back to them their own thinking.* The Lord must bring out of the Levites their murderous feelings. If these feelings had remained concealed it would have done much more damage. As the Levites slept that night in their tents, their minds would have been filled the horrible images of the men and women they had cut down in cold blood. This was the desire of their hearts and God gave it to them. Through their sinful desire God also brought judgment upon those who refused to repent and were allowing Satan access into the camp by their complete rebellion.

Our Father in heaven is all wise. He deals with men through the two-step process of the covenants: first to expose men to their wicked selves in order that they might turn to Christ and then be saved by His righteousness, while at the same time allowing the sinfulness of men to destroy themselves in judgment.

When Moses was tested by the Lord in regard to standing back and having the Israelites consumed we see the New Covenant way of responding to such situations. When the Levites received the instruction to slay the offenders, they might have done as Moses had done. Firstly, *they could have confessed their murmuring against Moses and their foolishness in seeking to do the promises that God had promised to them. They might have also confessed their resentment back in Egypt for refusing to accept the New Covenant. Then they would have been filled with the Spirit of God and the wicked and rebellious would have fled for their lives or maybe even killed one another in their efforts to escape.* Moses provided the source of the pattern of how to deal with these situations. The Levites might have reflected on the way Moses handled the situation. Rather than repent of their murmuring, they chose to rest in their good works of not bowing before the Golden Calf. They chose rather to kill others than confess their own sins.

In the language of the Old Covenant, the Lord sent a message to the entire camp that idolatry is completely unacceptable. The Lord gave them a message in a manner they understood. The death of the three thousand men placed a restraint upon wicked hearts, but *in the end it did not help even one of those Levites; none of them entered the Promised Land.* They all fell in the wilderness and died. For of all those who left Egypt, only Caleb and Joshua entered the Promised Land. As the Lord says – He visited the iniquities of the fathers upon the children of those who hated Him. The Levites still had the seeds of resentment towards the Lord, but they simply were not aware of it. This is proven by their failure to enter the land of Canaan.

Because of the light that shone from the face of Moses and his willingness to die for those who hated him, from Scripture, I am fairly confident that Moses had some understanding of the mirror principle, and as the Lord had dealt with him earlier in chapter thirty-two of Exodus so he was commanded to deal with the Levites later in the chapter. The same test came to all who had not bowed the knee to the Golden Calf.

This mirror principle applies in the same way to many other stories in the life of Moses.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. (5) And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor. Numbers 25:4-5

This is the language of the mirror. These actions are not the character of Christ and therefore the word of the Lord is reflecting the thoughts of the people in order to bring them to repentance. The simple key to read these stories is to compare them to the actions of Christ on earth. Jesus loved His enemies and never killed anyone. He keeps His Father's commandments which say, "Thou shalt not kill." Therefore these commands are given in the mirror of men's own thoughts of how to deal with the situation. Whether Moses fully understood this or not does not change the mirror principle of how God speaks to a group of people in the Old Covenant.

There is another story that we need to consider in the life of Moses that is a little different, that is the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. It is important because Korah was of the tribe of Levi; the ones who did not bow the knee to the Golden Calf. His story tells us what was in the hearts of some of those considered to be righteous at the time of the Golden Calf incident.

Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men*: (2) And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: (3) **And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, *Ye take* too much upon you, seeing all the congregation *are* holy, every one of them, and the LORD *is* among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?** (4) And when Moses heard *it*, he fell upon his face: (5) And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will shew who *are* his, and *who is* holy; and will cause *him* to come near unto him: even *him* whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. (6) This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; (7) And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be *that* the

man whom the LORD doth choose, he *shall be* holy: *ye take* too much upon you, ye sons of Levi. (8) And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: (9) ***Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?*** (10) ***And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee:*** and seek ye the priesthood also? (11) For which cause *both* thou and all thy company *are* gathered together against the LORD: and what *is* Aaron, that ye murmur against him? Numbers 16:1-11

Korah charged Moses with a spirit of control and a desire to impose himself on the people. Of course this charge is projecting Korah's own desires onto Moses. It unveiled the feelings of his heart. Korah indicated that all the congregation is holy and the Lord is among them. Why is he saying this?

We must look at the events just prior to this. The twelve spies had returned from Canaan, and ten of them had given an evil report which was believed by the Israelites. Only Joshua and Caleb expressed faith that God could take them into the Promised Land. The response of the people was to seek to stone Caleb and Joshua to death. In the clamour, Moses is subsequently tested in the same way as before – The Lord tests Moses with an offer of a greater replacement nation. So wicked were the people that it would have been a big temptation to give into this desire to get rid of them.

And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? (12) I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they. Numbers 14:11-12

Once again Moses intercedes for the people reflecting the Spirit of Christ just as the Lord desired.

And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) (14) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard

that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. (15) Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, (16) Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. (17) And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, (18) The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. (19) **Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.** Numbers 14:13-19

The Lord pardoned the Israelites which prevents them from suffering the immediate consequences of their sinful rebellion. Instead the Lord reflects back to the people what they judged in that they kept saying that God was trying to kill them in the wilderness.

Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, **as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:** (29) Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, (30) Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. Numbers 14:28-30

We must remember that this death sentence was not for the purpose of simply destroying the people, it was a ministration of death designed to bring them to repentance. If they had accepted the sentence and confessed their wickedness they would *still* have obtained eternal life even as Moses did. Moses did not enter the land of Canaan and yet he received eternal life. All of the children of Israel might have done the same *if* they had repented.

When Israel was faced with their own wickedness, Satan stirred up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. They criticised the leadership of Moses and cast all the blame for what had happened since leaving Egypt, upon him. Through

Moses, God told the people they were evil and would surely see death. This was intended to bring them to repentance but they chose rather to blame Moses for the failure that had taken place. The accusations became very personal.

Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? (14) Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up. (15) And Moses was very wroth, [grieved] and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.
Numbers 16:13-15

Moses was accused of making himself a prince over them, trying to kill these men, and take their possessions. The Hebrew word *wroth* can be translated *grieved*. Moses had done so much for these people; he had even offered to surrender his eternal life for them. Yet, nearly the whole congregation accepted the lies and accusations of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rather than repent of their wickedness. This really hurt Moses. He was pushed to the very limits by this test. Korah gathered all the congregation against Moses and then the Lord stepped in.

And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation. Numbers 16:19

Once again Moses was tested on whether to let all the people perish or plead for them.

And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, (21) Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. (22) And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation? Numbers 16:20-22

Once again Moses remains faithful and pleads for the people. Such a precious Spirit resided in the heart of Moses; so faithful was Moses to

plead for the people. Moses does then speak of one man – Korah. The test goes deeper now. The Lord instructed Moses:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (24) Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. (25) And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. (26) And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. Numbers 16:23-26

These men are about to fully step outside God's hedge of protection. When the command to move away from their tents was given, they might have even then repented but they stood defiant to the end being ruled by the spirit of Satan. Satan had control of these men and now he must find a way to put the cause of their destruction upon God.

So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. (28) And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. (29) If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. (30) **But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.** (31) And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: (32) **And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods.** (33) They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. Numbers 16:27-33

These conspirators had questioned the right of Moses to lead them. They accused him of seeking to make himself a prince over them. The whole congregation had turned against Moses because of the work of Korah and his associates. Let us look again carefully at what Moses says:

And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. (29) **If** these men die the common death of all men, or **if** they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. (30) But **if** the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD. Numbers 16:28-30

The people had seen plenty of evidence that the Lord was leading Moses through all that happened in Egypt, the Red Sea, and at Mt Sinai. There was abundant evidence that Moses was sent by the Lord. A miracle performed by the Lord in the context that Moses framed it, was a miracle that responded to doubt. When Jesus was questioned by Satan about His position as the Son of God, He refused to work a miracle in response to the temptation connected to "*if thou be...*":

And when the tempter came to him, he said, **If** thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. (4) But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Matthew 4:3-4

After all Moses had done, like Jesus, *they all forsook him and fled*. Mark 14:50. While Moses was suffering in his flesh, Satan called him to come down from this cross. He was tempted to call for a miracle to sustain his position. Never once did Christ respond to the **if** question. Never once did He appeal for a miracle to prove His own identity. He trusted completely in what His Father had told Him.

John the Baptist, who was the greatest of the prophets, faced the same test while in prison. The same *if* principle appears in the question John asked his disciples to inquire of Jesus.

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, (3) And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Matthew 11:2-3

There was no miracle for John like there was for Moses. He went to his death trusting fully that Christ indeed was the Messiah. The disciples of

John returned from their interview with Jesus and gave John the confirmation he desired.

When the Lord told Moses to tell the people to stand back from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, did Moses assume responsibilities that were not given to him when he expressed the *if* questions? As God was forced to withdraw the protection of His angels from these wicked men, Satan tempted Moses with the *if* questions revealing how he had planned to destroy these apostates. Remember that Satan had taken full control of these men. He pressed them hard to resist the appealing Spirit of Jesus to repent. Jesus is the restorer while Satan is the destroyer and through the doubts placed in the mind of Moses, Satan was able to cover his work of destruction to appear as a direct judgment of God. It is an extremely clever deception that without the in-dwelling of Christ will deceive the very elect.

This was the most excruciating test for Moses and it is such a lesson for us. Moses bore the weight of the lies against him for such a long time and pleaded the defence of these sinful people again and again. When it came down to this one evil man and his associates who had turned everyone away, the test became gigantic. It is a test that very few men if any have faced since that time. So Satan was the one who opened the ground and swallowed up these men in order that God would be blamed for doing it. Paul gives us a strong clue to what happened in this verse.

Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. 1 Corinthians 10:10

The word destroyer, as we mentioned earlier, is venomous serpent. Korah and his men led the murmuring against Moses, and Paul says the venomous serpent destroyed them. The swallowing up of Korah and the his associates happened before the faces of the 250 princes. This gave them time to realise they were in great danger and that they should run to their Saviour to flee the destroyer. Sadly they did not repent and they were given up fully to Satan.

And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense. Numbers 16:35

Many will cry “but it says the fire of the Lord,” and will choose to ignore the injunction to compare all Scripture and show that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Jesus, in Luke 9:54-56, told the disciples that the fire that came from heaven in response to Elijah was not the spirit that He operated by. We know from the story of Job that the “fire of God” came down and burned up the sheep and the servants of Job.

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, **The fire of God is fallen from heaven**, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.
Job 1:16

We know that Satan brought down this physical fire and consumed them. So if physical fire is what is meant in the text then this is how it came, yet, as explained in the chapter *Smiting Angels*, this fire may have been the conviction of the Spirit of God that struck terror into the hearts of these men, fully revealed as a flash of light. The Spirit without leniency was smiting the conscience of these men of their sins and urging them to repent, yet as they could not believe in a merciful God, their sins consumed them. As we have already seen this principle of fire from heaven is mentioned in several passages in the Bible.

When these 250 princes refused to repent and God withdrew His angelic protection, did Satan send physical fire and consume them or was it simply the coals of fire from the conviction of sin? It is natural to assume that when these princes were consumed that they were turned to ashes but as we learn in the story of Nadab and Abihu, the fire that consumed them did not even burn up their coats.

And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. (3) Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. (4) And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. (5) So they went near, **and carried them in their coats out of the camp**; as Moses had said. Leviticus 10:2-5

From all the principles we have learned it is evident that there are a number of explanations from Scripture that can be given to show that God is not the destroyer but that Satan is. A correct understanding of the covenants used in conjunction with the perfect life of Jesus on earth traces these violent stories to their source – he who has the power of death and that is the devil. Hebrews 2:14.

Moses was the meekest and most gentle man that lived until the time of Christ. Many erroneous things have been attributed to him through a wrong understanding of the covenants. Under the severest trial, he was tempted and this allowed Satan to cover his work of destruction. This test would have overcome anyone of us, so we cannot judge Moses for what happened. But we also see how one failure to Satan's temptations can have huge ramifications, particularly if it is a leader who has lost sight of Christ. It is important to understand the lesson here that we might see a consistent expression of the character of God in Scripture. Only Christ gives us that perfect picture. How thankful we should be of that example so that we can read the Old Testament in His pure light, discerning the truth of our Father's meekness of which Moses was a shining example.

23. Elijah and the Final Frontier

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels... Revelation 12:7

Satan's process of recruitment required the use of propaganda against our heavenly Father in order to secure the allegiance of the angels. This separation succeeded with one third of the angels through his lies. Revelation 12:4,7. Satan projected his harsh ideology onto God thus drawing the angels towards himself. The angels who followed Satan ended up under the tyrannical regime they believed they were fleeing from. "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." John 8:34.

Satan concealed his true motivation while projecting the very opposite of what he himself had become. All the wisdom, intellect, and powers he had received in his creation by God were crafted into a masterpiece of deception to convince the universe to worship him as supreme.

Man fell into the dragon's snare through the tales that Satan told. He accepted Satan's propaganda against God and embraced the serpent, the very one he thought he was running from in the garden. Satan became the author of death and had the power of death as we discovered in chapter 3. His key lie was that God does not forgive. The reality of this was revealed in the fact that Adam, Eve, and Cain never asked for forgiveness of their sins when approached. Adam learned the skills of deflection and projection as an armour against repentance. He discovered a way to stiffen his knees as to not bow and ask for forgiveness from God.

In this state of mind every action of God that would call man to see his great problem is interpreted as an effort by God to harm or destroy him. This is why the gift of the cross is understood by the natural man as the wrath of God that causes him to rise up and strike His Son. Recall in chapter 20 we stated:

This is the complexity of the cross. It reveals the violent character of Satan and the natural consequence of a sinful life but it *feels* as if God, in terrible wrath, is the one heaping torment on the sinner. *Agape*, Chapter 20, page 203.

Cain feels his own self-condemnation which is the natural consequence of his sin. He feels that his sin is so great that it can't be forgiven. Yet at the same time there is an expression of casting this back onto God to make Him responsible for these consequences. These are the two sides of judgment and therefore the two aspects of the cross. *Agape*, Chapter 20, page 204.

The Bible describes this process of projecting our attributes back onto God as a man reading the Word of God and then seeing his own natural face. We then added to this, the two sided nature of the cross applied to the theme of the covenants:

If you do not understand the two-step process of the covenants you will attribute the exposure of man's sinfulness as God being sinful. God in the image of man, heaven forbid!

In practise this means that the stories of Scripture that are understood to show the greatest triumphs for God actually serve to become the greatest defeats for His character because they are read through the lens of projected sinful human attributes.

Two such stories that fall into this category are the victory of Elijah on Mt Carmel and the offering of Isaac on Mt Moriah. We will consider the story of Elijah in this chapter and the story of Abraham in the next. The story of Elijah has been used by Satan as one of his greatest propaganda weapons against our heavenly Father and His character.

Through the projected mirror Satan causes the fire that fell from heaven on the altar of Elijah to deceive if possible the very elect. It is wrongly believed that God is *in* the fire, wind, and earthquake while the still small voice of the Spirit of God is drowned out by the relentless propaganda of the serpent, whose enmity towards God is magnified in the fallen souls of men.

If we could go back about 2600 years to stand on Mt Carmel with the rest of Israel just after the fire came down on the altar of the Lord and consumed the sacrifice, we would witness a confronting scene. 850 men are seized, men who had led the nation deep into idolatry with its abominable practices. These men had squashed the worship of the true God and even played their part in putting to death those faithful to Jehovah. Elijah, the man of God, then takes his sword to begin the work of cleaning up this abomination. Man after man is run through with a sword, 850 men dropping to the ground breathing his last breath.

And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. 1 Kings 18:40

The hillside is littered with the bodies of the idolaters. Their blood soaking the barren soil until later that evening when the heavens opened up and the skies poured down rain. The rain seems a manifest token of what seems to be heaven's approval of the butchery that took place that day.

Before continuing this part of the story, let's advance to the verses just before Elijah is translated to heaven in a fiery chariot.

Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. (10) And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. 2 Kings 1:9-10

What had Elijah done to cause a band of 51 soldiers to come after him? The king at the time has become sick and sent messengers to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron. Elijah intercepted the messengers and told

them the king would die. Naturally, the king was not happy about this, and sent his men to capture Elijah.

When these men came to take Elijah, he commanded fire to come down out of heaven and destroy them. We might think that the next set of soldiers would learn from what happened and try alternative means to negotiate with Elijah. Sadly, they too met with fire from heaven and died. 102 men were destroyed by fire. This appears to be a superhero prophet that can call fire from heaven and destroy the enemies of God. Right after this story we read:

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.
2 Kings 2:11

For most people this is convincing evidence that God sent down fire from heaven and burned up these soldiers and then took His superhero prophet to heaven. This amazing occurrence, coupled with Elijah's triumph over the prophets of Baal at Mt Carmel, appears to be a marvellous victory for the cause of truth.

If we go to the perfect reflection of the Father in Christ we find divine commentary on these stories.

And when his disciples James and John saw this, **they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?** (55) **But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.** (56) **For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.** And they went to another village. Luke 9:54-56

Then said Jesus unto him, **Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.**
Matthew 26:52

Jesus answered, **My kingdom is not of this world:** if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.
John 18:36

When we behold the glory or character of the Lord Jesus we see something different to what we see in the stories with Elijah. The disciples wanted to emulate Elijah but Jesus rebuked them telling them that this is not His Spirit or method of work. Jesus is not the destroyer but the Saviour. The fact that Jesus speaks directly to the story of Elijah bringing down fire to consume men, telling us that this is not His Spirit, means we need to look more closely at this story to grasp what exactly happened.

What is fascinating is that many modern versions leave out a critical part of what Jesus said:

When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" (55) But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Luke 9:54-55 (NIV)

The exclusion of the statement "I am not come to destroy men's lives" in the New International Version leaves the reader wondering exactly why the disciples were rebuked. It might have been just an issue of timing or misuse of God's power. The inclusion of the phrase on the mission of the Son of God not to destroy, speaks not only to the desires of the disciples but also the actions of Elijah.

We return to the morning after the great victory on Mt Carmel. Queen Jezebel is extremely upset about what took place and sends a message to Elijah.

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. (2) Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, **So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.** 1 Kings 19:1-2

Elijah had been fearless in announcing the coming drought to King Ahab and all throughout the three and half years that Ahab had tried to find and kill him. He trusted the Lord to care for him and provide his needs. After Elijah kills the prophets of Baal something changes and he runs for his life.

And when he saw that, **he arose, and went for his life**, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. (4) But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might

die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, **take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.** 1 Kings 19:3-4

Why would Elijah run from this woman? He had stood on Mt Carmel alone when the king and priests of Baal might have seized him and killed him at any moment. Elijah trusted to the protection of his God. But the reformation that Elijah hoped for did not materialise. The people did not repent of their involvement in the worship of Baal. His heart was filled with fear and he felt compelled to leave his post of duty. Why the sudden change in Elijah? Now having taken life, Elijah experiences a similar experience to what came upon Cain.

Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that **every one that findeth me shall slay me.** Genesis 4:14

The Ten Commandments reflecting the character of God state plainly – *thou shalt not kill*. When men kill other men the fear of death increases in the soul. What you do to others causes you to fear the same will be done to you. This fear increases because Satan is given greater access to tempt and harass. There is a felt need for protection where armies or walled cities becomes more necessary to deal with this fear.

Elijah uttered the mournful words, “take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” What was Elijah wrestling with inside? Why was he overwhelmed with discouragement to the point of death? True, his heightened expectation of reformation did not occur, but what prompted him to compare himself with his fathers, desiring to die?

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. James 5:17

Notice what Elijah said to the Lord when asked why he had fled.

And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? (10) And he said, **I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with**

the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. 1 Kings 19:9-10

Elijah complains that, despite his loyalty, he must witness the agony of seeing the prophets of God slain with the sword, and apparently being left alone. If Elijah was subject to like passions as we are, could he have been tempted to seek revenge for the killing of God's people and possibly those who were his good friends? Would you be tempted with revenge if a close friend of yours was killed? Would it be possible to have this motive hidden deep in your heart, even hidden from yourself and covered with a zeal for God?

When Elijah surveyed the scene of destruction of the prophets of Baal, did he see manifested that seed of murder that resided deep in his soul? Did he become aware that he was no better than his fathers? When Jezebel threatened his life, did he then become uncertain of his relationship with God? Like Adam, did Elijah weave into his response to the question, "What are you doing here?" the thought that it was really God's fault that all this happened? Elijah's expressions are defensive; "I have done this and I have done that." "This situation is terrible and I am all alone."

To some people this type of probing into the superhero prophet is sacrilegious. For those who desire to overcome all sin, they see in the experience of Elijah their own nature on display in order that they might be instructed to face earth's final crisis. It is critical for us to read these stories in a manner that will truly instruct us, so that when we come to a crisis in our lives and we manifest traits of character that are un-Christ-like we will be able to hang on and not plead to die in despair. We must read this story to its depth and comprehend its lessons for us in the last days. The Spirit of Elijah will come to God's people not only to warn the world but to place them in a position to see *their own* murderous nature revealed. If you don't learn the lesson, you will die in discouraging despair, or worse: you will justify murderous behaviour as divine wrath.

We can be confident that Elijah was not in the New Covenant experience at this time. The New Covenant experience is the writing of the character of God into the heart. The character of God is revealed in the law of God.

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

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts:... Hebrews 8:10

Elijah runs to Mt Sinai and is questioned by God, “Why are you here?” Elijah offers his defence. He states that he has been faithful to God but everything was falling apart, in that he was alone, and the leadership were trying to kill him. The Lord proceeds to demonstrate to Elijah that the problem is in his understanding.

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: (12) **And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire:** and after the fire a still small voice. 1 Kings 19:11-12

God’s character was not revealed in the forceful demonstrations of nature. Plainly, he was not in these things. The fire that came from heaven and consumed the sacrifice was interpreted as a show of force that legitimised Elijah in killing the prophets of Baal with the sword. He was told that God was not in the fire. What does this mean? God sent the fire but He is not in the fire? The Lord is telling Elijah, in effect, that He has responded to the request made to reveal who served the true God. The response was in a manner that the audience understood.

All Israel were in the Old Covenant experience. What they witnessed was a display of power according to their understanding of how God should act. All the people interpreted from what they saw that God was in this fire. God told Elijah that He was not. God spoke to the people in the mirror of what was in their hearts. God indeed worked the miracle of the fire *but it was not the reflection of His own character.*

The display of power released the seeds of vengeance in Elijah. This is the work of the law in the Old Covenant. God would cause sin to abound. In the same way that Christ told the woman that it is not right to take the children’s bread and cast it to dogs, our Father in heaven gave a display of power to test the hearts of the people. This display revealed what was in Elijah. In the mirror Elijah hears the command that his heart desired – the

commandment to slay the prophets of Baal. It revealed Elijah as a murderer no better than his fathers. The prophets of Baal are punished in the process. The Lord works through the Old Covenant to send a message to Israel that idolatry is bad, but His character is not reflected in this process.

The miracle of the wind, earthquake, and fire shows us that Elijah did not understand the character of God. However, God was seeking to reveal His own character to him in order for Elijah to see the contrast with his own and repent of this spirit of vengeance. God asked Elijah the question again in order to draw a confession from Elijah.

And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? (14) And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.
1 Kings 19:13-14

Elijah repeats his original defence. This indicates that he does not discern the meaning of the events just shown him. Elijah is brought to the limit. As Jesus said to the disciples, He says to Elijah, “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” Elijah is told that his work will soon end.

And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: (16) And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and **Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.** 1 Kings 19:15-16

The seeds of fear from killing the prophets of Baal remained in Elijah. The willingness to kill is revealed again just before Elijah was translated, when Elijah called down fire from heaven on those who came to capture him. Do we know if Elijah was afraid when these men came to capture him?

And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, **Go down with him: be not afraid of him.** And he arose, and went down with him unto the king. 2 Kings 1:15

Elijah was still afraid. When the captain of the fifty men first called to Elijah, he called him “man of God.” The captain did not doubt he was a man of God.

And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, **If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty.** And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. 2 Kings 1:10

The Lord showed Elijah that He was not in the fire. Why did Elijah then call for fire? He was afraid. How could it be possible that fire could come down out of heaven and consume these men? Under the service of the king who had given himself to the service of Baal, the god of Ekron, the hedge of protection was stripped away. Who brought fire down on these men?

And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.... (16) While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, **The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them;** and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Job 1:12,16

Why would Satan burn up the men who were sent to capture the prophet of God?

Inflict injury on oneself to win the enemy's trust. Stratagem 34 of 36.
The Art of War by Sun Tzu

When Elijah in fear appealed for the support of a miracle to give assurance that he was indeed a man of God, he opened the door for Satan to strike. In striking the very men under his control, Satan convinced the world that God struck these men down and killed them.

The disciples of Jesus took the bait and were eager to follow the example of Elijah in killing the Samaritans. Through this strategy Satan secured the trust of his earthly enemies. They became imbued with his spirit through this seductive strategy. It only cost Satan 102 men, but won for him the propaganda war with the goal of mischaracterizing God, the God Christianity almost universally accepts today. Satan, of course, did this in

unison with the carnal spirit of man, who in his unrepentant nature likes having a wrathful Creator God, because either it justifies his own wrath, or it makes him feel morally superior to God and fortifies him in his rebellion. This story of Elijah is part of the final frontier in escaping the ensnaring web of lies that Satan has laid for men.

When a man invokes divine power in self-defence, he has transitioned to work for the enemy. A man may change sides in this spiritual war without having any idea that he has done so. We would never know the truth without the words of Jesus spoken to His disciples about this fire from heaven, and thus we would be locked into the belief that God sends fire from heaven to kill. This false belief would ensure that we would attempt to serve Him from fear, and not love.

After 40 days of temptation in the wilderness Jesus had become very hungry. Satan tempted Jesus to work a miracle to save Himself. He said, "If you are the Son of God turn these stones into bread." In reply Jesus said that, "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the Father." He refused the *IF* question of the enemy, and clung to the word of His Father. Those who wish to defeat Satan's strategy, partially articulated in Sun Tzu's *'The Art of War'*, must comprehend how Satan works; this is understood not through studying the books of the occult inspired by Satan, which plant seeds of corruption, but through the wisdom given to us from God. It is by allowing Jesus to show us our stubborn, flawed character, allowing Him to work change in us and then through us. He gives us a new moral imperative based on a perfectly assured faith in our Father – as joint heirs with Christ we follow with Him in the same spirit of self-sacrificing love shown in the ministry of Jesus on earth. For the children of God:

... overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; **and they loved not their lives unto the death.**
Revelation 12:11

God's people do not overcome adversity by the sword of their hand with the power to kill people. They love not their lives unto the death.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
(36) As it is written, **For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we**

are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (37) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Romans 8:35-37

How then could Elijah be translated to heaven? Elijah is a type of those in the last days who are translated to heaven without seeing death.

Behold, **I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:** (6) And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Malachi 4:5-6

In the last days the remnant of God will face the beast and his image in the Spirit of Elijah. Romans 11:2-5; Revelation 12:17. This remnant will pass through a trial similar to Elijah in confronting the kings of the earth with their apostasy. This trial is also expressed in the story of Jacob.

Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: **it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.** (8) For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: Jeremiah 30:7-8

Before Elijah could be translated, the yoke of sin must be fully broken. The passions that Elijah was subject to must be overcome before going to heaven. The story of Elijah is connected to the final events of earth's history.

And he doeth great wonders, **so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,** (14) **And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast;** saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. (15) And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. (16) And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: Revelation 13:13-16

The placing of Elijah's story of the fire from heaven in the context of the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6 and Revelation 13:13-16 connects the events of the last days to his experience. The fear in Elijah had to be conquered, and it is through a process of severe soul searching that Elijah broke the yoke from off his shoulders. Elijah was a man of prayer. He prayed earnestly for rain on the day of Mt Carmel, holding on in faith, waiting for the small cloud the size of a man's hand to come. 1 Kings 18:41-45. In the last days the Lord's people will also pray earnestly in the time of Jacob's trouble to gain the victory over the beast and its image.

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. Daniel 12:1

Elijah's experience is also reflected in the life of John the Baptist. He had a major crisis of faith right before he was martyred.

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, (3) And said unto him, **Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?** Matthew 11:2-3

Jesus referred to John the Baptist as the second Elijah.

And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. Matthew 11:14

The crisis of faith that John experienced in believing in Christ as the Messiah surfaced the elements in his character that needed to be overcome. As with John the Baptist, Elijah had to overcome these things. In the crucible of affliction, the sinful hearts of men are revealed, and in that very place the Lord Jesus makes His righteousness much more to abound.

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: (21) That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5:20-21

Elijah went to heaven depending on the righteousness of the Messiah alone. He did not go as a superhuman prophet roasting his enemies. He went as a helpless sinner trusting alone to the grace of God in the promise of the Lamb.

When we combine the stories of Jacob, Elijah, John the Baptist, and the Spirit of Elijah to be manifested in God's people in the last days, we see that all of them are brought to repentance in order to receive the crown of life. They are all brought into a difficult position that exposes the sinful roots of their frail human condition.

This work of repentance is not visible to the Bible reader in the life of Elijah, yet the words of Jesus indicate that the initial spirit in Elijah was not the Spirit of Christ. This must have been repented of before translation could occur. John the Baptist's lack of faith in the Messiah also meant that he needed to repent of this in order to receive eternal life. The experiences of these two men will be repeated by the remnant of the last days. Some will be translated to heaven without seeing death (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) but pass through a time of trouble to purify the dross from their souls. Some will be executed like John the Baptist. But all are brought to a point of repentance that need not be repented of.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. 2 Corinthians 7:10

For Jacob, his self-trusting, self-protective, deceptive character was finally surrendered after his all night struggle with the Son of God, refusing to let go until he gained the assurance of divine blessing and total trust in the God who fed him all his life. Genesis 48:15.

For Elijah, the bodies of 952 men scattered on the ground over the two events, gave evidence of the spirit of revenge and fear that resided in him without him knowing it was there.

For John the Baptist, he risked casting doubt on the work of the Messiah which would have impacted many thousands of people. Yet they both overcame their condition through repentance and trusting alone to the merits of our Saviour. The same will be the experience of God's last day people. It is the final frontier.

There are no hero prophets; there is only Christ and Him crucified. There is only the righteousness of Christ alone for salvation. God did great things in these two prophets yet the greatest thing was bringing them to understand their own need of salvation as no different to anyone else.

When we truly grasp this truth – *there is none righteous, no not one* – then the deceptions of Satan will lose their power over us.

Satan desires men to surface read the Bible and believe that the actions of the prophet reflecting his own violent character should be understood to be the character of God. When God brings men through the Old Covenant to see themselves, Satan convinces men to project the frail human actions exposed as reflections of the character of God. This process of proclaiming holy the actions of men, that they are under the direct will of God, only serves the purpose of justifying the spirit of revenge, violence, and eliminating your enemies.

Let us look to Christ alone as the perfect example of the Father. Only in studying His character can we be certain we are getting the still small voice of God not mixed with the wind, earthquake, and fire. Let us not hurt God by misunderstanding Him, for in this way the truth is rejected and despised of men. “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; **because he had done no violence**, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” Isaiah 53:9.

24. Abraham and the Abomination that Desolates

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. (2) And he said, **Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering** upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. Genesis 22:1-2

After all that we have considered it should become clear that this passage can be read in at least two different ways. One way reveals the love of God in such an amazing way; Abraham offering his son Isaac provides a symbol of the love of God being willing to give up His Son for us that we might see and believe on the name (character) of the Son of God and be saved. In contrast, looking at the mirror of the Old Covenant we see a picture of God testing Abraham's loyalty through an inconceivable test at best and a demand for Abraham to kill his own son at worst.

Why would God ask Abraham to offer his promised son *for* a burnt offering? The request appears to fit perfectly into the concept of an angry deity that demands satisfaction by death. This is how all the pagan religions operate; appeasement of your deity through sacrifice is the heart of paganism. Why does the Bible apparently portray God in this light?

Firstly, let us go back and look at the origins of sacrifice in Scripture.

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. Genesis 3:21

We are not told how the skins came into existence. It is highly probable that an animal or animals had to die in order for the skins to be procured. God might have created these skins without the death of an animal but this is only speculation as from this verse we simply don't know. The first passage that speaks of sacrifice is found in the next chapter of Genesis.

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. (4) **And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.** And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: Genesis 4:3-4

This story indicates that the offerings were required and that without the offering of a lamb the worship could not be considered acceptable.

But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. (6) And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? (7) **If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?** and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. Genesis 4:5-7

Therefore it appears that God required men to sacrifice animals as part of their worship. The refusal of Cain to bring an animal sacrifice escalated to the point of the first murder. What is most significant is that while Cain would not recognise the sacrifice of the lamb, he found a substitute in the murder of his brother to satisfy his own wrath.

This is important to the story of the offering of Isaac because this also was a proposition of a human sacrifice for the purpose of atonement. As to the Lord's attitude towards sacrifices we note the following with great interest.

Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, **and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee:** if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. (6) **Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.** Psalm 40:5-6

The inspired psalmist declares that God did not desire sacrifice. He then makes the incredible statement that God never requested or demanded burnt offerings and sin offerings. At first this thought seems totally incompatible with what is written in the rest of the Old Testament. The instructions God gave to Moses with explicit details on how the sacrifices were to be presented seems to surely indicate that this is exactly what God desired. Yet we read again:

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: (23) But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. (24) But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. Jeremiah 7:22-24

This seems completely contradictory. The prophet Jeremiah writes under inspiration that God did not instruct Israel concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But the writings of Moses give many commands about this.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (2) Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them: (3) If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering. (4) **And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle** of the congregation before the LORD; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the LORD. Leviticus 4:1-4

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (2) **Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savour unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season.** (3) And thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot day by day, for a continual burnt offering. (4) **The one lamb shalt thou offer in the**

morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even;
Numbers 28:1-4

We remind ourselves of one of the key points of chapter 21 of this book.

...in the Old Covenant or natural state, the commands He issues that are in conflict with the life of Jesus on earth give evidence of the divine mirror in operation.

Let us come back to the moment that God approached Adam in the Garden of Eden. God asked Adam if he had eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam does not repent of his actions, but rather accuses God of causing the problem. Adam does not realise that in his heart are the seeds of murder. In taking the advice of the serpent, Adam has embraced the spirit of the serpent who was a murderer from the beginning. John 8:44. In order for Adam to repent of his sin, he needed to begin to understand what he has done in eating the fruit.

We discussed this reality in chapter 19 – *Wounded by Our Transgression*. We repeat this point:

When Adam and Eve fell into sin they became like Satan in nature. The Spirit of Christ that had been in them was pierced and crushed like teeth grinding seed. It is the Spirit of Christ in man that gives him life. He is the light which lights every man coming into the world, John 1:9. If Christ left Adam completely then he would die. The Spirit of Christ in Adam was crushed yet Christ didn't withdraw himself, though it caused him agony to stay. From the continual suffering of Christ, the rock, came forth the spiritual water to keep Adam alive. *Agape*, Chapter 19, page 189, 190.

Adam was not aware that he had the seeds of violence inside of him. He did not understand that the events of the crucifixion of Christ that would manifest 4000 years later found their source in him. The Lord had to show Adam what the problem was in order for Adam to grasp his desperate situation and respond to the Spirit of Christ and repent.

The sacrificial system was a mirror of what men naturally feel towards Christ. The sacrificial system is a school master to bring men to Christ, yet as we have stated previously, men project this mirror back onto God and

place their own character on Him. Thus it is almost universally believed that God demanded the sacrifices and as a consequence men knowingly or unwittingly believe that God killed His own Son.

Abraham was raised in Babylon – the land of the Chaldees. Genesis 11:31. He was raised in a culture of human sacrifice. The principles that had manifested in Cain when he killed his brother became the hallmark of every pagan religion. The slaughter of millions of animals and many thousands of people all stem from the deceitful heart of man projecting back onto God his own wrathful nature. Rather than accept that the sacrifice is a reflection of himself and his depraved condition, men turn the sacrifices around as something required by God in order to please Him.

And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.
1 Samuel 15:22

Abraham had failed to trust the Lord would give him the promised son that he so much desired. He asked the Lord to accept Eliezer, his faithful servant. Genesis 15:2. Abraham then listened to his wife's suggestion to have a son through her servant Hagar, who gave birth to Ishmael.

Their lack of faith created a negative family environment, and Abraham is forced to send away Hagar and Ishmael from his home. In despair Abraham realises his failures. The temptation to sacrifice something in order to appease God increases. All of his childhood experiences, mingled with the seeds of Adam's carnal inheritance, press Abraham to seek atonement through appeasement.

It is in this context that God places Abraham's problem in the mirror. The command comes forth as a reflection of his own thinking in appeasement terms.

At the same time we note carefully that God did not actually tell Abraham to kill his son, Isaac. God told him to offer Isaac *for* a burnt offering. The command provided the ability to be read two different ways.

When Jesus spoke to the woman who asked for her daughter to be healed, Jesus said "It is not right to take the children's food and give it to

dogs.” He did not call her a dog. He spoke the thought that was in the mind of the disciples and what she perceived Jews thought of her. She understood Him to say she was a dog by her response, but she could have as easily told him she was a child of God.

The same thing is happening in the story of Abraham. God only told Abraham to offer his son for a burnt sacrifice. He did not tell him explicitly to kill his son. The reasoning for this could be for Abraham to relinquish any desires for his son that were outside the will of God. Because of the way Abraham was raised and because of his appeasement mindset, Abraham understood that God desired him to kill his son. God knew this would happen. It was necessary to reveal in Abraham his subconscious understanding that God needed to be mollified, while at the same time bringing Abraham to the point of complete trust in God. It is an amazing process of bringing Abraham into the New Covenant of faith in spirit and truth, through the glory of the Old Covenant. 2 Corinthians 3:7-9.

And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. (12) And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. (13) And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. Genesis 22:11-13

If we draw from this story that God does not want appeasement through the killing of our children but rather through the killing of His own Son, then we are still deeply entrenched in paganism not too far removed from the example of the Aztecs of Central America. The only difference is whose son the deity demands to die; that God’s Son is a more worthy and valuable sacrifice compared to the lower sacrifices of the pagans.

The desire to appease God through offering a sacrifice has been a *continual* grief to God over the centuries. He never desired man to appease Him with the slaughter of animals.

And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. (21) And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his

heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. Genesis 8:20-21

The surface reading of this verse causes men to think that God is appeased by sacrifice. The sweet smell that comes into the nose of the Lord causes Him to promise not to curse the ground anymore. The reality is the word *smell* is actually the word *ruach*. It is the root word from which we get the word Spirit, or God's Spirit. The word means:

A primitive root; properly **to blow, that is, breathe**; only (literally) to smell or (by implication) perceive (figuratively to anticipate, enjoy): - accept, smell, X touch, make of quick understanding.

The breathing can be either in or out. The breathing out suggests giving something. The breathing in suggests receiving something. At the beginning of verse 21 is the word *and*. This connection word does not exist in the Hebrew. God was not appeased by the sacrifice of the animals. He accepted the repentance of Noah who through this act intended to say, "I know that I am worthless in myself and I am guilty of murder against your son." The Lord in His great mercy breathes His Spirit on the earth and purely out of His grace does He send life to replenish the earth. When we read the Bible in the light of the character of Christ, all these dark appeasement passages begin to shine in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6.

Cain took the principles of appeasement worship a step further towards nature worship. He removed the lamb that was the symbol of his murderous heart and simply offered fruits and vegetables. In this act of placating God, the things of the earth became his saviour. Cain added to this worship the murder of his brother and so the origins of pagan worship began. In the pagan cults this manifested through the worshipping in groves of trees combined with human sacrifice. This type of worship was a *continual* or *daily* sorrow for God. Satan perverted the most precious truths designed to be taught in the sacrifice and caused men to seek to appease God.

Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: (3) And ye shall overthrow their altars,

and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. (4) Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God. Deuteronomy 12:2-4

The way that Israel should have destroyed the high places of Paganism was to cease the appeasement mindset of worship and allow God to breathe *on* them His Spirit (not smell the smoke *from* their sacrifices).

They thought that God was altogether such a one as themselves; they thought that *they* were giving God what He demanded: blood, the evidence of life sacrificed to satisfy a divine thirst. But God said *He* would give the blood.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: **and I have given it to you** upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Leviticus 17:11

If they had listened to the voice of God, they would have torn down these altars that resided in their own minds.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (4) (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, **but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;**) (5) **Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,** and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

The evidence that Israel never fully escaped the appeasement principle of worship is reflected in the fact that the High Places remained in Israel nearly the whole time, even among kings righteous in the eyes of the Lord.

And **Solomon** loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed **and burnt incense in high places.** 1 Kings 3:3

But the high places were not removed: nevertheless **Asa's** heart was perfect with the LORD all his days. 1 Kings 15:14

And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all

their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. (10) **And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: (11) And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen** whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger: (12) For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing. 2 Kings 17:9-12

Two kings removed the High Places: Hezekiah and Josiah.

He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. 2 Kings 18:4

And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel. (20) And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem. 2 Kings 23:19-20

The book of the law was also found in the reign of Josiah and they began again to observe the statutes and keep the festivals of the Lord. 2 Chronicles 35:1. Sadly Josiah died in battle against the king of Egypt and Israel reverted to paganism once again in their worship. Not long after this they were carried away into Babylon. The desire of Israel to worship the appeasement gods around them is most vividly portrayed in the vision of Ezekiel.

And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, **were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.** Ezekiel 8:16

It is little wonder that as the nation of Israel and especially their leaders were enslaved to worshipping the sun like the pagan nations that eventually they would become physically enslaved by pagan nations. While in the captivity of Babylon, Daniel pled for understanding of what will happen to God's people. In the vision of Daniel chapter seven he sees

a succession of unclean beasts coming up out of the sea to rule the world. God's people are oppressed and persecuted by these ruling powers. God's people are scattered under this persecution, yet all of this takes place because of Israel's refusal to remove the High Places of placation based worship and simply repent for their sins and accept the righteousness of God in the Messiah.

And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; (28) Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even **I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.** (29) And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. (30) **And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images,** and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. (31) And I will make your cities waste, and **bring your sanctuaries unto desolation,** and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. (32) And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. (33) **And I will scatter you among the heathen,** and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Lev. 26:27-33

It is beyond the scope of this book to deal with the seven times mentioned here but it does have a prophetic connection to the restoration of the true gospel amongst God's people.

It was the Lord's plan for Israel to be the leader of nations and that the surrounding nations would come to Israel to learn about the true God and His ways. If only they had listened to His voice and discerned the everlasting covenant and turned from their appeasement theology. There would not have needed to be these great pagan kingdoms arising in the manner they did. These kingdoms were a magnification of the sinful heart of man in order that men might discern the tyranny and futility of the ways of man.

From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that is the three and twentieth year, the word of the LORD hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened. (4) **And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear.** (5) They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and

from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: (6) And **go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt.** (7) **Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.** (8) Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, (9) Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Jeremiah 25:3-9

The four kingdoms that arose in Daniel's vision were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. These kingdoms all had temples of worship in which sacrifices were offered before their gods. Central to Satan's war against God is the continual propaganda of appeasement through sacrifice. Their sacrifices were offered daily. Written on the Cylinder of Cyrus (538-529BC) is an inscription that speaks of their daily sacrifices to their gods.

“**Daily** he planned and in enmity, he allowed the **regular offerings** to cease; he appointed-he established within the city.” Quoted in F.L Sharp, *Antiochus or Rome*, page 40.

This quote mentions a time when the offerings were interrupted. This tells us that they usually had daily sacrifices as part of their services. As Daniel continued to wonder about the future and the persecution of his people he was astounded to the point of despair when in vision he heard two heavenly beings conversing:

And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. (10) And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them. (11) Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and **by him the daily [sacrifice] was taken away,** [rum – exalted, lifted up and taken away] **and the place of his sanctuary was cast down.** (12) And an host was given him [The Little Horn] against

the daily [*sacrifice*] by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered. (13) Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, **How long shall be the vision concerning the daily [*sacrifice*], and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?** (14) And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed. Daniel 8:9-14

We don't wish to get bogged down in all the detail of this passage. The essential point we wish to make here is that the **daily** system of worship as practised by the pagans would be taken away in its pagan form and replaced and exalted into a Christian framework. The power that emerged at the fall of the Roman Empire would take the sacrifice of Christ and frame it in the language of penal substitution. The offering of Christ would be presented to the world as an appeasement of an angry deity that demanded the death penalty. This is the part that is not hard to understand. The gospel message that is preached in most churches is actually sourcing its inspiration from pagan concepts of worship.

As Daniel contemplated the horror of this taking place he was overwhelmed.

And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days. (27) **And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it.** Daniel 8:26-27

When seeking for understanding of how this would take place, the angel Gabriel was sent to Daniel to explain more about the previous vision. Gabriel first gives to Daniel the starting point of the prophecy concerning the seventy week period that would bring Messiah the Prince. Then Gabriel says something very significant.

And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and **in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation [food offering] to cease, and for [against] the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate,** even until the

consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.
Daniel 9:27

This verse speaks of the work of Christ on earth. At the death of Jesus, the sacrifice of animals would no longer form part of the worship of God. When Christ died, the curtain in the temple was ripped in half thus signifying the end of the physical sacrificial system.

However, there is a deeper meaning to this text which has been completely missed by most. We know that after Jesus died on the cross, animal sacrifices continued to be offered even though they had no significance. The deeper reality of the work of Christ is that *the ceasing of offering sacrifices is not simply a physical thing*. When the truth of the cross would be accurately understood then the principle of appeasement theology would cease in the heart of the believer. When the true everlasting covenant is comprehended, men will cease to approach God through the process of appeasement sacrifice. This is the deeper reality of the meaning of the text that *he shall cause sacrifice and oblation to cease*. The little word *for* can be translated *against*. When the everlasting covenant is appreciated more fully then appeasement theology will cease, and the precious truth will work *against* the overspreading of abominations that made the gospel desolate of God's true character of love. A book could be written just on this issue but the connection is clear. The true understanding of the cross will expose and defeat the abomination that makes desolate.

Today when most people speak of the cross of Christ they speak in the context of God's wrath being satisfied. This thinking only leads to an abomination that desolates the heart. Any feelings a person has for God is secretly desolated when they entertain the idea that God would kill His own Son to satisfy His own anger. The soul is left barren with the thought that God had to enact a death decree that only the killing of His Son would satisfy. The Catholic teaching is the fullest expression of this appeasement system. By attending Mass at least each Sunday, confessing your sins to an earthly priest, believing in the Trinity, and relying on the merits of Catholic saints, you can avoid the wrath of God's eternal flames of hell.

The truth is simply this:

Sacrifice and offering only truly ceases for those with whom the Messiah confirms the covenant.

The simple removal of animal sacrifices in itself does not remove the desire to appease God through these sacrifices. Like Abraham, today we can hear the voice calling to us as we are about to plunge the knife into our most cherished relationships thinking that this will appease God.

For all the preachers of the gospel who sacrifice their families to preach the message they feel called to share, listen to the voice – “I don’t need to be appeased! Your works in preaching do not atone for your sins. Your profession of a version of doctrine that causes the need to single out others as heretics to be isolated and condemned can cease.”

Our Father in heaven wants us to be free of our pagan thinking. He desires us to truly believe that He loves us – agape loves us. There is nothing we can do or say to make Him love us more than He already does. Read these penetrating thoughts by this Christian author:

The idea of a propitiation or sacrifice is that there is wrath to be appeased. But take particular notice that it is we who require the sacrifice, and not God. He provides the sacrifice. The idea that God's wrath has to be propitiated in order that we may have forgiveness finds no warrant in the Bible. It is the height of absurdity to say that God is so angry with men that He will not forgive them unless something is provided to appease His wrath, and that therefore He Himself offers the gift to Himself, by which He is appeased...

The heathen idea, which is too often held by professed Christians, is that men must provide a sacrifice to appease the wrath of their god. All heathen worship is simply a bribe to their gods to be favorable to them...

The persecution that was carried on in so-called Christian countries in times past and is to some extent even now, is but the outcropping of this heathen idea of propitiation. Ecclesiastical leaders imagine that salvation is by works and that men by works can atone for sin, and so they offer the one whom they think rebellious as a sacrifice to their god not to the true God, because He is not pleased with such sacrifices. E. J. Waggoner, *Present Truth*, Aug 30, 1894.

If we are honest and see the reality of our Father's character of love, it will begin to awaken in us a deep sense of repentance.

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Hosea 6:6

The appeasement sacrifice system is one of the last pieces in the human defence against accepting our responsibility for joining with Satan and his angels in the murder of the Son of God. When we cross the final frontier this is what will take place.

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. Zechariah 12:10

The agony of soul that Adam could have offered to God in response for his sin can today be ours in the light of the truly loving character of God. God does not require appeasement sacrifice and offering to please him. This is the sacrifice that He requires:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Psalm 51:17

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Isaiah 57:15

If you are willing to carefully search the Scriptures in light of the principles of this book, you will find the truth of the words spoken by Jesus to Philip:

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father... John 14:9

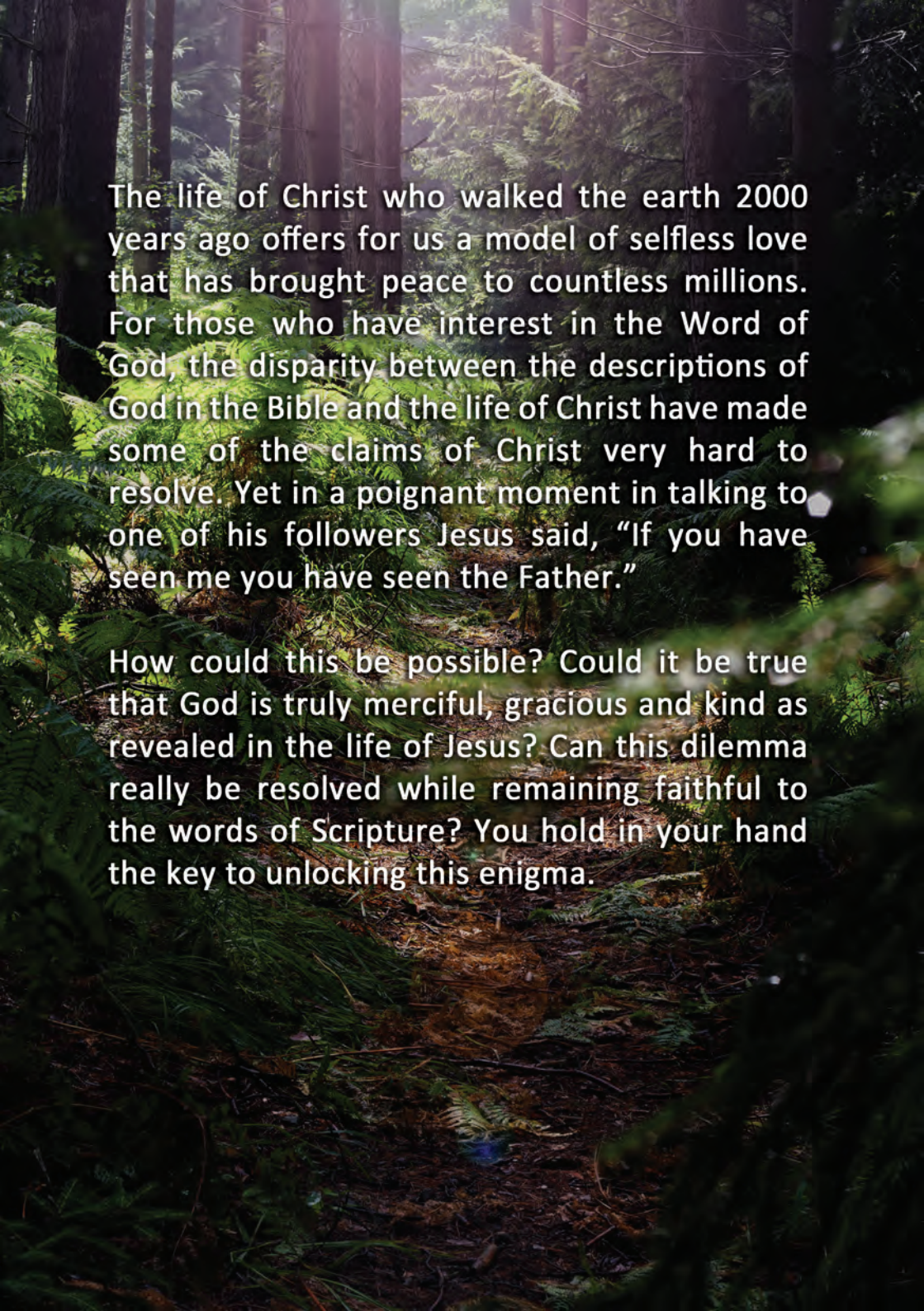
For myself personally, it is such a joy to awake each morning with the thought of the tender love of my Father in heaven. I am moved deeply that He has been so willing to send His Son to show us what He is really like. Even with all the risk that humanity would twist everything, Jesus

came willingly to show us the Father and that we might know that He is not our enemy; He is our Father, our precious Father that loves His children. No words can truly express the depth of His fully selfless-Agape love for us.

It is my fervent desire that we can join together by stepping into that holy place of perfect peace and hear these words in all their fullness.

And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Matthew 3:17

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. Ephesians 1:6

A photograph of a forest path. The path is covered in fallen leaves and ferns, leading through tall trees. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a dappled light effect. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

The life of Christ who walked the earth 2000 years ago offers for us a model of selfless love that has brought peace to countless millions. For those who have interest in the Word of God, the disparity between the descriptions of God in the Bible and the life of Christ have made some of the claims of Christ very hard to resolve. Yet in a poignant moment in talking to one of his followers Jesus said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father."

How could this be possible? Could it be true that God is truly merciful, gracious and kind as revealed in the life of Jesus? Can this dilemma really be resolved while remaining faithful to the words of Scripture? You hold in your hand the key to unlocking this enigma.