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WHEN GOD WAS BLAMED

Accusations Unmasked:
Revealing Divine Love Through Scripture,
History, and Human Tragedy

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WHEN GOD WAS BLAMED

Accusations Unmasked:

Revealing Divine Love Through Scripture, History, and Human Tragedy

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Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to God—the fountain of all wisdom and true knowledge—who graciously enabled me to write this book. Though I write as a child playing at the edge of an infinite ocean, I rejoice in the privilege not only to write, but also in the long-suffering heart of God that bore with me—even when I preached and taught a character that misrepresented His agape principles and the divine methods of life rooted in His eternal design law.

I remain profoundly thankful for the many people who have shaped my journey—through their time, resources, encouragement, prayers, and talents.

As we grow—both physically and spiritually—God appoints different agents to shape who we become, each doing their best with the light they've been given.

At every stage of life, they have inspired me in my pursuit to behold God as revealed in the image of His Son, Christ Jesus.

In a special way, I am indebted to those who have played a vital role in giving voice to this message and making it possible for me to share it.

As God continues to impart His knowledge, may you find joy in spreading it far and wide.

To everyone I've had the privilege of encountering—may God bless you in ways only He knows best.

And as for me, I ask for long life for you all, that you may continue to vindicate the character of the God you so dearly love.

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Author's Preface

Dear Reader,

TRUTH loses nothing by close examination. The message concerning the character of God, with its many facets, must be laid open for all to explore.

The controversy surrounding the character of God has many dimensions, and God has inspired different authors to explore it from various angles. My view is that if we can deeply grasp the great controversy through the lens of counterfeit justice—and how this distortion has influenced humanity's perception of God—we will better appreciate the broader unfolding of this controversy on earth. Still, we must recognize that our small earthly experience is only a fragment of the larger cosmic conflict.

Many authors have written extensively on this subject, and I believe God has provided ample information for anyone seeking to understand His character. Yet I trust this study will not be in vain—that it will reach someone. I draw encouragement from the fact that God chose various authors to write the message of salvation in the Sacred Scriptures. These people, each with unique dispositions, were used in His wisdom to reach different minds. There were audiences whom apostle Paul could reach, but who might have been difficult for apostle Peter to connect with. In that same spirit, I believe God can use this work to reach someone.

The first half of this book explores the principles of the controversy, showing that Christ's mission encompassed far more than salvation for the human race. It is important for the reader to engage with the entire book to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how this controversy has played out on Earth. I am convinced that unless we view earthly events in the context of the ancient and heavenly controversy, we will merely be reading history as detached observers. Everything that happens in this world—including its bloody history—stems from the controversy over the image of God presented to humanity and how that image has shaped human hearts.

Ultimately, we must use the principles learned through the cases examined in this book as a mirror to reflect on the image of God we worship, and to understand how that image influences our relationships with one another. I trust that through this reflection, we will be better positioned to understand why Christ waits with longing for His character to be revealed in His people. It is my hope and prayer that this book lifts you to a new level in your spiritual journey.

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Chapter 1

Trust Deficit

To understand Christ's attainments during His mission on earth, we first need to identify the problems faced by humanity and the entire universe. The human race is caught in a war whose origins go beyond the creation of our world. Although the principles of this battle span various realms, we were drawn into the universal conflict by the archenemy through deception. By choice, we (humans) accepted his lies as truth, plunging our world into a darkness of sorrow and misery.

We are most vulnerable when we do not truly know the identity of the person or power we are dealing with. It is far more difficult to be harmed or cornered by an enemy whose nature and tactics we understand. The greatest threats to the kingdom of Christ often come not from those who openly oppose it, but from those who appear to embody its highest virtues. Cloaked in piety and moral excellence, beneath the surface they conceal sinister motives, grievous sins, and destructive intent.

These individuals serve as the enemy's most effective agents, for they are the least suspected. From the beginning, it has been the devil's strategy to disguise himself in forms that profess goodwill toward those he secretly seeks to harm. His power lies not merely in temptation, but in deception—appearing as light while sowing darkness. The danger is not always in what is obviously evil, but in what masquerades as good.

An angel is, by definition, a messenger. And it is both astonishing and deeply unsettling that the prince of darkness would present himself as a bearer of light. Scripture counsels us not to be surprised by this deception:

“ And no marvel; for Satan himself is **transformed** into an angel of light.” (2 Corinthians 11:14)

The word transform here means to disguise—to assume a role that contradicts reality. When he appears as a healer, he is in truth a destroyer, preying on those whose health he pretends to protect. When he champions so-called human rights, his true aim is bondage, not freedom. His ultimate goal is to overthrow humanity while arousing as little suspicion as possible.

This is the genius of his strategy: not brute force, but subtle imitation. Not open hostility, but counterfeit virtue. And so, the call to discernment is urgent—for the enemy does not always come roaring. Sometimes, he comes smiling.

Adam was forewarned of a cunning adversary—one whose heart was set on evil and whose purpose was to bring about their downfall. Lucifer understood that if he were to appear in his true form as a declared enemy, he would be met with immediate resistance. So he disguised himself as a radiant serpent and approached Eve as a messenger of enlightenment.

He presented himself as a benefactor, claiming to seek nothing but their elevation to the highest possible state. His words were tempting, full of flattery and false wisdom, designed to stir desire and break down trust. Pretending to offer divine insight, he concealed his real goal: to deceive, to corrupt, and to destroy.

Finding Eve alone in the garden, the serpent engaged her in conversation, skillfully leading her into his trap with a question that directly challenged the wisdom and goodwill of God's command: “Yea, hath God said ...?” The intent behind this question was not merely to sow doubt in Eve's mind, but to cast scorn upon the Lawgiver, the Designer, the Creator Himself: “How could God forbid something so seemingly good?”

This subtle manipulation primed Eve to believe that God did not have her best interests at heart—that His command was rooted not in love, but in control. The serpent accused God of lying for selfish reasons, implying that if they ate from the tree, “Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4), and that He was simply trying to withhold from them the fruit they truly needed.

The serpent pressed further: “God knows that in the day ye eat thereof, then **your eyes shall be opened**, and **ye shall be as gods**, knowing

good and evil" (Genesis 3:5), 'and He doesn't want you to be like Him.' It was as if he suggested that the fruit held some hidden qualities—that by ingesting it, they could become independent of the great Source of all things.

Eve was led to believe that there was knowledge she could attain apart from God; knowledge that would elevate her to a goddess-like status. Yet behind this lofty promise lay the greatest tragedy—the degradation of humanity through pride, deception, and disobedience.

God is often portrayed as selfish in His requirements, as if His commands were made for His self-preservation:

“ It was by falsifying the character of God and exciting distrust of Him that Satan tempted Eve to transgress”¹

Eve lacked no fruit. The garden was abundant, filled with trees of every kind—including the tree of life, which bore fruit in season and offered sustenance beyond mere survival. Her choice to eat from the forbidden tree did not arise from need, but from rebellion—a response shaped by a distorted perception of her Father's character. She had been led to believe that He was not trustworthy, that His command concealed selfish intent.

The tree itself was not poisonous, for God had declared all creation "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The danger lay not in the fruit's physical properties, but in the thoughts and knowledge she consumed at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was the internal shift—the embrace of suspicion, pride, and autonomy—that brought death. The tragedy was not in the tree, but in the heart that reached for it.

This manipulation is characteristic of Satan, aptly named the devil, whose role is to falsely accuse and slander. For instance, one might accuse another of stealing his wife—but such an accusation carries weight only if the act truly occurred. If the accused has done no wrong, the claim becomes slander: a false charge intended to harm. In this way, the devil is indeed a slanderer.

G1228 – *diabolos*, from G1225 – *a traducer; specifically, Satan (compare H7854): - false accuser, devil, slanderer.*

Christ referred to him as "a liar and the father of [lies]" (John 8:44). His slander centers on the character of God. But what does the name Satan

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol.5, p.738.2

mean? In Greek, it is associated with the concept of an accuser, though it does not specify whether the accusations are true or false. In Hebrew, however, the term Satan offers deeper insight.

H7854 – *sâṭān*, from H7853 – *an opponent; especially (with the article prefixed) Satan, the arch enemy of good: - adversary, Satan, withstand.*

The devil's aim in every accusation is to undermine the good of those he targets. This is his ultimate goal. Eve believed the counterfeit knowledge about the Creator—presented as truth but rooted in lies—and acted upon it. In doing so, she misrepresented God's goodness and damaged humanity. Both parties suffered a loss. Having achieved his aim through the serpent's deception, the devil then used Eve as a medium to ensnare Adam.

By accepting falsehoods about God and making a deliberate choice to rebel against Him, Adam and Eve's nature and destiny were changed. Through turning the hearts of God's first human children against Him, Satan usurped the dominion of this world. As a result, humanity became estranged from God, who alone is the source of life.

“ Having the **understanding darkened**, being alienated from the **life of God** through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” (Ephesians 4:18)

We must understand that God did not arbitrarily impose death upon humanity. It's not as though He threatened our first parents with punishment if they ate from the forbidden tree, as that would be an act of force and manipulation. Such a scenario would undermine true freedom. Instead, the solemn warning “thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17) was not a threat but a revelation of consequence—the inevitable result of accepting Satan's counterfeit knowledge of good and evil.

God, the Source of life, knew that separation from Him would lead to death. Yet some argue that if God didn't punish sin with death, humanity could live forever in rebellion. This raises a deeper question: Do humans possess within themselves the source of life apart from God? That belief echoes the serpent's lie—“Ye shall not surely die”—a promise of life independent of the Creator.

But if God had to chase down humanity to kill them to prove His warning true, it would ironically validate the devil's claim that death

stems from God's actions rather than from estrangement from Him. Such a view distorts the divine character, portraying God as the author of death and suffering, rather than the One who grieves over it.

“ The displeasure of the Father for **sin, and its penalty, which is death**, were all that He could realize through this amazing darkness.”²

Death is indeed the penalty of sin, but this is not a punishment imposed from outside; rather, it is a consequence of willfully separating oneself from the source of life. When Adam and Eve heard God walking in the Garden, they ran away, because they were afraid. As Adam stated, “I heard thy voice in the garden, and **I was afraid ...**” (Genesis 3:10). Why were they afraid? It appears they perceived God as frowning upon them in anger. However, they had not even seen His face! The issue was clearly within their minds. Their thoughts were distorted; they began to see God through the lens provided by their new acquaintance, the devil.

God's footsteps and presence remained unchanged. The daily rhythm of His nearness continued as before, but their perception had shifted—because enmity had taken root in their hearts. The devil had manipulated their understanding of God's actions and intentions, leading them to see Him through a distorted lens. Apostle Paul writes,

“ **For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God.**” (Romans 8:6,7)

Restoration cannot be achieved through commands or force; it cannot be won with thunder. This is not only because God does not employ such methods, but because one can compel a person to kneel before them without winning their heart. Even if God forced the devil to keep silent throughout eternity, it would not bring back peace to the universe. Incarcerating all the rebels in eternal hell would not restore trust either. Trust cannot be regained through making statements or counterclaims.

The loss God has experienced within His family resembles a classic tragedy: the heartbreak of losing loved ones through the schemes of a foe who sows discord among those who once cherished one another. When a lie takes root and trust is shattered, it becomes especially difficult for the

² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol.2, p.209.3

innocent party to reclaim the love that was once freely given.

Responding to accusations with counterclaims is not enough. Trust cannot be restored by argument alone—it must be rebuilt through consistent, unwavering demonstrations of trustworthiness, even in the most painful and challenging circumstances.

“ **O taste and see that the LORD is good:** blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” (Psalms 34:8)

Each individual must determine for themselves whether God is truly good. This understanding is crucial for salvation. The more we learn about someone, the more our faith in them can deepen, or conversely, give way to doubt. For this reason, God sent His Son, so that the world might know Him as He truly is (see 1 John 3:2).

God knows that humanity fell through deception, and He assures us that anyone who comes to a true knowledge of Him, as revealed through His Son, can experience multiplied peace and reconciliation through restored trust. The Apostle Peter expresses it this way:

“ **Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.**” (2 Peter 1:2)

There is a knowledge that increases sorrow and bitterness (see Ecclesiastes 1:18), hatred, and a heavy burden to the heart of man regarding God. This comes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In contrast, as God's true knowledge is restored in a person, peace and grace begin to fill their life. It is fair to say that our insecurity about God's goodness towards us, as well as our fear and uncertainty regarding our salvation, is directly proportional to our misconceptions about Him.

On the night of Christ's birth, the angels joyfully announced to the watching shepherds that His arrival meant peace on earth for all who would receive Him into their lives.

“ **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.**” (Luke 2:14)

This is a powerful summary of Christ's mission on earth: He came to restore broken trust by revealing who God truly is. It's no surprise, then, that the sole requirement for salvation is faith. When Christ walked the dusty roads of Jerusalem, healing those afflicted by disease and despair,

He often confirmed that their faith was critical to their recovery, e.g.:

“ And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: **thy faith hath saved thee.**” (Luke 18:42)

Anyone can be delivered from the oppression of the great enemy through simple, genuine faith in God.

In His medical missionary work, Christ fulfilled His mission in a sound, practical way—demonstrating what is truly needed for humanity to be made spiritually whole: faith in God through Him:

“ **For by grace are ye saved through faith;** and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

The grace that has been made available to all can only be accessed through faith. It is like God’s outstretched arm—an open invitation to receive the free gift of salvation. But what exactly is faith, and how do we come by it?

We often quote the familiar verse which speaks eloquently of faith’s role in salvation, yet it is worth pausing to examine it more closely.

“ **Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**” (Hebrews 11:1)

Analyzing the term faith, we discover the following:

G4102 – *pistis*, from G3982 – *persuasion*, that is, *credence; moral conviction* (of religious truth, or the *truthfulness of God* or a religious teacher), especially *reliance* upon Christ for salvation; abstractly *constancy in such profession; by extension, the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself: - assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity.*

It’s not unreasonable to equate faith with belief in someone or something. When a spouse says to their partner, “I have faith in you,” they’re expressing a deep-seated belief in that person’s character. This isn’t a fleeting emotion or a conclusion reached overnight—it’s a conviction formed through careful observation, especially in moments of adversity.

Faith, in this sense, is relational and experiential. It can be directed toward people, objects, or even ideas, but its strength lies in the trust that emerges from tested reliability.

Strong’s Concordance suggest that this concept also relates to the *truthfulness of God*. In other words, to accept the free offer of grace for salvation, we must be truly convinced that God is reliable and trustworthy.

There is more to explore in the above-quoted verse (i.e., Hebrews 11:1). Let's divide it into two parts: **“Faith is the substance”** and **“Faith is the evidence.”** What did the word “substance” mean to the authors of the manuscript? This term did not refer to a tangible object; instead, it was used figuratively to convey assurance, which is a state of mind.

Faith Is the Substance

Let's explore the meaning of the word *substance*.

G5287 – *hupostasis*, from a compound of G5259 and G2476 – *a setting under* (support), that is, (figuratively) concretely essence, or *abstractly assurance* (objectively or subjectively): - confidence, confident, person, substance. Refer to the abstract.

The word *hupostasis* is a compound word formed from two components:

G5259 – *under*, which suggests placing something beneath; and
G2476 – *stand*, which means to uphold or support an object, much like a stand does for box speakers.

When these two terms are combined, they create the word **under-stand**.

Faith is an abstract concept that exists in the mind and manifests in actions, as James explains. This understanding can pertain to an idea, an object, or a person. Therefore, it is essential to have an understanding of God if we wish to be saved, as indicated in John 6:69 and 9:35.

Understanding varies among individuals; we are not all at the same stage of spiritual growth, which is why we say that faith can grow. However, everyone must possess at least some “measure of faith” (Romans 12:3).

Faith Is the Evidence

And now, let's look at the meaning of the word *evidence*.

G1650 – *elegchos*, from G1651 – *proof, conviction, evidence, reproof*.

This word refers to the result of having truly understood something. It gives rise to conviction or correction. While people may have an understanding of what you are saying, they may not actually feel convicted. Faith requires both understanding and conviction, with evidence being the foundation.

Those who have evidence for the hope within them (see 1 Peter 3:15) are called witnesses. For this reason, after His resurrection, Christ instructed His faithful followers to remain in Jerusalem until they received the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, so that they might be His witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Their calling was to bear witness to what they had seen, heard, and touched with their own hands (see 1 John 1:1). “That which was from the beginning” had become flesh and dwelt among them (see 1 John 1:1 3). They were not testifying to second-hand reports or rumors—they were eyewitnesses to the incarnate Word. Christ Himself affirmed their testimony, saying:

“ And ye are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:48)

The early Church believed the gospel, because the apostles bore witness to it: they offered compelling, firsthand evidence that Jesus is the Christ—evidence grounded in what they themselves had seen Him do. They saw angels speak with Him. They saw Moses and Elijah converse with Him. They witnessed Him fulfill every word foretold concerning the Messiah. Walking with Him along the dusty roads of Galilee, through Jerusalem and Samaria, they beheld the Word in motion—and in truth, they saw no shadow of darkness in Him.

All these experiences formed an unshakable body of evidence—evidence that gave rise to a faith no force could overthrow. Even when silenced by rulers and authorities, they could not remain quiet.

“ But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19,20)

The good news they had received was so life-giving, so refreshing, that they longed for the whole world to drink from its quenching waters. They were faithful messengers indeed—like cold water to a weary soul—bringing joy to the one who sent them (see Proverbs 25:13).

They had seen and heard these things directly from Jesus. Through these experiences, confirmed by the Spirit of God, the apostles were fully persuaded that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

The Witness of Christ to the Character of God

When it comes to understanding the character of God, the task of bearing witness to Him is daunting—for no one has ever lived with Him. To dispel the darkness surrounding the world's perception of God, only One who knows the breadth and depth of His character could reveal it: the Word, who was with God from the beginning. He alone holds the evidence. He alone can testify to the Father.

We, as Christians, are not direct witnesses of God—we are witnesses of Christ. And Christ is the witness of God. Christ is the true and faithful witness—not only of our character, which He knows perfectly, but of His Father, with whom He had dwelled from eternity past before taking on human flesh.

“ **A faithful witness will not lie:** but a false witness will utter lies.”
(Proverbs 14:5)

There is no true knowledge of God apart from Christ. Any attempt to bypass Him is destined to fail.

“ Do you want to know more of the **character of God**? Then bear in mind that the Bible gives the revelation of Him in the **character of Jesus Christ.**”³

The second witness of God's character is His law (see Isaiah 8:20). It is important to note that the testimony given in the life of Christ fulfilled God's ideal of righteousness as expressed in the law. Had Christ spoken beautifully about the Father's love but lived contrary to the divine standard of righteousness, His testimony would have been void. No wonder, during His ministry on earth, He asked:

“ Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?” (John 8:46)

In essence, He was asking whether anyone had evidence that His life contradicted the law. His supreme desire was to do the will of the One who sent Him.

“ **The glory of Christ is revealed in the law, which is a transcript of His character ...**”⁴

³ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1902, par.3

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 22, 1902, par.20

In the days of Isaiah, what testimony was available about God besides His law?

In the New Testament, John the Revelator defines the testimony as “the faith of Jesus” (see Revelation 14:12; 12:17). It is called the faith of Jesus—not merely faith *in* Jesus.

Faith is born from understanding the evidence and being persuaded by it. Before Christ took on flesh, His faith was already active—for it was His Spirit who spoke through the prophets (1 Peter 1:11). Yet the heroes of old received this faith through a veiled understanding. In other words, whenever they yielded to the faith of Jesus working through them, they bore testimony of Him, though their perception remained obscured by the veil. This limitation made it necessary for the True Witness Himself to come in the flesh and remove that veil (see 2 Corinthians 3:7–18).

Therefore, anything spoken or done by the men of old must ultimately be tested by the testimony of the True Witness and the great standard of all righteousness.

The mission of Christ was to establish this faith, which had been broken by lies. He came as the embodiment of the Father’s truth, living out that truth in the flesh. His actions represent the Father’s perspective, not merely through verbal claims but through practical deeds. The Apostle Paul states:

“ Even when we were dead in sins, He hath **quickened us** together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).” (Ephesians 2:5)

The work of Christ was to give us new life, connecting us to His mission. This is further explained:

“ **For by grace are ye saved through faith;** and that **not of yourselves:** it is the **gift of God:** Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8,9)

The faith through which we are saved does not originate from us; it is a gift. No one can get to know God solely through their efforts. As it is written:

“ **Canst thou by searching find out God?** Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” (Job 11:7)

“ **O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!** **how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!**” (Romans 11:33)

The understanding that arises from speculative conjecture will not save anyone. In fact, it is deeply problematic. We risk fashioning a god in our own image, shaped by personal assumptions rather than divine truth. Christ was sent to restore the broken trust within God's family—a reconciliation of our hearts with the heart of God.

“ It is only because of God's grace that you have been healed through **trust**—and **you did not create this trust yourself**, but it was established through the **evidence of God's character** revealed in the **gift of Jesus Christ**.” (Ephesians 2:8 The Remedy)

It was not out of place for Christ to declare:

“ **I and my Father are one.**” (John 10:30)

Other Bible translations expand the meaning:

“ **I and My Father are one heart and mind.**”
(John 10:30 The Message Bible)

It is on this basis that no one else was qualified to be sent to this darkened world to reveal the true character of God except for the One who fully understood the height, depth, and breadth of God's love: His Son.

“ **The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God ...**” (Hebrews 1:3 New Living Translation)

The Father and the Son are of the same character; therefore, if God had chosen to come to the earth Himself, every act of mercy performed by Christ would have been perfectly replicated—exactly the same.

God revealed His true character through the actions and teachings of Christ. As the Son was destroying the works of the enemy, it became evident to anyone willing to accept the truth that the Father and the Son were One. Wherever Christ went—healing the sick, freeing the demon-possessed, and raising the dead—He was demonstrating the works and character of God while simultaneously dismantling the works of the devil (see 1 John 3:8). This is why He told His disciples,

“ **... he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.**” (John 14:9)

This was a challenging statement for many—for who would believe Him? People often perceived God as a terrifying figure, one whose anger could engulf the world. Hasn't God been presented to them as a God of war?

Just before His suffering and death, Jesus declared in prayer that He had finished the work God had given Him to do. The mission to reveal the Father's true character was complete. It is important for everyone who desires to know God to remember that Christ manifested God's character when He took on human flesh (see John 17:4 6).

“ Christ came to our world **to reveal the Father amid the gross darkness** of error and superstition which then prevailed... **A knowledge of God must be preserved amid the darkness** that covers the world and the gross darkness that envelops the people.”⁵

It is essential to understand that everything we can and need to know about the character of the invisible God has been made visible through the Word who came and lived among us. Inspiration teaches:

“ 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)

“ Do you want to know more of the character of God? then bear in mind that the Bible gives the **revelation of Him in the character of Jesus Christ ...**”⁶

“ **What exalted ideas of the law of God** do we obtain as we behold Jesus fulfilling **every precept, and representing the character of God before the world!** It was by fulfilling the law that Christ made known the Father to the world.”⁷

It is up to each of us to decide how much of the ‘works of darkness’ God can utilize when it is ‘convenient’ for Him. We know from Christ’s character—harmless and undefiled (see Hebrews 7:26)—that **in God, there “is no darkness at all”** (1 John 1:5). He fulfilled every precept.

So, does God bear false witness? Did He lie to our first parents? Did Christ kill anyone? If not, then how can God be said to kill? Or does He not kill at all? ••

5 Ellen G. White, *Special Testimony for Our Ministers*, A01a, p.10.1

6 Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1902, par.3

7 Ellen G. White, *Sabbath-School Worker*, November 1, 1895, par.2

Chapter 2

Counterfeit Justice

DID Adam and Eve believe that God would forgive them after they ate the fruit? Why didn't they run to God when they heard Him walking in the garden? Why did they hide instead of confessing, "Father, we have sinned and we are dying. Please help us"? Why did they run away? Why were they afraid? Was the perfect love 'for God and one another' still in their hearts? .

Trust was broken, and a lie was believed. The nature of fear that was in Adam is described as follows:

“ And deliver them who through (G1223 – *dia*) **fear of death** were all their lifetime **subject to bondage.**” (Hebrews 2:15)

If they believed the serpent's lie—"Ye shall not surely die"—did they even consider they were dying?

The word G1223 – *dia* indicates ***the channel through which an act occurs.***

In this sense, humanity is in bondage—a prisoner of Satan—through (*dia*) the fear of death. This understanding is crucial to grasping the complex web the devil wove around his prey.

The serpent deceived Adam and Eve into thinking that eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would cause them no harm, as he clearly declared, "You shall **not** surely die." It is not difficult to see that Satan instilled a false belief in them.

Having believed a lie about God, given to them by their new, 'well-informed' friend—the devil, masquerading as an angel of light—led

them to believe that it was **God** who intended to harm them. This fear drove them further away from God and deeper into the deceptive grasp of Satan.

We all share in the flesh and blood of our parents, inheriting not only their mortality but their psychological burdens. This is why every person 'born of a woman' is subject to fear. Though the source of this fear is Satan, Adam was the *dia*—the channel through which the infection spread to humanity. Thus, the fear of death, by which we are bound, arises from the belief that God demands our death.

“ Therefore as by [G1223 – *dia*] the offence of one judgment came upon all men to **condemnation**; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto **justification** of life.” (Romans 5:18)

Paul is comparing and contrasting two Adams: the first being our natural father and the second being Christ. Both are *dia*—channels through which significant consequences are transmitted. We all fall under condemnation through (*dia*) channel of the actions of the first Adam. In contrast, through (*dia*) the Conduit of the righteousness of the second Adam, we receive justification.

But how did we come under condemnation because of Adam's offence? Was it that God arbitrarily declared humanity as criminals due to Adam's sin? Apostle Paul clarifies:

“ And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: **for the judgment was by one to condemnation**, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.” (Romans 5:16)

Paul explains that condemnation entered the human race through (*dia*) one man—the first Adam—who acted as the channel by which judgment came, resulting in the condemnation of all humanity.

Adam's poor judgment is the reason we are all condemned. We are not condemned by God or His Son. When Adam sinned, he was deceived by Satan into believing that *God would punish him with death*. This is the pillar of his deception, the foundation of his lies, and a cornerstone of his prison. When we believe that God is intent on condemning us, we find ourselves in a perpetual struggle to survive, thinking of God as our enemy. This belief originates from Satan, and we received this lie

through (*dia*) the channel of our first father, Adam.

A person trapped in this mental deception cannot accept that forgiveness is freely given. They insist that there must be punishment. This is the ultimate deception used by the dragon of Revelation 12 to ensnare angels during the ancient conflict (*polemos*).

“ The mighty revolter now declared that the angels who had united with him **had gone too far to return**; that he was acquainted with the divine law, and **knew that God would not forgive** ...”⁸

To say that someone knows the law of God is to say that they understand the character of God, as the law is the transcript of God's character:

“ The living God has given in **His holy law a transcript of His character** ... The ideal of Christian character is Christlikeness.”⁹

To suggest that 'God cannot forgive because of His law' is to imply that His very character is unforgiving. Some may quickly dismiss this as an obvious falsehood—after all, nearly all of Christianity professes that God is indeed forgiving. But the devil is cunning. He cloaks his lies in half-truths and misleading ideas. He doesn't care if you say you believe in God's forgiveness; he aims to undermine that belief subtly, whispering theories that suggest God's actions prove otherwise.

Let's look very carefully at the following statement, weighing and analyzing every word:

“ In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan; and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice.”¹⁰

Have you pieced together the clues? How does the devil portray the law or the character of God? He says that if you go against God's ideas, He cannot forgive you without first inflicting punishment. This belief is the

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.40.3

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p.365.2,3

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.761.4

foundation of the devil's prison. He has bound us by making us believe it is impossible for God to forgive anyone who has violated His law. When he told the angels, 'I know the law,' he implied, 'I know God. He cannot forgive us; he insists that we must first be punished. His law demands punishment.'

Through Adam, we have been infected with this *counterfeit system of justice*, where *God's justice has been placed in conflict with His mercy*. Satan claims that if God chooses to show mercy instead of punishing, then He ceases to be a God of truth. Conversely, if He punishes sin, then He ceases to be a God of mercy. This is the conflict presented to us. Each of us must decide for ourselves if our God has checks and balances with two conflicting outcomes.

To truly understand the judgment system we derive from Satan, we need to read the following statement diligently. Only then can we grasp the complexity of the system of lies originating from the father of deception. It is not easy to dismantle his illusions.

“ **Satan will be judged by his own idea of justice.** It was his plea that every sin should meet its punishment. If God remitted the punishment, he said, He was not a God of truth or justice. **Satan will meet the judgment which he said God should exercise.**”¹¹

The judgment of condemnation exists in the minds of humanity. This serves as a stronghold for the devil's influence, trapping everyone in chains of darkness and a state of hopelessness. The father of lies convinces us that we have sinned too severely to be forgiven or that we have failed so badly that God must punish us, subjecting us to pain and suffering to satisfy His sense of justice before deciding what to do with us.

All the while, he masquerades as the voice of God. Remember—he transforms himself into an angel of light! He exalts himself as though he were God, and makes us believe it. He establishes his throne within us—but it is a throne that frames and devises *mischief* through the very law meant to reveal God's holiness.

“ **Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?**” (Psalms 94:20)

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol.12, p.413.1 (also *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol.5, p.1087.4)

Mischief, whether it pertains to the body or the mind, is a form of evil. Terms associated with this include grievance, misery, pain, perverseness, sorrow, toil, travail, trouble, weariness, and wickedness. Instead of serving as a hedge of protection against pain and trouble, the law often becomes a source of these issues. In other words, evil arises from the law itself.

When someone believes that God will send calamities to individuals who withhold their tithes, or sends fires to California or the Hollywood Hills to punish those engaging in various forms of wrongdoing, it reflects a misunderstanding of God's law. This perspective mistakenly interprets the law as a means of creating evil.

This is not true of God's law, which is a fountain of life. Its design is to preserve life, not to produce evil. Evil does not arise from the law itself, but from its violation—from breaking the hedge of protection. A broken law is like a shattered fence: the danger does not come from the fence, but from its absence. The evil enters not because the fence was flawed, but because it is no longer standing.

This sheds light on how “the mystery of iniquity” (2 Thessalonians 2:7) infiltrates the temple of God, claiming it as its own dwelling. Like the strong man who secures his goods (see Mark 3:27), iniquity fortifies its hold, distorting the character of God in the process. In this context, it asserts authority over the temple, masquerading as the rightful owner while concealing its true nature beneath layers of deception and sinister disguise.

“ He claims to be officiating as the voice and power of God, claims that his decisions are justice, are pure and without fault. Thus he takes his position on the **judgment seat** [throne] and declares that his counsels are **infallible**. Here his merciless justice comes in, a **counterfeit of justice**, abhorrent to God.”¹²

This “counterfeit justice,” which was entirely contrary to God's love, compassion and mercy, led to distrust not just here on earth, but it affected all intelligent creatures of God. The sacred relationship they once enjoyed with their Creator was ruptured.

¹² Ellen G. White, *Christ Triumphant*, p.11.4

“ It was most difficult to make the deceiving power of Satan apparent. His power to deceive increased with practice. If he could not defend himself, he must accuse, in order to appear just and righteous, and to make God appear arbitrary and exacting. In secret he whispered his disaffection to the angels. There was at first no pronounced feeling against God; but the seed had been sown, and the love and confidence of the angels was marred. The sweet communion between them and their God was broken. Every move was watched; every action was viewed in the light in which Satan had made them see things. That which Satan had instilled into the minds of the angels—a word here and a word there—opened the way for a long list of suppositions. In his artful way he drew expressions of doubt from them. Then, when he was interviewed, he accused those whom he had educated. He laid all the disaffection on the ones he had led. As one in holy office, he manifested an overbearing desire for justice, but **it was a counterfeit of justice**, which was entirely contrary to God's love and compassion and mercy.”¹³

Therefore, the mission of Christ was as crucial to them as it is to us. It was indeed surprising to the un fallen worlds when Christ announced that He would come and die to save humanity! Affected by Satan's deception, they were prepared to see the human race destroyed. All the heavenly hosts would have bowed and proclaimed God to be just ... but what about mercy? When they heard that God sent His Son to die for mankind, they all bowed and cried out, “Behold, here is Love!”¹⁴

“ **Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the un fallen worlds.** The archapostate had **so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles.** They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion.”¹⁵

We must try to understand how the cross resolved this ancient controversy. Satan's notion that “justice was inconsistent with mercy” is a deception—an accusation born of the devil's distortion. So then, what is God's justice? And how did the cross solve this paradox? What kind of justice is it that meets mercy with a kiss upon the cross? ••

¹³ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, September 7, 1897, par.3

¹⁴ See Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 27, 1902, par.4

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.758.3

Chapter 3

Mission of Suffering

THE suffering and death of Christ were the cost of at-one-ment and salvation. Yet the driving force behind this redemptive plan was not divine vengeance but God's goodwill and infinite love for humanity. It was never a scheme to satisfy wrath or to punish mankind—it was love, reaching into our ruin to restore, as stated in the Bible:

“ For God so loved the world that **He gave His one and only Son**, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NIV)

Yet the gift bore a great cost—one deeply felt by the Giver.

“ In order to fully realize the value of salvation, it is necessary to understand **what it cost**. In consequence of limited **ideas of the sufferings of Christ**, many place a low estimate upon the great work of the atonement.”¹⁶

The devil seeks to distract the human mind with trivial pursuits and the quest for greatness, ensuring that the suffering of Christ goes unnoticed. One author articulated this idea as follows:

“ In order for human nature to keep its selfish ambitions alive it must **sleep to the sufferings of Christ**. If we awake to Christ's sufferings and we feel for Him then we will watch with Him and we will give up our aspirations and desires for the things of this world.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol.2, p.200.1

¹⁷ Adrian Ebens, *Cross Examined and Cross Encountered*, p.21

The death of Christ was necessary to save us from the penalty of the law. But why was this necessary? Is it because the Father required the death of the transgressor?

If that were true, God would be both the one who wills our punishment and the one who rescues us from His own death-sentence—a contradiction already addressed in Chapter 1, *Trust Deficit*. To grasp the true necessity of Christ's death, we must look more deeply into the nature of the penalty humanity faced after the fall. Only then can we rightly understand why such a cost was required.

Christ's death is a significant argument regarding the immutability of the law. In other words, God did not intend to save humanity while disregarding His divine law. This is not due to any arbitrary nature of God; rather, transgression from the beginning has placed humanity in a terminal state: “dying thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). This condition was incurred by humanity as a result of separation from the source of life. Therefore, God cannot save humanity by changing or abolishing the law.

Christ's death is a result of His willingness to take on Himself our broken and fallen human nature. It also demonstrates that although God desires to save humanity, He does not lie—as the devil suggests when claiming that we will *not* die.

“ The death of God's beloved Son on the cross shows the **immutability of the law of God**. His death magnifies the law and makes it honorable, and gives evidence to man of its **changeless character**. From His own divine lips are heard the words: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.' (Matthew 5:17). The death of Christ **justified the claims of the law.**”¹⁸

This serves as a sobering revelation for sinners, regarding their final fate if they cling to sin.

The death penalty is still practised in today's world. Human justice has led many to believe that God imposed a death sentence on humanity, which was executed on Christ—on our behalf. While it is true that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), this is not a punishment that God enforces as part of the law, as discussed in the previous chapter

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol.2, p.200.2

(regarding *mischief*). When we sin, we become servants of sin, and the wages we earn stem from that sin. The term of indicates the source, and this has nothing to do with God.

If we interpret God's law through the lens of human justice systems, we can mistakenly think that God operates like worldly governments. In such systems, laws are established by humans and enforced by monitoring those who break the law (*mischief*) and 'bringing them to justice.' Without this enforcement mechanism, or with the ability to manipulate it, many can evade consequences. Many people mistakenly believe that God's law functions in the same way.

The entire human family has been misled by a counterfeit notion of justice, leading us to think that Christ paid the penalty (that we assume God requires!) before we can be liberated. However, God did *not* require such a price. If He did, then our forgiveness would not be free; it would be a transaction facilitated by Christ. This would imply that God does not forgive freely, but only after receiving a payment or bribe.

The story of the Prodigal Son, as told by Christ in Luke 15:11–32, well illustrates this point. It teaches us that the father's love for the lost son led him to accept the son without requiring him to make amends for his mistakes. In fact, Christ's own example on the cross demonstrates that God forgives even before the sinner asks for forgiveness (or even feels the need for it). No one in the crowd, driven by demonic influences, had asked for forgiveness when Jesus asked, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

The significance of the cross is symbolised in the Jewish sanctuary by the altar of burnt offering, located in the outer court. By understanding this symbolism correctly, we can gain insight into the purpose of Christ's death in relation to justice. The construction details of this altar are found in Exodus 38:1,2.

The altar is made of the shittim wood and is overlaid with brass. The wood represents the hearts of men (see Isaiah 7:2; Jeremiah 5:14).

Now, why is the altar overlaid with brass? In scripture, brass is often associated with negative connotations—a carnal mind that is prone to violence and murder. Brass is not a naturally occurring metal but rather an alloy made from mixing zinc and copper. The inventor of this alloy was a descendant of Cain, the murderer of Abel.

“ And Zillah, she also bare Tubalcain, an instructer of every **artificer in brass** and iron: and the sister of Tubalcain was Naamah.”
(Genesis 4:22)

Zinc and copper in the human body are antagonistic, meaning that one can inhibit the absorption of the other, depending on their levels. This raises the question: What are the antagonistic principles in the lie that the devil propagated in heaven? Are they not justice and mercy? The devil argued that God's justice and mercy are inconsistent and separate from one another. However, the work of the cross addresses this conflict in the human heart. Through the cross, God reconciles these two concepts, allowing them to coexist harmoniously (“kiss each other”). The same author who presented the theory of justice as posited by the devil also notes this reconciliation.

“ **Justice and mercy were reconciled by Christ's sacrifice.** At the cross, Mercy and Truth met together; Righteousness and Peace embraced each other. Through the sacrifice of Christ, Mercy is reaching out, offering to cleanse man from his unrighteousness.”¹⁹

Were God's justice and mercy ever antagonistic? To claim so implies that God has two conflicting natures, which aligns with the distorted justice advocated by the devil. Through the death of Christ on the cross, people would be led to believe that God is only willing to forgive once their corrupted notion of justice is satisfied at the cost of the life of the Son. Yet it was a demonstration of His great love that one should die for their enemies.

God is doing everything possible to save us—even going beyond what He Himself requires for belief. In this redemptive process, the unchangeable nature of His law is revealed, along with the truth that humanity cannot survive apart from Him, the Source of life. Though the entire universe—and I, a sinner—may recognize the justice of God and acknowledge my dying state, such awareness alone does not save me. It only intensifies my awareness of my miserable condition (see Romans 7:24).

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 14, 1902, par.10

We cannot save ourselves; no matter how hard we try, we cannot change our corrupt, sinful condition. We are like the leopard that cannot change its spots (see Jeremiah 13:23). If Christ's mission were purely about showing us our fate originating from our terminal condition, it would be rendered useless, horrifying, and mentally torturous. Instead, He desires to unite His divine strength with our frail humanity to tame our sinful nature. Therefore, the suffering and death of Christ alone do not save us; rather, they reconcile our minds and hearts, preparing us to accept His remedy. To convince us of His care and willingness to save, He took on humanity so that we could understand that He truly knows our woes and infirmities (see Hebrews 2:17) and trust Him.

However, does this imply that before Christ, God was ignorant of the peculiarities of sin and the plight of humanity? For 4,000 years, was He not personally acquainted and touched with our struggles? How miserable must those sinners have felt if their Creator did not fully understand their weaknesses! Some have mistakenly concluded that He was made aware of and able to feel the suffering of humanity, becoming our high priest only after taking on a human nature. This idea places the Savior of the world at a distance from humanity, separated by not less than 4,000 years.

Yet, we find a different narrative in Scripture. In Psalms 139:24, David affirms that God was intimately aware of and knew him in a profound way. This knowledge was too lofty for him to comprehend fully. To Isaiah, God was personally affected by the afflictions of His children; their woes were a personal concern for Him, as indicated in Zechariah 2:8, where it says they are the “apple of His eye.”

If God intimately understands every human being who has ever existed, then what was the necessity for Paul to mention the following?

“... in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”
(Hebrews 2:17)

Christ's suffering as a man did not grant Him this knowledge; He came so that humanity might believe that He, having lived as a man among men, is truly compassionate towards our infirmities. Given the greatness of

God, it is difficult for humanity to comprehend that He is affected by our sorrows and suffering. To gain our trust and convince us of His willingness to help us in our trials and tribulations, He chose to become a man.

“ All heaven suffered in Christ’s agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him. When there came upon Israel the calamities that were the sure result of separation from God, —subjugation by their enemies, cruelty, and death, —it is said that ‘His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.’ ‘In all their affliction He was afflicted: ... and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old.’ Judges 10:16; Isaiah 63:9.”²⁰

It is comforting and deeply reassuring for us, who live in the wake of Christ’s incarnation, to know that God sent his Son in human flesh—subject to temptation, acquainted with sorrow, and touched by the same frailties we bear. Yet this truth does not begin with Bethlehem, as one writer observed:

“ All this was as true eighteen hundred years before Christ as eighteen hundred years after. God knew men as well, and sympathised with them as much, **four thousand years ago as He does to-day.** ... God was in Christ, not that **He might know men, but in order that man might know that He does know them.** In Jesus we learn how kind and sympathising **God has always been**, and have an example of what He will do in any man who will fully yield to Him.”²¹

What would make us easily accept the motion that Christ earned the role of priesthood after He experienced our struggles by taking on human form? Why do we relate so well to the image of God as a distant deity, far removed from human suffering, sitting on His throne, indifferent to the pain and heartache of those He created? This view stems from a distorted sense of justice that leads us to believe our suffering is appointed and ordained by God as punishment for breaking His law.

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *Education*, p.263.

²¹ Ellet J. Waggoner, *The Present Truth*, vol.11, December 19, 1895, p.803.6

How could someone who demands our death possibly be *moved* by our suffering? Would he even care?

Furthermore, this perception is reinforced by seeing God's law as a set of legal rules, similar to human laws. In this context, the law is understood to demand a punishment once it has been broken. As a result, Christ would only earn the right to plead humanity's case before a stern God after paying this debt. Before His death, forgiveness was merely figurative, conditional on the arrival of someone who would pay for the sins committed by those who had been figuratively forgiven.

For this reason, sins are understood as being recorded in heavenly books—legal documents that retain guilt until the appointed time when Christ would die to settle the debt and extend His favor to those who profess faith in Him. Viewed through this legal framework, intercession portrays God as a deity who must be appeased, rather than one who freely reconciles.

God is deeply wounded by our selfish actions—what Scripture calls “transgressions” of His law. But this pain does not stem from wounded pride or self-centered offense; it flows from the heart of a Father. We are His children, and it grieves Him to witness the cruelty we bring upon ourselves through separation from Him and our willing submission to our enemies. God does not hand us over to them—we do that ourselves. And it wounds Him still more when those enemies mistreat us.

In His mission as a man, Christ lived and walked as any other. He entered this perilous world as one of humanity's own—exposed to risk, to failure, even to eternal loss, just as we are. His was not a mission of guaranteed success, but one that could have cost the heavenly Father His only begotten Son, along with a world already steeped in misery. It was a mission filled with danger—potentially a deadly mission.

As our hearts ache for our children, knowing the trials they face and the harsh environments they must endure, so too did the Father grieve for his Son. He sent Him from the courts of heaven into the shadows of our broken world—for our salvation. It was a costly mission.²²

As a descendant of Adam, partaking of our “flesh and blood” like the rest of us (Hebrews 2:13,14), Christ was truly our brother in suffering

²² See Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp.49.1, 131.2

and woe—not a brother in our sins, but a brother in the consequences of sin. Although fully divine through His sonship of God, He chose not to hold onto that status.

His earthly days were marked by severe conflict with sin. Since His flesh was our flesh, there was no inherent advantage within it. Therefore, “he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death” (Hebrews 5:7) and achieved victory as a human, and thus it was a victory for all humanity. This wouldn’t have been possible had Christ not assumed our sinful nature and dwelt among us. As such, He achieved victory over sin and thus has provided us with the example of a godly, victorious life to aid us in our struggles. ••

Chapter 4

The Punishment of the Sinner

GOD'S justice, as revealed in His word, demands that the wounds inflicted on sin-stricken humanity be healed—even while we remain in the grip of the cruel ruler we chose for ourselves. Abraham declares that God's justice is about doing what is right (see Genesis 18:25). According to God's system, what must be done for His oppressed creatures?

“ How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? ... **Defend the poor and fatherless:** do justice to the afflicted and needy. **Deliver the poor and needy:** rid them out of the hand of the wicked.” (Psalms 82:2-4)

Divine justice requires that those who execute righteous judgments ultimately protect the vulnerable and deliver them from their oppressors. This vision of justice centers on the afflicted—not on those who exploit them. Indeed, it is the poor who are judged with justice (Psalms 72:2,4), not their oppressors. By breaking the yoke of the oppressor, God reveals His judgment in favor of the poor and the fatherless. This is the kind of justice God calls us to embody on behalf of all who suffer under oppression:

“ Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and **plead the cause of the poor and needy.**” (Proverbs 31:9)

If God's justice involves “pleading the cause of the poor and needy,” why would it be difficult for Him to rescue a man held captive under oppressive rule? Why would someone need to take the sinner's place and die to

save him? Some have argued that God's law demands punishment—an idea that seems to suggest a malignant attribute in God, as though He were driven by vengeance against offenders. But since God's law cannot be separated from His character, such a view would imply that He is inherently vengeful.

Did God need to kill a man to satisfy His justice, only to devise a plan that ultimately contradicts His own purpose? Does this not resemble the accusation Jesus refuted:

“ If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” (Matthew 12:25,26)

What we need to understand is that God's law is a law of liberty, and therefore His justice also embodies liberty. This means that although it is right for God to deliver the oppressed from the bonds of their oppressors, He cannot do so against their will. We cannot envision God as a savior who uses force, nor as a physician who heals with a sword in one hand and a divine injection in the other.

“ Doth a fountain sends forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” (James 3:11)

The death of Christ reveals that God cannot alter His nature to accommodate the unwilling sinner—such a concession is simply impossible. Therefore, God demonstrates to the unrepentant sinner the justice of His judgment through the fate of His beloved Son. It is tempting to assume that when we speak of “His punishment,” we mean that the punishment is inflicted directly by His hand. But this assumption leads to a dangerous misunderstanding.

“ I was shown that the **judgments of God** would not come **directly out from the Lord** upon them, but in this way: **They place themselves beyond His protection.** He warns, corrects, reproves, and points out the only path of safety; then if those who have been the objects of His special care will follow their own course independent of the Spirit of God, after repeated warnings, if they choose their own way, then He does not commission His angels to prevent Satan's decided attacks upon them.”²³

²³ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol.14, p.3.1

The common belief that 'God seeks to save humanity from what He is going to do to us for rejecting Him' has led some to suggest that Christ came to shield us from God's wrath. This perspective implies a troubling division between the Father and the Son—as if the Son came not to reveal the Father's heart, but to protect us from it. Such a view portrays Christ not as the true expression of God's character, but as a necessary buffer against divine anger—sent to mitigate God's wrath and protect us from God Himself.

Contrary to this notion, we learn something interesting from nature. If one decides to break the laws of nature, does it require God to step in to punish them? For instance, consider the Dead Sea. Why is it called Dead? This body of water does not conform to the principle of love, on which the law of life is based. It has an inflow of water but lacks an outlet, resulting in a stagnant state, which reflects a moral condition we might call *selfish nature* or *selfishness*. The outcome is a dead sea—full of water but devoid of life. Who is responsible for its lifelessness?

Similarly, think of a person who has ingested poison. The poison clogs the system, preventing the body from benefiting from nutrients in the blood and blocking the excretion of waste. Without intervention, the person will die. What would be the just action to take if this person were found on the floor, dying? Would it be just to suffocate them to death? No! But if they refuse the antidote or remedy because they perceive the giver as their enemy, what will the result be? They will likely die! These examples illustrate that breaking God's laws causes separation from life.

“ To transgress His law—physical, mental, or moral—is to place one's self out of harmony with the universe, to introduce discord, anarchy, ruin.”²⁴

We are all aware that transgressing the law of gravity could result in damage, pain, suffering, or possibly death. An angel would not need to come and execute the transgressor of this law. Therefore, Christ's death was not meant to demonstrate that it is *God* who would kill us if we refuse to accept His solution for sin. Nor was it a *payment* required by God before He forgives. The damage or death is the unavoidable result of breaking the law upon which life was created to operate.

²⁴ Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p.55.2

Due to a distorted understanding of justice, the gospel has been infected with pagan beliefs, causing Christ's death to be viewed as a punishment from God intended to appease His wrath against humanity. Some have taught such ideas, as the following quote reveals:

“ God is personally offended by sin and thus he needs to be personally appeased in order to offer a personal forgiveness. In keeping with his divine principles, his personal nature, and the magnitude of the sins of man, the only thing that God would allow to appease him was the suffering and death of the sinless representative of mankind, namely, Christ.”²⁵

We need to understand the true nature of Christ's mission, as well as the purpose of His suffering and death. While He satisfied the demands of justice, which can often be considered inconsistent with mercy—leading to humanity being imprisoned by sin—this was not a true reflection of God's ideal justice. Those who grasp these dynamics will better understand the following statement from one of the writers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It's important to recognize the framework in which justice and mercy become inconsistent:

“ Justice and Mercy stood apart, in opposition to each other, separated by a wide gulf. The Lord our Redeemer clothed His divinity with humanity, and wrought out in behalf of man a character that was without spot or blemish. He planted His cross midway between heaven and earth, and made it the object of attraction which reached both ways, drawing both Justice and Mercy across the gulf. Justice moved from its exalted throne, and with all the armies of heaven approached the cross. There it saw One equal with God bearing the penalty for all injustice and sin. With perfect satisfaction Justice bowed in reverence at the cross, saying, It is enough.”²⁶

What kind of justice is this that has descended from its exalted throne? It is a justice that stands in opposition to mercy—a justice that resides in our own hearts, enthroned in iniquity, and wielded by the devil to distort the image of God. This misunderstanding has even influenced the armies of heaven. Christ's mission was to establish His cross as the

²⁵ Robert A. Sungenis, *Not by Faith Alone*, Santa Barbara: Queenship 1997, pp.107,108

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*, October 1, 1899 par.22

meeting place of justice and mercy—a divine coalition drawing the hearts of humanity closer to His own.

“ By the offering made in our behalf we are placed on vantage-ground. **The sinner, drawn by the power of Christ** from the confederacy of sin, approaches the uplifted cross, and prostrates himself before it. Then there is a new creature in Christ Jesus. The sinner is cleansed and purified. A new heart is given to him. Holiness finds that it has nothing more to require.”²⁷ ••

²⁷ Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*, October 1, 1899 par.23

Chapter 5

The Hour of Temptation

HUMANITY has forfeited much by failing to keep watch with Christ in Gethsemane. In His hour of deepest sorrow, when our elder Brother longed for close companions to share the weight of His anguish, He found them asleep (see Mathew 26:36–46).

The three slumbering disciples stand as a solemn symbol of a drowsy Church—unaware, unready—at the very moment their Master faced His greatest temptation. Christ did not bring them merely for His own comfort, but also for theirs. Had they remained awake, the events unfolding in those sacred hours—just before Judas arrived with the bloodthirsty crowd—might have prepared them for the trial they were about to face.

Misunderstandings about God's character and the purpose of Christ's death might have begun to clear. Yet history repeats itself: the Church sleeps through its most critical hour.

This moment is preceded by Christ's mournful cry to His disciples, uttered just after the Last Supper. As we trace His footsteps, the night thickens with silence. Each step toward His familiar place of prayer is weighted with sorrow. Our hearts ache—not only with grief, but with the quiet dread of what we now know to be true. "Why are you sad?" someone might ask. Perhaps it is the painful realisation that His words about His death were not metaphor, but prophecy. Perhaps it is the collapse of our cherished dreams—visions of worldly greatness now scattered like dry leaves in the wind. Perhaps our ambitions for wealth and status have been hushed, silenced by the stillness of the night. Each heart knows its own sorrow. And yet, we ask again, "Why are you sad?"

The great enemy and oppressor has seized our attention, distracting us with his relentless wars of ambition. We quarrel over greatness—who deserves it, who defines it—while the sorrow and suffering of Christ remain scarcely noticed, barely understood. Some have betrayed Him like Judas, trading sacred loyalty for worldly gain. And in the end, the Man of Sorrows walks alone, bearing the weight of the cross we refused to share. But why was Christ, our brother, sorrowful?

“ Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to **be sorrowful and very heavy.**” (Matthew 26:36,37)

It is unfortunate that Peter left no personal account of that night. It seems he did not even hear Jesus express His sorrow. I find myself longing to understand what weighed so heavily on my Savior’s heart.

The only words He spoke that night, preserved for us to read, are found in His prayer—His plea for the cup to be taken from Him. But what was in this proverbial cup? I yearn to understand. Did the Father compel Him to drink it? Was the Son subjected to mental torment at the hands of the Father? Is this the moment when divine wrath is poured out—not upon the body, but upon the mind of the Son?

Scripture opens a window into the heart of Christ, offering glimpses of what may have been unfolding within Him:

“ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou **so far from helping me**, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but **thou hearest not; and in the night season**, and am not silent.” (Psalms 22:1,2)

This is unlike the Father I know—the righteous Judge who delivers all who call upon His name. Was the Son of God met with silent treatment? Did He endure the cold shoulder of heaven so that justice might be satisfied? At this hour, He cries out—forsaken, unheard, and utterly alone. It is horrific: deserted by His closest friends, and now met with silence from His beloved Father.

The suffering Redeemer, in the final moments of His earthly agony, uttered these piercing words from the cross—words that echo through eternity—just before He breathed His last:

“ My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

This must be the cup He so deeply dreaded. But why would the Father allow it? It hurts to contemplate. Why? What wrong had He done? How could the Son ever deserve such anguish?

Remember, the justice of God is to deliver the sinner—but never against his will. There is an explicit word from God concerning the fate of every resentful soul. Christ stood in the place of such a sinner, receiving the treatment that was ours. God’s justice, which cannot override the will of the uncooperative sinner, leaves him to face the consequences of his own voluntary choice—alone.

There is another piece of the puzzle that brings the picture into sharper focus: Christ was surrounded by the powers of darkness.

“ Behold Him in the garden of Gethsemane. The burden of the sins of the world was upon Him, while **the powers of darkness oppressed His soul**, and He poured out His prayer of agony to His Father, saying, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt ...”²⁸

This situation was truly terrifying. Was God not mentally torturing His Son? It seems the assault came from demons—from fallen angels—who surrounded Him. They must have sought to discourage Him, making Him, in the place of a sinner, feel that His case was hopeless. He was confronted by the very oppressor of those He came to save. This was indeed the hour of temptation. The specific words these demons haunted Him with will be revealed in eternity. What is clear is that this mental anguish was designed to dissuade Him from the mission He had willingly embraced.

God’s wrath, rightly understood, is not an arbitrary punishment—it is essentially allowing us to follow our own choices. From eternity past, Christ made a willing, voluntary decision to take the place of fallen humanity. And in this role, He experienced the cross.

His struggle was so intense that His sweat turned to blood. This reveals the cost of our salvation—not what God demanded, but what it cost both the Father and the Son to ransom us from the deadly grasp of the devil.

²⁸ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, February 9, 1891 par.3

As His blood flowed, it moistened the earth from which man was first formed. It is as though His blood initiates a new creation—a new humanity—not fashioned from clay and water, but from clay and blood. What a staggering mystery: a new Adam born not of dust alone, but of divine sacrifice. This is the astonishing work of both the Father and the Son, accomplished through everlasting love.

The words Christ uttered on the cross were not entirely His own. As the bearer of sin, He voiced thoughts shaped by the torment of the enemy. These words did not reflect ultimate reality; God had not truly withdrawn from the Son. Rather, they expressed the Son's interpretation of the moment—an interpretation forged in the crucible of anguish and temptation. What He spoke revealed the depth of that torment, and the source of those thoughts was the devil himself.

“ **He was oppressed by the powers of darkness.** Satan declared that Christ was in his hands, and that he was superior in strength to the Son of God, that God had disowned His Son.”²⁹

“ **Such were the temptations that Satan pressed upon the Son of God,** while legions of evil angels were all about Him, and the holy angels were not permitted to break their ranks, and engage in conflict with the reviling foe. Christ could not see through the portals of the tomb.”³⁰

“ **When Christ sought the garden of Gethsemane, the enemy pressed darkness upon his soul.** Even His disciples did not watch with Him through that hour of trial. They heard the agony of prayer that came from His pale and quivering lips, but they soon allowed sleep to overcome them, and left their suffering Master to **wrestle with the powers of darkness alone.**”³¹

How I wish Peter and His two other beloved friends had understood the challenges their Master faced! I wish that I, too, were more awake to the suffering of Christ. What precious moments have been lost, moments in which we could have grappled with and ministered to the suffering Son of God!

²⁹ Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, September 15, 1892, par.1

³⁰ Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, September 15, 1892, par.2

³¹ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, November 25, 1889, par.1

The battle was not one of physical endurance but of the mind and spirit. By the time Peter awoke, Judas and his band of murderers had arrived, manifesting in flesh what had already unfolded in the unseen realm. It was too late for the disciples to emerge victorious. The battle Christ had fought—and won—while they slept was now revealed to their dulled spiritual vision.

Like Samson with his head shaved, they shook themselves awake and reached for weapons of war, ready for confrontation. But for their Master, it was a strange struggle indeed.

May we spend much time “watching with Christ” in Gethsemane, that we might begin to understand the great cost of our salvation. While there is still time, let us accept His offer of justice.

The death of Christ declared to the watching universe—and to every human heart that dared to look—that “God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner,” wielding punishment for sin. He stands instead as Redeemer, bearing the cost Himself.

“**God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression;** but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown which yields its unfailing harvest. **The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner,** and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and **no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan.** The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace and resisting the pleadings of divine mercy. Never was there given a more decisive testimony to God’s hatred of sin and to the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty.”³²

³² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p.36.1

King of my life, I crown Thee now,
Thine shall the glory be;
Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow,
Lead me to Calvary.

Lest I forget Gethsemane,
Lest I forget Thine agony;
Lest I forget Thy love for me,
Lead me to Calvary.

May I be willing, Lord, to bear
Daily my cross for Thee;
Even Thy cup of grief to share,
Thou hast borne all for me.³³ ••

³³ Jennie Evelyn Hussey, Hymn *Lead me to Calvary*, 1921

Chapter 6

Mystery of Iniquity

THE plan of redemption came at an immeasurable cost—the life and suffering of both God and His Son. Our salvation does indeed depend on His death. Without the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, humanity could not be saved. Yet this does not mean that His death alone was sufficient for our salvation.

“ For if, when we were enemies, we were **reconciled to God by the death of his Son**, much more, being reconciled, we shall be **saved by his life.**” (Romans 5:10)

God reconciled the world to Himself through the death and suffering of His Son, Jesus Christ. This statement has led some theologians to assume that God demanded the death of His Son in order to be reconciled to humanity. First, it is important to note that it is strange and foreign to Scripture to suggest that God needed to be reconciled to man, as this would imply that God is changeable and capable of experiencing the variableness and shadow of shifting like a common mortal. Yet some Bible scholars still promote this view:

“ Christ’s self-sacrifice is pleasing to God because this sacrificial offering took away the barrier between God and sinful man in that **Christ fully bore God’s wrath on man’s sin.** Through Christ, God’s wrath is not turned into love but is turned away from man and borne by Himself.”³⁴

³⁴ Hans K LaRondelle, *Christ Our Salvation*, Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1980, pp.25,26; quoted in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), p.111

“ Paul always speaks of people being reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:19; Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:20). He never refers to God being reconciled to us. In spite of that fact, however, we should recognize that sin affected both sides. Humanity’s rebellion and sense of guilt alienated it from God, while God was separated from humankind by His necessary hatred of and judgment on sin (His wrath). Christ’s sacrificial death (propitiation) removed the barrier to reconciliation from God’s side.”³⁵

Secondly, to claim that sin stirred enmity in God’s heart toward humanity implies a need for appeasement.

The concept of sacrifice or oblation in the process of atonement suggests that the one who has been offended harbors resentment toward the offender and must be appeased to restore peace. While it is true that Christ is our propitiation, does this mean He was appeasing His Father? Yet it was the Father Himself who “sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Does this mean He offers the sacrifice to Himself? Some authors tend to support the opposite:

“ Every text in the Bible that speaks of reconciliation, makes God the one who makes the reconciliation, – God in Christ. Every text in the Bible that speaks of the atonement, when we get it right, makes God the one who makes the atonement in Christ; not Christ simply, but God in Christ; just as God in Christ creates, redeems, reconciles, He makes the atonement. And every time the atonement, reconciliation, or propitiation are mentioned, it leads us right back to the character of God.”³⁶

Powerful words indeed. Yet contrary to Scripture, paganism has taught that oblations are offered to the gods to appease their wrath or secure their favor. Tragically, this heathen notion has been projected onto the sacrifice of the cross. Pagan religions promote this concept:

“ If it is an ordinary case, the blood of bulls and goats will suffice; but if it is an extraordinary case, the blood of some innocent virgin or child must flow; and when the god smells the blood, his wrath is appeased.”³⁷

The idea here is that Christ’s death was intended to free us from the wrath

³⁵ George R. Knight, *The Cross of Christ: God’s Work for Us*, Review and Herald, 2008, p.74

³⁶ G. E. Fifield, Sermon, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, February 12, 1897, p.14.3

³⁷ G. E. Fifield, Sermon, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, February 12, 1897, p.14.3

of His Father against the transgression of His law. Yet this perspective portrays Christ as the object of divine fury rather than the embodiment of the Father's love for His wayward children. We rightly affirm that Christ died in our place—that He was treated as we would have been. But this leads to the troubling conclusion that God smote and killed His Son in the same manner He would have punished us. Inevitably, we find ourselves believing that God killed His Son instead of us, based on the assumption that such punishment would have been our fate. How accurate, then, was Isaiah's prediction centuries before?

“ Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: **yet we did esteem** him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”
(Isaiah 53:4)

How guilty, in this case, is the whole world? The devil, our oppressor, inspired Judas to betray his Master and stirred the chief priests and rulers to demand the death of God's beloved Son. After failing to break Him in Gethsemane through mental anguish alone, the devil resorted to bodily torment combined with psychological cruelty. His final blow came as he incited the crowd to mock Christ as one cursed and punished by God.

Remember the darkness that the great enemy cast over Christ's heart in Gethsemane? That invisible shadow was later mirrored by the physical darkness that enveloped the land for three hours. At the ninth hour—3 p.m.—this darkness seemed to concentrate upon the Man of Calvary. It symbolised not only Christ's sorrow and agony but also the source of that suffering: the shadow of the evil one.

Yet this same darkness covered the people as well. They too were shrouded in the gloom that obscured God in the eyes of Christ—a darkness born of misunderstanding.

The people were far from grasping the gravity of what was unfolding. To them, the darkness was proof of Satan's declaration that God was punishing His Son.

If you were the devil, would you allow them to see that you were the one pressing for the death of their Substitute? To do so would be to reveal yourself as their future murderer. And so, the chief deceiver led them to believe that God was responsible for it all.

“ As the outer gloom settled about the Saviour, **many voices** exclaimed: **The vengeance of heaven is upon Him. The bolts of God's wrath are hurled at Him**, because He claimed to be the Son of God. Many who believed on Him heard His despairing cry. Hope left them. If God had forsaken Jesus, in what could His followers trust?”³⁸

Suffice it to say, the great enemy has deceived us all. Who among us has not been guilty of this blasphemy? Even Isaiah included himself, confessing that “we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” We killed God’s beloved Son—and then boasted that God did it. In effect, we cast Satan as an agent of divine justice in God’s hands, doing His bidding.

But if God truly intended Satan to fulfill the requirements of His justice, why would Scripture call him a murderer? By attributing his own nature to God, Satan enthroned himself in the temple of God. Through the very means by which God sought to reveal His love, Satan established his counterfeit throne and expected worship as though he were God.

The mystery of iniquity had yet to be stripped bare and its true nature revealed to the blind captives of Satan: the human race.

Yet Christ did not die in vain. His death served a purpose far greater than the redemption of our fallen world. The stakes were cosmic. The rebellion of Satan had rippled across the universe, and through the cross, Christ reconciled even the minds of the unfallen worlds.

“ **And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.**” (Colossians 1:20)

Do “things in heaven” require reconciliation? Not in the sense of moral failure, but in the sense of restored unity and clarified understanding. The “things” Paul refers to are intelligences—holy beings who, though unfallen, needed at-one-ment (or reconciliation). Thus, the death of Christ has profound significance for the unfallen worlds. These beings closely observed the final conflict between Christ and the great accuser. Prior to that moment, Christ declared, “Now is the judgment” for “the prince of this world” (John 12:31). Who was scrutinizing the devil’s actions

³⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.754.3

against Christ during those hours of temptation? Meanwhile, the Church remained in a state of slumber.

Tracing this conflict back to the celestial realm where it first began, we find a second “casting down” of the serpent during the time of the woman who gave birth to a male child (see Revelation 12:10–12). The first casting down, mentioned in v.9, occurred before the creation of the world. The second marked the moment when the accuser was stripped of his standing before the heavenly court.

Christ alludes to this second expulsion of Satan when He declares, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). This statement signals the weakening of Satan’s grip on the minds of intelligent beings. Ultimately, at the cross, he was unmasked as a murderer—what he had been from the beginning. So thoroughly had he cloaked himself in deception that even the angels struggled to discern his true nature.

By orchestrating the death of Christ, the devil exposed himself as the architect of counterfeit justice. The unfallen worlds finally saw who desired the death of sinners: the one who had been the “murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). “His disguise was torn away,” and his character laid bare.

“**Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe.** He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted. ... The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.”³⁹

To the unfallen worlds and holy angels, Christ’s death marked a decisive moment: the universe was now secure on God’s side. They saw Satan for who he truly was—yet their understanding, though awakened, was not yet complete. The mystery of iniquity had been unveiled, its contours laid bare before their eyes.

But for humanity, the work was far from finished. The same path that severed the bond of sympathy between Satan and the holy angels would need to be walked again—this time, within the human heart. ••

³⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.761.2

Chapter 7

The Wrath of God

WHEN Adam sinned against God, the circle of love—the bond of love and trust between the Creator and humanity—was severed by the devil's lies. It was man who changed, both in nature and in destiny. Just as God would not alter His law to accommodate lawlessness, so too His character remains unchanged. His law is a reflection of His character—unshaken by any circumstance. As noted,

“ Through belief in Satan's misrepresentation of God, man's character and destiny were changed ...”⁴⁰

The sacred record provides clear testimony about God's immutability:

“ For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” (Malachi 3:6)

After Christ's completed mission, those who witnessed His life and teachings supported the following statement:

“ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)

What Christ revealed was a reflection of who His Father has always been—and will always be. He did not come to change God's feelings toward humanity, but to reveal them more clearly.

This should now be evident, as God continues to unveil Himself. Yet Scripture also speaks of the wrath of God. What does this mean—and

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p.346.1

how does it operate? It is the misunderstanding of this concept that has given rise to certain theological interpretations, often distorting the character of God, as evident in some publications, e.g.:

“ ‘If people are to be forgiven, then the fact of [divine] wrath must be taken into consideration. It does not fade away by being given some other name or regarded as an impersonal process’ [quoted from Leon Morris]. In other words, **Gods’ wrath must be propitiated or turned away from the sinner**. That was one aim of Christ’s self-sacrifice on the cross.”⁴¹

With that notion, Christ’s mission can appear antagonistic to God’s wrath—suggesting a division between the two. Yet Scripture presents a more complex picture:

“ And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who **delivered us from the wrath to come.**”
(1 Thessalonians 1:10)

Paradoxically, we also read of men fleeing from “the wrath of the Lamb,” crying “to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:16). Yet, as Scripture declares,

“ **the wrath of man** does not produce the righteousness of God.”
(James 1:20)

This implies that God’s wrath must be fundamentally different from human anger. Unlike ours, His wrath is rooted in His character and flows from ‘what is right.’

To grasp what divine wrath is not, we must first examine human anger. How do we respond when provoked? Man’s anger often manifests aggressively—clenched fists, raised voice, harsh words. Others may retreat into passive aggression, withdrawing outwardly while nursing resentment within.

When Scripture says that “the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God,” it reveals a deeper truth: in such moments, love is absent from the heart, and we don’t usually try to hide it. Let us first turn to the scriptural perspective.

⁴¹ George R. Knight, *The Cross of Christ: God’s Work for Us*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2008, p.74

“ **And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel:** and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" (Genesis 30:2)

How do you think Jacob was behaving, as narrated in this verse? Was he so enraged with Rachel that he shouted and rushed at her? Would such behavior be justified as long as he let go of his anger before sunset? If you were in Rachel's place, what would you have hoped for from him in that moment? And what does this verse actually mean? Scripture counsels:

“ **Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.**" (Ephesians 4:26)

Is this possible with human anger? It seems not, since

“ **the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God...**"
(James 1:20)

This indicates that Jacob displayed not human anger but rather godly anger. What do the Scriptures teach us about God's anger, and what does Christ's mission reveal about it? This forms a major part of our discussion.

“ **And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless."**
(Exodus 22:24)

“ **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 32:10)

We are easily tempted to project our own character onto God, interpreting the verses quoted above through the lens of human emotion.

When we examine the original Hebrew word used for anger, it evokes a vivid mental image.

H639 – *'anaph*, from H599; (*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.

The term transliterated as *anger* in Hebrew describes the appearance of a person's nose or face.

When a person is angry, their face often betrays signs of distress. A surge of adrenaline triggers rapid breathing, an elevated heart rate, and

muscle tension as the body braces for confrontation—fight or flight. In such moments, people tend instinctively rush toward the one they perceive as guilty, propelled by a sense of justice and a desire to punish. This impulse, unchecked, can lead to harm—and in extreme cases, even to death.

Yet rapid breathing is not exclusive to anger. Pain, too, can provoke the same physiological response. It stands to reason that when a person's face reveals deep suffering, their breath may quicken—not from rage, but from anguish.

Considering God's form of anger (*aph*, H639), it is worth examining how Scripture portrays His actions when that anger is kindled.

“ Then **my anger** shall be kindled against them in that day, and **I will forsake** them, and **I will hide my face** from them, and **they shall be devoured**, and many **evils and troubles** shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our **God is not among us**? And I will surely **hide my face** in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.” (Deuteronomy 31:17,18)

The pattern traced above suggests that God's anger is revealed through His withdrawal. To *forsake* is to *hide one's face*—an image that parallels the concept of anger. The troubles and evils that come upon a person exposed to God's anger do not originate from God, but rather from His absence. A similar concept is found in the New Testament.

“ **For the wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” (Romans 1:18)

The subsequent verses explain this phenomenon:

“ **God also gave them up** to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.” (v.24)

The author continues,

“ **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.” (v.26)

Passive-aggressive anger in people often manifests as withdrawal from

a situation, driven by unresolved emotion. This can be described as ' harbouring negative feelings' and recoiling to protect oneself. But does God withdraw for the same reason? Is He reacting out of emotional pain?

What we discern from the pattern in Romans 1 is that when human beings wholly reject God's mercy, grace, and truth, He gives them over to their own choices. This is not an act of abandonment, but a reflection of divine freedom—God does not coerce love or obedience. His face may bear the marks of sorrow and anguish—not from self-pity, but, as Hosea reveals, from the deepest pain of sympathy. It is the grief of a heart that longs for restoration, even as it honors the freedom of those who turn away.

“ And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. **How shall I give thee up**, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine **heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together**.” (Hosea 11:7,8)

God's anger is laced with sorrow, not fury. It is the anguish of a Father who wrestles with the pain of releasing His defiant children to the consequences of their own choices. In Him alone is our help and salvation; we have no other shield against the hatred and evils of the enemy. Yet He will not impose His protective presence where it is unwelcome. Still—how can He bear to watch His child descend into destruction?

When Christ came to earth, He revealed that same tender character. And when Israel had filled the cup of His wrath (see Isaiah 51:17), He displayed what Scripture calls “the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:16). We are told that He wept over Jerusalem, mourning for His beloved, cherished house (see Luke 19:41). From His gentle lips came the heart-breaking words: “Your house is left to you desolate” (Matthew 23:38). Were these words spoken out of disdain? Did He take pleasure in their ruin?

“ In a voice choked by **deep anguish of heart and bitter tears** He exclaimed, “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!” **This is the separation struggle**. In the lamentation of Christ the

very heart of God is pouring itself forth. It is the mysterious farewell of the long-suffering love of the Deity.”⁴²

Some have argued that Christ, in his anger, lunged to drive people out of the temple, overturning tables. This story is recorded in Matthew 21:12-15; Mark 11:15-19; John 2:15,16. Jesus is said to have used a scourge to drive them out. However, it’s important to clarify a few points regarding this event.

Christ picked up a scourge made of small cords, typically used to guide cattle into the temple courts. He did not strike anyone with it. In His hand, “that simple scourge seemed terrible as a flaming sword”⁴³ This perception arose in the minds of the guilty. They were driven away not by physical force, but by their own sins and by Christ’s righteous indignation. As they fled,

“ Christ looked upon the fleeing men with yearning pity for their fear and their ignorance of what constituted true worship. In this scene, He saw symbolised the dispersion of the whole Jewish nation—their wickedness and impenitence.”⁴⁴

While the guilty ran, the simple and oppressed gathered around Him (see Matthew 21:15). After recovering from their terror, the Pharisees returned to challenge Christ’s authority, unaware that they had just fled from the son of a carpenter. When they arrived at the temple, they were stunned by what they saw—a different side of the supposedly angry Jesus, now peacefully surrounded by the poor and humble.

“ When they fled, the poor remained behind; and these were now looking to Jesus, whose countenance expressed His love and sympathy. With tears in His eyes, He said to the trembling ones around Him: Fear not; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. For this cause came I into the world.”⁴⁵

This illustrates the tragic irony of fleeing from a harmless Lamb. How dangerous can a lamb truly be? Have you ever seen an angry lamb? And yet, because of Satan’s deception and humanity’s misunderstanding of God’s justice, people run from the very One who longs to save them. His face—His “anger”—is streaked with tears of love and sympathy, ready and willing to deliver them. But they refuse to let Him. ••

⁴² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.620.1

⁴³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.158.2

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.162.1

⁴⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.162.5

Chapter 8

The Wrath of Babylon

THE last significant drama to unfold on this earth is outlined in the prophecy of Revelation 18. The world is soon to witness bloodshed resulting from religious bigotry and intolerance.

When Christ was on earth, all the fury of hellish powers was directed at him. Throughout his ministry, He faced hatred from the very religious Jewish leaders who were supposed to guide His people. He “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”(1 Peter 2:22), who committed no evil, was hated to the point of death. At one point, he asked those who were plotting to take his life, “Which of the works I have shown you do you want to kill me for?” (John 10:32).

They rejected Him as the Son of God because His works contradicted their image of God. Believing their justice system justified their actions, they determined to put Him to death.

“ The Jews answered him, **We have a law, and by our law he ought to die**, because he made himself the Son of God.” (John 19:7)

The works of Christ were not the works of their father (the devil), therefore His actions condemned them, and they were determined to remove this ‘thorn in their flesh.’ If Christ had come in the very character they cherished, they would have accepted him as their Messiah. However, when he refused to enlist as their captain in arms and take up carnal weapons to fight their oppressors (see John 6:15), His kingdom seemed so contrary to their understanding that they grew increasingly disappointed with Him. The same men who had hailed Him as their King only a short while earlier, now demanded His death.

They had not understood Him. In His kingdom, He and His servants do not fight (see John 18:36). This was puzzling even to His disciples. Throughout history, from Babylon to Rome, kingdoms rose to power through force. But why was this Redeemer, their beloved Kin, not prepared to fight in the same way?

“ The Jews were looking for a Messiah who would establish them in **their arrogance and pride, and lead them on to victory over their enemies.** Christ possessed every qualification of character that should have induced them to accept of him; but his very **righteousness stood in the way of their acceptance;** for his habits, character, and life were all at variance with the habits and practices of the Jews. He condemned evil wherever he found it, and the untainted purity of his life and character put to shame the wrong-doers... They could not tolerate **true holiness, true zeal for God,** which was the distinguishing **feature of the character** of Christ; for true religion cast a reflection upon their spirit and practices. They could not comprehend a character of such matchless loveliness as that of Christ's. In the heart of Jesus, there was hatred of nothing save sin. They could have received him as the Messiah had he simply manifested his miracle-working power, and refrained from denouncing sin, from condemning their corrupt passions, and from pronouncing the curse of God upon their idolatry; but since he would give no license to evil, though he healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, and raised the dead, they had nothing for the divine Teacher but bitter abuse, jealousy, envy, evil-surmising, and hatred. **They hunted him from place to place, in order that they might destroy the Son of God.**”⁴⁶

As the Jews were pursuing Jesus to kill Him, who was inspiring their actions? According to Christ, if they were truly partakers of Abraham's spirit, they would have cherished His works and would not have sought His death. Therefore, He declared that they were not children of Abraham, but rather a seed of a different father (see John 8:39–44). This implies that the devil was inspiring the Jews to seek Christ's death, and their plan ultimately succeeded as they put Him on the cross. However, when John wrote about this event in Revelation 12, he referred to the dragon as the

⁴⁶ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, August 6, 1895, par.10

one pursuing the death of Christ.

“ And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the **dragon stood before the woman** which was ready to be delivered, for **to devour her child as soon as it was born.**” (Revelation 12:4)

This symbolic language refers to Rome as an agent of Satan, the dragon (Revelation 12:9). Rome was Satan’s instrument, acting as his channel.* This pattern can also be seen in the crucifixion of Christ.

What is significant for us in this story is that after the male “child was caught up unto God” (Revelation 12:5), the dragon’s wrath was then directed toward the woman and subsequently toward the remnants of her offspring (v.17). This indicates that wherever there is religious persecution, we can observe the dragon’s anger directed at the remnant—those who embody Christ’s character.

Anyone who displays intolerance toward those who hold different beliefs or forms of worship should examine the source of their inspiration.

“ There can be no more conclusive evidence that **we possess the spirit of Satan** than the disposition **to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work**, or who act contrary to our ideas.”⁴⁷

The wrath of the dragon should not be expected to manifest directly from the devil himself. He is the source of evil and operates through various channels to carry out his works. According to Revelation 12:17, his wrath will be directed toward those who keep the commandments of God. Therefore, we must attentively study the Bible, history, and current signs of the times to trace the development of these channels wherever they may be found.

The dragon will be at war with those who “keep” the commandments —what does that truly mean?

G5083 – *tērēō*, from *teros* (*a watch*; perhaps akin to G2334); *to guard* (*from loss or injury, properly by keeping the eye upon*; and **thus differing** from G5442, which is *properly to prevent escaping*; and from G2892, which implies *a fortress or full military lines of apparatus*).

⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p.487.3

* See note at the end of this chapter

Did you catch that? The type of “keeping” the commandments of God that Satan despises is not a legal or military approach. That attitude does not reflect God’s character. Some believers can recite the ten commandments of the Decalogue but follow them as if they were following military orders. Unsurprisingly, their enforcement of the law mirrors that same spirit. But the devil does not oppose them—for in truth, *they are doing his work!*

G2334 – *theōreō*, from Thayer’s definition, we get the following insights: 1. *To be a spectator, look at, behold: a. to view attentively; b. to consider, view mentally.* Strong’s definition adds: *to be a spectator of, that is, discern, (literally, figuratively [experience] or intensively [acknowledge]).*

Combining the two definitions, we can see that the devil will hate those who have an alternative view on the law of God, but most importantly, *have experienced it in their lives.*

However, those who keep their eyes on the law in a way that reflects G2334 are the ones who truly understand it. This means they have experienced what the law represents—God’s character. This group of people has contemplated the law of God—the law of love—much like a person “beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,” is “changed into the same image” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Only these individuals remain vigilant, ensuring they do not tarnish the character of God.

“ There is nothing in the heart of the man who abides in Christ that is at war with any precept of God’s law. **Where the Spirit of Christ is in the heart, the character of Christ will be revealed, and there will be manifested gentleness under provocation, and patience under trial.”**⁴⁸

As the conflict between Christ and Satan unfolds, the character of each will be formed in those who behold them. Those who reflect on the lovely, harmless, and gentle character of God, as revealed in Christ, will develop similar traits within themselves. Conversely, those who focus on the malignant character of Satan will also become like him. This leads to a close confrontation between the two groups in the last days, with each group wielding the weapons that align with their character.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 20, 1895, par.6

In Revelation 18, two groups stand revealed in their full maturity. Those aligned with Christ are portrayed as an angel ablaze with glory, illuminating the earth with radiant light. What makes this brilliance so striking is its timing—it shines most vividly in the darkest hour.

Consider the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ, under crushing temptation, received assistance:

“ And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, **strengthening him.**” (Luke 22:43)

That moment of divine encouragement foreshadows the mission of the three angels. As messengers of God, they herald truth in a time of global deception. And just as Christ was not left alone in His agony, His faithful will be strengthened to accomplish their mission. Another angel will come to reinforce the message of the three angels during Earth’s final crisis.

The fourth angel of Revelation 18 does not erase the work or responsibilities of the messages that came before; he arrives to strengthen the faithful for their final commission. His appearance is not incidental—it marks a decisive hour in Earth’s history. At this time, Satan, working through nations intoxicated by Babylon’s deception, will seek to extinguish the remnant of Christ. The fury unleashed against God’s people will be fierce. But the brilliance of heaven’s light will blaze fiercer still.

“ For all nations have **drunk of the wine of the wrath** of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.” (Revelation 18:3)

“ This **wine of error** is made up of false doctrines ... These and kindred errors are presented to the world by the various churches, and thus the Scriptures are fulfilled that say, ‘For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’ It is a **wrath which is created by false doctrines**, and when **kings and presidents** drink this wine of the wrath of her fornication, they are **stirred with anger against those who will not come into harmony with the false and Satanic heresies** which exalt the false Sabbath, and lead men to trample under foot God’s memorial.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, September 12, 1893, par.20

“ Kings, and rulers, and governors have placed upon themselves the brand of antichrist, and are represented as the dragon who goes to make war with the saints,—with those who keep the commandments of God, and who have the faith of Jesus. In their enmity against the people of God, they show themselves guilty also of the choice of Barabbas instead of Christ.”⁵⁰

Soon, dramatic scenes will unfold across the earth. Some will commit acts of violence in the name of God (see John 16:2), convinced they are rendering Him service. Yet in reality, they will be manifesting the wrath of the dragon. Their distorted sense of justice—once used to persecute the Church of Christ—is not born of righteousness, but inspired by the devil himself.

It is vital that we devote our time to contemplating and absorbing the ways and character of God as revealed through His Son. In doing so, we prepare not merely for confrontation, but for faithful representation of Him as well. May we allow Christ to cleanse the combative and unyielding corners of our nature, so that what remains is gentleness, courage, and the unmistakable fragrance of His grace.

God is preparing His people to stand firm in the coming hour of trial. The message of warning must not be silenced—it must rise as a loud cry. Though the times will be marked by confrontation, Christ calls His followers to engage not with force, but with fidelity to His ways. The mission must be carried out on His terms, by His methods.

This is why the angel came in glory. In Scripture, glory is not spectacle—it is the revealed character of God, as shown to Moses: compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness (see Exodus 34:6–7). Those who deliver the loud cry will not resemble warriors of this world. They will reflect the humility and gentleness of their Redeemer, whose strength is made perfect in meekness.

It is said that when the hour came for Christ’s arrest and prosecution before earthly courts, the same angel who had strengthened Him in Gethsemane returned—this time to stand between the Savior and the mob. For a moment, heaven intervened. The angel’s presence was not to prevent the cross, but to bear witness that Christ surrendered not because He was overpowered, but because He chose the path of redemption.

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, August 29, 1893, par.1

“ A divine light illuminated the Saviour's face, **and a dovelike form overshadowed Him.** In the presence of this divine glory, the murderous throng could not stand for a moment. They staggered back. Priests, elders, soldiers, and even Judas, fell as dead men to the ground.”⁵¹

This calls to mind the baptism of Christ, when the Spirit of God descended upon Him like light, taking the form of a dove. It was not merely a sign—it was a declaration. The dove, gentle and pure, embodied the very character of the One it rested upon.

“ The heavens are opened, and upon the Savior's head descends a dovelike form of purest light, – fit emblem of **Him, the meek and lowly One.**”⁵²

The latter rain will fall only upon those who have truly partaken of the flesh and blood of the Savior—not merely in ritual, but in reality. These are the ones who have internalized His character, allowing His gentleness, purity, and selfless love to shape their own lives. In them, Christ is formed.

Such transformation fulfills His longing for disciples who go forth as harmless as doves—unarmed by worldly power, yet clothed in divine strength.

“ Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and **harmless as doves.**”
(Matthew 10:16)

Those who endure times of trial and faithfully represent God to the world are those who have surrendered their lives into His hands, trusting Him alone for vindication. They will not rely on worldly weapons for defense. Instead, they will advance like a mighty army—undaunted, unwavering—bearing banners that shine with truth and grace.

“ Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?” (Song of Solomon 6:10)

When Christ gazes down at His bride, He recognizes their unity and sees her profound beauty. He breaks into a poem of adoration, declaring,

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.694.5

⁵² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.112.1

“Thou art beautiful, O my love” (Song of Solomon 6:4). As we await the arrival of the Bridegroom, it is our responsibility to encourage His people to behold their God, for they will be transformed into His likeness.

“ Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, 'Behold your God.' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a **revelation of His character of love**. The children of God are to manifest His glory. **In their own life and character**, they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.”⁵³

It is at midnight that the cry is heard: “Behold, the bridegroom cometh!” (Matthew 25:6). According to prophetic vision, it is precisely when “darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people” (Isaiah 60:2) that the light of God will rise upon Jerusalem, drawing the nations toward its radiance.

In other words, those still ensnared within the systems of Babylon—yet belonging to God's flock in another fold—will begin to discern truth from deception. Not through signs or wonders, but through the character of those who proclaim the loud cry.

Their lives will speak louder than their words. It is the purity of heart, the humility of spirit, and the unwavering love for truth that will distinguish God's messengers. Their witness will awaken longing in those who have not yet come out of Babylon. The call will not be coercive—it will be compelling. A summons not merely to flee deception, but to behold the Bridegroom and prepare to meet Him.

In the darkest hour, God is often misrepresented—portrayed by religious institutions as a tyrant whose laws are mere human constructs, subject to revision and enforced by threats of death. Yet God seeks a people who will remain faithful to Him in such times of distortion and trial.

Just as Christ endured unspeakable cruelty—from His arrest onward, as men sought to pressure Him into revealing Himself—so too will many of God's children face unimaginable horrors, designed to break their allegiance to their Master. They spat upon the Savior and mocked His holy name, hoping to provoke even a frown. But He bore it all in silence, dying alone for you and me, offering Himself as our example.

⁵³ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p.415.5

Upon His sacred brow, they pressed a crown of thorns and scorned Him with the words, “Behold the King.” They struck Him, cursed Him, and mocked Him—each act inspired by the dragon, aimed at defacing the character of His Father. Yet Christ held fast to the love of His Father, unshaken.

When their jeers failed to provoke Him, they nailed Him to a shameful cross. And still, He gave Himself willingly, with one thought for the howling mob: “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34).

We cannot foresee what trials await us. But may we be found ‘watching with Christ’ in our own gardens of Gethsemane. As we behold His path to the cross, may we long to reflect Him—and in doing so, may the Father clothe us in His glory. This is what we need most. ••

- * Rev 12:9 clearly identifies the great dragon as Satan—not Rome. Yet earlier in the chapter, the force seeking to devour the male child at birth is pagan Rome, acting as the visible agent of the dragon’s intent. While the devil has never relinquished his throne, Rev 13:2 tells us that “the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority.” This transfer is not abdication, but delegation—Satan empowering earthly systems to carry out his will while retaining ultimate control.

Commenting on that, EGW wrote: “In the sixth century the papacy had become firmly established. Its seat of power was fixed in the imperial city, and the bishop of Rome was declared to be the head over the entire church. Paganism had given place to the papacy. The dragon had given to the beast “his power, and his seat, and great authority.” (GC 1888 54.2).

“In Rev 13:1–10 is described another beast, ‘like unto a leopard,’ to which the dragon gave ‘his power, and his seat, and great authority.’ This symbol, as most Protestants have believed, represents the papacy, which succeeded to the power and seat and authority once possessed by the ancient Roman Empire” (GC1888 439.1).

The following explanation may be useful:

"It has always been thought to be an easy task to demonstrate that the Roman power in its first religious form, is what is set forth under the symbol of the great red dragon of Rev 12. Symbols are applied in accordance with the position in which they are placed and the work which they are said to perform. In the present case, the dragon certainly represents that human government which attempted to destroy the Lord Jesus when he came into this world. And there can be no dispute that that power was Rome.

But does it not say in v.9, that the great dragon is the old serpent, the Devil and Satan?

- Very true; but it does not say that the great red dragon, spoken of before, was the Devil and Satan. Mark how carefully the prophecy distinguishes between these two symbols.

One is a great red dragon, having seven heads, ten horns and a tail, that sweeps a third part of the stars of heaven from their orbit, and casts them to the earth. Surely such a description cannot be made to apply to Satan as a person. Such an application would be more grotesque than the burlesques of Satan, born in the envenomed and hostile minds of skeptics and scoffers, wherein he is shown with a cloven foot, bat's wings, cattle's horns, and a dart-pointed tail.

The other is a reference to Satan personally, and the explanation is immediately added, stating that by this dragon, Satan is meant.

How particular the angel is here to define the term dragon, so that no mistake can be made. There is no need of confounding the two descriptions. The dragon by which the devil, personally, is represented, is not a 'great red dragon,' is not a dragon with seven crowned heads, nor one with ten horns and a tail. This dragon is a symbol of Rome, while the religion of the empire was pagan."

(Uriah Smith, *The Seven Heads of Revelation 12, 13, and 17*, p.2.2, www.egwwritings.org).

Chapter 9

The Beastly Religion

THE early Church was gathered in Jerusalem to receive the empowering guidance of the Holy Spirit. This group was composed of individuals from humble backgrounds, most of whom were considered uneducated by the standards of the time. They relied solely on the power of the Word to go forth and conquer nations. Yet Christ understood that His chosen disciples—those entrusted to continue His work—did not yet grasp or appreciate the true nature of His mission. Although He had much to share with them, they were not ready to comprehend His teachings. It was only after He departed from their sight that they began to pray, reflect on their experiences, and contemplate the prophecies that spoke about Him and His commission.

Without a full understanding of Christ's mission, they risked misrepresenting Him and His sacred purpose. Men like James and John, for instance, wanted to call down fire from heaven, believing they were following the example of Elijah (see Luke 9:54). Their impulse revealed a need for re-education—a deeper grasp of the spirit in which Christ operated.

Peter, too, misunderstood the nature of the conflict. Armed with a sword, he believed he was entering a holy war. But when Christ rebuked him for using it, Peter was confronted with a contradiction: had not the Master instructed them to acquire swords? To Peter, it seemed inconsistent. Yet from Christ's perspective, the mission was complete. He had fully revealed the character of His Father.

Now, the task belonged to the disciples—not to defend the kingdom with weapons, but to behold the character of God and be transformed into that same likeness.

In a special sense, during those days, the disciples devoted themselves wholly to aligning their lives within the circuit of divine love. They emptied themselves of ego, setting aside the struggles for superiority and self-importance that had once clouded their understanding of Christ's suffering.

In the sacred rhythm of life, when we operate by the principles of Agape love, what we receive must be given away—and in giving, it returns to the Giver of all gifts.

Apart from the brief mention that the disciples “were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:53), there is little historical record of them engaging in corporate worship of this kind. Instead, these men spent time searching their hearts. And as they prayed, the words of Christ—once allowed to fade from memory—returned to them with clarity and power.

The teachings that had once seemed difficult to grasp now unfolded with unmistakable meaning. Their former misunderstandings of Christ's character dissolved, leaving them with one burning desire: “if only they would bear witness in their lives to the loveliness of Christ's character.”⁵⁴

They mourned the time they had squandered and longed to relive those three sacred years with Him. If only they could tell Him how deeply they loved Him—how they would minister to Him with greater tenderness and understanding. The memory of His final prayer on the cross, pleading for forgiveness for those who mocked and killed Him, brought them comfort. In that moment, they grasped the truth: they were forgiven, for God harbors no resentment toward sinners—sin does not alter His nature.

Now, they were ready to proclaim to all—both free and bond—what they had heard, seen, and touched with their own hands (see 1 John 1:1) concerning the glory of God. Often overwhelmed by the magnitude of it all, some, like John, could only cry out, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us” (1 John 3:1)!

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p.36.1

The humble group of apostles and disciples, lacking wealth or earthly honor and recognition, soon became a threat to the Pharisees and Sadducees, who had positioned themselves as the centers of truth. This new wave of believers in Israel started to be perceived as nuisances that needed an urgent solution, lest they contaminate the entire nation with their teachings, which the religious leaders called heresy. These leaders hated to see the work of Christ continued by men and women who taught the words of life and spoke with such power and authority that they felt unable to counter them with arguments.

As a result, persecution against the young Church intensified. Members who professed belief in Christ were pursued and publicly beaten. Some were arrested and imprisoned, while others were stoned in public as a warning to others and to instill fear. The devil inspired men to devise brutal forms of execution aimed at inflicting maximum pain, but they could not extinguish Christ's presence in the hearts of His newly acquired "bride."

Initially, the believers faced persecution from their former brothers, the Jews. To be fair, the general populace was being rallied by the religious leaders, fueled by their hostility toward Christ's teachings. They feared that if this sect were not extinguished, the entire nation might turn to Him—and they themselves would be exposed for having incited His death.

False witnesses were often recruited to accuse the disciples of unspeakable crimes, so they might be stoned or imprisoned. The religious leaders, gripped by the wrath of the dragon, were willing to go to any length. They bribed Roman soldiers to overlook the unlawful execution of Christ, knowing full well that only Rome held the authority to carry out capital punishment after a formal trial.

Just as Christ maintained a calm demeanor and friendly countenance during His trial and abuse, so did His disciples. There was neither indignation on their faces nor fear in their voices. They took part in the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

When the first martyr, Stephen, was being stoned, his thoughts were filled with mercy for his persecutors. The impression he left on the

witnesses of his death and the way he bore his suffering testified to the truth of the message he had preached about Christ.

The death of Stephen wrought conviction in the mind of Saul, who was present at the scene. This conviction lingered in his mind, even as he continued to wreak havoc in the Church. Though it took time for him to wrestle with his conscience, Saul eventually became a disciple of Christ on the way to Damascus (see Acts 9:1–18). In his letters to the Church in Corinth, Paul recounted the tremendous struggles he faced in his ministry—being stoned and left for dead, enduring many beatings at the hands of the Jews, and being cast into dark dungeons, in addition to experiencing significant physical needs—yet God never forsook him.

Although Rome initially aided the Jews quietly in their plots against the disciples, their hatred towards Christianity eventually became evident.

Many Gentiles began to reject paganism and embrace the faith of Christ. Consequently, the new Church plunged into a prolonged period of persecution under the power of the fourth beast of Daniel 7:19, which symbolizes Rome.

According to Daniel 7:23, a beast refers to a kingdom but can also denote the king(s) of that kingdom: “These great beasts, which are four, are four kings” (Daniel 7:17). It raises the question of why God chose to use such ferocious beasts to represent the four great kingdoms that would rise on the earth. It is also noteworthy that Christ’s kingdom is represented in contrast by a lamb.

The cruelty and tyranny inflicted on humanity by the rulers of earthly kingdoms can best be symbolized by terrible, cruel wild beasts. This imagery reflects the character of those governments. It does not matter who the king is; if the principles of the kingdom are inspired from below, those who hold dissenting ideas and dare to maintain a free conscience will face force, which is always a satanic method.

The fourth beast described in Daniel 7 is also referenced in Revelation 12:3,4. The symbolic language here has a dual application. The dragon primarily represents Satan: “And the great dragon was ... called the Devil, and Satan” (Revelation 12:9), but secondarily, the red dragon with ten horns and seven heads represents Rome, which ruled at the time of Christ’s birth.

From this comparison, we can conclude that the beastly character reflects both Satan's animosity toward Christ and His followers, and the oppressive policies enacted by kingdoms that cause suffering and pain to humanity through tyrannical rulers, in which the devil delights himself.

“ The symbols of earthly governments are wild beasts, but in the kingdom of Christ, men are called upon to behold, not a ferocious beast, but the Lamb of God. Not as a fierce tyrant did he come, but as the Son of man; not to conquer the nations by his iron power, but ‘to preach good tidings unto the meek;’ ‘to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;’ ‘to comfort all that mourn.’”⁵⁵

If a person encounters a god of a ferocious system, then, due to the design law of worship that God instilled in us, that person may be misled and transformed into the likeness of the ferocious beast. This explains the nature of persecution wherever it occurs.

Historically, all four kingdoms depicted in prophecy as ruling the world were steeped in pagan religion. They practiced idol worship, offered sacrifices, and made offerings, yet their deities reflected the dragon's vision of justice. Those who worship such gods can grasp and appreciate only Satan's version of justice. They may complain when subjected to it by those in power, but given the opportunity, they often replicate the same cruelty toward dissenters.

This dynamic is vividly illustrated in the relationship between the Jews and Rome. Though the Jews despised and lamented Roman oppression, they themselves persecuted the Christians. In Egypt, the Israelites suffered under Pharaoh's rule, forced to labor even on the Sabbath, and those who resisted faced execution by stoning. Yet when they themselves felt treated unfairly by Moses, they sought to stone him.

Moses refused Pharaoh's offer to sacrifice to God within Egypt, recognizing that the very animals designated for sacrifice were sacred to the Egyptians. He saw it as a trap—one that could end in the Israelites being stoned (Exodus 8:26). Ironically, the same people who suffered under such a system often replicated its patterns of oppression themselves.

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work*, December 24, 1907, par.3

Are things different today? Have you experienced mistreatment and oppression within certain religious circles? Have you been disfellowshipped or barred from participating freely in worship services, treated like someone unstable who must be monitored to prevent harm to others? Yet, after leaving those denominations, whether you joined free churches, independent ministries, or other groups, do you find that the same patterns of behavior are repeated? Have you continued this cycle in your new community?

Back to the early disciples: during the time of Paul's persecution, God's faithful followers were scattered and living as fugitives across the earth. They were hunted down, much like a predator pursuing its prey for food. Paul's final arrest occurred during Nero's reign as Roman emperor. The character of Christ, which was evident in Paul, even managed to impress the hardened emperor. Those judging the sedition charges were experienced in recognizing guilt by observing an individual's demeanor. They were taken aback by Paul's calm serenity as his false accusations were read. They had never seen a calm criminal before and wondered how he could possibly be guilty.

Overwhelmed by love for the people before him—men and women still bound in service to the enemy of souls, as he himself had once been—Paul's heart ached with compassion. When granted the chance to speak in his own defense, he did not plead for mercy or vindication. Instead, he forgot himself entirely and delivered a fervent sermon, longing for those present to behold the Son of God and receive Him as their Redeemer.

What stirred Paul most deeply was his own encounter with God's mercy. Having once wreaked havoc upon the Church, he knew firsthand the wonder of being forgiven. As he reflected on the blindness that had once gripped him—leading him to reject the sonship of Christ and pursue righteousness apart from its true source—his heart grew heavy for all who remained under that same veil.

He understood that the minds of both Gentiles and Jews were veiled by the prince of this world (see 2 Corinthians 4:4), and that such darkness could only be lifted through Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:14–18). The memory of his own awakening fueled his longing that others, too, might behold the glory of God and be transformed.

Paul had served the Church faithfully; he gave everything he had, including himself, unreservedly to the service of his spiritual children. However, during his time of need—much like Christ's own trials—many deserted him. In his old age, confined to a cold dungeon, Paul found himself longing for the support of his dear brethren, and he wrote to Timothy that he had been forsaken by Demas (2 Timothy 4:10). Those in the Church in Asia avoided him and turned away, seemingly unwilling to associate with him, just as Peter had denied his association with Christ three times.

Despite these hardships, what was on Paul's mind? He told Timothy in his second letter, "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge" (2 Timothy 4:16). What a giant of love this man became! This reflects the power of mercy received. By beholding the God of mercy, Paul's heart, like those of other disciples, was transformed into a stream of mercy towards those who persecuted him.

Thus, the persecution and deaths of countless martyrs became the very seeds from which Christianity spread. The character of Christ, faithfully reproduced in their lives, drew hearts with cords of love that no flame could sever. Their witness, forged in suffering, became a light that pierced the darkness—and many were drawn not by argument, but by the beauty of a life laid down in love.

The persecution of the Church did not end with Paul's death. Unspeakable cruelty and torture were unleashed upon this harmless, gentle company of believers. Daniel foresaw such devastation, describing the beast that "devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it" (Daniel 7:7). Yet every martyr fell as a seed—sown into the hearts of those who witnessed their sacrifice, bearing the imprint of God's character.

Though many were imprisoned and slain, others stood unwavering beneath the banner of Christ. And those who died were not defeated, but crowned as conquerors over the fourth beast—Rome itself. Seeing the losses he was incurring, the great deceiver shifted his strategy. No longer attacking from without, he planted his beastly principles within the Church itself—the beast within the temple. This intrusion marked the greatest woe ever to befall the bride of Christ. ••

Chapter 10

The Beast Within the Temple

REALIZING that persecution could not extinguish Christianity, the beastly power described in Daniel 7—explored in Chapter 9, *The Beastly Religion*—shifted its strategy. The Church's prosperity and hard-won victories were now under threat, not from external force, but from internal compromise. The purity of Christ's bride was about to suffer a devastating blow, delivered by the devil in a form few expected.

Paganism began to cloak itself in Christian garb. Under the guise of conversion, its adherents infiltrated the Church—not to embrace the humble faith of Christ, but to dilute it. The sacred was mingled with the profane, and the altar of truth was quietly encroached upon by the principles of the beast. Thus began the most insidious chapter in the Church's history: not persecution from without, but corruption from within.

It became fashionable for many to profess Christianity, and soon magistrates, kings, lawyers, and various polished individuals flocked to the Church—not because they accepted Christ as their Redeemer from sin and self, but due to their desire for personal gain and self-interest. Learned pagan men entered the Church while maintaining their previous practices, including idol worship.

This infiltration did not go unchallenged; genuine disciples of Christ protested the admission of such individuals into the Church without clear evidence that they were accepting Him as their personal Savior, rather than merely adopting His name to mask their former beliefs.

Worship of self is at the core of pagan practices, as man cannot surpass the standards he sets for himself. Consequently, there is nothing

in creation that symbolizes self-worship as fittingly as the deification of man. With human hearts being “desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9), the result of pagan worship frequently leads to wickedness and all forms of licentiousness.

In Romans 1:18–30, we see the pattern we identified earlier: when people refuse to give God the glory He deserves and turn toward self-worship, we witness base, sinful acts that bring shame to the very beings God created in His own image. This is why self-worship, in any form, is not only intertwined with idolatry but also with sexual sins and depravity.

Throughout history, the naked female figure has often been revered as the ultimate symbol of deity, while animals were exalted as gods by pagan worshippers. This connection is telling, for what one worships often reveals the character one seeks to embody. The object of reverence becomes a mirror—reflecting not only divine ideals but also human desires.

Fierce beasts, in particular, have served as more than mere symbols of divinity; they have embodied the personalities and preferred behaviors of their worshippers. Nations, too, have adopted ferocious beasts to represent their governments, admiring the traits these animals portray. Babylon chose the lion for its regal dominance, Greece the leopard for its agility and cunning, and modern Russia the bear for its strength and resilience. These emblems speak volumes—not only of political identity, but of the virtues each nation esteems.

In prophecy, when God revealed to His servant a new form of Christianity emerging from His temple—His bride—He employed the imagery of a beast (Revelation 13:1–10). This symbol was not arbitrary; it signified a distortion of divine truth cloaked in religious garb. It is vital to remember that Scripture outlines only four kingdoms that would dominate the world until the last days, preceding the return of the Son of God. Therefore, whatever rises to replace pagan Rome must bear its imprint—camouflaging Roman origins beneath a veneer of sanctity.

Daniel, in his visions, saw a “little horn” emerge from the fourth beast (Daniel 7:8, 24–26)—a power both subtle and blasphemous, speaking great things and waging war against the saints. This horn did not arise from a vacuum; it grew from the remnants of Rome, reshaping its political strength into religious authority. Thus began a new chapter

in the great controversy: not the beast of persecution, but the beast of deception—enthroned within the temple itself.

Daniel was troubled by the fourth beast, particularly regarding its reign under the little horn kingdom. These concerns remained with him, and understanding Daniel's distress, God repeated the vision in Daniel 8, providing additional insights to help him piece everything together.

In summary, the vision described in Daniel 8 includes several key figures. Let's have a closer look at them:

- 1. A ram with two horns**, one of which is taller than the other (vv.3,4); it symbolizes the kingdom of the Medes and Persians (which succeeded the kingdom of Babylon, v.20). This kingdom (the ram) is overthrown by the he-goat.
- 2. A he-goat with one prominent horn between its eyes** (v.5), which is later broken and replaced by four horns (v.8); it represents Greece (v.21). The notable horn signifies the first king of Greece, while the four horns that follow represent the four rulers governing after the first king, reflecting the division of the kingdom (v.22).
- 3. A little horn, which emerges** (v.9), representing a king of “fierce countenance and dark sentences” (v.23); it must represent a different kingdom in contrast to Greece. After Greece was divided into four parts, the only kingdom that expanded its territory to include Israel (the “pleasant land”) was Rome—the fourth beast of Daniel 7. Daniel 8:24,25 indicates that this little horn will “destroy the mighty,” and “stand up against the Prince of princes”, implying Christ and His people. This connection is crucial for understanding how paganism infiltrated Christianity.

When we compare Daniel 8:10 with Revelation 12:4, we notice parallels. The great red dragon that reigned at the birth of Christ symbolizes pagan Rome. This dragon is said to have cast down the “stars of heaven,” referring primarily to the angels (Revelation 1:20), and secondarily to Christ's disciples and the persecution of the Church during the reign of terror under pagan Rome. Of particular interest is the following passage:

“ Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of the **sanctuary was cast down**. And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered.”
(Daniel 8:11,12)

How did the little horn cast down the sanctuary? What sanctuary is being talked about? How did the horn magnify itself against the “Prince of the host”—Christ? How did it cast down the truth and prosper? We will endeavour to explore these questions in a step-by-step manner.

The phrase “the sanctuary” in v.11 points to a sacred place of worship. This term can apply to either a place of worship for Jehovah or for idols. In this context, the sanctuary is referred to in many Bible versions as “his sanctuary.” The subject from the beginning has been the little horn, and his pertains to the figure throughout the verse—the little horn, which represents Rome. What is happening here is a shift to a different form of governance that differs from pagan Rome but still originates from it.

At this stage, Rome, through compromise, proposed unity with Christianity. The emperor of Rome, Constantine the Great (306–337 A.D.), adopted Christianity, becoming not only an earthly king but also a bishop of the Church. Through a false policy of peace, he plotted the overthrow of the faith he publicly advocated. While the sacred places of worship for pagan deities were technically eliminated, in reality, compromised Christianity allowed paganism to thrive in its midst.

Through this apostate Christianity, the “daily”—sacrifices and offerings made to pagan deities—were “taken away.” All pagan gods and ceremonies were rebranded with Christian names or attributes. This strategy was intended to attract pagan worshippers and lead them toward the religion of the Bible, but it only advanced paganism under the guise of Christianity.

Through this apostasy, the little horn, representing a new and false form of Christianity, “cast down the truth to the ground ... and prospered.” Before we explore how this new religion became beastly—referring to the beast warned about in Revelation 14:9 (“... If any man worship the beast and his image ...”)—it is important to understand how this little horn enshrined itself in the temple of God.

There is a crucial detail that sharpens our understanding of this connection: the phrase, “Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host” (Daniel 8:11). This verse is tied to the removal of the “daily”—a reference to paganism. Yet it presents a striking paradox: by displacing paganism, the little horn did not purify worship but exalted itself against the Son of God. In essence, it reintroduced paganism in a subtler form. Through papal Rome, a different god was enthroned within the temple of God—one fashioned in the image of human pride and ecclesiastical power. The Apostle Paul issued a similar warning:

“ Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God: Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.” (2 Thessalonians 2:3–7)

Paul cautioned the Church about the apostasy that would occur before the second coming of Christ. He warned that a religion would emerge in which God would be dethroned from His temple by the man of sin. This would happen through the workings of the mystery of iniquity, as we discussed in Chapter 6, *The Mystery of Iniquity*.

Thus, we cannot be mistaken in stating that by accepting pagan doctrines and a pagan understanding of oblation, all cloaked in gospel language, a different god was placed in the temple of God. This temple must refer to the one within reach of humans, rather than the one in celestial heaven where God physically dwells.

This reality is both disturbing and alarming. While papal Rome embodies the little horn, we must recognize that wherever SELF is worshipped under the guise of Christianity, the operation of the mystery of iniquity is at work, and eventually, this will fully evolve into a beast. The sad truth is that many will profess Christianity and claim that God is on the throne, while actually worshipping a god disguised in darkness, who misrepresents the attributes of the Creator God. The true occupant

of that throne will be none other than Satan. This understanding sheds light on the reason for the following statement (which has been attributed to the great reformer, Martin Luther):

“ I am more afraid of my own heart than of the pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great pope, SELF.”

We need to be aware and on guard, as wherever the “great pope” (self) is found within Christianity, it will manifest a beastly character and bad treatment of fellow human beings.

The little horn of Daniel 7 “speaks great words against the Most High” (v.25). What are these “great words”? The phrase “against the Most High” immediately signals that this power speaks of God—but not in reverence. Its words are adversarial, not worshipful. One translation renders the verse as follows:

“ Then he will blaspheme the High God, persecute the followers of the High God, and try to get rid of sacred worship and moral practice. God’s holy people will be persecuted by him for a time, two times, and half a time.” (Daniel 7:25 The Message Bible)

From the controversy between Christ and the religious leaders of His time, we learn that blasphemy was understood in two primary ways: when a man claimed the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:7), or when he asserted equality with God (John 10:33). To the Pharisees, Christ appeared to be an impostor, for His character did not align with their cherished expectations of the coming Redeemer, nor with their entrenched conception of God’s character.

How does a man’s claim to equality with God stand against God? Does God feel threatened? Surely not. The Almighty is not diminished by human arrogance, nor unsettled by false claims. Man—who cannot even change his own sinful nature—cannot alter the nature of God. So what, then, is the essence of blasphemy in such acts?

In Matthew 12:31, Christ declares that blasphemy against the Spirit is unforgivable. Yet we know that sin does not change God; forgiveness is not God “letting go” of His resentment, but rather the transformation of the sinner. The unpardonable sin, then, does not arise from God’s unwillingness to forgive, but from man’s inability to receive forgiveness. It is not a particular act or degree of sin, but—as the context reveals—attributing

God's works to the prince of demons (v. 24). This rejection of the Spirit's conviction is not merely error; it is a willful refusal to be healed by truth.

Christ cast out demons "by the finger of God" (Luke 11:20)—a phrase Matthew 12:28 identifies as the Spirit of God. If His miracles were wrought by Satan's power, then the very works He was undoing—disease, oppression, and death—would have been authored by God Himself. In effect, the religious leaders claimed that the evils Christ alleviated by divine power were, in fact, caused by God. This is the essence of blasphemy: attributing Satan's malignant character to God, and crediting Satan with God's benevolent acts.

Returning to the little horn, we begin to see why man's claim to equality with God amounts to speaking *against* Him. In doing so, man projects his sinful nature onto God, fashioning God in man's image. The sin-filled character of Satan—whose image fallen humanity bears—is thus imputed to God. Consider, for example, the medieval Church's doctrine of indulgences, which portrayed God as one whose forgiveness could be bought, echoing human grudges and appeasement rituals. Even the sacrifice of Christ was misrepresented as a transaction to placate divine wrath, rather than a revelation of God's self-giving love.

When men claimed to represent the monarchy of heaven by wielding the sword against dissenters, they grossly misrepresented God: they portrayed Him as one who compels conscience by force. Such distortions of God's character sowed seeds of violence, which later bore fruit in the French Revolution, where rejection of the Bible—and of its Author—became widespread. The rebellion was so resolute that even the seven-day week, a sign of creation and divine rhythm, was deliberately replaced with a ten-day cycle. One historian recorded:

“ Rome had misrepresented the character of God and perverted His requirements, and now men rejected both the Bible and its Author ... Rome had ground down the people under her iron heel; and now the masses, degraded and brutalized, in their recoil from her tyranny, cast off all restraint. Enraged at the glittering cheat to which they had so long paid homage, they rejected truth and falsehood together; and mistaking license for liberty, the slaves of vice exulted in their imagined freedom.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p.281.3

The self-proclaimed “images of God” were infamous for their atrocities. They decreed the death of Protestants, offering rewards for severed heads. Nobles and royalty found entertainment in the torture and martyrdom of Protestants—under monarchs who claimed divine authority.

Just as the wars of Israel were falsely labeled “holy wars,” these rulers declared “holy crusades”—not only against Muslims, but also against Protestants. Yet these were not acts of evangelism, but campaigns of conquest. While we hold open-air campaigns to proclaim good news, popery waged war to preach a “god of war,” blessing combatants and offering indulgences as spiritual currency. This was the blasphemy of the little horn: claiming to be the “Vicar of Christ” while portraying Him as one whose forgiveness could be bought with bloodshed.

Consider the Albigenses—those ascetic dissenters of 12th and 13th century southern France, branded heretics by the Roman Church:

“ Venturing to meet by night on the mountainside or lonely moor, they were chased by dragoons and dragged away to lifelong slavery in the galleys. The purest, the most refined, and the most intelligent of the French were chained in horrible torture amidst robbers and assassins ... Hundreds of aged men, defenseless women, and innocent children were left dead upon the earth at their place of meeting. In traversing the mountainside or the forest, it was not unusual to find ‘at every four paces, dead bodies dotting the sward, and corpses hanging suspended from the trees.’”⁵⁷

The Massacre of St. Bartholomew was no exception. The king—revered as a saint—sanctioned the midnight slaughter of Protestants. When the bell tolled, it signaled not only the hour but the church’s blessing on mass murder. Thousands were dragged from their homes and slain without warning. No age or station was spared—babies, mothers, the elderly, peasants, and nobles alike were butchered. The carnage spread for two months, claiming 70,000 of France’s finest lives.

These examples reveal how papal blasphemy directly provoked the reaction of the French Revolution. France responded to the prevailing ideology that kings were divine representatives—an ideology sanctified by the Church and enforced through violence.

⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p.271.3

“ God has raised up kings as his ministers to rule the peoples in his name. The royal throne is not the throne of man, but the throne of God himself. The person of kings is sacred. Their authority is from God. They are his lieutenants upon earth. To attack them is sacrilege.”⁵⁸

This doctrine was not merely a papal teaching; it was embraced by congregants and, in time, even adopted by Protestants after the Revolution.

“ Kings are the image of God upon earth, which means nothing more than that they are the personification of supreme justice, truth, and goodness.”⁵⁹

This is the dimension of blasphemy that Protestants often fail to perceive. When man claims to be the “image of God,” he projects sinful human character onto the divine. Thus continues the ancient controversy begun by the serpent in heaven—now carried forward through his agents on earth. Wherever clergy exalt themselves as kings or lords over their congregations, claiming to embody God’s justice and authority, the papal spirit is alive. And just as in France, such misrepresentation will lead people to despise the God of Scripture, mistaking His character for the oppressive nature of their religious leaders.

But how did the papacy become the beast of Revelation 13:1? It is essential to note that we are discussing apostasy within the early Christian Church. Not all believers accepted the doctrines of paganism, and there was resistance. Having lost the power and influence of the Holy Spirit that once accompanied the truth they preached, these churches sought to replace that power by aligning themselves with the state to promote their doctrines and directives. By seeking the assistance of civil government, false Christianity emerged as a significant threat against God’s true Church in the last days.

Those who dare to resist the commandments and traditions of men—distortions that misrepresent the character of God—have often faced brutal persecution. History bears witness to countless faithful souls who, standing firm in their convictions, endured torture, oppression, and martyrdom for their defiance. For more than a millennium, various expressions of Christianity have tragically turned against fellow

⁵⁸ Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*

⁵⁹ Source: www.Libertarianism.org

believers, a perplexing reality that defies the spirit of Christ. In this false religious system—cloaked in the name of Christianity—the God of heaven and His Son have been grievously misrepresented, their image obscured by human pride and institutional power.

“ During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, thousands of nonconformist ministers were forced to flee from their churches, and many, both of pastors and people, were subjected to fine, imprisonment, torture, and martyrdom.”⁶⁰

Christ and his followers faced persecution from the Jews, but a time came when those who claimed to follow Christ began to kill nonconformists in the name of rendering Him service. This troubling system is believed to have received a mortal wound around 1796, marking its decline. However, it is predicted that this wound will eventually completely heal. Interestingly, God does not provide warnings about the various beastly kingdoms that existed before the emergence of the little horn. In contrast, we receive a serious warning about one particular beast and his image:

“ ... If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, 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 14:9,10)

But why is this the case? It is clear that this beast will be cloaked in deception, specifically targeting religious individuals in the last days, especially Christians. To fully understand this warning, we need to further explore the mark of the beast and his image. ••

⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p.165.3

Chapter 11

The Mark of the Beast

THE warning in the third angel's message addresses the *worship* of the beast, the *image* of the beast, and the receiving of the *mark* of the beast or the *number* of his name. Those who are considered victorious are depicted as being in the company of "a Lamb [who] stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1).

This reveals that the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan will culminate in the formation of two distinct groups—each bearing a name and sealed with a corresponding number. One reflects allegiance to the Lamb, the other to the beast. These identifiers are not merely symbolic; they signify spiritual loyalty, moral alignment, and the character each group has chosen to embody.

“ And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, 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: 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 14:9-11)

“ And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had **the mark**, or **the name** of the beast, or **the number** of his name. Here is

wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is **the number of a man**; and his number is six hundred threescore and six [666]." (Revelation 13:17,18)

The beast mentioned in Revelation 14:9 refers to the first beast in Revelation 13:1, whose mortal wound was healed in its papal stage.

The mark of the beast can be found on either the forehead or the hand. The forehead symbolizes the development of character, and those who receive the mark are thus characterized as having adopted the qualities of the beast. This suggests a future time when a form of Christianity will emerge that denies the power of Christ's character and fosters a beastly character instead. The number associated with this mark is referred to as the *number of a man*. John specifically said "a man," not "man" or "the man." If he had said "man," it would imply a reference to humanity as a whole. If he had used "the man," it would bind us to the scriptural identity of "the man," who is Christ Jesus.

“ For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, **the man Christ Jesus.**” (1 Titus 2:5)

We also encounter an identity in Scripture referred to simply as "a man," yet cloaked in ominous titles: "the son of perdition," "the mystery of iniquity" (2 Thessalonians 2:3,7). "The mystery of iniquity" represents both the antichrist power as a kingdom or system, and the deception through which Satan sits in the temple of man's heart, posing as God. This "mystery of iniquity" misrepresents the character of God, cloaking Him with the cruel and tyrannical nature of Satan. In the last days, some Christians may accept the number that represents the character of the man of sin. They will not only be numbered as loyal subjects of the beastly systems of the time of the end, but will also embody that character themselves.

In the Scriptures, those who behold the Lamb of God—the image of the invisible God—will have His character engraved in them, represented as having the Father's name on their foreheads. This speaks of another mystery mentioned in the Bible, known as the "mystery of godliness:" "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). But why is the number of the beast 666? To decode this, we need to consider the seal of God placed on the foreheads of His saints, as described in Revelation 7:2.

A seal is placed to mark identity and authentication. The individual whose seal is affixed to something indicates their approval and serves as an authority behind that endorsement. After the sealing process is completed (Revelation 7), John sees the number of those who are sealed (Revelation 14), noting that the seal on their foreheads bears the name of the Father. This implies that whatever is used to place the seal must carry the Father's name.

It's important to remember that we have both the instrument of sealing and the seal itself—much like a stamp. In Scripture, a name refers to both authority and the character of that authority. Where has God left a seal of His authority and character, aside from His law? While the law expresses His character, we must ask: In the Ten Commandments, where can we find a figure that explicitly represents God's authority, distinguishing Him from other gods? (That distinction is the very purpose of the seal.)

The fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15) gives us insight into the source and authority behind the principles of the Decalogue. It identifies Him as “the LORD thy God,” and more specifically “Jehovah thy God.” This commandment emphasizes that He is the Creator and Designer.

Those who accept and understand this law recognize that the author is the Creator of everything. This awareness fosters a deeper appreciation for the law, as it was given by the One who designed and created them. Consequently, they gain a better understanding of the purpose of their creation and how they can fulfill their intended roles. This distinction sets the law of God far above the shifting standards of human legislation and policy.

The law of God, reflecting His character, serves as the instrument for sealing His children. As the prophet Isaiah said,

“Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.”
(Isaiah 8:16)

It is clear that this seal is not a literal mark on their foreheads, but rather a deep understanding of the significance of God's design law and the development of its principles within their character. Therefore, observing the fourth commandment becomes a natural extension of this

understanding, with the Sabbath serving as the token or sign of this relationship.

“ Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily **my sabbaths ye shall keep:** for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.” (Exodus 31:13)

As the Sabbath marked the completion of God’s perfect creation on the seventh day, the number seven (7) came to symbolize fullness (completeness) and divine perfection. In contrast, number six (6)—the sixth day, on which *humanity* was created—carries its own weight of significance. It was on the sixth day of the week that Christ died, fulfilling the demands of justice that Satan had twisted to serve his own ends. Satan, having misrepresented God’s justice, cloaked it in a counterfeit version—posing as a false voice for God and distorting the meaning of divine wrath. In doing so, he obscured the true nature of justice, which is not retributive but restorative; not arbitrary, but anchored in love.

Those who worship the beast will also receive the number of the beast, which reflects beastly character:

“ And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or **the number of his name.**” (Revelation 13:17)

We find ourselves in a situation where some Christians believe it is acceptable to impose the death penalty on those who transgress God’s law, interpreting it from a human perspective. It is important to remember that the “man of sin” sets his throne in the temple of God by misinterpreting God’s character. This power will “think to change times and laws” of God (Daniel 7:25). Such a policy or philosophy could only be conceived if people view God’s law as akin to human legislation, which can be amended, repealed, or even deleted.

How could men even think to alter divine law unless they believe that such laws could be revised and revoked like human laws? To be misled by this notion and to attempt to change any of God’s commandments is to acknowledge that one views His law through the lens of human laws. This perspective is influenced by papal Rome and its teachers, many of whom were trained as lawyers.

“ The great men who built up the Western Church were **almost all trained Roman lawyers**. Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, Gregory the Great (whose writings form the bridge between the Latin Fathers and the Schoolmen) were all men whose early training had been that of a Roman lawyer, —a training which **moulded and shaped all their thinking**, whether theological or ecclesiastical. They instinctively regarded all questions as a great Roman lawyer would. “They had the lawyer’s craving for exact definitions. They had the lawyer’s idea that the primary duty laid upon them was to enforce obedience to authority, whether that authority expressed itself in external institutions or in the precise definitions of the correct ways of thinking about spiritual truths. **No branch of western christendom has been able to free itself from the spell cast upon it by these roman lawyers of the early centuries of the Christian church.**”⁶¹

However, they were not ordinary lawyers; they were scholars of Greek philosophy. In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Greece was symbolized by brass, which, as mentioned in Chapter 2, *Counterfeit Justice*, signifies a theory of justice rooted in satanic principles. In other words, Roman lawyers interpreted the Bible and the Gospel from a legal point of view, using legal terminology. Consequently, sin has always been framed as a legal issue, with the solution being also a legal one—namely, the removal of charges from a book of records after a penalty has been served.

This legal interpretation of the law forms the foundation of the little horn’s campaign against the fourth commandment. Those who align themselves with this view partake in their deceptive teachings.

This explains why the papal system has not only disregarded the second commandment (which addresses the worship of graven images), but it has also modified the fourth commandment—God’s sign of authority and character—and split the tenth commandment into two parts, to keep the right number. A review of the Catholic Catechism reveals these changes. However, such alterations would not be sufficient without directly attacking the seventh day, which reflects God’s design, and shifting the minds of the followers of the beast toward a different sabbath—the first day of the week.

⁶¹ Thomas Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*, p.168

“ Sunday is our mark of authority ... The Church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact.”⁶²

The mark of papal authority will manifest as Sunday sacredness when enforced by the beastly civil powers. When Christians make Sunday observance a matter of life and death through governmental means, it will signify that they have received that sign and have been worshipping a god possessing satanic attributes.

Our personalities are shaped by the deity we behold, and we will not suddenly receive either the mark of the beast or the seal of God. Our decisions and modes of worship reveal the god we are following, and our characters are being molded after either the Lamb or the beast. When Sunday law is enforced, it will become clear to whom we belong and with whom we are numbered.

May God help us develop His character, for by beholding Him, we are transformed into His likeness:

“ And the very God of peace **sanctify you wholly**; and I pray God your **whole spirit and soul and body** be preserved **blameless** unto the coming of our Lord Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Those will be declared “holy, holy, holy” unto the LORD (777 unto the Lamb). Those who behold the disposition of the devil while professing to know God will be numbered as “unholy, unholy, unholy” (666 unto the beast). They will embody a character shaped by the beast, reflecting what they have been beholding. Therefore, choose carefully whose character you will commit to watching and thus reproducing in your life.

An inspired author provides a penetrating insight into this cosmic controversy, unveiling the profound spiritual tensions that underlie the clash between truth and deception:

“ The discord which his own course had caused in heaven, Satan charged upon the law and government of God. All evil he declared to be the result of the divine administration. He claimed that it was his own object to improve upon the statutes of Jehovah. Therefore it was necessary that he should

⁶² “Sabbath Observance”, *The Catholic Record*, London, Ontario, Canada, September 1, 1923, vol.XLV, 2342, p.4

demonstrate the nature of his claims, and show the working out of his proposed changes in the divine law. His own work must condemn him. Satan had claimed from the first that he was not in rebellion. The whole universe must see the deceiver unmasked.”⁶³

Thus, in every age, Satan has sought to present his own works as though they were the works of God. He disguises his methods with the semblance of divine authority, deceiving nations and peoples into attributing his violence and cruelty to the will of Heaven.

The task of this study, therefore, is to unmask the deceiver by dismantling the false guise under which he hides; by contrasting the ways of the world with the witness of Christ and the law of God.

There is a stark and essential distinction between the laws, principles, methods, and government of God and those of the world—systems shaped by the influence of the great adversary himself. While God’s ways reflect justice, mercy, and truth, the world often operates through fear, pride, and control. In the chapters that follow, we will examine a series of scenarios drawn from both Scripture and recent history, exploring the underlying motives that drive worldly systems and contrasting them with the heart and intentions of God, whose government is built not on coercion, but on truth, love and freedom. ••

⁶³ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p.498.2

Chapter 12

Bloody History

THE world has endured long millennia filled with brutality, cruelty, and the oppression of humanity. Man seems to continually invent cruel methods of inflicting the greatest possible pain on his fellow man. The slower the method of death, the more satisfying it seems to be for the executioner.

I was on my farm with some young people who were helping with a few tasks. During the usual tête-à-tête and chit-chat, the conversation turned to cases of family violence they had heard about. One case was particularly striking—and deeply offensive to them. It involved a husband who murdered his wife, cut her flesh into pieces, cooked some of it and served to their children as a meal.

What a gruesome murder! What could lead someone to take the life of a person they once claimed to love and cherish? How could such a barbaric act be explained or justified?

After recounting the story, the young men began sharing what they believed should happen to the man. One proposed that he should be cut into small pieces with a sword—slowly but surely—until his final breath. He felt this would be a just punishment, as he was deeply disturbed by the atrocity.

This reaction reflects a classic understanding of “a life for a life” or “an eye for an eye” justice. It summarizes much of humanity’s behavior over the past six thousand years: cruelty repaid with cruelty, violence met with violence.

But what lies behind the disturbing reality that some find it acceptable—even justifiable—to crush human life? By examining some of the most harrowing episodes in world history, we will attempt to piece together the puzzle and trace the thread that connects humanity's deepest sorrows.

Some sensitive individuals have resorted to avoiding watching television altogether, as the news is often nothing but a relentless stream of murder and death—served back to back. The bloodshed is overwhelming, too much to bear. The trauma associated with such events can be life-shattering and devastating. Many who have witnessed atrocities have never moved on without carrying deep scars of every kind.

I remember that during the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya, a middle-aged man was so traumatized by the events that he suffered a stroke. These are painful and sensitive moments in history—difficult to revisit yet necessary to reflect upon.

We must first confront the depth of our troubled condition if we are to offer any meaningful solutions. The purpose of this book is to illuminate how the great controversy between good and evil is inseparably linked to human suffering. The war that Satan began in heaven has not ceased—it has been carried forward, relentlessly, through the fallen human race to its devastating consequences. No wonder one author observed:

“ The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ.”⁶⁴

Despite numerous peace initiatives, war, conflict and violence have sadly become a daily reality for many. These issues are relentless. But is there an acceptable level of violence? Are there legitimate uses of force?

There are countless laws aimed at curbing the abuse of humanity and preventing crimes against it, yet conditions in the world seem to worsen. If it's not outright war, it is the rumors of war. Tensions between nations are a constant source of concern. What lies behind such strife?

When promises of peace and safety are made, disasters often strike unexpectedly, as if every effort towards global peace becomes a precursor to disaster. The Apostle Paul, in his writings about the events of the last days, captured this unsettling reality as follows:

⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p.143.2

“ For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then **sudden destruction cometh upon them**, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5:3)

Sacred history does not predict a future of worldwide peace, as some might desperately hope. The first recorded human conflict was the bloodshed of the righteous Abel. But what exactly did Abel do wrong to Cain? What were they fighting over?

Some argue that the wars in the world are driven by a struggle for minerals and natural resources. Yet, Cain and Abel had no such dispute over resources; rather, Cain was so consumed by envy that he plotted Abel's death. This suggests that there is more to global conflict than just the desire for resources.

To propose that people fight solely over resources implies that if these resources were shared communally, the world would be at peace. Perhaps this represents the illusion behind the so-called “New World Order.” This is not to say that natural resources do not play a role in conflicts, but rather that they are not the root cause.

Ethnicity and race may contribute to conflict, but they are not the true source either—Cain and Abel were not divided by race; they were immediate brothers. While race and ethnicity have certainly contributed to humanity's suffering and violence, history shows that people of the same race have often engaged in deadly conflicts with one another. Notable examples include the American Civil War (1861–1865), the Somali Civil War (1991–present), and the Korean War (1950–1953).

This suggests that there must be something deeper involved—something that transcends race and tribe.

In my view, the missing link in understanding these conflicts is the concept of the deity one worships. The idea of a god or supreme being is a universal thread woven throughout human history. Although different cultures and individuals associate various identities with this sovereign being, we will examine the attributes of such deities and the roles they have played in the wars and acts of cruelty experienced across the globe.

We will explore the history of war through a unique perspective, combining it with scriptural interpretations of human conflict.

The Scriptures contain numerous accounts of war, ethnic cleansing, and violence. For some, referencing these texts can evoke discomfort or skepticism—especially for those familiar with these troubling narratives. However, in this exploration, we will not shy away from any sacred or sensitive topics. We will examine every instance of violence that may help us uncover the answers we so desperately seek.

I invite you to journey with me through this intellectually demanding exploration—a path that requires not only careful thought, but also spiritual discernment and emotional honesty. We will wrestle with complex truths, challenge prevailing assumptions, and seek a clearer vision of the character and purposes of God amid the tangled systems of this world. ••

Chapter 13

Rwanda's Prayerful Militias

AMONG the most widely documented conflicts, the Rwandan genocide ranks as one of the deadliest in modern history. The genocide lasted fewer than 100 days, yet the scars it left on the Rwandan people are profound and enduring.

The events of April to July 1994 occurred within a long and complex historical context that preceded the massacres. Understanding this broader context is essential for grasping the genocide not merely as a standalone tragedy, but as part of a larger picture—a vital piece in the puzzle of human history, warfare, and the role of the divine.

The Rwandan genocide was a state-orchestrated campaign of ethnic violence primarily targeting the Tutsi population, perpetrated by members of the Hutu political majority. Although it is often framed as a tribal conflict, the motivations behind the atrocities extended beyond mere ethnic divisions. During the genocide, Tutsi individuals were systematically hunted, executed, and driven from their places of refuge.

The violence was spearheaded by the Rwandan Armed Forces. Prior to the genocide, intermarriage between Tutsi and Hutu created a complex social fabric, blurring ethnic distinctions. Consequently, individuals of Hutu descent who exhibited physical characteristics commonly associated with Tutsi—such as tall stature and narrow features—were often misidentified and killed. This misidentification and persecution extended within Tutsi communities as well, further complicating the dynamics of identity and violence.

In the years following 1994, some political commentators and security specialists have sought to rationalize the retaliatory violence inflicted on Hutu populations by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF). They argue that the post-genocide context necessitated heightened security measures to protect the fragile new government. While it is true that certain Hutu exiles—mainly former elites—organized armed rebellions from neighboring countries, substantial evidence and firsthand testimonies indicate that the RPF's reprisals against Hutu civilians went well beyond legitimate national security concerns or counterinsurgency efforts.

To fully understand the dynamics of this conflict and to pave the way for collective progress, we must examine the historical context that led to the formation of the RPF in Uganda. The RPF was composed primarily of Tutsi exiles who had fled to Uganda as a result of the Hutu uprising in the 1950s, during which over one hundred thousand Tutsi were forced to flee following the overthrow of King Kigeli V Ndadurwa, the last Tutsi monarch.

His removal marked the end of the Tutsi monarchy and the beginning of a Hutu-led regime, which itself was later overthrown in 1994. It is important to recognize, therefore, that Rwanda's history has been revolutionary in nature—shaped by two opposing movements that challenged each other's vision for the nation's future. These upheavals were more than mere political struggles for power; they were deeply rooted in ideological divisions, many of which were instilled during the colonial period and continued to influence Rwandan society long after independence.

There is an ongoing debate about the origins of the Tutsi, and it is not the purpose of this book to take sides or determine which view is more valid. Instead, we will present the perspectives held by different groups and proceed with our study.

Some scholars have proposed that the Tutsi are of Hamitic origin (descended from Ham, one of Noah's sons), tracing their ancestry to Ethiopia and Sudan. This theory suggests that the Tutsi were racially superior to other ethnic groups in the region. Those who oppose this view argue that the Tutsi are of Nilot (originating from the Nile Valley) or Cushitic (originating from the Horn of Africa, specifically Ethiopia and Somalia) ancestry, and some patriotic groups support this perspective.

What is particularly interesting about the Tutsi is that they speak Bantu languages, such as Kinyarwanda and Kirundi—the same languages spoken by the Hutu. While some argue that the Tutsi, as immigrants, simply learned the local languages, modern genetic research shows significant genetic overlap between the Tutsi and the Hutu. This suggests that the two groups were not vastly different; in fact, they were so closely connected that one could consider them brothers.

This raises an important question: if they were so closely related, why did they come into such deep conflict? Where did the classifications of “Tutsi” and “Hutu” truly originate? This leads us to examine the role of colonial influence—and the colonial powers—in shaping these divisions.

“ To the missionaries, the Tutsis seemed tall and elegant, with refined features and light skin, in some ways closer in appearance to Europeans than to their short, stocky, dark compatriots (Hutus). The missionaries argued that the Tutsis were probably a pastoralist Hamitic group from Somalia or from Ethiopia who had conquered the inferior local populations and brought civilization. They hypothesized that the Tutsis were not really African, but a Hamitic or perhaps even Semitic group from the Middle East, perhaps even a lost tribe of Israel.”⁶⁵

Guided by this ideology, Catholic missionaries prioritized the conversion of the elite, convinced that their influence would lead others—followers, subjects, and dependents—to embrace the Catholic faith in turn. They were supported by German colonial authorities, who viewed the spread of Catholicism as a means to strengthen their control over the region. In their efforts to protect this newly aligned territory against Protestant and Muslim influences, the policy was to ensure that all chiefs and local elders converted to the faith. These leaders were seen as natural rulers, closely related to the “superior” European race, while the Hutu were regarded as subordinates or even slaves to this so-called superior class.

However, this mindset was not solely the product of colonial ideology. The Hamitic hypothesis existed prior to the arrival of colonial missionaries. Before colonial rule, the Tutsi held a higher position in Rwanda’s social hierarchy, while the Hutu occupied a lower one. A person classified

⁶⁵ Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp.42 44

as Hutu could gain Tutsi status by accumulating significant wealth—particularly in cattle and land. Conversely, a Tutsi who became impoverished could be demoted to Hutu status. Among the Tutsi, a particular clan known as the Nyinginya held the most power.

This underscores that the issue is rooted more deeply in human nature than solely in colonial influence. Throughout history, societies have shown a persistent tendency to designate certain groups as divinely favored and others as inherently inferior—doomed to serve those elevated by cultural or religious constructs.

Discrimination of this nature was openly institutionalized within the education system and Church structures by missionaries. Individuals identified as Tutsi—even those with origins in Hutu monarchies—were granted preferential treatment, while those classified as Hutu were subjected to a deliberately inferior education. This was designed to limit their roles to manual labor in mines and industries rather than intellectual or leadership positions.

After World War I, German colonial rule was replaced by Belgian administration, yet the same social stratification remained intact. Distinctions were even reinforced through language: members of the elite were instructed in French, while the Hutu were restricted to Swahili. This system was meticulously engineered to prevent Hutu advancement, effectively barring them from higher education and preserving the dominance of the privileged class.

The situation deteriorated to the point where only individuals of Tutsi descent were deemed eligible to become missionaries within the Church. The image of God presented to the people appeared to favor one group—the Tutsi—as the divinely appointed ruling class, while portraying the Hutu as the subjugated class, whose role was to obey. The message was clear: “Servants, obey your masters.”

Those who accepted this theological framework saw no issue in treating those in the lower social strata as inherently inferior. It was considered acceptable to restrict the education of the Hutu, while Tutsi children were enrolled in the best schools and groomed for leadership roles. According to this ideology, God had arbitrarily anointed the Tutsi as natural-born rulers. They were simply fulfilling their divine role, and it was allegedly not their fault that the Hutu were deemed inferior; it was

a matter of divine design.

This was not solely a Catholic issue. Protestant missionaries from both Germany and later Belgium also subscribed to the belief that the Tutsi were inherently superior. Despite denominational differences, the same god was preached—a god whose perceived will served to reinforce existing power structures. This god showed no regard for the skin color of those who believed in him; rather, his character was reproduced in them.

The systemic social segregation endorsed by colonial authorities and their religious institutions laid the groundwork for civil unrest in Rwanda, ultimately culminating in the 1994 genocide. The Hutu uprising of the 1950s was a revolution led by a marginalized and oppressed class rising against their exploitative rulers.

Between 1960 and 1962, tens of thousands of Tutsi were killed by Hutus, prompting many Tutsi to flee to neighboring countries. This exodus ultimately led to the formation of the Rwanda Patriotic Front, which would later play a significant role in the events of the 1994 genocide. From 1962 onward, Rwanda became a Hutu-dominated nation, while the Tutsi, having largely fled to Uganda and then Zaire, became a marginalized minority.

It is not mere conjecture to conclude that the 1994 genocide was rooted in ideological class stratification. Those who participated in the atrocities likely believed they were engaged in a holy war to restore what they perceived as a divinely ordained social order.

On April 6, 1994, Rwanda's Hutu president, Juvénal Habyarimana, was killed when his plane was shot down as it approached a military base in Kigali. He had been returning from peace talks in Tanzania aimed at brokering a ceasefire between the Rwandan government and the RPF. His death was immediately blamed on the RPF, which was largely composed of Tutsi exiles. This event triggered the horrific genocide that followed.

In the aftermath, Tutsi civilians were hunted and killed with shocking brutality, often compared to exterminating pests. Even individuals who merely resembled Tutsi, including moderate Hutus or those in mixed marriages, were not spared. The violence was so extreme that, according to French academic and African historian Gérard Prunier, some Hutu men were forced to pay bribes at militia roadblocks to avoid

being compelled to kill their Tutsi wives and parents in law.⁶⁶

Widowed women and girls who survived the genocide were subjected to horrific acts of violence—they were raped, beaten, had their limbs mutilated, and in some cases, they were forced to kill their own children. History bears witness to the disturbing reality that as Hutu militia groups carried out these atrocities, they often clutched rosaries and prayed, while their victims did the same. Churches, traditionally places of refuge, were tragically transformed into killing zones. As the professor of political science and international relations at Boston University, Timothy Longman notes:

“ Believing that their actions were consistent with the teachings of their churches, **the death squads in some communities held mass before going out to kill.** ... People came to mass each day to pray, then they went out to kill. In some cases, militia members apparently paused in the frenzy of killing to kneel and pray at the altar.”⁶⁷

How can a person commit heinous acts—such as raping women and massacring children—yet still hold a mass to dedicate themselves to God before carrying out killings? How could someone confidently stand before such a deity unless they are convinced that their god approves of their actions? Those who conducted such masses and prayers must have been worshipping a god whose character mirrored their own cruelty, or perhaps they themselves had been transformed into the very image of the god they believed in.

“ Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. **They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.**” (Psalms 115:4–8)

When Scripture states that “those who make them are like unto them,”

⁶⁶ See Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, Columbia University Press, 1998, p.265

⁶⁷ Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp.6,7

it reveals a profound truth: people are transformed into the character of the gods they behold. As the psalmist observes, they become like idols—“eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not.” In contrast, the Apostle Paul writes that those who behold the glory of God in Christ’s face are gradually transformed into His likeness, from glory to glory. The object of one’s worship inevitably shapes the worshiper.

“ 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)

Those who envision a vindictive and vengeful god will, in time, become vengeful as well—waiting for the moment when their god avenges on their behalf. They will be as unforgiving as the deity they worship. Neuroscientific research has shown that the concept of God a person holds activates different parts of the brain, either positively or negatively, depending on that god’s attributes. As discussed by Christian psychiatrist Timothy R. Jennings, beholding a God of love has been shown to “increase capacity for empathy, sympathy, compassion, and altruism.”⁶⁸

Due to the brain’s neuroplasticity, the neural pathways we frequently use grow stronger, while those that go unused are weakened and eventually pruned away. In other words, if one continually focuses on an authoritarian god who inspires fear and hostility, the areas of the brain responsible for love and empathy are suppressed, while those related to fear are reinforced. This explains why agape love cannot coexist with fear. As Scripture states, “Perfect love casts out fear”—it does not cultivate it.

“ 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)

It was predictable that following the genocide of the Tutsi, a wave of vengeance would rise against the Hutu—targeting not only the perpetrators but also ordinary Hutu civilians who had no involvement in the atrocities. Such innocent individuals always exist, because God preserves a faithful remnant. Fearing retribution from the RPF, a significant number of Hutu—both elite and commoners—fled to neighboring countries, and their fears were not unfounded.

⁶⁸ Timothy R. Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain*, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, USA, 2013, p.27

Initially, the RPF focused on stopping the genocide and restoring peace in Rwanda. However, in the aftermath, many Hutu feared living under a government now controlled by the RPF, which was predominantly Tutsi. Refugees were sought out and forcibly repatriated to Rwanda. For many, this return was deeply traumatic, especially for those who had witnessed the killing of relatives, whether they had been involved in the genocide or were falsely accused.

Additionally, Hutu refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo faced severe violence and persecution. The trauma of being uprooted, blamed, and punished—"regardless of individual guilt"—left deep scars on countless Hutu families.⁶⁹

Just as Adam shifted the blame onto Eve when confronted by God (Genesis 3:12), the Hutu militia in exile betrayed their fellow Hutu refugees in various camps. In Rwanda, these elites portrayed themselves as defenders of the oppressed Hutu majority, supposedly fighting against Tutsi dominance. However, when their own lives were at risk in exile, these same elites used ordinary Hutu refugees as human shields. As a result, countless innocent Hutus were indiscriminately and brutally killed.

The aim here is not to downplay the atrocities committed against the Tutsi. Rather, it is to delve deeper into the roots of violence and demonstrate that cruelty is not exclusive to any one race, ethnicity, or political group. As long as violent and distorted views of God are embraced, cruelty can emerge from anywhere.

A particularly horrific situation unfolded among Hutu refugees fleeing indiscriminate attacks by the RPA and the militia group known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) in Zaire. Many of those targeted had no connection to the 1994 genocide. A UN report acknowledges:

“ The accounts heard or read by the joint mission show that most of the acts of violence attributed to AFDL were carried out against refugees inside the camps, not only at the beginning of the war but up to at least May of this year. Very often, **the targets were neither Interahamwe combatants nor soldiers of**

⁶⁹ See Gérard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp.107-112

the former FAR: they were women, children, the wounded, the sick, the dying and the elderly, and the attacks seem to have had **no precise military objective**. Often the massacres were carried out after militia members and former FAR soldiers had begun to retreat.”⁷⁰

This situation can only be described as pure vengeance inflicted on refugees simply because they were Hutu. However, it is essential not to lose sight of the original causes of the tension and recurring cycle of violence between the Hutu and Tutsi. These issues stem from entrenched ideologies of superiority and inferiority, which have been arbitrarily attributed to divine design. These beliefs, shaped and reinforced by colonial and religious systems, laid the groundwork for violence justified by identity.

In her memoir, a Hutu woman and survivor, provides a haunting first-person account of what she and thousands of others endured in the aftermath of the genocide.

“ We were pursued like wild animals. I saw people shot down without pity, children dying of hunger, the elderly collapsing on the roadside. No one cared whether we were guilty or innocent—only that we were Hutu.”⁷¹

Her testimony reveals the indiscriminate nature of the violence, where survival was determined not by individual actions or guilt but by collective identity. This serves as a sobering reminder that when vengeance is fueled by collective blame, justice becomes distorted, and innocent lives are sacrificed under the burden of inherited guilt.

“ We began to pass the bodies of the dead and dying. When someone was too sick to keep on walking, he sat down by the side of the road and waited for death. The first and the last time I dared to look at one of these unfortunates, my eye fell on a teenager hardly sixteen years old. Like the others, she was lying at the side of the road, her large eyes open. She watched, without seeing them, her companions in misery who abandoned her without giving her any help and who didn't wait for her to die before giving her a coffin. Her clothes were wrapped modestly around her, but I couldn't help noticing that they were

⁷⁰ UN Report A/51/942, par.46

⁷¹ Marie Béatrice Umutesi, *Surviving the Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, esp. pp.95-120

soiled with the excrement that she could no longer hold back. A cloud of flies swarmed around her. Ants and other forest insects crawled around her mouth, nose, eyes, and ears. They began to devour her before she had taken her last breath. The death rattle that from time to time escaped her lips showed that she was not yet dead.”⁷²

What kind of god would stand by and witness the consequences of the seeds sown in Rwanda—seeds of segregation, hatred, and bloodshed—planted by those who claimed to speak in his name? A troubling question lingers: Is this the same God who sent His Son to reveal a character defined by love? Can such horrors truly grow from divine love? If God is love, is this what love produces?

Even more unsettling is the question: How different is this campaign of vengeance from the atrocities recorded in the book of 1 Samuel? Are we witnessing echoes of ancient violence—once attributed to divine command—now re-enacted in modern times under religious justification?

These are not easy questions. But they must be asked if we are to confront the distortion of God’s image in the minds of men and women, and in the systems they created.

“ Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus, saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which **Amalek did to Israel**, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now **go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and sucking, ox and sheep, camel and ass.**” (1 Samuel 15:1-3)

In 1 Samuel 15, God commands King Saul to “utterly destroy” the Amalekites—men, women, children, infants, and even livestock—as an act of divine judgment for what they had done to Israel generations earlier. This passage is one of the most morally troubling in Scripture. Saul’s partial obedience—sparing King Agag and keeping select livestock—results in God rejecting him as king.

⁷² Philip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda*, New York: Picador, 1998, pp.165,166

This raises profound questions: What do we make of a command that appears to sanction genocide? How have such texts shaped the moral compass of those who later claimed to act in God's name? Could this ancient episode, taken without context, have influenced those who saw themselves as agents of divine retribution in Rwanda?

When violence is framed as a sacred duty, it becomes extremely dangerous. God portrayed as endorsing ethnic cleansing can easily become a model for individuals who use religious language to justify mass killing. The vengeful rhetoric of some Rwandan militias, their prayers before slaughter, and their sense of divine mission bear unsettling resemblance to Saul's commission against the Amalekites—except now, the "Amalekites" were their close neighbors!

However, Jesus offers a radical correction to this image. In stark contrast, He teaches:

“ You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you: love your enemies, bless those who curse you ..." (Matthew 5:43,44)

The God revealed in Christ subverts the narrative of redemptive violence and replaces it with the message of redemptive love. In Him, the cycle of vengeance is broken.

Therefore, the real crisis extends beyond the atrocities themselves; it lies in the image of god that permits, even blesses, such acts. If the god we perceive is tribal, vengeful, and violent, we may become the same. But if we truly behold the God revealed in Jesus—a God of mercy, justice, and self-giving love—then even in the face of deep injustice, our response will be transformed.

How are we meant to understand passages like 1 Samuel 15? Are we really to believe that the actions of the Amalekites—attacking Israel in their weakest and most vulnerable state as they fled Egypt—justify the complete annihilation of their descendants generations later? Can such a response be reconciled with the concept of divine justice?

If we allow this logic to stand, how is it fundamentally different from the reasoning used by Hutu extremists to justify atrocities against the Tutsi? Or from the Rwandan Patriotic Front in their retaliatory violence against Hutu civilians—violence that is often overlooked in

post-genocide narratives? If one group's suffering becomes a justification for brutality, then where does it end? Are we merely exchanging one cycle of vengeance for another, each time baptizing it in the name of justice or divine will?

If these portrayals truly reflect the nature of God, what conclusions are left for those who have suffered under such ideologies? What image of God do they carry—those who were hunted, humiliated, and killed while others prayed with rosaries in hand?

And what about the soldier commanded to carry out such divine orders—to kill not only men but also women, children, and even infants still nursing at their mothers' breasts? How does he begin to tear a screaming baby from a mother's arms, silencing their cries in obedience to god? What kind of transformation must occur in a person for that act to seem righteous? Surely, it requires a conscience numbed by the image of a cold, distant, and merciless god—one whose character he has come to reflect.

This illustrates the terrible power of theology: it shapes our moral universe. The God we behold is the God we become like. If our image of God sanctions hatred, we will become hateful. However, if we behold a God of love, justice, and mercy—as revealed in Christ—we will become agents of healing, not destruction.

Umutesi leaves us with his witness and I leave it here before I give my final remarks for this chapter:

“ Many people in Mbandaka told us about these massacres, which they described as horrifying. Even women and children were killed without pity. **The rebels, we were told, took babies by their feet and smashed their skulls on the walls of houses or put a bullet in their heads.**”⁷³

Friends, how do we reconcile the image of Christ—the one who healed the broken, embraced outcasts, and wept with the suffering—with these stories of vengeance and bloodshed? How do we align the God whom Jesus came to reveal with the God seemingly behind the slaughter of infants, the endorsement of ethnic cleansing, and the prayers of killers in sanctuaries turned into death chambers?

⁷³ Philip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda*, New York: Picador, 1998, p.242

Can we say, with any integrity, that the God of Christ is the same as the one invoked to justify the genocide of the Amalekites or the mass killings in Rwanda, carried out by those who prayed before murdering their neighbors?

Is this truly the character of the God whom Jesus called “Father”? If so, then how unfitting is it really for some to describe such a deity as the quotation below?

“ The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”⁷⁴

If the dominant interpretations of these troubling passages—and the behavior of those who claimed to represent God, such as the clergy complicit in the Rwandan Genocide—are accurate portrayals, then perhaps evolutionary biologist and ethologist Richard Dawkins, an atheist, might be more honest about this God’s character than many religious leaders.

But I protest. I cannot accept that this is the true God of the Bible.

Like Martin Luther before the Diet of Worms, I feel compelled to lay before you my thesis—not out of rebellion, but out of reverence for the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. I invite you to explore with me a different vision of God: not the God of tribal vengeance, nor the cold deity of fear and power, but the God revealed in Jesus—self-giving, forgiving, and radically loving, even to enemies, whose justice is always restorative, never vindictive.

Let us dare to question the traditions that have marred the face of God with violence. Let us rediscover the God who hung on a cross rather than wield a sword.

Counterfeit Justice Influences

To understand the root of these horrors, we must examine humanity’s conception of justice. What kind of justice inspires a man to tear a child from its mother’s arms in the name of God? What interpretation

⁷⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Bantam Press, UK, 2006, p.31

of justice motivates entire communities to pray before going out to kill? If these acts are indeed considered “justice,” then something has gone terribly wrong in our understanding of justice itself.

The prophet Isaiah records the words of God:

“ Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass” (Isaiah 48:4).

Here, brass symbolizes the sinful nature of humanity, a nature that has deviated from its original design, which intended for mankind to operate according to the law of love. The Apostle Paul writes that such individuals become “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1). This alloy of copper and zinc—two opposing elements fused together—traces its origin to Cain, the first to take a life, and has become a symbol of cruelty and violence. It embodies the essence of fallen human nature.

Isaiah’s imagery of an obstinate man having a forehead (brow) made of brass refers to the person’s reasoning, their interpretation of the world, and their actions. This counterfeit justice is the distortion and infection the devil introduced into the minds of humanity and fallen angels, creating a significant deviation from God’s original design.

“ The condemning power of Satan would lead him to **institute a theory of justice inconsistent with mercy**. He claims to be officiating as the voice and power of God, claims that his decisions are justice, are pure and without fault. Thus he takes his position on the judgment seat and declares that his counsels are infallible. Here **his merciless justice comes in, a counterfeit of justice, abhorrent to God.**”⁷⁵

In the statue of Nebuchadnezzar described in the book of Daniel chapter 2, different metals represent various kingdoms, each reflecting the character of the kingdom it symbolizes. Brass, the third metal, stands for the kingdom of Greece and its philosophy. This brings to light a critical point regarding the understanding of human violence: How did the Greeks perceive the justice of their gods, and how did that perspective shape their behavior? This line of inquiry is both fascinating and profound, especially when we observe similar patterns throughout human history, particularly in Rwanda.

⁷⁵ Ellen G. White, *Christ Triumphant*, p.11.4

The ancient education system, which significantly influenced the transmission of societal values, was primarily oral and performative. This system mirrored the moral compass of society, with Greek literature playing a central role. Unlike modern educational practices, which often involve reading set texts, literature in ancient Greece was acted out. The most celebrated scriptwriters of the time were often those who created the most violent and bloody plays, pushing the limits of imagination to depict extreme cruelty. This trend reveals much about Greek society, as playwrights would only craft narratives that resonated with their audiences. The prevalence of violence in these plays was not merely a personal preference; it reflected societal appetites. Even today, a compelling script often mirrors societal issues and current affairs.

Consequently, Greek tragedy filled theaters and became the mental diet of the audience. The human brain is shaped by what it consistently focuses on, so Greek tragedy both reflected and reinforced the character of those who engaged with it. For instance, Euripides portrayed characters like Medea, who killed her own children. What is especially important for our analysis is how these tragedies depict justice.

In Greek mythology, Agamemnon—the leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War—was compelled to sacrifice his own daughter after offending the goddess Artemis. The Greek fleet, stranded at Aulis due to unfavorable winds, could only sail once this act of appeasement was performed—the sacrifice of his daughter!

This portrayal of the gods mirrors Dawkins' description of the God of the Bible as vindictive, cruel, and demanding the blood of innocents for appeasement. One might question whether such representations influenced perceptions of the God of the Bible—as a deity who requires the sacrifice of the innocent to favor individuals like Agamemnon, and as a god who exhibits favoritism.

More crucial to our discussion is the type of justice portrayed here. The individual who offends the gods must face calamity as punishment, even if that punishment falls on someone else. Those who behold such a deity will inevitably begin to behave like that god, and this theme is echoed in the later theatrical plays.

Clytemnestra, mourning the loss of her daughter, views her husband's actions as a betrayal of justice. From her perspective, the moral order has

been disrupted, and she sees herself as the agent through whom divine justice must be restored—even if it requires violent means. This cycle of vengeance continues with their son, Orestes, who, in his quest to avenge his father's death, believes that justice has once again been violated. He wrestles with the moral implications of killing his own mother but ultimately concludes that true justice demands decisive action, including the shedding of blood. For him, justice is not something to be negotiated; it must be executed, regardless of the cost.

This pattern is mirrored in Rwanda and throughout the history of war. It is not merely a problem within Greek philosophy; rather, Greek thought reflects the wider human tragedy under the counterfeit justice of Satan. Long before the Greeks, this concept of justice was evident in the Biblical Mesopotamia through the Code of Hammurabi. In that context, justice was not only punitive but also hierarchical. A commoner who harmed or killed someone of noble status faced disproportionately severe punishments. Justice was often retributive and proportional, meaning the punishment mirrored the crime. The well-known phrase “an eye for an eye” essentially paraphrases one of Hammurabi’s laws: “If a man has destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy, they shall destroy his eye” (Law 196). If this were applied literally and universally, wouldn’t the world be filled with blind people? If in doubt, just consider the history of Rwanda!

Historically, Hammurabi was likely a contemporary of Abraham, who lived around the 18th century BCE, 400–600 years before Moses. This is why, when examining similar laws in the Torah given to Moses, it is essential to consider the historical context. One must ask: Are all the recorded laws a reflection of God’s ideal will, or are they examples of God’s accommodative will? God Himself acknowledges, “I gave them statutes that were not good” (Ezekiel 20:25). This raises a profound question: Does God give what is “not good”?

In the Hebrew language, God is often described as *doing* what He merely *permits*. This idiom, supported by biblical scholarship,⁷⁶ reflects a worldview where God’s *sovereignty* is so total that even what He *allows* is attributed to Him as *doing*. The Hebrew verb *nathan*, translated as

⁷⁶ See *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol.2, p.989

give, can also mean to *permit* or to *suffer*. Thus, some laws and actions attributed to God in the Old Testament must be viewed as *permissive accommodations*, not *prescriptive ideals*. God sometimes allowed these due to respect for human freedom and cultural limitations. A British writer, literary scholar and theologian captures this nuance beautifully.

““ **What God allows, He is sometimes said to do.”**⁷⁷

The verse “Every good and perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17) makes it clear that God cannot be the source of both good and evil gifts. It is then conclusive that while God only gives what is good, He sometimes permits things that fall short of the ideal. But why?

““ **He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.”** (Matthew 19:8)

It is due to human stubbornness that God allows people to follow their own ways until they come to recognize their mistakes and are willing to accept His ideal principles. God never forces anyone against their will. If it is historically accurate that Hammurabi existed before Moses, then it is reasonable to conclude that God permitted some of the prevailing justice systems to govern Israel until they were mature enough to embrace His true principles. Even when God allowed these systems to exist, He always sought to minimize harm and protect the vulnerable, seeking to reduce the impact of evil.

When Christ came to fully reveal the character of God, He taught profound truths that often shocked His listeners. Most importantly, He embodied those truths in His own life—culminating in His death on the cross, where He prayed for the forgiveness of those who murdered Him. In Christ, we see the clearest picture of God’s ideal character, one of mercy, forgiveness, and self-sacrificing love. Jesus’ words strike at the very heart of counterfeit justice:

““ **Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 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. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take**

⁷⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 1940

away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." (Matthew 5:38-41)

This presents a radically different vision of justice—one that stands in stark contrast to the punitive, retaliatory systems we have inherited from Mesopotamian codes, Greek tragedy, and even the justice traditions that have shaped much of the violence seen in places like Rwanda. Christ came to reveal the true ideals of God, calling humanity not to repay evil with evil, but to overcome evil with good. This principle is foreign to human nature; on the contrary, it is often perceived as weakness. Yet, within it lies the strength of Heaven.

What we have observed in the pages of human bloody history—from the horrors of genocide to revenge-driven atrocities—is the bitter fruit of a counterfeit justice, one not rooted in divine love but in pride, fear, and retribution. God's justice, as revealed in Christ, does not seek destruction but redemption. While nations may scorn such a path, history has shown—and continues to do so—that the farther humanity strays from the law of selfless love, the deeper our world sinks into suffering and sorrow.

Let it be clear: the way of Christ is not a way of weakness, but rather a higher justice that reflects the heart of Heaven. It calls for a new perception, a transformed heart, and a justice that heals rather than harms. To follow this path is to reject the brutal cycles of violence and to embrace the character of God as revealed on the cross.

To Our Dear People of Rwanda

My heart goes out to each one of you who has seen, felt, and endured the unimaginable tragedy. May you find healing in God's justice—not the justice of revenge, but the justice that restores, mends, and reconciles. May His love bring peace where there has been pain; joy where there has been mourning; and unity where there has been division—between brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives.

God has not overlooked your tears. He truly cares for every scar, every loss, and every silent cry for justice. His heart is with you, and His justice offers hope that the brokenness of the past does not have to define the future. May Rwanda rise with healing in its wings! ••

Chapter 14

The Holocaust and the German Christians

THE more we trace the history of human warfare, the clearer it becomes that distorted views or constructs of God can be extremely dangerous. Time and again, people have committed unimaginable atrocities in the name of a god they claim to represent. As we study these human tragedies, we often wonder how man can be so wicked and brutal. Our words fail, and our hearts break as we try to make sense of such evil. But what is even more disturbing is the presentation of such acts of cruelty as a ruling of divine authority—when God is portrayed as one justifying or even promoting hate, violence, and bloodshed. This concept imbues evil with a sense of righteousness, which makes it not only more dangerous but also more brazen and unrepentant.

The Holocaust stands as one of the clearest and most sobering examples of this extremely dangerous pitfall of misguided beliefs regarding God's justice. Before we delve deeper into the subject of justice, a brief background of the Holocaust might help us better understand its context.

Germany had lost in World War I and, as a result, was burdened with blame and reparations under the Treaty of Versailles.⁷⁸ The nation's economy was in disarray and was further deteriorated by the Great Depression. With widespread poverty and despair, Germany became fertile ground for radical ideologies. In this climate, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi), established in 1920 and under

⁷⁸ See Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking after the First World War, 1919–1923*, *Historical Journal*; 2008

the leadership of Adolf Hitler from 1921, rose to power, exploiting both nationalist sentiment and religious rhetoric.

The democratic Weimar Republic (1919–1933), officially called the German Reich, proved to be fragile and unstable. In a desperate attempt to redeem the state of affairs, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Chancellor. Though Hindenburg and former chancellors knew of Hitler's extremism, they believed they could control him, yet they were gravely mistaken.

Hitler's political party gained popularity by promoting ideologies supposedly promising the redemption of Germany from its post-war humiliation and economic despair. The Nazis strongly advocated for territorial expansion, particularly through the concept of *Lebensraum*, which translates to living space. This idea was rooted in the belief that Germany needed more land to support its growing population and to ensure national strength.

Having lost many of its colonies in World War I, Germany was eager to reclaim its power and territory. The pursuit of *Lebensraum* directly influenced the Nazi decision to invade Poland—an act that ultimately triggered World War II.

Nazi Expansion Ideology

The expansionist ideology of the Nazis was primarily rooted in two major beliefs, which fueled aggressive policies of violence and ideological zeal:

- a) Racial Ideology
- b) Social Darwinism.

Racial Ideology

Nazi leaders and members believed in the existence of a superior and inferior race. They perceived history as a constant struggle for survival between these groups, where the superior race was destined to dominate—or even eliminate—the inferior one. Any form of mingling was forbidden, as it was believed to contaminate the purity of the noble race.

The Nazis perceived themselves—particularly the Germans—as the chosen people, called to purge the world of the ‘unfit’ in order to secure the survival of the ‘supreme’ Aryan race. To them, this mission was

divinely sanctioned and morally justifiable. This belief laid the foundation for the ethnic cleansing that led to the mass murder of millions of Jews, targeting also disabled individuals and Slavic peoples (including Poles, Russians, and Ukrainians).

What made this tragedy even more disturbing was that the atrocities were cloaked in pretend theological terms, e.g. “mercy killings,” “doing God’s work,” and “acting according to a divine order for the preservation of the strong”—what they called *racial hygiene*. The Jews in particular were seen not just as inferior but as a direct threat, and were blamed for Germany’s loss in World War I. As such, their complete extermination became the goal of the regime.

Almost half a million disabled people were forced to undergo sterilization to ensure their disabilities would not be passed to future generations. Others were executed under the pretense of ‘acts of compassion’ through gas chambers disguised as shower rooms. Victims were led to gas chambers and poisoned by pure carbon monoxide. Those who insist that God endorses and commands killing as an act of mercy are no different from their counterparts in the WW II Germany.

The number of people sentenced to extermination was so high that gas chambers alone could not meet the demand. As a result, other brutal methods were employed, including *lethal injections, medication overdoses, starvation, shootings, and willful neglect*. Much like in Rwanda, these atrocities occurred under the silent watch and support of the majority of religious leaders. Tragically, a distorted form of Christianity was crafted, and through it, many theologians of that cult-like movement endorsed and justified the violence. They gradually reshaped the image of God in the minds of young people, both in schools and churches, to align with Nazi ideology.

In subsequent chapters, we will examine some of these abominations approved and endorsed by religion.

Social Darwinism

Some argue that it was the *abuse* of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, rather than the *theory* itself, that influenced Nazi ideology. But one must ask a question: If Darwin’s core principle was “survival of the fittest” as

an explanation for biological development and origins, to what extent is that principle allowed to progress once it has been set in motion? If, in the course of evolution, certain human groups are seen as biologically superior while others are deemed inferior, how difficult is it to see that the struggle for survival is a continuation of the same process? In this case, it becomes easier to understand how the Nazis could justify their belief that the Aryans were simply following the “natural order” by keeping their race pure. Edicts prohibiting intermarriage with Jews, and the systemic violence directed toward them, were thus framed not as acts of hatred but as acts of necessity—a supposed duty to preserve the Aryan race.

German Christians

Most, if not all, of Hitler’s close associates were former Christians. However, they later rebranded themselves as “German Christians” (Deutsche Christen) in an effort to distinguish their beliefs from traditional, biblical Christianity. While some have labeled Hitler an atheist, he was far from being one. In reality, Hitler and his Nazi followers did not reject religion altogether—they *rejected Christianity as it was presented in the Bible*. Certain biblical attributes of God were particularly offensive to them, and they actively worked to remove or replace them, going so far as to reshape biblical narratives to fit their ideology. Hitler once stated:

“ Christianity is a rebellion against natural law, a protest against nature. Taken to its logical extreme, Christianity would mean the systematic cultivation of human failure.”⁷⁹

For the Nazis, core Christian virtues of meekness and humility were signs of weakness and failure. They wanted nothing to do with a religion that taught turning the other cheek or loving one’s enemies. Instead, they sought a new brand of faith with a god that aligned with their worldview—militant, nationalistic, and racial. This was the driving force behind the German Christian movement of the 1930s.

What kind of Christianity did they want to promote? It was a Christianity where Jesus was *Aryan*, not *Jewish*. They saw themselves as God’s chosen people on a divine mission to purge the earth of the so-called

⁷⁹ Hitler’s Table Talk 1941–1944, October 10, 1941, p.33

“inferior races”—especially the Jews, whom they blamed for killing Jesus. In this twisted theology, they considered themselves ‘instruments of divine justice.’ They clung to Christ’s rebukes of the Pharisees as justification for their antisemitic agenda, reinterpreting His words to fuel a genocidal cause.

They reasoned that passages of Scripture where Christ spoke against the iniquities committed by the Pharisees were too offensive and needed revision since the Jews had corrupted the truth. Jesus’ statement, “Blessed are the meek” (Matthew 5:5) was interpreted as clearly distinguishing humanity—particularly the superior Aryan race—from animals. In the animal kingdom, there are both ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ species, and the Nazis specifically admired brutal beasts like lions as embodiments of the characteristics they wished to emulate. In the Nazi philosophy, animals were regarded as having a higher status than some humans, especially since animal rights were enacted around 1933—animals were to be respected, and mistreating them would result in severe punishment.

The tragedy before us vividly reveals the consequences of the “death of God”—not in the philosophical sense alone, but in the loss of His true image as revealed in Christ. When the image of God is eroded from human hearts, humanity descends below the level of the beasts. Created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), men and women can become far worse than animals when they begin to worship themselves. Self-deification leads to dehumanization—first of the self, then of others. Made to reflect divine love and dignity, some begin to see their fellow humans as less valuable than the beasts of the field.

When the image of God is eclipsed, the world itself becomes a living hell. As the Apostle John’s prophecy describes, fallen humanity becomes “a habitation of devils, a hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Revelation 18:2). This haunting description speaks not only to their moral corruption but also to the nature of the gods they worship—false gods born of fear, power, and hate.

In Nazi Germany, the so-called German Christians rejected the glory of God as revealed in Jesus Christ—“the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3)—and replaced Him with a god of their own imagining. In doing so, they embraced a terrifying counterfeit: a god in the image

of man, and ultimately, in the image of Hitler. Their worship devolved into ideology. The cross was emptied of Christ, and the swastika took its place. A terrifying fusion of Christian language and Nazi ideology was imposed on both the young and old, shaping consciences into tools of cruelty. So thorough was this corruption that in some churches, Hitler was even reverently included in place of Christ in rewritten versions of the Lord's Prayer:

"Adolf Hitler, thou art our great leader.
Thy name makes the enemy tremble.
Thy Third Reich come,
Thy will be law upon the earth.
Let us hear daily thy voice and order.
Deliver us from the Jews,
for thine is the Reich, the power, and the glory.
Heil Hitler. Amen."⁸⁰

How could their eyes gaze upon mutilated bodies and trembling victims during the so-called 'selection'—a dehumanizing process where newly arrived prisoners were lined up and examined by Nazi doctors or officers to determine who would be spared for forced labor and who would be sent immediately to the gas chambers? Men, women and children were separated like cattle in a marketplace. The young, the healthy or the strong were sent one way; the elderly, the sick, pregnant women and young children were sent another—often straight to their death. It was a grotesque ritual of judgment, carried out with cold efficiency, stripping people not only of dignity but of life.

How could the Nazis go home, cradle their children on their lap, and enjoy a meal together while the cries of infants dying of thirst in locked train cars, or in sweltering summer heat, echoed in their minds? These were babies begging their helpless mothers for a drop of water before both met their deaths at the hands of their oppressors. The mind hesitates to write, and the hand trembles at such unthinkable cruelty.

And yet, this is what happens when the image of God is erased from the human heart.

⁸⁰ Source: www.Libcom.org

“How Do You Read It?”

One must pause to consider how the contemporary Church—this new crop of Christianity—handles scriptural imperatives such as “love your enemies” or “do good to those who hate you” (Matthew 5:44). Historical precedent reveals that these verses have not always been received in the spirit in which Christ delivered them.

We have previously touched on the rewriting of Scripture under the Nazi regime. A key institution responsible for this was the Institute for the Study and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life. They systematically removed references to Christ’s Jewish heritage from the Gospels. Yet significantly, they did not expunge every text—they instead focused on *reinterpreting* those that remained untouched.

This distinction is critical. If one were to replace Christ’s name with that of another—e.g., Hitler—or strip Him of His Jewish lineage while leaving His teachings intact, the transformation would be superficial at best. For as Paul reminds us, “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6). Transformation does not arise from textual form alone, but from dedicated engagement with the *spirit* of the Word.

To propagate their ideology, the Nazis enlisted theologians to reinterpret Scripture for both the church and the schoolroom, with every reading shaped to serve the supposed good of the German people (*Volk*). In this ideological framework, when Christ commanded love for one’s neighbor, the ‘neighbor’ meant *only* fellow Nazis. Those described as “Blessed [for suffering persecution] for righteousness’ sake” (Matthew 5:10) were interpreted to be the Nazis themselves. Such reasoning inverted the Gospel, turning the persecutor into the righteous victim. In short, all Scripture was reinterpreted through the lens of the Aryan racial struggle for existence.⁸¹

This historical distortion should evoke a deep concern in us today. The greatest threat to the integrity of the gospel in our time may not come from the rewriting of Scripture, but from subtle methods of misinterpretation that fashion a god in the image of fallen humanity—a deity who endorses violence, pride or nationalism under the guise of holiness.

⁸¹ For further reading, see: *The Sermon on the Mount and Christian Ethics in the Nazi Bible*, www.omnilogos.com

This brings us to a pivotal moment in the Gospel of Luke, where Christ responds to a lawyer's question about eternal life. According to Jesus, eternal life flows from knowing "the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom [He] hast sent" (John 17:3). Yet Jesus, instead of answering the lawyer directly, poses two questions of His own:

“ **What is written in the Law? How do you read it?**” (Luke 10:26)

This dialogue reveals that Christ cared not only about the content of Scripture but also about the interpretation of Scripture. It is not enough to know *what is written*; we must also discern *how we read it*.

This, I believe, is one of the most important questions facing the Church today—one that strikes at the heart of our witness, our theology, and our capacity to embody grace in a fractured world.

Are we reading Scripture with the same ideological filters as those who once twisted it to justify genocide? Are we shaping a Christ who blesses our prejudices and affirms our idols? If so, we should not be surprised by the outcome. As Hitler once chillingly declared:

“ **We will train young people before whom the world will tremble. I want young people capable of violence—imperious, relentless and cruel.**”⁸²

Teachers, preachers, and parents: We must be vigilant. The seeds of interpretation we sow today will bear fruit in the next generation. Unless we are prepared to raise disciples in the image of cruelty, we must return to the spirit of Christ's word—marked not by domination or violence, but by love, truth and humility. ••

⁸² Hitler's Table Talk, 1942, recorded by Hitler's private secretary, Martin Bormann

Chapter 15

God: A Man of War?

THE two historical tragedies—the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide—should be enough to convince anyone that there is a link between a distorted image of God and the use of power that has resulted in unimaginable atrocities. There is hardly any war in history where the perpetrators have not justified their actions by claiming divine authority. How they do this can often be traced back to specific misinterpretations of Scripture, upon which they anchor their so-called divine responsibility.

But when similar atrocities are described in the Scriptures as committed by God's people, one might tremble and wonder—could God really be the father of war?

In the Bible, God is depicted as the “God of peace” (Romans 15:33). Christ promised His disciples peace even in tribulation—peace that the world cannot provide. Yet in another passage, the same God is described as “a man of war” (Exodus 15:3)—the Hebrew word for war means a warrior. How can these two images be reconciled? Are they two opposite qualities of the same being, revealed in accordance with our expectations or requirements?

This tension reminds the Mongol conquests, which began in 1206 under the leadership of Genghis Khan. Their expansion across Asia and into Europe was marked by brutal violence, mass destruction, and enormous loss of life. Yet, after conquest, the Mongols were known to be surprisingly tolerant rulers, especially toward religion. Is this how we are to understand God? As one who uses force for a “greater good,” only to show mercy afterwards, in different circumstances?

When God sent Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt into Canaan, many extraordinary events unfolded in Egypt. Yet at no point did God invite the Israelites to engage in armed combat for their liberation, with Him as their leader. Though He was their Deliverer, He did not ask them to take up weapons or declare Himself their heroic general.

Moses himself had been thoroughly trained in Egyptian military tactics. As a potential future pharaoh, he received the highest education in both Egyptian wisdom and warfare (Acts 7:22). Human logic would suggest that this was the perfect opportunity to lead an uprising against Egypt—but God never endorsed that method. Instead, He chose to deliver His people not by the sword but through signs, judgments, and acts of divine power.

And yet, as the Israelites journeyed toward the Promised Land, warfare began to take place more frequently in their pilgrimage. By the time they reached Canaan, the settlement of the land was carried out by war. This dramatic shift raises important and sobering questions: Why didn't God use Moses' military skills from the start? And more importantly, was war ever part of God's original plan?

The answer lies in the promise itself. The land was first promised to Abraham—not to be seized by force, but to be received as a gift. God said:

“ And to you and your descendants I will give the land where you are residing—all the land of Canaan—as an eternal possession; and I will be their God.” (Genesis 17:8 Berean Standard Bible)

An “eternal possession” cannot be secured through war, bloodshed, or conquest. Such a gift from God was to be received in trust and patience, not taken by force. This confirms that warfare was never God's intention. The land was not to be *won*—it was to be *inherited*.

The land was given to Abraham as an “everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8 KJV). This was not merely a promise to his descendants, but to Abraham himself. Yet Abraham died without owning any of the land except for a burial site (see Acts 7:5). For this promise to be fulfilled, Abraham himself must live again to possess the land—therefore, the fulfillment points beyond this present world. As Paul later affirms,

“ The promise that he would be heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” (Romans 4:13)

The land of Canaan was only a portion—a local fulfillment—of the greater inheritance: the earth made new, part of God's kingdom.

Was it God's plan for humanity to fight their way into heaven? The promise was not to be fulfilled by their works. Do you remember Abraham's conflict with God regarding Ishmael? He wanted to help God fulfill His promise, but God referred to Ishmael and Hagar as the "works of the flesh"—he could not be heir together with the "son of promise" (Galatians 4:21–28).

God wanted the heirs of the promise to trust Him. He was to give them the Promised Land in His own manner, just as He had saved them from the hands of pharaoh—without them having to shed blood (neither their own nor that of the Egyptians). Conquering Canaan by the sword meant attempting to establish Christ's kingdom by force—a concept which Christ Himself rejected. He told Pontius Pilate not to be concerned about His kingdom:

“ My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight ... but now is My kingdom not from hence.” (John 18:36)

So what kind of kingdom was the one established by sword in the Old Testament times? God is even presented as a "man of war" (Exodus 15:3)—and not just metaphorically. Did they then make God in the image of a man altogether? Has the silence of God caused the world to think that He is like them?

When Pharaoh at last agreed to release the Israelites, God directed them on a longer route to avoid exposure to war. They were not only unarmed but untrained in warfare (see Exodus 13:17). Though the route was longer, it spared them the immediate conflict with hostile tribes along the way. One historian noted:

“ Instead of pursuing the direct route to Canaan, which lay through the country of the Philistines, the Lord directed their course southward, toward the shores of the Red Sea. 'For God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.' Had they attempted to pass through Philistia, their progress would have been opposed; for the Philistines, regarding them as slaves escaping from their masters, **would not have hesitated to make war upon them.**

The Israelites were poorly prepared for an encounter with that powerful and warlike people. They had little knowledge of God and little faith in Him, and they would have become terrified and disheartened. **They were unarmed and unaccustomed to war,** their spirits were depressed by long bondage, and they were encumbered with women and children, flocks and herds. In leading them by the way of the Red Sea, the Lord revealed Himself as a God of compassion as well as of judgment.”⁸³

God's wisdom is profound. He did not want to endanger the lives of helpless people—women and children in particular. By extension, this decision also spared the shedding of blood, not only of the Israelites but also those whom they might have engaged in battle. That is true divine responsibility and restraint.

But does this suggest that, had Israel been trained and armed, God would have led them into war? Not at all. Even Moses once assumed that God required his military skills. Trained in all the wisdom and warfare of Egypt, Moses attempted to assist God by acting on his own initiative. Seeing an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite, he struck the man down and buried his body in the sand. But the next day, as he sought to reconcile two quarrelling Israelites, one of them rebuked him: “intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?” (Exodus 2:14). In that moment, Moses recognized that his efforts had been misguided.

This marked the beginning of Moses' 40 years of retraining in the wilderness, where God would undo the first 40 years of Egyptian military conditioning. He would be reshaped—not into a general, but into a shepherd—because God's method of deliverance would not be through force but through trust and obedience.

“ In slaying the Egyptian, Moses had fallen into the same error so often committed by his fathers, of taking into their own hands the work that God had promised to do. It was not God's will to deliver His people by warfare, as Moses thought, but by His own mighty power, that the glory might be ascribed to Him alone.”⁸⁴

Physical combat was never God's plan for His people. So how did war become part of Israel's experience—not only in the conquest of Canaan,

⁸³ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.282.1

⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.247.3

but in the many battles they fought after settling in the land? And if war was the ongoing reality, did they ever fully possess the Promised Land as intended, or was their inheritance always marked by tension, compromise, and unmet expectation?

The key to these questions lies in the story of the twelve spies sent into Canaan. I encourage you to read the full account in your Bible before continuing with this study. The narrative is found in Numbers 13–14 and later revisited by Moses as a historical reflection near the end of his life, in Deuteronomy 1:20–41.

Would you like help shaping the next section—perhaps exploring the emotional tremors and theological tensions stirred by Israel's response to the spies' report? In the Numbers account, we read:

“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, everyone a ruler among them.”
(Numbers 13:2)

At first glance, it appears to be a direct command from God. But let us reflect: Did God really need this reconnaissance mission to assess the land? Did He not already know the geography, the inhabitants, and the conditions of Canaan? Would it make any sense to send Israel on a journey only to discover that the land might not be good enough? That line of reasoning borders on absurdity.

God knew the land well. He had chosen it and promised it to Abraham's descendants long before. So the spying mission was not for His sake—but for theirs. It was meant to reveal something about the people's trust in God, not about the land. Still, why give such a command if it risked causing doubt?

This is where Deuteronomy provides important insight, as Moses adds details not disclosed in the Book of Numbers. They help us better understand the real reason for the spy mission.

“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. 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.”
(Deuteronomy 1:21,22)

Just on the border of the Promised Land, God compared the land to a mother setting a rich spread for her children to choose whatever they wish—but they rejected it and decided that they first needed to send a few of them to confirm the goodness of the land, the route, and the capabilities of its inhabitants. It was distrust at its worst, yet God permitted them to do as they pleased. He did not force them, for the possession of the land required faith in Him.

Do you see that some commands of God may, in fact, fall short of expressing His ideal will? In Numbers, Moses records that the LORD simply said, “Send thou men.” It was a command—but not necessarily the way God would have preferred. His desire was for them to trust Him fully, but they had their own will. He permitted what they insisted upon, even though it reflected their weakness rather than His best.

We know how the story unfolds. The spies entered the land and saw mighty men—figures of strength and stature that overwhelmed them. Discouragement set in as they compared themselves to what they saw. Reality was distorted by fear, and their confidence faltered, not because of what God had said, but because of what they allowed themselves to believe.

To be honest, if I were in their place—not knowing how it would end—I might have wanted to spy out the land first as well. We’re all weak. We all wrestle with distrust. Isn’t that why so many today feel the need to “test” before they commit—whether in matters of faith or relationships? Don’t we often “spy” on people before choosing a spouse, trying to discern if they’re truly safe, truly good? In fact, isn’t this the very logic behind cohabitation for many—“Let’s try it out first and see if it works”? It’s the impulse to gather evidence before surrendering, to secure certainty before offering trust.

But does love grow out of distrust? Can a promise stand firm where suspicion is the foundation?

In the same way, Israel didn’t trust the One who had brought them out of Egypt. They wanted to see with their own eyes and thus confirm what God had already guaranteed. It was their lack of trust (and not any flaw in the promise) that proved to be their downfall.

After this disastrous breach of trust, the spies' report terrified the people. Gripped by fear, they cried out that they would rather have died in the wilderness. Some even proposed appointing a new leader to take them back to Egypt. And once again, God granted their desire—commanding them to turn back into the wilderness. This retreat wasn't His ideal; it was a concession to their hardened hearts.

Yet even then, they rebelled. Suddenly, they proposed going up to fight. But did God tell them to fight? Or was fighting simply what they had come to expect? They viewed God as a man of war—someone whose role was to lead them into battle.

“ Then ye answered and said unto me, We have sinned against the LORD, **we will go up and fight, according to all that the LORD our God commanded us.** And when ye had girded on every man **his weapons of war**, ye were ready to go up into the hill.” (Deuteronomy 1:41)

When you read the story, do you find any moment where God explicitly instructed them to go up and fight? Where did that idea come from? It was their interpretation of God's words—that He had “set the land before” them and commanded them to “go up and possess it.” Their imagination of God had been shaped more by conquest than by covenant, more by power than by presence. They projected their own expectations onto God.

They had left Egypt unarmed—so where did they even get the weapons they now sought to use in battle against the Canaanites? At least we've now settled one question about the wars of Israel:

“ **The Lord had never commanded them to ‘go up and fight.’** It was not His purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict obedience to His commands.”⁸⁵

Whatever God *allowed* was never His original design or ideal—it was an accommodation of human unbelief and resistance to His ways. The wars that followed were not “holy wars,” nor were they expressions of His perfect will. God's ideal was *trust*, not military conquest.

Remember when God commanded Hagar to return to Abraham after fleeing from Sarah's mistreatment (Genesis 16:9)? That command did not sanctify the extramarital relationship between Abraham and

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.392.3

Hagar. Similarly, just because God bore with human ways of settling disputes through violence—even back in Abraham’s day—does not mean He endorsed them. Abraham avoided war whenever possible, but when Lot was captured, he was compelled to fight, which left him with emotional scars.

War is never without effects. God never designed to expose an entire nation to the trauma of bloodshed, fear, and loss. He did not intend to lead His people into generational cycles of violence, nor into the emotional scars we now understand as PTSD. That was never part of His plan of redemption!

After rescuing Lot, Abraham was shaken. The experience had deeply disturbed his tender, Christlike spirit. God had to come to him with reassurance, saying: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Genesis 15:1). This divine comfort speaks volumes—it wasn’t just a response to external threats but to the internal anguish caused by war.

God’s ideal was always peace through faith, not conquest through violence—a vision rooted in trust, covenant, and the quiet strength of obedience rather than the clamor of swords and territorial ambition.

Let’s take a few steps back in the story. Upon returning from war, Abraham gave a tithe, acknowledging God’s favor and protection. However, that does not mean God approved of war as His preferred method. When the king of Sodom came and pleaded for the people Abraham had rescued (see Genesis 14:21), it reflected the prevailing custom of that time: whoever went to war and conquered became the rightful owner of all spoils—whether material goods or human captives, who would become slaves or concubines. The fact that Abraham refused to claim such rights reveals his moral character, but the system itself was deeply flawed.

It is essential to include a disclaimer: While God’s accommodative nature is evident in many situations, He only permits certain things while seeking to lift humanity step by step toward higher ideals.

This is seen, for example, in the dietary laws. God gave instructions regarding clean and unclean meats (see Leviticus 11)—not because He created animals to be slaughtered, but as a measure to reduce harm and suffering to people caused by flesh consumption.

Another example of God's leniency is found in the matter of divorce. It was never God's design that a man should marry a woman only to cast her away when she no longer pleased him. Yet, due to the hardness of human hearts, God permitted divorce (see Deuteronomy 24:1–4). Jesus later made it clear that this was not so from the beginning.

“ Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because **your hearts were hard**. But it was not this way from the beginning.”
(Matthew 19:8 NIV)

Here again, God was working within the cultural and spiritual limitations of fallen humanity, *allowing* what He did not command, and *tolerating* what He did not approve, all the while pointing His people toward a better ideal.

Similarly, in times of war, we see divine accommodation at work. Certain individuals were exempted from battle (see Deuteronomy 20:5–8)—including those newly married—suggesting that God acknowledged the profound toll war takes on human life. If war were truly His ideal, why make such exceptions? Why not perform a miracle to secure victory without bloodshed? The answer is simple: war was not God's way. It was man's. To attribute its devastation to divine design is to misread God's character and portray Him as indifferent—or worse, cruel.

Furthermore, Israel was instructed to offer terms of peace to the enemy cities first. If the city surrendered, it was spared (see Deuteronomy 20:10,11). If it refused, the men were to be killed, while the women and children were taken as spoils (vv.12–15). Though far from ideal, these instructions reflect God engaging with the hardened realities of human culture and rebellion—seeking, within those constraints, to limit bloodshed. His heart was always inclined toward the ideal. But humanity, exercising its moral freedom, would not be coerced. One author put it this way:

“ The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority.”⁸⁶ ••

⁸⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.22.1

Chapter 16

The Swords of Levi

ABRAHAM'S heart shows that he was not drawn to war as many others have been—his response was exceptional, and few have followed his path. A person's actions reveal the true nature of their heart, and Israel's choice to use war as a means of settling in Canaan exposed what was in their hearts. Just a few years earlier, they had cried out under oppression, but once the roles were reversed, they were ready to replay the very script of their former oppressors. This is the unfortunate pattern of fallen humanity.

Remember, they departed Egypt unarmed. Our present concern is to trace the origin of the weapons they later possessed.

Soon after leaving Egypt, Israel faced a discouraging situation: the Red Sea lay before them, and Pharaoh's army was closing in from behind. Had they remembered the mighty hand that delivered them from Egypt, they would have had no reason to fear. But the enemy managed to paralyze them with fear, and they forgot that victory did not depend on their own strength.

Their terror came from realizing they were no match for the army pursuing them. That fear led them to a tragic conclusion—they believed that God needed them to fight, and knowing they were unprepared, they saw death as inevitable. Regret took over, and they bitterly questioned their decision to follow Moses. In their minds, the exodus had been a grave mistake. As a God-appointed leader, Moses assured them:

“ The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”
(Exodus 14:14)

Moses is essentially telling them: *it is God who will fight, not you.* He calls them to remain at peace, for the battle did not belong to them. This only makes sense if they had mistakenly assumed that they were expected to fight. What follows is the miracle—God creates a path through the waters of the Red Sea. The people cross joyfully and break into praise, celebrating the Lord's deliverance. But did they truly grasp what God was teaching them?

The next morning, the scene before the Israelites was striking: “the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore” (Exodus 14:30). The bodies of Pharaoh’s army lay strewn along the shore, still clad in their armor. This appears to be a fair explanation for the origin of the weapons that Israel later possessed. It marked the beginning of their departure from God’s intended way of giving them the land of Canaan. From that moment, they began to trust in the sword. Yet a person can only wield weapons that reflect the principles of the kingdom they serve—their instruments of justice reflect their underlying philosophy.

Here lies the genesis of the very statutes Ezekiel would later describe as “not good” (Ezekiel 20:25). They were not God’s ideal, but His concession—allowing Israel to operate within a framework they could grasp. That system became the measure they received throughout their journey and daily life, whenever they clung to it. For God is not only a respecter of human freedom; He is unwavering, consistent and does not change (see Numbers 23:19), and there “is no变ability, neither shadow of turning” in Him. He does not change like a chameleon. These swords were *never* woven into the fabric of His government. That truth remains unaltered.

Christ affirmed this eternal principle when He declared:

“ He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: **he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.** Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.” (Revelation 13:10)

What did Jesus mean by the above statement? Did He imply that if you kill a person with the sword, you yourself will be killed the same way? Or was He speaking figuratively—referring to the underlying system upon which those who kill and take others captive operate? *If they choose*

such a system, they will also fall under the same system. This aligns with what He earlier said:

“ Take heed what you hear: **with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you;** and unto you that hear shall more be given.” (Mark 4:24)

This concept of measuring and meting clearly refers to a justice system. In other words, the standard of justice you apply to others reflects what you believe to be just for yourself. And God, being perfectly just, will not impose upon you any other system than the one you affirm by your own actions. To do otherwise would make Him less than a God of truth and justice.

History repeatedly shows that the system of justice a person embraces closely relates to the *image of God* they hold in their heart. This is clearly illustrated in one of the parables of Jesus. A man who was given a talent but failed to invest it said of his master:

“ I knew you to be a **hard man** ...” (Matthew 25:24 30)

He perceived the giver of talents—who represented God—as harsh and unforgiving. And in the end, *he was judged according to the very image of justice he projected onto God.*

Likewise, when Israel picked up weapons from the corpses of the drowned Egyptian soldiers, they unknowingly projected onto God the image of a *stern and militant master*. By doing so, they made a theological statement: *God delivers and conquers through power and war.* And because God honors human freedom, He met them on the terms they chose—but it wasn’t long before they tasted the bitter fruit of that system.

Soon after crossing the Red Sea, they were given another chance to correct their course—at Mount Sinai. There, God offered them a covenant:

“ Now therefore, if you will indeed **obey my voice and keep my covenant**, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples ... and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:5,6)

This wasn’t a new arrangement, but a *reminder of the promise given to Abraham*—that the inheritance would come not through conquest or strength, but through *trust*. God was calling them back to the terms of

the original covenant: faith, dependence, and a priestly calling rooted in divine mercy.

A covenant is a *promise*, not a *bargain*, for God does not enter into negotiations with mortal men, whose “Yes” often means “No” (see 2 Corinthians 1:17). It would be absurd for God to form a mutual agreement with beings He knows cannot faithfully keep their part. This is why Paul emphasized that *God’s covenant with Abraham was a promise—not a contract*. He wrote:

“ Now to Abraham and his seed were the **promises made** ... And this I say, that the covenant, which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law ... cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.” (Galatians 3:16 18)

The only faithful way to relate to a promise is not by trying to fulfill it yourself, but by cherishing it, longing for it, and fulfilling the terms for receiving it. In this case, God required *obedience born of trust*. But instead of trusting, Israel promised to *do* what only God could accomplish. It was a grave misunderstanding, which marked the establishment of what came to be known as the Old Covenant—a system rooted in human effort, which Paul describes as leading not to life but to slavery and death (see Galatians 4:24).

This was a double tragedy. First, they had already chosen the system of the sword. Now, they added to it by insisting on being treated by God based on their *performance*. Yet the works of the flesh can never lead to true righteousness but only to bondage, and eventually to death—the inevitable wages of sin (see Romans 6:23).

Not long after making this vow, they broke the very promise they had made. In Moses’ absence, they demanded that Aaron fashion a golden calf, declaring that this god would lead them back to Egypt. A cascade of disheartening events unfolded in rapid succession, culminating in thousands dying upon Moses’ return from the mountain.

Moses called for a segregation. Those who had not participated in the act of idolatry, along with those who had but later repented, were to stand on the side. The tribe of Levi and a few others remained loyal to the King of Heaven, but a large number, especially from the mixed multitude (Egyptians who had joined Israel), remained unmoved and indifferent

(see Exodus 32:26–28).

The Levites were then instructed to take their swords and execute judgment, resulting in the *terrible slaughter* of about three thousand unrepentant sinners. Here arises a deep moral and theological issue: they acted under the direct command of God. So, did God change and suddenly become like man? To understand this event, we must remember that both the Levites and those they slaughtered were operating under a system that was not God's ideal. They had already initiated an arrangement based on works—a justice system rooted in performance, where those who fail to meet its terms face death under the rule of the sword.

That was the only system they had chosen, and God simply applied their own decisions back to them. But the swords wielded by the Levites were more than tools of discipline; they became symbols of a *counterfeit justice system*—a justice intertwined with human wrath and cruelty. It is no coincidence that the very tribe chosen to execute this punishment was the tribe of Levi—the same Levi who had once slaughtered the men of Shechem in revenge for raping their sister Dinah.

Jacob, under divine inspiration, described their character truthfully in his prophetic blessings:

“ Simeon and Levi are brothers; **instruments of cruelty** are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter into their council; let not my glory be united with their assembly; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they lamed oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.” (Genesis 49:5–7)

This is a fitting description not only of their characters but also of the nature of any justice system rooted in the sword. Man's anger and wrath are almost always accompanied by cruelty, even if considered righteous under the pretense of “justice.” Cruelty does not cease to be cruelty simply because it is commanded. So, was it cruel vengeance when they avenged Dinah yet holy judgment when they killed in the name of God?

Is this not why people are eager to link their atrocities to divine command? For if an act is attributed to God, who will dare question it? Who would question a genocide, a massacre or an injustice once it has been labeled as “God-ordained”?

That is how brutality becomes sanctified. That is how infliction of suffering becomes justified—when it is claimed to be the will of God. But let us ask plainly: If God today commanded someone to molest or rape a ten-year-old girl, would we say it is acceptable simply because He said it?

This is significant. What would you say was the justice system of the Egyptians? It was one of retribution, power, and terror—one that had enslaved Israel and would harshly put offenders to death. Now consider this: What would those Egyptians who joined Israel have expected from a just God—one who abhors idol worship and had already judged Egypt's idolatry with plagues? Would He now play favorites simply because the offenders were the Israelites? For God to be seen as truly just, would He not have to apply the same standard to all—"giving them up" to their chosen ways?

Contrary to the common misconception, Christ completely did away with the sword when He gently rebuked Peter for using it. After Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, Jesus immediately countered the violent act by healing the man's wound (see Matthew 26:51,52). Very interesting indeed!

It becomes even more fascinating when we consider how Luke captures Christ's words just before healing the wounded man:

“ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, ‘**No more of this!**’ And He touched his ear and healed him.” (Luke 22:50,51 ESV)

It is as though Christ was saying, “Enough of this system of the sword—it is time to demonstrate the justice system that *heals*.”

But here's the tension: Was it not Christ Himself who had earlier instructed them to buy swords if they didn't have one? And yet, He turns around and tells Peter plainly,

“ They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”
(Matthew 26:52)

What was the purpose of the sword then? Was it meant for decoration or symbolism? Should we take His instruction literally or understand it within a larger, symbolic framework?

It may be prudent to reflect more thoroughly on this. Consider the fact that Peter is called Simon. In Genesis, Jacob called Simeon and Levi

“brethren,” not just biologically, but brothers in character. This connection is worth noting:

“ Simeon and Levi are brethren; **instruments of cruelty** are in their habitation ...” (Genesis 49:5)

Could it be that the spirit of Simon the disciple was, in that moment, echoing the same character that once wielded Simeon’s sword in the name of justice? Was Jesus showing that the kingdom He came to establish would not rely on such instruments of cruelty, but rather on the healing touch of mercy and truth?

“ Earthly kingdoms rule by the **ascendancy of physical power**; but from Christ’s kingdom **every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion, is banished.**⁸⁷

How, then, should we classify the use of force whenever it appears? It always belongs to the realm of carnal weapons—those rooted in the systems of this world. So what are we to make of the wars recorded in the Old Testament? They were fought with worldly instruments, and this we can affirm: whenever God appeared to command physical warfare, it reflected a people unwilling to rise above their carnal ways. In His patience, God accommodated their limited understanding, permitting them to proceed as He gradually unveiled His true character to their hearts.

It becomes evident that the disciples misunderstood Christ’s instruction about buying swords (see Luke 22:35–38). They did not go out to purchase any; instead, they hastily presented the two they already possessed. This was not a moment of obedience but of projection—an imposition of their own notions of justice and their impulse toward combat onto Christ. His response was telling:

“ They said, ‘Look, Master, two swords!’ But he said, ‘Enough of that; **no more sword talk!**’” (Luke 22:38 The Message Bible)

Their attitude grieved Him deeply. They still had not grasped His mission, nor the nature of His kingdom. They had misread the kind of “sword” He required.

But what sword has Christ ever asked His noncombatant soldiers to wield? We are not left in darkness here, either: it is the Word of God

87 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p.12.2

(see Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12). That is why, in the book of Revelation, the sword is depicted as coming from Christ's mouth and not from His hand (see Revelation 1:16). This symbolic imagery confirms that Christ's warfare is not physical but spiritual: His sword is not one forged of iron, but one shaped by truth, love, and self-sacrifice.

This chapter serves as a key to unlocking our understanding of warfare throughout Scripture. None of the Bible's war narratives should be used to justify violence today or to depict God as a champion of bloodshed. God's wars are never waged with carnal weapons. Whenever such weapons are employed, it reveals that the conflict is misaligned with His ultimate desire.

And God made this unmistakably clear. He delivered Israel from Egypt without a single weapon being raised—a profound testimony to His ways. The fall of Jericho's walls offers another glimpse of divine power that bypassed earthly combat. While questions remain regarding the nature of the plagues in Egypt, the weight of evidence presented thus far should not be dismissed. We will return to that discussion later in the book, where the plagues will be examined in greater detail. ••

Chapter 17

The Slaughter of the Amalekites— A Mirror for Saul

In Chapter 13, *Rwanda's Prayerful Militias*, we mentioned the ethnic cleansing of the Amalekites and noted how closely it parallels the Rwandan genocide. We will now endeavor to find reasons behind the apparent command from God to engage in such atrocities. We've gained a better understanding that the reason God appears to be involved in the wars of Israel was His *accommodative will*—allowing people to pursue their own will instead of following God's *ideal will* for them.

When those whom God desired to lead were not ready to align themselves with His ideal will, He permitted them to follow their own ways for a time. Thus, whatever God apparently “commanded” was a reflection of their desires, not God's. And regardless of whether or not He had given them explicit instructions, they would still follow their bloodthirsty aspirations.

This is where the Word of God functions as a mirror intended for self-examination. Unfortunately, many project their reflection onto God, blaming their perverted actions on Him. Apostle James writes:

“ 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:** For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.” (James 1:23,24)

There are different types of mirrors, each reflecting according to the state of a person's heart. First, there is a mirror for the spiritual man—the Gospel. We are told,

“ We need to understand that the Gospel fully reveals the glory of the Lord. **It is the mirror that reveals the character of God to the converted soul.**”⁸⁸

Then, there is the *mirror for the natural man—the law and the written Word*. These are God’s thoughts clothed in human language, much like “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). This corresponds to the brass mirror made “of the looking glasses of the women” (Exodus 38:8).

“ **We are to keep the mirror**—the law of God—**ever before us**, that we may discover our defects of character. By this law we are to test our lives.”⁸⁹

To better understand the Amalekite slaughter, we must go back to where the seeds of hostility were first sown—seeds that ultimately sprouted, producing fruit of counterfeit justice. Abraham’s grandson Esau, after realizing the implications of despising his birthright and being cheated by Jacob of his rightful blessing, set out to destroy his brother (see Genesis 27:41). Though Esau had disregarded the spiritual responsibilities of the firstborn and sold his birthright for a bowl of food, he deeply coveted the earthly privileges the birthright entailed. His anger burned against Jacob, and he pursued him with murderous intent. Even after decades, upon hearing of Jacob’s return, Esau was still planning to retaliate. Had God not intervened, the reunion could have ended in bloodshed.

But who—or what—was truly behind Esau’s wrath? Was it merely the sting of betrayal and loss, or was something deeper at work?

“ **Satan had accused Jacob before the angels of God**, claiming the right to destroy him because of his sin; he had **moved upon Esau** to march against him; and during the patriarch’s long night of wrestling, Satan endeavored to force upon him a sense of his guilt, in order to discourage him and break his hold upon God.”⁹⁰

Can you see the work of the enemy behind the scenes? Satan, the author of counterfeit justice, was fueling Esau’s desire for revenge. The system of justice Esau pursued—a justice void of grace—was inspired by hellish powers. And this legacy didn’t end with him. Let’s consider another relevant episode:

⁸⁸ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, February 24, 1909, par.3

⁸⁹ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 25, 1886*

⁹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.201.3

“ Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau’s son; she bore **Amalek** to Eliphaz.” (Genesis 36:12)

Amalek was Esau’s grandson. This not only explains the Amalekites’ hostility toward Jacob (Israel) but also reveals their spiritual legacy—a lineage steeped in the pursuit of counterfeit justice. Jesus warned:

“ **With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.**”
(Matthew 7:2)

It is true that God does not punish children for the sins of their fathers, as stated in Ezekiel 18:20. However, Scripture also mentions that He “visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Exodus 20:5). This is not an arbitrary punishment; rather, it reflects the natural consequences that arise when individuals continue in the sinful ways of their ancestors. The more sin is fostered, the more it expands; oftentimes, a child may end up even worse than his father.

This was true of the Amalekites. Without provocation, they attacked the Israelites soon after their exodus from Egypt. This marked the first military engagement between the descendants of Jacob (Israelites) and those of Esau (Amalekites) (see Exodus 17:8–16).

We find that the Amalekites deliberately targeted the most vulnerable among the Israelites. This was not merely a response to a military threat—it revealed a sinister character driven by hatred and cruelty, as recorded in Scriptures:

“ **Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; 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.**” (Deuteronomy 25:17,18)

This helps us understand more clearly what would later unfold. It is not an attempt to justify war or violence—quite the opposite. It shows how war emerges from seeds sown by human choice. When people operate within a framework of counterfeit justice, they eventually reap the evil they have sown. The very justice they demand becomes the standard by which they are judged. Both aggressor and victim become trapped in the same defective system of retaliation and revenge. It is a grave and serious mistake.

God, in His wisdom, allows sin to punish sin, yet those who have not completely severed themselves from His mercy still find His protection. We see this in the case of Moses lifting his hands during battle: as long as his hands remained raised, Israel prevailed. But when he grew weary and lowered his hands, the Israelites began to lose ground (see Exodus 17:11–13). The rod Moses held in his hand was symbolic of God's power and presence. When lifted, it signified that Israel was under God's banner; when lowered, it revealed what happens when God's presence departs—everything begins to unravel.

At the conclusion of that first war involving the Israelites, a memorial was erected and named *Jehovah-Nissi*, meaning “The Lord is my Banner” (Exodus 17:15). It marked the reality that victory was not about Israel's strength but about God's abiding presence.

Even though God provided victory over the Amalekites on this occasion, it is important to note that there was also a time when the Amalekites were not prevented from destroying Israel. At the border of Canaan, when the Israelites rebelled against the Lord and refused to enter the land, God directed them to return to the wilderness. Nevertheless, they presumptuously decided to go up and fight, despite God's clear warning that He would not go with them. As a result, they were utterly defeated:

“ And the Lord said unto me, Say unto them, **Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you;** lest ye be smitten before your enemies ... and the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah.” (Deuteronomy 1:42–44)

This defeat was not a random tragedy—it was the natural result of disobeying the clear instruction of God. We often refer to such moments as “God's judgment” or “punishment,” yet God did not command the Amalekites to fight Israel. He simply *did not prevent* the outcome of their rebellion.

This same principle is observed in other cases, where Israel is portrayed as an instrument of divine judgment. God is often said to have *commanded* them, but in reality, He was mirroring back to them their own methods and framework of justice. Whether He is described

as commanding it or not, the outcome would likely have been the same, as they were already bent on acting in ways aligned with their warped understanding of justice. In this way, the Bible often reflects not only God's permissive will but also humanity's distorted reflection of Him.

With this understanding, we can further explore the story:

“ Samuel also said unto Saul, **The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.** Thus, saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and **spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and sucking, ox and sheep, camel and ass.**” (1 Samuel 15:1-3)

Why did Samuel have to remind Saul who it was that made him king? This reminder was not just rhetorical—it was a sobering call to remember his divine appointment as a monarch and, as such, his accountability to God. Saul had not appointed himself king. His authority was not self-made but granted by the very God who now sent him a command through Samuel. Samuel's point was clear: if Saul's kingship came from God, then obedience to God's word was not optional. It was the prerogative of the One who made him king to command him to fulfil His purposes.

By this time, however, Saul had already begun to sever himself from God due to a series of willful departures from God's explicit instructions. His repeated failure to submit to divine guidance—including his impatience in offering the sacrifice himself instead of waiting for God's prophet Samuel (see 1 Samuel 13) and his impulsive oath that nearly led to his son Jonathan's death (1 Samuel 14)—was evidence of a heart gradually drifting from the path of obedience and replacing it with pride. Samuel's reminder served as a final wake-up call: return to the God who raised you, and heed His word with the humility your calling demands.

His attempt to kill Jonathan was especially revealing of his true heart. Rather than repenting for his earlier error, Saul was willing to sacrifice his faithful and victorious son to legitimize himself in the eyes of the people. Thankfully, the men of Israel intervened and saved Jonathan.

Saul had gradually strayed from the path of righteousness, and

his heart was becoming hardened in rebellion and disobedience. In light of this, God gave him another chance—a command to destroy the Amalekites.

“ Now go and smite Amalek, and **utterly destroy all** that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.” (1 Samuel 15:3)

This command served as a mirror intended to reveal what was in Saul’s heart and offer him an opportunity to redeem himself by returning to the right path. We read a distressing report of what happened in the war:

“ And [Saul] took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and **would not utterly destroy them**: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.”
(1 Samuel 15:8,9)

What exactly did Saul destroy? He had been commanded to *destroy everything*, but he and his army destroyed only what they considered “vile and refuse.” The rest—the “best”—they spared. This was not accidental. It reveals a preexisting attitude: They had already determined, even before the battle, what they would and would not destroy.

God, who sees the heart, knew this in advance. He saw that these men shared the same mindset as the Amalekites, who had first attacked Israel without provocation. Saul, having embraced this corrupt system of valuing human life based on profit and self-interest, was now operating on the same principles. The Amalekites were facing judgment through a man who had assimilated and applied their very logic.

Here lies the deeper tension in this passage: the same Bible that states, “God commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites,” also records that Saul destroyed only what he deemed worthless. If we insist this command reflects God’s ideal will, we face a disturbing implication—that God regarded certain people, including women, children, and infants, as nothing more than “refuse.” But what loving parent would ever think of their own children that way?

As we conclude, we must briefly address the phrase: “I have *remembered* what Amalek did to Israel” (1 Samuel 15:2). Does God suffer from temporary amnesia? What did He mean by saying “I have remembered”? Elsewhere, God promises:

“ For I will forgive their wickedness and will **remember their sins no more.**” (Jeremiah 31:34 NIV)

Let’s begin with what is certain: Even after we are forgiven, we humans do not truly forget our past sins. Like the Apostle Paul, we can often recall them rather clearly. The key difference lies not in erasure *from memory* but in *how* we remember our wrongdoings. Forgiveness removes the sting of guilt and despair—we no longer live under the condemnation we once felt.

Likewise, when God “remembers” our sin, it does not mean He forgets and later recalls it like a human being would. Instead, it refers to how God chooses to *respond*. To ‘remember,’ in biblical language, often means to bring something into action or judgment. His ‘remembering’ of Amalek did not cause His spontaneous reaction, but God ‘remembered’ the long-withheld calamity by letting it loose. In fact, the declaration that Amalek would face judgment was made 400 years earlier (see Exodus 17:14 16). God was not acting on a whim, nor did He suddenly desire their extermination. Rather, He had given them ample time to turn from their evil ways—but instead, they only sank deeper in cruelty and aggression. When their sin fully ripened, God ceased performing miracles to shield them from the consequences of their own choices.

“ They had taken oath by their gods that they would destroy the Hebrews, so that not one should escape, and they boasted that Israel’s God would be powerless to resist them. They had not been injured or threatened by the Israelites. Their assault was wholly unprovoked. It was to manifest their hatred and defiance of God that they sought to destroy His people. The Amalekites had long been high-handed sinners, and their crimes had cried to God for vengeance, yet His mercy had still called them to repentance; but when the men of Amalek fell upon the wearied and defenseless ranks of Israel, they sealed their nation’s doom.”⁹¹

⁹¹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.300.1

“ After denouncing judgments against the Amalekites, the Lord waited long for them to turn from their evil ways; but they went on in sin until their iniquity had reached its height, till their day of probation ended, and divine justice demanded their destruction. ...

‘A hidden boundary between
God’s mercy and his wrath.’⁹²⁹³

We understand that the concept of divine justice has often been interpreted through human eyes, with our eyesight distorted by the counterfeit justice introduced by Satan. In the case of the Amalekites, what is presented as God’s wrath or punishment must be understood through the lens of God’s character and His consistent manner in dealing with His creation. His justice is not an arbitrary sentence pronounced on the transgressor but the grim act of giving over / letting go of an individual or people to the consequences of their hardened choices.

The Amalekites sealed their doom not because God suddenly became vindictive, but because they reached the point where they had wholly aligned themselves with hatred and rebellion. God’s justice was not applied through a direct infliction of violence but by suspending His divine protection and allowing them to reap the results of the very violence they practised and glorified. In this light, the just result was the destruction of Amalek, not through divine retribution, but because of divine withdrawal—a solemn response to a people who had long resisted mercy. ••

⁹² Joseph A. Alexander, Poem/Hymn, *The Hidden Line* (aka The Doomed Man), 1837

⁹³ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 24, 1882, par.5,6

Chapter 18

Joshua and Post-Canaan Wars

THE above case studies serve as a foundation for further exploration by those seeking a deeper understanding of God's character. While there are many more examples, we aim to highlight key events that unlock broader sections of Scripture. In this chapter, we will focus on the wars under the command of Joshua after Moses was laid to rest.

The first notable conflict was the fall of Jericho (see Joshua 6). Jericho was a heavily fortified city, and when news spread of Joshua's advancing forces, its citizens placed their confidence in the strength of the colossal city walls. They sealed off the city, allowing no one to enter or leave, believing they were secure within their fortress. The concerning aspect of the story arises from the fact that it was God who brought down the walls, thus enabling Israel to destroy the city's inhabitants.

God commanded the Israelites to march around the city in a particular order: All the "men of war" were to go first, followed by seven priests blowing their seven trumpets, and the Ark of the Covenant was to follow right behind them, while "the rear guard came after the ark" (v.9). This act was to be repeated faithfully for six days. After obeying these instructions, on the seventh day, as the people gave a "great shout," the walls fell (v.20). The walls collapsed without any invasive action by Israel's army, clearly pointing to a supernatural intervention.

We are not told how exactly the walls fell, and it is not our focus at this time. The fall of Jericho by God's own hand demonstrates that He did not need Israel's military forces to accomplish His purposes in giving

them the land. This raises a critical question: If God could bring down the city walls without human intervention, could He not have given them the land without war? Why, then, would He decide to involve them in this conflict?

If the violence were not necessary, it would suggest that either God willed suffering for both Israelites and Jericho—a picture of a sadistic deity—or that war was not truly His will, as we have concluded in earlier chapters. Interestingly, in the days of Gideon, a similar situation arose, but the outcome followed a different path, suggesting that God's intent had never been war—He had ways to achieve his purposes without bloodshed.

God commanded Gideon to prepare for war to deliver Israel (Judges 7), “greatly impoverished because of the [constant harassment by] the Midianites” (Judges 6:6). Like many others, Gideon had not yet grasped the true character of God and therefore incorrectly assumed that the only way deliverance could be achieved was through combat. He also doubted his ability to economically sustain such an undertaking (see Judges 6:15). After much hesitation and bargaining, Gideon eventually consented and gathered a large army—only for God to drastically reduce it to just three hundred men.

God did this intentionally, to demonstrate that Israel's rescue would not depend on human power, lest they boast, “Mine own hand ... saved me” (Judges 7:2). Armed only with trumpets, pitchers and torches, Gideon's men surrounded the camp of the Midianites and “blew the trumpets.” What followed was a panic: confusion broke out among the Midianites, leading them to turn “every man's sword against his fellow,” leading to self-destruction (Judges 7:22).

This example, as well as God's supernatural overthrow of Jericho, supports the notion that He never ordained Israel to fight their battles. Rather, it shows that He had His own means to drive out the inhabitants of the land to make way for the Israelites. The Canaanites were tenants on God's land, yet they defiled it through idolatry and injustice. This was evidence that they rejected God, who had thus far protected them. God needed His land for the people who would become the predecessors of the Messiah, the Savior of humanity.

Because God had to work with Israel within their own framework of

ways and understanding, He simply “gave up / let go” the inhabitants of Jericho (see Joshua 6). God told Joshua, “See, I have given into thine hand Jericho” (v.2). But one might ask—was this an act God took pleasure in? We gain insight from God Himself: “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?” (Hosea 11:8). In this case, God is lamenting the state of Israel at large, and no recipient of the “giving up” is mentioned. In both passages, however, the Hebrew word used is:

H5414 – *nāthan*, which carries the meaning of *yielding, surrendering, or withdrawing protection*.

God did not arbitrarily abandon Jericho or Ephraim; rather, despite His continued favor and blessings, they chose to cling to their idols. As a result, God allowed them to follow the path they had freely chosen.

The Gibeonite Treaty and the Battle of Aijalon

One of the wars often cited to defend the idea that killing is part of God’s justice is the battle in the Valley of Aijalon. However, with the perspective we established in the previous chapter, we can look at this story from a different point of view.

After God permitted Israel to take Canaan by military invasion—contrary to His original design—it became evident that they would not possess the land as the eternal inheritance promised to Abraham, but rather as any other earthly kingdom conquered by violence. Although God would still seek to govern and guide them, this permissive will would inevitably be burdened by human devising and compromise. For instance, according to the law God had given them, they were required to offer terms of peace to a city before attacking it. This allowed for the formation of alliances and peace treaties, much like in our world today.

In Joshua 9–10, we encounter a war that arose directly from such an agreement. The Gibeonites entered into a peace treaty with Israel by deception (see Joshua 9:15). As a result, the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-Zedek, felt threatened and formed a coalition with four other kings to attack Gibeon (see Joshua 10:5,6). This mirrors modern political dynamics—such as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, where international alliances play a significant role. The men of Gibeon called upon Joshua for help, and this led to a bloody war.

Had Israel followed God's original plan for their settlement, the conflict would not have occurred. Nevertheless, the battle raged on, and as evening approached, the victory—as they understood it—remained elusive. Victory in this scenario meant subduing the enemy by force, a notion entirely contrary to God's principles. The origins of this war were not godly. From the beginning, coercion was not part of God's plan:

“ Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. **Compelling power is found only under Satan's government.** The Lord's principles are not of this order.”⁹⁴

It becomes evident, then, that although Joshua acted with good intentions, he—and the entire nation of Israel—had intertwined into their character principles of other than divine origin. Yet, in their blindness, God did not abandon them to die, as long as they remained faithful to what they knew was true.

As evening drew near, Joshua prayed, asking for the sun to stand still (see Joshua 10:12,13). This event has often been interpreted to mean that God intended for them to continue slaughtering their enemies. But it's important to remember that Joshua did not initiate the war, nor did the Gibeonites. The five kings had commenced the conflict. Joshua's request was likely driven by essential foresight: knowing that the enemy had not surrendered, he feared they would regroup and counterattack under the cover of darkness. Hoping to prevent that, he prayed for more daylight.

God did allow the sun to stand still—but how, we do not know. What we do know is this: the sun, as always, shone on both the good and the evil. As Jesus said:

“ 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 5:45)

One may rightly ask, “How did God originally intend to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan?” Scripture offers a clear and deliberate answer, spoken by God Himself:

“ **Little by little I will drive them out** from before you, until you have increased and possess the land.” (Exodus 23:30; Deuteronomy 7:22)

⁹⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.759.1

Notice the emphasis: there was room for Israel to occupy the land gradually and peacefully, without the shedding of blood. This is not a foreign idea. Even in our modern context, we've witnessed territories once predominantly inhabited by a particular community gradually being settled by incomers, who eventually become the majority. Over time, the original inhabitants migrate or become absorbed, and their identity eventually vanishes—no force is involved, just a natural social movement takes place.

There is a region in Kenya that was originally inhabited by the Maasai community but is now considered Kalenjin land—situated in the heart of what has long been recognized as Maasai territory: Narok County. How did this happen? Historically, the Kalenjin were allocated a small portion of land by the government. As their population grew, the Maasai living nearby began selling their land and relocating, partly because of longstanding tensions between the two communities. Over time, the Kalenjin became the dominant population—not by war, but through a gradual and voluntary process. Something similar might have occurred in Canaan if Israel had allowed God to carry out His plan in His own, peaceful way. Scripture affirms this possibility:

“ I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.” (Exodus 23:27)

The “fear of the Lord” here is not terror in a common sense but rather a moral and spiritual awakening that leads to repentance: “Fear the Lord and depart from evil” (Proverbs 3:7). A person who accepts the truth and wisdom of God experiences peace and reverence (which Scripture calls “the fear of the Lord”). However, when a wicked person is confronted by truth but refuses to change, fear becomes terror. In such cases, they flee even when no one is pursuing them—a dynamic that applies to all, even Israelites:

“ The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.” (Proverbs 28:1)

“ You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up.” (Leviticus 26:38)

God also promised another non-military method of displacement. Because the inhabitants had forsaken God, He would no longer restrain the forces of nature that could drive them out, e.g., He would 'send' a swarm of aggressive wasps (hornets), capable of clearing entire regions:

“ And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you.”
(Exodus 23:28 ESV)

This way, no life would be needlessly lost in the quest for inheritance. No woman would be left a widow because her husband died on the battlefield. No father would be left childless because his sons were ambushed in the hills. Above all, Israel could have inherited not just land, but the eternal promise—the very inheritance that Abraham longed for as he walked through Canaan as “a stranger in a foreign land” (Exodus 2:22 NKJV). ••

Chapter 19

The Destroying Angel

WAR has not been the only tool used by the great deceiver to misrepresent God—not merely as a violent deity, but as a vengeful, vindictive, and tyrannical figure. Throughout history, God has been accused of killing and committing murder, either directly or through His angelic agents. Some of these distortions are modern; others are rooted in misreadings of Scripture. This and the following chapters aim to address and respond to these misrepresentations.

DURING the COVID-19 pandemic—often described as an era of medical tyranny—many manifestations of what could be called the spirit of the dragon emerged across the global population. Before we turn to the central concerns of these chapters, it is worth pausing to briefly reflect on that period.

Governments around the world claimed that COVID-19 ‘vaccines’ were both free and optional for eligible individuals. Allegedly, people were free to choose whether or not to be vaccinated, in keeping with the principles of medical ethics.

That sounded reassuring—until public statements began to emerge from the World Health Organization (WHO) and national health bodies. Although these institutions did not legally mandate vaccination, their language, recommendations, policies and actions often amounted to coercion. The messaging during that time often carried a kind of bipolar tension, something along the lines of:

“ No one should be forced to take a vaccine. We must ensure people have the information they need to make informed decisions.”⁹⁵

On the surface, this sounds reasonable—empowering people with information to make their own choices. But that principle quickly unraveled when paired with draconian measures designed to pressure people into making the “right” decision. These tactics often left those who chose against it being shamed, threatened, or victimized—while others complied not out of conviction, but out of fear.

Choices have consequences, yes—but when those consequences are designed and imposed by the very authorities who claim to offer freedom of choice, their claim becomes self-contradictory. One cannot credibly affirm liberty while punishing those who exercise it not according to their plans. Consider these statements:

“ We’ve been patient. But our patience is wearing thin. And your refusal has cost all of us.”⁹⁶

“ I really want to p!ss off the unvaccinated.”⁹⁷

Following these declarations came a wave of restrictions: unvaccinated individuals were denied access to gyms, travel was curtailed, jobs were lost, and the right to assemble—including in churches—was suspended. Yet all of this unfolded under campaigns that insisted vaccination was a matter of personal freedom.

Any rational observer would recognize this as coercion or psychological manipulation. The only difference between this and religious persecution by armed police or militias is the method: one uses physical weapons; the other, psychological and social pressure.

When God created humanity as intelligent beings and moral agents,

“ He endowed them capable of appreciating the wisdom and benevolence of His character and the justice of His requirements, and with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus—paraphrased from multiple public briefings.

⁹⁶ USA President Joe Biden, September 9, 2021—announcing vaccine mandates for companies with more than 100 employees.

⁹⁷ French President Emmanuel Macron, January 2022

⁹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.48.4

If God presents Himself as a God of absolute liberty, who never uses coercion, then He has fully distinguished Himself from being the source of punitive consequences following human choice. If God is truthful and consistent, then He neither formulates penalties for disobedience and breaking His laws nor sets traps for human failure.

“ We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. **By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death.**”⁹⁹

When addressing this “train of circumstances,” the author offers a striking clarification—one that leaves no room for vagueness, evasion, or excuse. She writes:

“ I was shown that the judgments of God would not come directly out from the Lord upon them, but in this way: **They place themselves beyond His protection.** He warns, corrects, reproves, and points out the only path of safety; then if those who have been the objects of His special care will follow their own course independent of the Spirit of God, after repeated warnings—if they choose their own way—then **He does not commission His angels to prevent Satan's decided attacks upon them.**”¹⁰⁰

But how is it, then, that God has been portrayed—both throughout history and, allegedly, in the Bible—as punishing those who mock Him or reject His commands? Have you not heard such accusations?

Some of the most frequently cited examples I’ve encountered—often repeated in sermons by well-meaning but perhaps misinformed preachers—include the following:

- **Voltaire** (French writer and satirist, 17th century): “In twenty years, Christianity will be no more. My single hand shall destroy the edifice it took twelve apostles to build.”

⁹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Faith That I Live By*, p.84.7

¹⁰⁰ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol.14, p.3.1

- **Thomas Andrews** (Irish shipbuilder of the Titanic, 19th-2 intelligent 0th century): “Not even God can sink this ship.”
- **John Lennon** (English singer and songwriter, founding member of the rock band The Beatles, 1966): “Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink ... We’re more popular than Jesus now.”

These statements are often used to persuade congregations that God swiftly punishes those who dare to mock or question Him. They function as modern folklore, linking defiance of God with sudden or ironic destruction. This tone is not far removed from the following:

“ By the end of this winter, pretty much everyone in Germany ... will be vaccinated, cured, or dead.”¹⁰¹

The good news is that the above statements are human opinions about God and His government—not revelations from God Himself—and we are under no obligation to accept them as authoritative reflections of His character.

What is far more troubling is when similar views are drawn from Scripture and used to shape our children’s perception of God—for example, they are taught in Sabbath or Sunday School that God was the “hero” who killed the firstborns in Egypt. But is that truly the case? Was it God who killed the firstborns, as we usually hear? Or have we misunderstood His character and misread the story?

The Death of 185,000 Assyrian Soldiers

In the days of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, sent a scornful letter—designed not merely to intimidate Israel, but to mock the God of Israel Himself. Having subdued many nations, Sennacherib presumed his gods superior to all others (see Isaiah 37). His arrogant message was, in effect, an invitation for God to enter the conflict.

God’s dealings with sinners remain unchanged; no provocation disturbs His character. He sustained Sennacherib’s life even as the king remained blind to that reality—just as a blind man’s denial of light cannot

¹⁰¹ The rhetoric of German Health Minister Jens Spahn during the COVID-19 pandemic, November 2021

extinguish its presence. When men persistently resist the Spirit of God, He honors their freedom of choice and withdraws, thus relinquishing His protection and leaving them vulnerable to the assaults of the enemy. At that point, Satan's attacks are no longer restrained.¹⁰²

So by what extraordinary means did Sennacherib's army of 185,000 soldiers meet its sudden and devastating end?" Scripture records:

“ 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 have already examined the role of God's angels in human life and affirmed that they are not agents of destruction, for death finds its origin in Satan. Yet this account reports that the angel of the LORD “smote” the Assyrian army. How are we to reconcile this? An inspired author explains:

“ The angels of heaven do not come to the earth to rule, and to exact homage, but as **messengers of mercy, to co-operate with men in uplifting humanity.**”¹⁰³

If the mission of God's angels had been to slaughter soldiers, it would have amounted to 'exacting homage' through fear—a posture wholly inconsistent with the character of God. Some argue that God destroys to discipline or assert His kingship. Yet when Sennacherib learned of his army's fate, he went straight to the temple of his god, Nisroch, to worship (see 2 Kings 19:37), which revealed his reverence not for the God of Israel, but a stubborn allegiance to idols—gods with arms, yet powerless to save.

His misplaced trust was exposed as futile when he himself was slain in the temple of his god, murdered by his own son. The very act of parricide bore the mark of Satan, not of God, as Christ had banished the sword from His kingdom. The rebellion Sennacherib sowed against the heavenly Father had yielded rebellion within his own household against him.

The word smote in Scripture can signify more than physical assault:

- “The angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he **smote** Peter on the side, and raised him up...” (Acts 12:7).

¹⁰² See Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol.14, p.14.1

¹⁰³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.550.6

The word *smote* (G3960 – *patasso*) means 1. to strike gently: as a part or a member of the body. The angel's strike was physical, but gentle—hardly an assault; rather, salvific in its nature.

- “And David’s heart **smote** him after that he had numbered the people ...” (2 Samuel 24:10).

Here, *smote* (H5221 – *nakah*) means 1. to strike (lightly or severely, literally or figuratively) and describes emotional and spiritual anguish—guilt, shame, and terror—not physical harm.

If the same Hebrew word *smote* is used in the story of Sennacherib, then the term “smote” need not imply a physical blow. Mental anguish, left unchecked, can erode the very forces that sustain life. Christ Himself succumbed to overwhelming mental agony—first in Gethsemane, and then at Calvary.

Josephus offers further insight into the fate of Sennacherib’s army:

“ Now when Sennacherib was returning from his Egyptian war to Jerusalem, he found his army under Rabshakeh his general in danger [by a plague, for] God had sent a pestilential distemper upon his army: and on the very first night of the siege an hundred fourscore and five thousand, with their captains and generals, were destroyed.”¹⁰⁴

The soldiers are said to have died by plague—not by sword, nor by the physical blows of angels. If one insists that God is the source of disease, then the holy angels must be viewed as His agents of death. Yet this stands in stark contrast to Christ—the exact imprint of God’s nature, who healed disease and cast out oppression, undoing the works of Satan (Acts 10:38). His ministry was not one of affliction, but restoration. It is inconsistent to claim that disease is both authored by God and cast out by Him.

This distinction matters. Scripture does not say that the angel *smote them with (inflicted) disease*, but that he *smote them*—a term that leaves room for consequence without prescribing method. The angel did not use disease as a weapon; the disease was the outcome of the act of smiting.

The Assyrian soldiers perished by pestilence after being “smitten” by an angel. This smiting of conscience may have triggered a distemper;

¹⁰⁴ *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 10, ch.1, par.5

and having stepped outside divine protection, they were left exposed to the impotence of their god. Those who reject God the Creator do not provoke arbitrary wrath—they simply remove themselves from the shelter of His safety. The devastation that follows is often misattributed to God, when in truth it is the fruit of separation from Him.

Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant

After the Philistines returned the Ark of the Covenant to Israel, it remained in Baale of Judah for many years (see 1 Samuel 4; 2 Samuel 6). When King David sought to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, he departed from the divinely prescribed method of transport. Instead, he placed “the ark of God upon a new cart” (2 Samuel 6:3)—a decision rooted more in expedience than reverence. As the oxen stumbled (v.6), Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark, and in doing so, touched what was never meant to be handled so casually.

“ 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.” (2 Samuel 6:7)

God had given clear instructions regarding the transport of the ark: it was to be carried by priests using poles, not placed upon a cart (see Numbers 4:15). When Uzzah reached out and touched the ark, he violated those commands. But did God strike him down to punish a lack of respect? If so, was it effective? Did he gain that respect? Scripture records that David was both displeased and afraid after Uzzah’s death, naming the place *Perez-uzzah*—“the breach of Uzzah” (v.8). Yet fear cannot produce trust. “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18 NKJV). The truth is, force never wins hearts nor heals rebellion—it only deepens it. David’s fearful response reveals a misunderstanding of what had occurred, just as we ourselves have often misunderstood the story.

The key to understanding Uzzah’s case is threefold:

1. the **anger** of God,
2. the word **breach**, and
3. the word **smote**.

Though we have already explored the biblical interpretation of God's anger in depth, it bears repeating: *God's anger* is not a fit of rage, but the intense grief He feels when His child rejects His mercy. It is not rooted in self-pity, but in a deep yearning to deliver His beloved from the evil He sees approaching. Yet He restrains Himself—not out of lack of concern, but out of respect for human freedom.

The consistent pattern of God's anger is revealed with striking clarity when He speaks directly to Moses, exposing the depth of His grief:

“ Then **my anger** shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will **forsake them**, and I will **hide my face** from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, **because our God is not among us?**” (Deuteronomy 31:17)

He *forsakes*, or in other words, He *hides His face*. This withdrawal creates a breach in the hedge of protection—*He is not among them*—and the inevitable result is the outbreak of much evil.

Yet a missing link completes the picture—one that plainly emerges when God speaks through a prophet:

“ And my people are **bent to backsliding from me**: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him.” (Hosea 11:7)

This lament reveals the heart of God. The very children He had taught to walk were now resolute in forsaking Him. His “forsaking,” then, is not born of God's indifference or wrathful rejection, but of solemn respect for their freedom to choose.

This same sorrow echoes in Christ's lament over Jerusalem: “Your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:37,38). It was not the cry of one who had ceased to care. On the contrary, He had longed to shelter them beneath His wings, yet they would not receive Him.

Thus, God's *forsaking* is never an arbitrary abandonment. It is the deep grief of a Father who honors the freedom of His children—even when they choose to walk away. In simple terms, *He lets it be so*.

The crucial point to remember is this: **who initiates the breach?** In Scripture, God's law is portrayed as a hedge (see Isaiah 5:5)—a protective boundary woven from the very principles of life. When we live in

harmony with it, we align ourselves with life itself and dwell within the safety it provides (see Psalm 119:8–12).

“ His law is the hedge which He has built around His vineyard for its protection. The Lord has plainly stated the laws of His kingdom, and has declared that He will abundantly bless His people if they will obey them. It is their life to obey.”¹⁰⁵

Thus, Uzzah’s action—breaking the law that said, “they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die” (Numbers 4:15)—was an outward sign that he had stepped beyond this hedge of protection.

The second key lies in the word *smote*. When the angel of the LORD smote the Assyrians, the same Hebrew term (H5221 – *nakah*) appears in the account of Uzzah. Though God was in heaven, He attended the ark of the covenant through His angels. Thus, it was the angels who smote Uzzah. But what kind of smiting was this? The text does not specify. The verb *nakah* can mean to strike physically, or to strike with conviction. Was it a blow to the body, or a piercing of the conscience? The account leaves this open—inviting us to wrestle with the mystery.

This deliberate silence turns Uzzah’s story into a mirror. It compels us to project our understanding of God’s character onto the word *smote*. If we see God as violent, we imagine a violent blow. If we see Him as patient and grieving, we interpret the smiting differently.

God Himself does not need the mirror—He already knows what lies within our hearts. But in mercy, He places it before us, so that what He knows may be revealed to us. The smiting, then, is not only an act—it is a reflection.

King Herod

We see a parallel in the story of Herod (see Acts 12:20–25). When Herod exalted himself as a god, an angel of the Lord “smote him” (v.23). Yet Herod did not die instantly. Josephus describes his death in detail:

“ His entrails were exulcerated … his privy member was putrefied, and produced worms … convulsions seized all parts of his body … ”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol.14, p.343.3

¹⁰⁶ *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 17, ch.6, par.5, Whiston translation

Herod's condition deteriorated dramatically, and many regarded it as divine judgment. A burning fever consumed him from within; his entrails became ulcerated, fluid swelled his feet and abdomen, and his genitals decayed, breeding worms. His breath grew foul, and he suffered violent convulsions. Though he sought relief from physicians and therapeutic baths beyond the Jordan, his suffering only intensified. In despair, he attempted suicide with a knife, but was restrained by his cousin Achiabus. Soon afterward, he summoned the leading men of the Jews to the hippodrome and ordered his sister Salome and her husband to execute them upon his death—so that all Judea would mourn, whether they wished to or not.¹⁰⁷

God's *smiting* was not a strike of physical force, but a spiritual wound—a piercing of the heart meant to awaken conviction and invite godly sorrow, the kind that leads to repentance and life.

“ For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”
(2 Corinthians 7:10)

Herod's bodily collapse—parasite infestation, infection, and immune failure—unfolded as natural consequences of that inner rupture. Just as rebellion carries its own ruin, the smiting revealed what was already festering beneath Herod's grandeur.

In all cases—Sennacherib's army, Uzzah and Herod—the angelic act of smiting was not arbitrary violence but a divine unveiling. In each, the deeper truth emerges: God does not wield disease or death as a tool of terror!

The Death of the Firstborns in Egypt

Let us now revisit the narrative in light of the evidence presented and discussed in previous chapters. We can be confident that God does not act as a destroyer—unless He has changed, and we know He does not change.

“ For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast;

¹⁰⁷ See Antiquities of the Jews, book 17, ch.6, par.5

and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD." (Exodus 12:12)

If you have carefully read the previous chapters, you may have noticed a recurring theme: what we often refer to as the “judgments” of God are not actions He actively initiates. Rather, they are events that occur because He no longer intervenes, as people have placed themselves beyond His protection.

Consider the following: If someone were to place a plastic bag over their head in defiance of the natural law of breathing, they would die. God would not override the consequences with a miracle to force them to live. Their death would not be a punishment from God, but the natural result of violating a law He gave for their benefit. His instruction to breathe clean air was meant to preserve life, not restrict it.

In the same way, when we violate physical laws, consequences follow naturally. And so it is with all of God’s laws—for His laws are design laws, woven into the fabric of life itself. They are not arbitrary rules enforced by threat but principles of reality that sustain life, harmony, and freedom.

It is also important to recall the Hebrew use of idioms—especially those in which God is said to do what He merely permits. This principle is well known among Protestant scholars, including many within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. We’ve explored this concept earlier, but let us affirm this again: the “judgments” against the gods of Egypt did not originate from God Himself. Rather, He did not intervene to stop those false gods—who had eyes but could not see, hands but could not save—from being exposed as powerless when someone else mercilessly destroyed their devoted followers.

In this case, who was it that executed the firstborns, bringing weeping and wailing to Egypt?

We were taught in churches and schools that it was “the angel of the Lord” who carried out this act. If that were true—and if these were truly God’s angels—then it would imply they acted under His command. That, in turn, would portray God as a violent deity. A commonly cited verse to support this view is:

“ He let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a **company of destroying angels**.” (Psalms 78:49 ESV)

But if we claim that these “destroying angels” were dispatched by God from heaven, we risk attributing to Him a love that is manipulative. Picture someone who gifts you a car, proudly declaring it a token of their love for you—only to repossess it when the relationship turns sour, and on top of it, send your personal bodyguard who once protected you, to kill you. That’s not just manipulative and narcissistic—it’s hypocritical and double-faced.

This line of reasoning, when held to scrutiny, begins to fall apart. Consider this: When God created angels, did He assign some of them to the department of destruction? If so, He would be the first to conceive of evil and murder. That would make Him the original destroyer—a notion that stands in stark contradiction to the claim that God is love.

Let us examine other translations of the previously quoted Psalms 78:49, which offer a striking contrast:

- “ He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, **by sending evil angels among them.**” (KJV)
- “ His anger flared, a wildfire storm of havoc—an **advance guard of disease-carrying angels.**” (The Message Bible)

The mention of “evil angels” should make us stop and think. Were these God’s angels? Or fallen beings—agents of destruction permitted to act only because divine protection had been rejected? That is the crucial question we must wrestle with as we seek to untangle the ways God’s character has been historically misrepresented.

Those who brought calamity were angels of evil—beings who spread disease and suffering. When Christ walked the earth, He healed the sick and “destroyed the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8), revealing to the onlooking universe His authority over both disease and death. God does not send disease-bearing angels. Put in simple terms, *evil angels are demons*.

Having already dismantled the claim that God directly killed Egypt’s firstborns, let us now turn to further biblical evidence that strengthens this position. In the same book of Exodus, we find a foundational verse:

- “ 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)

Here we're told that "the LORD [would] pass through to smite the Egyptians"—but how would He do this? The verse provides clarity: by "suffering" (i.e., permitting) "the destroyer" to enter, or preventing him if the blood was present on the doorposts. Two key terms deserve close attention: "suffer" and "the destroyer."

The word translated as suffer is the Hebrew H5414 – *nāthan*, which we've encountered before. It means to *allow, permit, or not restrain*. Thus, on the night of destruction, God was either allowing or not allowing someone else to carry out the killings. Given our earlier conclusion—that God's restraint from preventing evil is a consequence of people placing themselves outside His protection—this "someone else" must be antagonistic to God, not one acting as His agent. This brings us to a crucial question: **Who is the destroyer in Scripture?**

“ Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the **destroyer**.” (1 Corinthians 10:10)

“ And they had a king over them, which is the **angel of the bottomless pit**, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is **Abaddon**, but in the Greek tongue hath his name **Apollyon**.” (Revelation 9:11)

"The angel of the bottomless pit" is none other than Satan himself. Let us now examine his names more closely:

Apollyon (G623) – *destroyer, that is, Satan.*

Abaddon (H11) – of Hebrew origin, meaning *a destroying angel.*

It becomes evident that the "destroyer" is Satan—the commander of the destroying angels, the evil spirits behind disease, calamity, and ruin. Further confirmation comes from the term "destroyer" in 1 Corinthians 10:10. The Greek word used is:

G3644, derived from G3645 – *a ruiner, specifically a venomous serpent—destroyer.*

Now connect this to Revelation 12:9, where Satan is described as "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." It all fits together well. The "destroyer" is not one of God's angels, but the adversary of God—the one who delights in death and suffering.

Therefore, God's mission in Egypt was not to kill, but to protect. He came to shield those who had placed their faith in the coming Messiah,

symbolized by the blood on their doorposts. The phrase “pass over” does not merely mean to *skip, bypass, or spare in passing*. In Hebrew, the word is *pāsah* (H6452), which means to *hover over*—like a mother bird guarding her chicks. This image is beautifully echoed in a prophecy:

“ Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will **shield it and deliver it, he will pass over it and will rescue it.**” (Isaiah 31:5 NIV)

In summary, God’s commanding angel passed through Egypt not to destroy, but to inspect each household. Those who marked their dwellings with blood—a sign of trust in divine mercy—were shielded from the destroyer. These were the homes over which God hovered protectively. Where no blood was found, divine protection was absent, and the destroyer—leading a host of evil angels—entered unopposed and destroyed.

This *company of destroying angels* is clearly identified in both Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. Their leader, Satan, is described in unmistakable terms:

“ In the Scriptures he is called a **destroyer, an accuser of the brethren, a deceiver, a liar, a tormentor, and a murderer.**”¹⁰⁸

Whatever study one undertakes on the nature and character of angels, this truth must remain central:

“ Angels are sent from the heavenly courts, **not to destroy, but to watch over and guard imperiled souls, to save the lost, to bring the straying back to the fold.**”¹⁰⁹

God’s true angels are ministers of mercy—not agents of destruction. The tragic deaths of Egypt’s firstborns were not acts of divine vengeance, but the sorrowful consequence of rejecting God’s protection and permitting the destroyer—Satan—to do what he does best: “steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10). ••

¹⁰⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p.137.4

¹⁰⁹ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol.36, April 13, 1904, par.19

Chapter 20

The Fires of Sodom and Gomorrah

FEW forms of death evoke deeper dread than death by fire. It is feared not only by human beings but even by the fiercest beasts of the wild. In the face of fire, the entire animal kingdom would flee in terror, abandoning the natural order of predator and prey. At those times, self-preservation overrides instinct; even a lion would forsake its hunt to escape the flames.

When crimes against humanity are committed, the method of atrocity often reveals something about the character of those responsible. Even in the case of a single murder, the manner in which it is carried out can expose the malice behind it. Consider the Holocaust: the placement of crematoria—often positioned at or near the entrance of the concentration camps—was no accident. It was a calculated strategy designed to inflict maximum psychological torment on those arriving. I hesitate to recount the gruesome details, but the point should be clear.

So here is the pressing question: If God is all-powerful—able to create with a word and, as Job 18:5,6 suggests, able to extinguish life as effortlessly as snuffing out a candle—why would He choose a method as cruel as fire? Does that not, in itself, paint a disturbing picture of His character?

Scripture tells us that God takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezekiel 33:11), and yet we are also told that He burned five cities in the days of Lot and Abraham. If He were merely responding to a moral crisis, could He not have eliminated them instantly, painlessly—as one

might flick away a fly or cast down a pebble? Or worse still: was the objective to make a public example of them, in the same way Hitler used public cremation to psychologically torment the Jews? Let us examine this accusation:

“ And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.”
(Genesis 18:20,21)

Was God *uncertain* or *misinformed* about the sins of these cities? The same God who “understandest my thought afar off” (Psalms 139:2)? Why, then, does He say He must “go down and see”?

What are we to make of such language? Perhaps it was not spoken for God’s clarification, but for ours—for human understanding. It models a process of fairness and transparency. God does not act arbitrarily, even though His knowledge is infinite. His “investigations” in Scripture often serve to demonstrate His justice to His creatures, not to inform Himself of something He does not already know.

It’s worth noting that it was Abraham—not God—who first introduced the idea of destruction:

“ Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”
(Genesis 18:23)

This reflects a human conception of divine justice—an idea that grievous sin demands immediate destruction. And indeed, this has been the prevailing view throughout history that God incinerated Sodom and Gomorrah in a display of wrathful judgment.

But is this conclusion accurate? Or is it shaped by human assumptions about His power, justice, and vengeance?

When the two angels arrived at Lot’s home (see Genesis 19:13), they told the household that they were going to destroy the city. Their language reflected human understanding—they spoke in terms Lot could comprehend. What God was no longer going to prevent was attributed to Him—a recurring pattern throughout Scripture. Within that framework, we read:

“ Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he **overthrew** those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.” (Genesis 19:24,25)

I used to take that passage quite literally: God rained down brimstone—sulfur and fire—straight from the sky, as though it were stored there, waiting to be released. But as I’ve continued searching, honest questions have surfaced.

Brimstone is a yellow mineral—sulfur. It doesn’t naturally hang in the sky like rain. So if it didn’t come from the atmosphere, did God create it on the spot, up high, like clouds? Did He speak it into existence for the express purpose of burning people alive?

If so, does that not imply He used His creative power—the same power that forms life, galaxies, and gives joy to all—to fashion an agent of destruction? Did His anger reach such a height that He designed a new substance not to heal, not to restore, but to torture?

That would mean God chose to act against Sodom not in the swiftest or most merciful way—such as ending their lives instantly and painlessly—but through one of the most agonizing deaths imaginable. Was the goal simply to eliminate them? Or was the method of destruction intended to serve as a terrifying example?

And if this was a moral emergency—a crisis demanding immediate justice—why not resolve it with divine finality, quick and painless? Could such an act truly be called “a merciful intervention?”

We’re told that “he overthrew those cities” (Genesis 19:25). Let’s take a closer look at the meaning of the word *overthrew*.

The Hebrew word used here is H2015 – *hāphak*, which means to *turn over*, to *upend*, to *overturn*—as one might flip over a table. It implies *disruption*, a *violent collapse*—not necessarily a direct act of raining fire from above.

So if brimstone was involved, where did it come from? This question invites us to reconsider the source of the destruction. If God did not personally hurl sulfur from heaven, could the fire and brimstone have originated from natural elements already present in the earth—unleashed when God withdrew His protective hand?

Could the cities have been situated near fault lines, underground sulfur deposits, or volcanic activity? Could the devastation have been triggered not by divine violence, but by the absence of divine restraint—allowing nature and Satan (the destroyer) to act unchecked?

This opens a new way of seeing the event: not as a spectacle of divine cruelty, but as the tragic consequence of a people who had placed themselves beyond the shelter of God's mercy—rejecting even the angels sent by Him to rescue them.

“ Elemental **sulfur** is found in nature both as a free element, especially in volcanic regions, and in combination with other elements in sulfide and sulfate minerals.”¹¹⁰

Brimstone was not a newly created element introduced by God for the destruction of Sodom. It was already present in the region, and Scripture itself offers evidence of this. While brimstone is often associated with volcanic areas—where subterranean activity can bring such materials to the surface—it is not exclusive to those zones. In the case of Sodom and its sister cities, there is compelling biblical evidence that brimstone and other flammable substances were already embedded in the land.

This suggests that the destruction may not have required a supernatural act of creation, but rather a divine withdrawal—a lifting of restraint that allowed natural forces to erupt. What had once sustained life was no longer held in check. The fire and brimstone, already present in the earth, were unleashed when God ceased to shield the land from its own buried dangers.

It is true that when Lot and Abraham parted company (see Genesis 13:5-9), the region looked tempting and very inviting:

“ And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.” (Genesis 13:10,11)

The land was lush and fertile, likened to Eden and to Egypt—regions known for their abundance. Yet beneath this surface-beauty lay hidden

¹¹⁰ Source: www.britannica.com/science/sulfur

volatility. Fertility does not preclude geological instability. In fact, the Dead Sea region, where Sodom is believed to have been located, is known for its *subterranean sulfur deposits, bitumen pits, and seismic activity*.

Consider this description of the region—just after Lot settled near Sodom—when the five kings attacked Sodom (see Genesis 14:1,2), long before its destruction:

“ All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the **salt sea**.” (Genesis 14:3)

“ And the vale of Siddim was **full of slimepits**; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.” (Genesis 14:10)

The *slimepits* mentioned in Genesis are pits of *bitumen* (*tar, pitch*)—a substance that can be solid, semi-solid, or liquid petroleum. According to sources like *Designing Buildings Wiki*, bitumen is a “highly flammable form of oil,” and its presence in the region long before Sodom’s destruction is significant.

Now combine bitumen with brimstone (sulfur), and you have a deadly mix—a *recipe for uncontrollable fire*. This reframes our image of Sodom: not as a city suddenly consumed by miraculous flames, but as one surrounded by volatile natural elements, requiring only a spark—or the withdrawal of divine restraint—to ignite catastrophe. This image is echoed later in Scripture:

“ **The whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning**, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein—like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the **LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath**.” (Deuteronomy 29:23)

The author of both Genesis and Deuteronomy—traditionally believed to be Moses—describes the region not only as one of destruction, but as one already *saturated with brimstone, salt, and frequent burning*. That’s a critical observation: *the land itself was hostile to life*, a reflection of what had occurred there—but also, perhaps, of what had *always been hidden beneath the surface, held in check until divine protection was withdrawn*.

This raises essential theological questions: What was holding those fires in check all along? – What happened when humanity persistently confirmed its rebellion, rejecting God’s appeals through Abraham and even the angels? And when divine restraint was lifted, what did Abraham witness from afar?

How would he interpret what he saw—as a man still shaped by a worldview that equated justice with retribution, and sovereignty with direct intervention? And how do we read his account today, influenced by centuries of tradition that attributes every calamity to God, rather than considering what unfolds when God simply lets go?

One final piece remains—one that may help us distinguish clearly between divine permission, divine withdrawal, and divine intervention.

“ And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Highest, none at all would exalt him. **How shall I give thee up**, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? *How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim?* Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man—the Holy One in the midst of thee; and I will not enter into the city.”
(Hosea 11:7-9)

In this divine lament, we sense the emotional and spiritual anguish of God as He contemplates letting Ephraim, who stubbornly clings to idolatry, go the way he has chosen. What God ultimately does is “give him up”—not in anger, but in sorrow. It is not a withdrawal of love; it is a withdrawal of protection. And this, Scripture tells us, is God’s wrath.

This same struggle echoes centuries later in the sorrow of Christ as He stands overlooking Jerusalem. With tear-filled eyes, He cries:

“ Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matthew 23:38).

In those few words, He reveals the eternal conflict within the heart of God—the agony of love rejected. One inspired writer captured it so poignantly:

“ This is the **separation struggle**. In the lamentation of Christ, the very heart of God is pouring itself forth. It is the **mysterious farewell of the long-suffering love of the Deity.**¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.620

What we see, then, in the overthrow of Sodom, the exile of Ephraim, and the desolation of Jerusalem, is not divine revenge—but the heart-break of divine *letting go*. Judgment, in this light, is not the explosion of divine temper, but the painful silence that follows when God is finally and firmly pushed away.

Strikingly, God compares His decision to give up Ephraim to the fate of Admah and Zeboim—sister cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities, too, were “overthrown.” But what does *overthrown* truly mean in its Hebrew root word?

The term used in Genesis for overthrow is H2015 – *hāphak*. While it often denotes physical *overturning*, it also carries meanings such as **to turn, to give over, or to withdraw**.

In this context, it suggests that the destruction of these cities was not necessarily an act of direct divine execution, but the result of God giving them up—*withdrawing* His restraining presence and allowing natural and moral consequences to unfold.

This sheds light on the nature of divine wrath. It is not the impulse of a short-tempered deity, but the *tragic result of persistent human rejection*. God longs to protect, to redeem, to shield. But when His grace is continually refused, He honors human freedom—and *withdraws*.

How fearful, then, it is for a sinner to slight divine longsuffering and despise the call of mercy—a call not only to repentance, but to remain under the shelter of God’s protection. Every resisted conviction, every rejected appeal is like a blow against the very wings of mercy that cover us. This divine reality is captured with piercing insight:

“ We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. **It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan.** The disobedient and unthankful have great reason for gratitude for God’s mercy and long-suffering in holding in check the cruel, malignant power of the evil one. But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed.”¹¹²

So then, the fiery judgment on Sodom was not a cruel or arbitrary act from a wrathful God—it was the *tragedy of divine relinquishment*. It marked

¹¹² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p.36.1

the moment when God, having exhausted every appeal, allowed them to embrace what they had persistently chosen: life without *His protection*.

This reframes everything about how we understand *divine justice*—not as vengeance, but as the sorrowful consequence of love that is ultimately, and fatally, rejected. ••

Chapter 21

Fires

HAVING examined the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire, we are moving in the right direction toward understanding God's non-violent character. When Christ was on earth, He declared that the mission of the thief is "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10a). The common factor in these three acts is the use of force. To steal from someone, one must take advantage of or overpower them—they will not surrender willingly. The same principle applies to killing or destroying a person or their possessions.

In contrast, God's Spirit of liberty (see 2 Corinthians 3:17) does not operate by force. He never reclaims by compulsion what He once freely gave to His creatures. Christ came so that humanity "might have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10b). The thief's work stands in direct opposition to Christ's mission: what he steals, kills, or destroys is life itself. Whether through disease—which weakens vitality—or through direct violence, the outcome is always the same: the removal of life. Every evil Satan brings upon the earth can be summed up in this—he takes life away.

God is the *source of life* (see 2 Corinthians 8:6), and Christ is its *channel* (see John 1:1). Since life flows freely from them, do they use force to reclaim it from those who reject it? If they did, God would appear not as a generous giver but as a deceptive one—an ironic thief who steals what He first bestowed. Yet God does not act this way. His laws are the protocols of life; obedience places us beneath the channels through which

life flows. “The law of the wise is a fountain of life” (Proverbs 13:14). When we embrace the lie that life can exist apart from God, we sever ourselves from the circuit of life and its Source—and death follows, not by divine coercion, but by natural consequence. In such moments, it is not God who withdraws life by force, but the creature who steps outside its flow.

Thou Shalt Not Kill

Any spirit that seeks to cut others off from the circuit of life—whether through deception or literal killing—reveals itself as opposed to the Spirit of Christ. To take life is to sever the flow of blood and disrupt the circulation of vitality. This, in essence, is what it means to destroy life. Yet some argue that there exists a justifiable form of killing under the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” They claim that when God destroys life, He is not committing murder but executing judgment. This assumption underlies the false portrayal of God as one who employs fire to annihilate life.

Before we continue, it will be beneficial to examine the foundations of this misconception.

“Thou shalt not kill.” (Exodus 20:13)

What does this command prohibit, and what does it not prohibit? Is there evidence that a form of killing exists which is not condemned by these very words—words written by the finger of God?

Some have argued that judicial killing is permissible, claiming it differs from murder. But consider this: God not only inscribed these words on stone—He also spoke them aloud from Mount Sinai. This moment stands apart from other occasions when God inspired the thoughts of biblical writers but allowed them to choose the words that best conveyed those impressions. Here, the precise words spoken by God bear a weight of authority that cannot be casually dismissed.

So where does the idea arise that certain forms of killing are justified? It originates in human conceptions of justice—conceptions deeply shaped by pagan religious systems. These ideas have profoundly influenced Christian thought, especially in the last days among those symbolized by the church of Laodicea.

Revelation 3:14-22 speaks to the Laodicean church. Much could be said about its condition, but the focus here is on how Laodicea's people understand justice.

The name *Laodicea* (G2993 – *Laodikeia*) is a compound of *laos* and *dike*. The word *laos* (G2992) means *people, tribe, or nation*. The real weight lies in *dike* (G1349), which carries meanings such as: 1. *Custom or usage*; 2. *Right or justice*; 3. *A legal suit*; 4. *A judicial hearing or sentence—especially condemnation*; (and most critically) 5. ***The goddess Justice—‘avenging justice.’***

This last definition connects directly to Acts 28:4, where the inhabitants of Melita believed that the goddess (*dike*) was punishing Paul. Seeing his misfortune, they concluded it was divine vengeance for a hidden crime. Their idea of justice was rooted in an avenging deity—a relentless force demanding blood as payment for guilt.

This is the root problem of the Laodicean church: though living in a time when God's judgment is said to be unfolding in the heavenly courts, they interpret divine justice through the lens of pagan philosophy. Justice is imagined not as a reflection of God's character, but as the Greeks conceived their gods—a vengeful force appeased only by blood.

The figure we now call “Lady Justice” was originally a pagan goddess, often portrayed as a woman holding scales in one hand and a sword in the other. In some depictions, she stands triumphantly over a serpent—a symbol of law prevailing over deception. To anyone trained in Roman law, shaped by Greek philosophical traditions, the meaning was unmistakable: if the scales revealed a person as wanting, the sword delivered the sentence. In such cases, killing was not considered murder, but justice—an execution sanctioned by law, not driven by personal vengeance.

This imagery lies at the ideological root of a theology that legitimizes execution as justice rather than murder. It's the same rationale used to sanctify violence in defense of nations. But this concept does not arise from the character of God revealed in Christ. It stems from a pagan vision of justice—one that cloaks violence in legality and calls it righteousness.

The Laodicean church represents people who embrace a justice system derived from human tradition—a justice of the people (*laos + dike*)—which, though it may appear equitable on the surface, is in fact

a counterfeit justice rooted in Satan's deception. One inspired Bible commentator puts it this way:

“ It had been Satan's purpose to **divorce mercy from truth and justice**. He sought to prove that the righteousness of God's law is an enemy to peace. But Christ shows that in God's plan they are indissolubly joined together; the one cannot exist without the other.”¹¹³

The reinterpretation of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13) as “Thou shalt not murder” fits neatly into this counterfeit justice. In that framework, judicial executions or state violence are considered righteous, while the commandment is redefined to prohibit only private, unjustified killing.

This idea is ancient. The reason was similar behind the Code of Hammurabi, and its logic echoed throughout empires. One of Rome's greatest theologians and philosophers of 4th/5th century, a convert from paganism, embraced and promoted this worldview:

“ **When war is undertaken in obedience to God**, who would rebuke, or humble, or crush the pride of man, it must be allowed to be **righteous war**; for even the wars which arise from human passion cannot harm the eternal well-being of God, nor even the saints.”¹¹⁴

In his synthesis of Roman law and Christian theology, Augustine framed state violence not merely as a political necessity but as divine delegation—an unsettling fusion that would shape centuries of doctrine.

Centuries later, an Italian Dominican friar and priest, the foremost scholastic thinker, as well as one of the most influential philosophers and theologians in the Western tradition, a Doctor of the Roman Church, followed with similar reasoning:

“ **Therefore if a man be dangerous and infectious to the community, on account of some sin, it is praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed** in order to safeguard the common good, since 'a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump' (1 Corinthians 5:6).”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.762.3

¹¹⁴ St. Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, XXII, par.75

¹¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q.64, Article 2, Obj.3

Thus, Western Christianity was shaped largely under the shadow of Roman law—a system itself deeply influenced by Greek pagan notions of justice, just as historian Thomas Lindsay had observed (see Chapter 11, *Mark of the Beast*). The result was a religious tradition that draped pagan justice in Christian garments, preserving its underlying logic while altering its outward form.

But does the Hebrew text itself distinguish between “murder” and “killing”? The common argument is that the sixth commandment refers only to unjustified, premeditated killing—murder—and not to judicial executions or acts of war.

Yet a closer look at the word (H7523 – *ratsach*) suggests otherwise.

““ Then ye shall appoint you cities... that the slayer (*ratsach*) may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.”
(Numbers 35:11)

Here, the word *ratsach* is used even for unintentional killing.

““ The murderer (*ratsach*) shall be put to death (*ratsach*) by the mouth of witnesses ...” (Numbers 35:30)

The same root word describes both the criminal act and the judicial execution. No sharp linguistic line exists between “murder” and “execution” in the original text.

This means the translation “Thou shalt not murder” doesn’t actually come from the Hebrew language itself. Instead, it was shaped by later traditions—especially legal and philosophical systems that had already taken in ideas of justice from pagan cultures.

The claim that “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13) refers only to murder—and not to judicial execution or warfare—is not strictly supported by the Hebrew word *ratsach*. Rather, it reflects a theological framework influenced by counterfeit justice.

By importing human legal categories into Scripture, we risk reshaping God into our own image—justifying violence under the banner of divine law. In doing so, we attribute to God acts that contradict His own revealed character: “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6), perfectly revealed in Christ Jesus as compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

When we say, “This kind of killing isn’t murder, because the law says so,” we are not simply interpreting Scripture—we are clothing human violence in divine authority. This is the legacy of counterfeit justice, not the voice of the God who wrote with His own hand, “Thou shalt not kill.”

Fires of Elijah

In essence, anyone who disrupts the flow of life—whether through deceit or violence—reveals the spirit of the opposing power. This is why Jesus rebuked His disciples when, in their misguided zeal, they wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans. Their desire for destruction ran against the very heart of Christ’s mission:

“ 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 [Elijah] did? But he turned, and rebuked them” (Luke 9:54,55a)

The disciples were certain Christ would approve their offer. After all, hadn’t God once sent fire from heaven at Elijah’s word? They were convinced He would welcome their fervor, but they were mistaken. Jesus’ stern rebuke stunned them—unveiling not only their error, but the spirit they had failed to discern.

One inspired author reflects on this moment, saying that their spirit was not aligned with the spirit of Christ. They had misunderstood the nature of divine power—not as a force for destruction, but as a presence of mercy and restoration:

“ They were surprised to see that **Jesus was pained** by their words, and still more surprised as His rebuke fell upon their ears, ‘**Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.** For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.’ And He went to another village [Luke 9:55b,56].”¹¹⁶

The disciples were likely feeling shocked and confused. Had they gotten the story of Elijah’s fire wrong? Was Jesus saying Elijah himself was part of the problem? Jesus made it clear: the spirit behind those fires wasn’t from God—it was from Satan. But which incident in Elijah’s life were the disciples recalling?

¹¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.487.2

King Ahaziah's Soldiers

Elijah's ministry records two well-known events involving fire: the contest on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) and the confrontation with King Ahaziah's soldiers (2 Kings 1:10-12). The answer is not difficult. The fire that destroyed human lives—the soldiers of Ahaziah—best fits the spirit in which the disciples desired to deal with the Samaritans. Before we examine that story, however, we must establish that the fire in question indeed came from a spirit antagonistic to Christ.

“ It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, that seek to **compel the conscience**. Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederate with evil angels **bring suffering** upon their fellow men, in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. He can admit no rival in the soul, nor accept of partial service; but He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love. There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the **disposition to hurt and destroy** those who do not appreciate our work, or who act contrary to our ideas.”¹¹⁷

King Ahaziah had sent messengers to consult the god of Ekron concerning his sickness. On the way, they encountered Elijah, who delivered God's message:

“ But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, **but shalt surely die**. And Elijah departed.” (2 Kings 1:3,4)

The expression “thou shalt surely die” recalls God's warning to Adam (see Genesis 2:17). In both cases, this was not a threat of what God Himself would inflict but a declaration of the inevitable result of separation

¹¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.487.3

from the Source of life. Ahaziah's fate, like Adam's, was the outcome of choosing independence from God.

The king's choice was extremely foolish. As the son of Ahab and Jezebel, he knew full well how God had dealt with his father's idolatry. He knew of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, where the impotence of false gods had been unmistakably revealed. He was aware of what had happened when the Philistines placed the ark of God in the temple of Dagon, the god of Ashdod:

“ And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.” (1 Samuel 5:4)

Despite all this, Ahaziah turned to Baalzebub, the chief pagan god of Ekron. By Christ's time, Baalzebub was identified with Satan himself, the “prince of the devils” (Matthew 12:24). Thus, in consulting him, Ahaziah effectively chose Satan as his protector—the very embodiment of folly. To seek healing from the author of disease, or life from the one who brings death, is the deepest ignorance.

The word H1168 – *ba'al* means *lord, owner, or master*.

Archaeological findings suggest that flies were linked to this pagan deity—possibly seen as symbols of protection from disease. It's strikingly ironic: the very figure connected to spreading illness was believed to guard against it.

But why, then, did Elijah say, “If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty” (2 Kings 1:10)? These are the very words the disciples recalled. If this fire was the work of Satan, why did Elijah invoke it? Was he calling upon another spirit?

It is important to note that, like the Samaritans, Ahaziah's soldiers were rejecting God's message and mocking His prophet. Their repeated address, “Thou man of God” (e.g. 2 Kings 4:16,40) was not acknowledgement but derision—similar to the mob that mocked Christ with, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (John 19:3). Their threats revealed contempt for Elijah and for the God he represented. Their trust was in Ahaziah's false gods, and thus they were left to them.

The fire that consumed the soldiers wasn't meant to prove Elijah's authority—after all, the dead couldn't witness or respond to it. Elijah wasn't asking God to defend his reputation; he was simply declaring what was bound to happen. Having rejected God, they fell into the snares of the destroyer—Satan—who claimed the right to harm them, just as he once tried to destroy Jacob:

“Satan had accused Jacob before the angels of God, claiming the right to destroy him because of his sin; he had moved upon Esau to march against him; and during the patriarch's long night of wrestling, Satan endeavored to force upon him a sense of his guilt, in order to discourage him, and break his hold upon God...”¹¹⁸

Significantly, the third captain sent by the king was not destroyed. In humility, he sought refuge in the God of Elijah. His submission saved not only his life but the lives of his men. Unlike the others, he expected nothing from the god of Ekron. Bowing before Elijah was not an act of worship of the prophet but an acknowledgment of the God Elijah served.

“Christ will never abandon the soul for whom He has died. The soul may leave Him and be overwhelmed with temptation, but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life.”¹¹⁹

Fires of God

Fire is undeniably linked to God throughout Scripture. In this section, we'll take a brief look at these fiery images and explore what they truly reveal about His nature.

The challenge for many readers is that when they hear the phrase, “God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29), they picture a harsh, sulfur-spewing figure—cold, mechanical, and terrifying. Sadly, this image has often been used to instill fear, especially in children. Some are even threatened with hellfire to force obedience, and in extreme cases, made to feel the sting of actual flames—perhaps from a kitchen burner—as a twisted lesson in religious discipline.

¹¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p.618.1

¹¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Prayer*, p.301.3

Such portrayals distort the meaning of divine fire. Rather than being a tool of terror, it is meant to reveal something deeper: God's purity, His passion, and His power to refine.

If we approach God's fire wrongly, we miss the sobering truth: our sinful ways and thoughts are not His (see Isaiah 55:8). We risk mistaking His holiness for hostility, failing to grasp that divine fire does not lash out arbitrarily—it consumes what cannot coexist with love. Few pause to ask what God's fire truly burns away, or how Scripture itself defines that fire: not merely as judgment, but as the purifying presence of the Holy One.

Mount Carmel

Let's reflect now on the fires in Elijah's story on Mount Carmel. Why did the devil not honor his prophets by sending down fire in that contest? Was he unable to do so? Prophet Elijah challenged the people:

“ And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under.”
(1 Kings 18:24,25)

The prophets of Baal realized “that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded” (v.29)—no god paid attention to them. This wasn't simply that their god was a lifeless idol carved from wood; we know that Satan energized the whole system.

We see that the devil had power to influence nature and manipulate the weather in the story of Job—even to bring down fire from heaven:

“ 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. And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.” (Job 1:16,19)

The conversation between God and Satan reveals that everything Job possessed was placed within Satan's reach (v.12). It was Satan who caused the fire. Notice the phrase, "the fire of God"—a reflection of the universal belief that God is the cause of all disasters. Yet in truth, it was Satan who kindled those flames.

Why then did Satan not use his power to enrich Job instead? Was it not because that was never his desire? No wonder he complained about God's hedge of protection around Job. How could he have been so sure that Job served God only for His blessings unless he had already tried to harm Job but had been restrained by that hedge?

When something aligns with his mission and character, the devil does not hesitate to do it. The Bible confirms that he can kindle fire if he so chooses: "And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men" (Revelation 13:13). Why then was there no fire when his prophets desperately needed him to prove on Mt Carmel that he was their true god?

The devil was restrained from sending fire, because his power was not needed in the unfolding plan of redemption. Once again, for the sake of Israel, Satan's influence was held in check. In doing so, God demonstrated His sovereign ability to restrain any force—so long as His children entrust themselves to Him. Therefore, when the devil is not restrained and his evil intentions prevail against the good of humanity, it is not because he has overpowered God. Rather, it is because God's children have, by their own will, chosen to align with their adversary.

But what was the lesson of fire in the sacrificial system? God ordained the kindling of fire in the sanctuary to reveal His desire to cleanse Israel from sin. Throughout Scripture, fire is often portrayed as a purifying force—it consumes impurity and symbolizes renewal (see Ezekiel 39:9,12,16).

This imagery finds its fulfillment in the words of John the Baptist, who prophesied that Christ "shall baptize you [humanity] with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). This baptism was not merely symbolic—it pointed to a transformative work in which fire no longer consumed offerings on an altar, but refined hearts, burning away sin and igniting holiness.

The presence of God, wherever it is found, consumes sin—that is, it cleanses. This is why *His word is often represented as fire* in Scripture. It is said to burn:

“ My heart was hot within me, while I was musing **the fire burned:** then spake I with my tongue.” (Psalms 39:3)

Remember also the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who later confessed that their *hearts burned* within them as Christ spoke (see Luke 24:32). It is these effects of the word that explain why it is symbolized as a double-edged, flaming sword proceeding from the mouth of Christ.

Jeremiah’s experience settles the question of what God’s fire truly is, for God Himself defined it for him:

“ 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)

“ Is not **my word like as a fire?** saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29)

That explains Jeremiah’s own testimony:

“ Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But **his word was in mine heart as a burning fire** shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9)

The word of God is a consuming fire—yet it is also profoundly creative:

“ By the **word of the Lord** the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.” (Psalm 33:6)

That same breath shaped galaxies and summoned life from dust. So how can it also bring destruction? It seems paradoxical that the word that gives life could also consume it. But this tension reveals something vital: *when the fire of God’s word meets a heart unwilling to part with sin, it does not refine—it devours.*

The fire that consumed Elijah’s sacrifice was no arbitrary sign—it revealed a divine pattern. Only after the bullock was slain and laid in order upon the altar (1 Kings 18:33) did the fire descend. This wasn’t a new ritual. Throughout the sanctuary system, God never permitted a living animal to

be placed on the altar. The offering had to be slain first. Only then could the rising aroma of burnt offerings—even sin offerings—be described as pleasing to God (see Leviticus 1:9,13,17; 4:31). *Death preceded consecration.* The fire responded not to life resisting surrender, but to life already yielded.

The aroma of sacrifice pleased God, not because He was in some way influenced, but because it symbolized sin consumed after it was separated from the sinner. This was His joy—which is why He sent fire to consume Elijah’s bullock on Mount Carmel without hesitation. Satan, by contrast, would never honor such a drama. He was enraged to see his works undone in the Israelites. What would have pleased him was fire falling on a living victim—an act that reflects his cruel, corrupt nature. The altar, in God’s design, was a place of cleansing; in Satan’s, it would be a place of cruelty.

There’s a profound way to interpret this “consuming fire.” Scripture tells us, “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and also, “God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). Put together, the puzzle reveals something remarkable: love is a consuming fire! No wonder Apostle John, describing Christ, states that “his eyes were as a flame of fire” (Revelation 1:14).

Not every consuming fire destroys or devours. Some fire purifies, some fire warms. When love fills the heart of the one you love, it shows in their eyes, and it can feel as though their gaze kindles love in your heart.

To the bride of Christ, His flaming eyes do not scorch—they kindle love. They warm the soul, awaken yearning, and refine what is impure. For love is not just an attribute of God—it is His glory, His essence. The fire of divine love consumes what cannot remain in His holy presence, yet it never consumes the beloved. It purifies to preserve.

How then does the same fire that refreshes and nourishes the bride of Christ devours the wicked? After confronting King Ahaziah, “Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” “in a chariot of fire” (2 Kings 2:11)—yet he was not consumed. Even the devil, before his fall, when he was the covering cherub Lucifer, “walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire” (Ezekiel 28:14). Why was the fire not destructive then? Scripture even declares that the saints “shall dwell with everlasting burnings” (Isaiah 33:13,14). How is this possible?

The following commentary is essential for our further study:

“ In all who submit to His power the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them. Jacob, after his night of wrestling with the Angel, exclaimed, ‘I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved’ (Genesis 32:30). Jacob had been guilty of a great sin in his conduct toward Esau, but he had repented. His transgression had been forgiven, and his sin purged; therefore, he could endure the revelation of God’s presence. But wherever men came before God while willfully cherishing evil, they were destroyed. At the second advent of Christ the wicked shall be consumed ‘with the Spirit of His mouth,’ and destroyed ‘with the brightness of His coming’ (2 Thessalonians 2:8). **The light of the glory of God, which imparts life to the righteous, will slay the wicked.**”¹²⁰

The Spirit of God consumes sin; therefore, the Spirit is fire. This aligns seamlessly with the Word being fire, for Christ said,

“ The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)

Spirit and Word are one. The “Spirit of His mouth” refers to His Word (see Revelation 19:15,21), and the sword from His mouth is the Word itself. The light of God’s glory is nothing less than the truth of His loving character. This truth gives life—so how can it possibly slay the wicked? Is the Spirit of truth the problem? If not, why are the righteous not destroyed?

“ Now Christ again appears to the view of His enemies. Far above the city, upon a foundation of burnished gold, is a throne, high and lifted up. Upon this throne sits the Son of God, and around Him are the subjects of His kingdom. The power and majesty of Christ no language can describe, no pen portray. The glory of the Eternal Father is enshrouding His Son. The brightness of His presence fills the City of God, and flows out beyond the gates, flooding the whole earth with its radiance.”¹²¹

If this radiant glory were in itself destructive, how could the redeemed—who are standing directly within it—remain unharmed? Indeed, they are sustained by it, for it is the very life and joy of their souls. The question then presses upon us: why does the same glory that enlivens

¹²⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p.107.4

¹²¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p.665.1

the righteous become unbearable to the wicked?"

To understand this, we must understand that *God's fire does not consume living flesh and blood*. The case of Aaron's sons illustrates this:

“ And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. And Moses called ... the sons of Uzziel ... and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. So they went near, and carried them **in their coats** out of the camp.” (Leviticus 10:2,4,5)

When they were buried, their clothes were still intact on their bodies. What kind of fire consumes the body but leaves the clothes untouched? Clearly, this was not physical fire. Sin is spiritual, for it is the breaking of a spiritual law (see Romans 7:14). Therefore, the Spirit consumes sin at its root—not in the flesh, but in the heart.

Gehenna

Returning to the sanctuary service, we see that the remains and ashes were taken outside the camp to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom (see Joshua 15:8; Jeremiah 7:31). This valley—later called Tophet—became a cursed place, infamous for Israel's horrific practice of child sacrifice, something utterly foreign to God's heart. In time, it was repurposed as a site for burning refuse, a fitting image of defilement.

Here, two fires come into view: one that burns within—the *fire of sanctification*, consuming sin in the hearts of believers—and the *fire that burns without*, reducing refuse to ash in the accursed valley of Tophet. The righteous, having received the Spirit of Christ, will rise with imperishable bodies (see 1 Corinthians 15:37–40), transformed by grace. But dust remains dust, and what is of the old nature will be cast outside the camp, cleansed in the fire that purges what couldn't be redeemed.

It will be likewise with the wicked, as the Psalmist discerned in the sanctuary drama (see Psalms 73:3,4,17,18). They first endure an inward fire—guilt, shame, hatred, and anguish—the torment that scorches the soul when sin pays its wages. **Only after this inner agony culminates in death does the cleansing fire devour their lifeless bodies** (see 1 Peter 3:10). As in the sanctuary, the flame consumed the sacrifice only once death had occurred. Christ emphasized this when He warned:

“ And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into **hell**, into the fire that never shall be quenched.” (Mark 9:43)

The word translated “hell” here is *geenna* (G1067), derived from the Hebrew *Ge-Hinnom*—the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem.

Christ was not invoking the horror of children burned alive, as once tragically occurred there, but repurposing Gehenna as a symbol: a place of final cleansing fire, echoing the sanctuary’s pattern of purification. It was not a threat of torment, but a warning wrapped in mercy—a call to holiness through the imagery of what must be cast out and consumed.

Thus, Gehenna does not depict eternal cremation of living beings, but the sequence revealed in the sanctuary: first the inner torment—the “unquenchable fire” or “worm that dieth not”—followed by the physical burning of the dead.

Thus, Gehenna does not portray the eternal cremation of living souls, but rather follows the sequence revealed in the sanctuary: first, the inner torment—the “unquenchable fire” and the “worm that dieth not”—symbols of guilt, anguish, and the soul’s decay under sin’s weight. Only then comes the outer fire, the physical burning of the diseased, echoing the sanctuary’s pattern.

“ We read of chains of darkness for the transgressor of God’s law. We read of the worm that dieth not, and of the fire that is not quenched. Thus is represented the experience of every one who has permitted himself to be grafted into the stock of Satan, who has cherished sinful attributes.”¹²²

Christ speaks of “the worm that does not die and the fire that is not quenched” (Mark 9:44,46,48). From the commentary above, we know these figures describe the same reality. What is striking is that His warning was not new. Two prophets had already spoken of it in detail. Isaiah writes:

“ And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: **for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched;** and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.” (Isaiah 66:24)

¹²² Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, April 14, 1898, par.13

This seals the truth: *God does not cremate living souls for any length of time.* Isaiah makes clear that unquenchable fire and the undying worm result in carcasses. Thus, unquenchable fire does not consume living flesh; otherwise, it would contradict the sanctuary typology. Ezekiel adds:

“ And say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein. And all flesh shall see that I the LORD have kindled it: it shall not be quenched. Then said I, Ah Lord GOD! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?” (Ezekiel 20:47-49)

What does “forest” symbolize in Scripture? Jotham’s parable shows that trees are representing people (see Judges 9:8-15). Prophet confirms:

“ 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)

No wonder Ezekiel says the fire is kindled in them. This points to an inward experience—the unquenchable fire and the worm that does not die—burning so long as sin remains. Proverbs explains the principle:

“ Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife.” (Proverbs 26:20,21)

As long as sinful character remains, the consuming fire does not go out. Likewise, the worm continues so long as it has food—sin to feed upon.

Ultimately, when a person is left to bear the full weight of their sins, their own deeds become the fire that consumes them.

“ Every word they have spoken against the world’s Redeemer will be reflected back upon them, and will one day burn into their guilty souls like molten lead.”¹²³

They not only experience the searing of their conscience, but the very memory of rebellion. The weight of unrepented sin will not merely

¹²³ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, April 12, 1883, par.3

accuse; it will crush. Their own choices, once cloaked in self-justification, will rise up as witnesses against them. And the justice they denied will be written across their hearts in sorrow and flame.

“ We should not try to lessen our guilt by excusing sin. We must accept God's estimate of sin, and that is heavy indeed. Calvary alone can reveal the terrible enormity of sin. If we had to bear our own guilt, it would crush us. But the sinless One has taken our place.”¹²⁴

How terrible sin truly is—how fearsome the weight of our evil deeds and careless words. Not because God lashes out in arbitrary fury, but because they turn inward, searing our own hearts and draining the breath of life until death remains. This is why God longs—not to punish, but to purge. By the creative power of His Word, spoken in love and carried by the Spirit, He seeks to consume sin within us. Only then can the ancient inheritance of condemnation be burned away, and the soul made new. ••

¹²⁴ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p.116.1

Chapter 22

The Flood of Tears and the Word Forsaken

ONE English hymn writer composed a melodious and spiritually enriching hymn about the blessings of water. Part of the lyrics is, “As water for the thirsty ... so is my Lord, my Living Lord ... to me.”¹²⁵ It is a powerful image that every person can relate to, for we have all experienced the refreshing effect of water when our body’s energy is drained by summer heat.

Think of the relief a cool shower provides when you burn with fever; smell the refreshing aroma after the rain, rising from the scorched and thirsty soil suffering from an extended drought; or the sweet scent of life as the ground receives moisture. The seed the farmer spread is watered and gladly expands into germination, breaking through the soil with the first shoot, and then the next—and thus the cycle of new life begins.

Think of the water nourishing the plant until it matures into a seed, providing food to the woman who sets the table for her husband and children (see Proverbs 31). Consider the birds of the air, who not only benefit from the farmer’s seeds but also enjoy the calming shelter of the leafy branches and fruit of the trees in the forest. Such and many more are the blessings we enjoy because water is following the circle of love—ever flowing, ever giving.

Yet the same water flooded entire villages in China during the Yangtze-Huai River Floods of 1931, sweeping millions of lives and resulting in devastating famine and disease. What happened with the waters of the

¹²⁵ Timothy Dudley-Smith, *Hymn As Water to the Thirsty*, 1975

Solai Dam in Nakuru, Kenya, that swept away a whole village overnight, as easily as one would sweep away the dust from the table?

The world has mourned the loss of many lives from the very things that were designed to be a life-giving blessing. Just recently, in 2025, I saw a young lady crying out on social media, calling for help as she watched her bedridden father surrounded by flood waters in Texas. It was agonizing even to watch, to say the least. The hearts of men failed them as they embraced their little children, helplessly watching as death swallowed them in destructive winds, tornadoes, floods, and the like. How do you explain that? Some have tried to justify it by labeling it “an Act of God” on their insurance claims—but is that really how God would act?

“ I believe that New Orleans had a level of sin that was offensive to God ... I believe that the judgment of God is a very real thing, and I believe that Hurricane Katrina was, in fact, **the judgment of God against the city of New Orleans.**”¹²⁶

Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, and many Christians interpreted it as an “act of God” meant to punish New Orleans for its moral failings, including support for LGBTQ+ rights. This view, however, is not unique. Following the 2011 tsunami in Japan, some similarly regarded the disaster as divine retribution—citing Japan’s secularism, materialism, and historical religious practices such as Shintoism as possible causes.

More recently, during the 2025 Golden Globe Awards, American comedian and host Nikki Glaser made a comment that quickly went viral following the devastating fires that swept through Pacific Palisades, Southern California. Reflecting on the way celebrities expressed gratitude in their acceptance speeches, she quipped that “God, Creator of the universe,” had received “zero mentions,” and added with biting sarcasm, “No surprise in this godless town [Hollywood].”

Less than 24 hours later, fires erupted—consuming billions of dollars’ worth of celebrity estates and leaving a trail of ash across Palisades. To some, the timing felt too precise to dismiss. Was this a mere coincidence, or a divine rebuke aimed at a culture that has grown comfortable mocking the sacred? Was God issuing a sobering reminder—that reverence still matters, and that silence toward the Creator is not without consequence?

¹²⁶ Pastor John Hagee on the USA National Public Radio, 2006

How do you understand natural calamities? As a Christian, do you see God the way the Greeks viewed their gods? When a person breaks God's laws, does He get so upset that He must cause a disaster in nature?

A similar line of reasoning is evident in Scripture when the Apostle Paul encountered a life-threatening storm at sea. The violent tempest led to a shipwreck, and the devil—intent on silencing Paul—inspired the soldiers to kill all the prisoners to prevent their escape, thereby deepening their own peril (see Acts 27:42). But the centurion, determined to spare Paul, intervened. He ordered those who could swim to do so, and the rest to cling to fragments of the shattered vessel or the forepart that remained.

Later, as they kindled a fire to warm themselves, Paul gathered a bundle of sticks—only to have a venomous snake latch onto his hand. The local inhabitants, linking the shipwreck with this sudden danger, concluded that Paul must have committed a grievous sin and that the god of vengeance would not allow him to live. Many Bible versions render this reasoning as:

“Justice has not allowed him to live.” (Acts 28:4)

Notice that “justice” in this case is portrayed not as an idea or abstract principle, but as an intelligent agent. So, who is this “justice”? Some translations make the identity explicit:

“When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, ‘This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the **goddess Justice** has not allowed him to live.’” (NIV)

Other versions go further, attributing the act to a goddess and naming her explicitly—Justice or Nemesis, representing divine retribution and righteous vengeance in ancient thought.

“And when the barbarians saw the beast hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘This man is certainly a murderer, whom, though saved out of the sea, **Nemesis** has not allowed to live.’” (The Darby Translation)

The devil, having failed to destroy Paul through the storm or by the hands of the soldiers, now stirred the minds of the locals—leading them to believe that their goddess, at the very least, demanded Paul's punishment. To them, it wasn't the devil at work, but a god.

“ This is not an isolated belief exclusive to the religion of the inhabitants of Melita. **We find that the devil does the same even today, using the name of the God of the Bible.** Let's keep in mind that the Greeks also held such beliefs. You may be familiar with the myth of King Agamemnon, who sacrificed his daughter after offending the goddess Artemis. And what had Artemis done? The goddess had caused unfavorable weather so that his ships could not sail.”¹²⁷

The idea of attributing natural disasters to the wrath of the gods is as old as humanity itself. And to appreciate just how murky the issue is, this belief even found its way into Christianity. Today, many still believe that God uses nature to punish those who have offended Him. That may explain why another Bible translation renders the same verse this way:

“ And when the people saw it [the snake] hanging on his hand, they said to one another, Without doubt this man has put someone to death, and though he has got safely away from the sea, **God will not let him go on living.**” (Acts 28:4 The Bible in Basic English)

How did the translators understand “God?” Did they consider God as one who destroys, or one who restores? In any case, who causes calamities in nature? Is it the devil or God? Or maybe both? To find the correct answer, we must understand a key truth: everything that was created was placed under the dominion of man (see Genesis 1:26). Therefore, whatever choices man makes affects all the inferior creation under his authority, to the extent that both the character and condition of man are reflected in the state of creation. Note this connection:

“ For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now ... even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” (Romans 8:22,23)

¹²⁷ Source: www.britannica.com/topic/Iphigenia-at-Aulis

All creation groans under the bondage of the great jailer—Satan. Yet it was not by its own will that creation was subjected to him, but through man's choice to rebel against God. As a result, man now suffers abuse and oppression under Satan's rule. And creation, placed under man's authority, mirrors that suffering. When man shifted his allegiance, all creation fell with him.

It is therefore right to say that to the extent that man has rebelled against God and placed himself outside the bounds of divine order, everything created for his blessing now reflects that rebellion in equal measure.

“ So long as Adam remained loyal to Heaven, all nature was in subjection to him. But when he rebelled against the divine law, the inferior creatures were in rebellion against his rule.”¹²⁸

This is a clear biblical concept. A sinful man—or man in his fallen state—is symbolized by brass [bronze in other Bible translations] (see Ezekiel 22:18–22). That same metal imagery is used to represent nature as a reflection of man's spiritual condition, e.g., the skies becoming heavy due to covenant-breaking:

“ And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass [bronze], and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust.” (Deuteronomy 28:23,24)

As a result of Israel's breach of God's covenant, they severed themselves from the blessings once declared in Deuteronomy 28. The consequence was drought and famine—conditions symbolized by the image of brass/bronze. In this, the weather itself became a mirror of man's rebellious condition, reflecting in nature the spiritual rupture between God and His people.

God does not actively impose these curses upon the earth. Rather, through their own choices, people sever themselves from His blessings—and their entire dominion suffers in turn. Even the ground becomes like them: hardened, unyielding, estranged from its intended fruitfulness (Leviticus 26:19). This principle is key to understanding the following verses:

¹²⁸ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.59.4

“ The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed ... Surely the joy of mankind is withered away.” “Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the pastures in the wilderness.” (Joel 1:10-12, 18-20)

The gloomy and unhappy state of man is mirrored in “ground dried up.”

“ How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished.” (Jeremiah 12:4 NIV)

“ The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and fades ... The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse consumes the earth.” (Isaiah 24:4-6 NIV)

This should be sufficient evidence to understand that God did not curse the earth in retaliation for man’s rebellion. The thorns, thistles, and barren ground were not imposed by Him—they were the natural result of man’s rebellion. God simply declared what He foresaw in the seed of rebellion sown into nature. He spoke of what He already knew would unfold (see Genesis 3:17,18).

Can you feel the ache in God’s heart as His children turn away—misled by the enemy’s lie that He is the one who hurls disaster upon nature, retaliating against those who have offended Him? And do you see, then, the profound meaning woven into Christ’s crown of thorns? He bore, quite literally, the emblem of a cursed creation—taking upon Himself the visible consequence of human rebellion, not as its instigator, but as its redeemer.

You may have heard farmers comforting themselves after drought ravages their crops or livestock. In the midst of loss and grief, they often murmur, “Well, it must be the will of God.” Some, burdened by the weight of their own failings, quietly surrender to the devil’s oppressive whisper—that God is punishing them. Yet in truth, it is the enemy’s hand at work. Across the ages, the great deceiver has cloaked his destructive schemes in divine disguise, falsely attributing his ruin to the heart of God.

We must come to see that God is not as the devil has portrayed Him—draped in garments of anger and cruelty. Rather, we are called to recognize Him as the healer and restorer, the One who mends what the enemy has torn. This, indeed, is the true meaning behind the verse:

“ If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and **seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways**; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and **will heal their land.**” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

The expression “God hid His face” is akin to saying that “God has forsaken them,” or rather, that the people have placed themselves beyond His protection. Yet when His people humble themselves and return to Him, the blessings they receive in their hearts through His abiding presence begin to extend outward—even to the land itself. The land becomes a mirror of the blessings they enjoy, and a reflection of their restored character.

“ It will be made a desolate waste, parched and desolate before me; the **whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares.**” (Jeremiah 12:11 NIV)

The Plagues in Egypt

We must remember: when disaster follows disaster, it is not God punishing us—it is humanity reaping the consequences of its own rebellion. Though God is the rightful ruler of all creation, nature has slipped from His governance, for man, by his own volition, surrendered to Satan’s rule and pushed God out of his life. In doing so, he transferred his dominion over the earth into another kingdom (see John 12:31). Nature—once designed to serve man under God’s authority—now serves the great enemy of both man and God. The result is chaos and disorder, a fearful reality, for God only reigns where He is welcomed and invited by the free will of man.

A divine drama unfolded before Pharaoh—performed by Moses and Aaron, directed by God—to reveal a vital truth about His plan of salvation. To Moses, God entrusted a shepherd’s rod, a symbol of divine power and

authority.¹²⁹ In Scripture, the scepter often represents rulership and dominion. This symbolism echoes through history: Maasai men, when attending significant gatherings or making public declarations, raise their shepherd's rods as a sign of authority. The gesture speaks to an ancient tradition still practiced in monarchies today—a custom the biblical writers themselves reflected (see Psalms 45:6,7; 110:2).

In this drama, Moses was instructed to give Aaron his rod—a symbolic act of delegated authority. As high priest, Aaron represented Christ, and Moses, acting in the role of God (see Exodus 7:1), portrayed the divine source of that authority. In the plan of salvation, God entrusted His power and authority to His Son, the incarnate Word (see Matthew 28:18).

Aaron was then instructed to cast down the rod (see Exodus 7:10), and it became a serpent—a symbol not only of evil, but of destruction. It's important to note that the rod in Aaron's hand was not a serpent; it became one only when separated from his grasp. This transformation speaks volumes. When Aaron reached out and seized the serpent by the tail, it reverted to a rod once more. The detail is rich with meaning: in Scripture, the tail symbolizes lies and deception (see Isaiah 9:15). Thus, the act of grasping the serpent by the tail suggests divine authority over falsehood—restoring order where chaos had taken root.

This reveals a profound truth: when humanity believed the lie, it became separated from God. The powers once entrusted to man—and to all creation—were severed from their divine source. Even today, our daily choices continue to drive that separation. When God's power is removed from its rightful place—when the control and authority over the dominion given to man are withdrawn from His hand—destruction inevitably follows.

As the drama unfolded, God used the rod to signal the source of impending destruction—where the serpent, the devil, was poised to unleash his evil work (see Psalms 78:49). During the Egyptian plagues, the rod consistently served as a pointer, marking the place where God was withdrawing His protection and allowing the Egyptians to fall under the power of their own gods (see Exodus 9:22,26).

¹²⁹ See Ellen G. White, *Christ Triumphant*, p.87.3

This pattern reveals a sobering truth: man's cruelty and atrocities increase in proportion to his separation from the presence and authority of God. As humanity advances deeper into the dominion of Satan, calamities and disasters rise in equal measure. The rod, once a symbol of divine authority, becomes a witness to the consequences of rejecting that authority—a silent testimony to the chaos that follows when God is pushed aside.

Our rebellion against God affects not only ourselves but the lower creation—and always to our own peril. In turning away from Him, creation no longer submits to our stewardship. Instead, it reflects our defiance. It rebels against us.

Have you ever tried to farm a piece of land left untouched for years—perhaps used only for grazing cattle? At first glance, it seems manageable: just grass. But once you begin to plough and plant, the weeds erupt with startling vigor. Where were they hiding? Why did they wait to make themselves known until you began cultivating soil?

I've often wondered at this. And now I see more clearly: even the weeds bear witness to a creation estranged from its Creator. They rise up, uninvited, as if to say, "We no longer serve you." In this, the land itself becomes a parable of our spiritual condition—resisting cultivation when severed from divine order.

Fiery Serpents

Remember the inhabitants of Melita, who concluded that the god of justice (this must have been a counterfeit justice!) was pursuing Paul? Through the venomous snake, Satan tried to achieve his mission after his failed attempt to destroy Paul with the storm at sea. This shows that lower creatures are also in rebellion and under the dominion Adam chose to hand over to Satan. So, the one using nature to cause harm can be no other than the devil.

One does not need to break God's law to experience the painful sting of the rebellious nature. Creation is already in rebellion; it is only God's restraining hand that protects us, as in the case of Paul. But Satan

does not give up easily. He reminds us that God is said to have sent fiery serpents to destroy the children of Israel when they murmured against Him. Their complaint included accusing God of bringing them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness (see Numbers 21:5).

As we saw earlier, God does not argue against the accusations of men but reflects their thoughts back to them. As the Israelites complained against God, venomous snakes, whose stings caused almost instant death, started to bite the people. Was it the act of God to exterminate the people in response to their murmuring? The Bible states:

“ And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.” (Numbers 21:6)

We've seen that when humanity rebels, it steps outside the shelter of God's protection. But what happens when that same humanity finds itself surrounded by a creation also in rebellion—no longer aligned, no longer tame? Did God create new serpents in that moment, or were they already present? The Hebrew word translated sent is H7971 – shalach, meaning: to cast away, forsake, give up, let depart. So who fits that description more fittingly—Israel or the serpents? It was Israel. God didn't summon the serpents; He simply withdrew. He gave them up. He let go. But why would He do that?

“ Because they had been shielded by divine power, they had not realized the countless dangers by which they were continually surrounded. In their ingratitude and unbelief, **they had anticipated death, and now the Lord permitted death to come upon them.** The poisonous serpents that infested the wilderness were called fiery serpents, on account of the terrible effects produced by their sting, it causing violent inflammation and speedy death. As the **protecting hand of God was removed from Israel**, great numbers of the people were attacked by these venomous creatures.”¹³⁰

God did not send the serpents as agents of divine punishment commissioned to strike the people. Rather, Israel's ingratitude—their rejection of God's constant care, the pillar of fire and the cloud—led to the loss of that saving protection. The serpents had always been there. But now, with

¹³⁰ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.429.1

the shelter withdrawn, they came to harm. Creation, once restrained by God's mercy, responded to rebellion with hostility.

The Bible was written under divine inspiration, yet its human authors were not passive instruments, mechanically transcribing dictated words. These holy men were moved by the Spirit (see 2 Timothy 3:16), but they wrote with their own voices—voices shaped by experience, culture, and style. They were guided, not overridden. Eternal truths were entrusted to human vessels. And so it is no surprise that man's "brass" often fails to reflect the full brilliance of divine light. One Bible commentator offers a compelling observation:

“ The Bible must be given in the **language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect.** Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes.”¹³¹

“ **The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression.** It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.”¹³²

“ It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. **Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions** but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. **But the words receive the impress of the individual mind.** The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus, the utterances of the man are the Word of God.”¹³³

“ **Understanding what the words of Jesus meant** to those who heard them, we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and may also gather for ourselves their deeper lessons.”¹³⁴

“ **This means we must compare scripture with scripture until we have one chain of uncontradictory truth that fits Christ's**

¹³¹ Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol.7, p.945.7

¹³² Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol.7, p.945.9

¹³³ Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol.7, p.945.10

¹³⁴ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p.1.2

character about God. When we appreciate that each language has its own figures, symbols, and literal meanings, then we must understand that the Bible also was written in its own language, called “scriptural language.”¹³⁵

There’s an important difference between a symbol and a figure. A symbol represents something beyond itself and often doesn’t exist in nature—like the lion with wings in Daniel 7, which symbolizes a kingdom. A figure, however, is based on real things—like calling God a “Rock” or Jesus a “Lamb.”

Symbols convey prophetic truths through imaginative imagery, while figures use familiar realities to express spiritual meaning. Knowing the difference helps us avoid misinterpreting or overspiritualizing Scripture.

“ Figurative language, or **figures of speech**, are literary devices used to create a stylistic effect by deviating from the literal meaning of words. These figures of speech, like metaphors...”¹³⁶

If you interpret the phrase “fall in love” word by word, you’ll miss the meaning entirely. No one imagines someone literally tumbling into affection. We instinctively recognize it as a figure of speech—nothing mysterious, mystical, or spiritualized. Just language doing what it does best: conveying depth through metaphor. Even so, there are figures of speech that we need to understand in the scriptural language. And let’s examine some of them briefly:

“ And the **evil spirit from the LORD** was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with his hand.” (1 Samuel 19:9)

How can it be that an evil spirit from the LORD tormented Saul so deeply that he needed David—who was gifted by God’s Spirit—to play the harp to soothe him? Does God send demons? Does He even possess them? How should we understand this troubling passage? A similar idea appears elsewhere:

“ And for this cause **God shall send them strong delusion**, that they should believe a lie.” (2 Thessalonians 2:11)

¹³⁵ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol.12, p.88.2

¹³⁶ Source: www.Indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/figurative

But isn't the devil the father of lies—the origin of deception (John 8:44)? Does he somehow stop being the father of lies in these moments? How should we understand this?

Another fascinating passage can be found in the Book of Ezekiel:

“ And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, **I the LORD have deceived that prophet**, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will **destroy him** from the midst of my people Israel.” (Ezekiel 14:9)

How should we understand such a statement? To gain a clearer picture, consider two parallel accounts of a single event:

“ 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)

“ And **Satan** stood up against Israel, and **provoked David to number Israel.**” (1 Chronicles 21:1)

Here we encounter the same event described from two distinct perspectives—one attributing the act to God, the other to Satan. How do we reconcile this? Are God and Satan somehow working together toward a shared destructive goal? That notion collapses under the weight of their fundamentally opposed governments. The confusion lies not in their intentions, but in our interpretations.

The key lies in recognizing a common figure of speech in Hebrew narrative. Scripture often attributes to God what He merely permits—a linguistic pattern known as the Hebrew permissive idiom. In such cases, while the actual causative agent (Satan, in this case) initiates the action, the text may still credit it to God's permission, especially when it occurs in response to human rebellion. God, in His respect for human freedom, does not always intervene to prevent the consequences of moral choices—particularly when individuals willfully distance themselves from His protective will.

“ **The Scriptures sometimes represent God as doing that which He does not prevent.**”¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol.2, p.531, comment on 1 Samuel 16:14

The Story of the Flood

Once we understand the Hebrew idiom that attributes to God what He merely permits, we're better equipped to reexamine other challenging passages—such as the account of the Flood. By applying the principle of human dominion and recognizing the Hebrew figures of speech regarding God's sovereignty, we can arrive at a radically different understanding of God's role in the destruction brought by the Flood.

Rather than viewing God as the direct cause of global devastation, we begin to see the Flood as the natural consequence of humanity's moral collapse—a world unraveling under the weight of its own rebellion. God's role, then, is not one of arbitrary wrath, but of sorrowful withdrawal, allowing creation to reflect the choices of its stewards. The ark becomes not just a vessel of survival, but a symbol of divine mercy amid destruction.

The Scripture gives us a glimpse of the pre-diluvian world:

“ 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. 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.** And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” (Genesis 6:4-6)

God is not a man, that He should repent in the human sense of the word. He does not experience regret as we do. The Scriptures declare:

“ **God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent:** hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19)

This being the case, we must find a meaning of the word repent that reflects God's nature—something deeper than human regret or change of heart. A powerful example of divine mercy and human rebellion is found in the story of Ephraim, where God says:

“ **How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee**

as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, **my repentings are kindled together.**" (Hosea 11:8)

Here, as Ephraim—whom God had lovingly nurtured and raised—pushes Him away, God undergoes what Scripture calls “repentings.” His heart is stirred within Him. The tenderness of His divine love recoils in sorrow and compassion for His wayward child. It grieves Him deeply as He contemplates, with aching reluctance, the possibility of leaving Ephraim to his idols.

The word *repentings* in Hosea 11:8 shares the same Hebrew root word as the one used in Genesis 6:6. That Hebrew word is:

H5162 – *nācham* – to sigh, that is, breathe strongly; by implication, to be sorry (in a favorable sense: to pity, console, or reflexively to rue; in an unfavorable sense: to avenge oneself).

This word conveys intense emotion—so profound it stirs deep sighs and heavy breathing. Just as “wrath” can be expressed in rapid breathing, so too can deep sorrow or compassion. In its favorable sense, the word reflects sorrow born of love—a grief that wells up when someone brings suffering upon themselves. It’s the sigh of a parent watching a rebellious child walk away from their care and protection, aching with pity yet still loving. In its unfavorable sense, the same word can describe breath drawn from darker emotions—self-pity, wounded pride, or a thirst for vengeance.

And so we are left with a mirror: How do we see our God? Is He like a man, selfish and offended, breathing heavily with indignation, in self-pity? Or is He the God whose heart turns within Him, sighing with sorrow and longing for His children to return to Him?

In Genesis, God’s heart is “overturned” because He had created a man. When we connect this to Hosea 11:8, a profound truth emerges: God’s sorrow was not born of regret but of compassion, because He had created him.

His grief was not rooted in disappointment—it was the ache of love and pity. He saw the ruin that lay ahead, the path of destruction His creation was choosing, and His heart yearned for them to turn back before it was too late.

Humanity had reached a tragic maturity—not in righteousness, but in rebellion. Their wisdom, innovation, and deeds had become sealed in evil. Genesis 6:4 refers to them as giants, but the Hebrew term Nephilim paints a darker picture: bullies, tyrants, violent oppressors. These were not merely physically imposing figures—they embodied the corruption and cruelty that grieved the heart of God.

Yet even in the face of such depravity, God did not respond with immediate destruction. He strove with man, not out of frustration, but out of love. However, because God's character is rooted in freedom, He would not strive with man indefinitely. The Apostle Paul reminds us:

“ Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”
(2 Corinthians 3:17)

That liberty is sacred. God's Spirit would not override the stubborn will of man, for to do so would violate the very freedom He had bestowed.

This reveals something profound: God's judgment is not the withdrawal of His love—it is the consequence of love rejected. He yearns, He warns, He waits. But He will not coerce. The tragedy of Genesis is not just the Flood—it is humanity's refusal to be free in the way God intended: free to choose righteousness, free to walk with Him.

Looking ahead, God foresaw a time when, if humanity did not repent, they would ultimately place themselves beyond the reach of His protection. He also perceived their moral collapse mirrored in creation itself—chaos, decay, and disorder spreading in response to human violence. This is the context behind His words:

“ My Spirit shall not always strive with man ... yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” (Genesis 6:3)

God was not arbitrarily shortening human lifespans. Rather, He was declaring a probationary period—a window of mercy during which humanity could turn back, but if rebellion continued and reached its full measure, destruction would become inevitable.

“ And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth ... for **it repenteth me** that I have made them.” (Genesis 6:7)

This statement should be understood the same way as when God says:

“ I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth ...”
 (Genesis 6:17)

This language is consistent with other Hebrew expressions, such as:

“ If the prophet be deceived ... I the LORD have deceived that prophet.” (Ezekiel 14:9)

Like other instances where Scripture says God “sent” calamity or deception, it can be understood as a Hebrew figure of speech: God *permits* but *does not commission* that which He does not specifically prevent. As we quoted C.S. Lewis before, “What God allows, He is sometimes said to do.”

God does not prevent moral evil or rebellion when it arises from free agents who have chosen to separate themselves from His protection. Scripture may depict the outcome as “God moving,” but the ultimate causative agent is often Satan or human rebellion.

God’s *permissive will*—His allowing of consequences—is distinct from His *active will*, which upholds righteousness and life.

Thus, when it is said in Genesis that God “sent a flood,” it reflects the same Hebrew nuance found in Ezekiel 14:9. God *permitted* nature to unravel into chaos under the conditions humanity had shaped and cultivated—allowing devastation to unfold, *without Him being the direct author of destruction*.

As established earlier, man’s rebellion sows its own consequences into nature. The dominion entrusted to him was fractured the moment he separated from God. The law of life that once governed creation was disrupted. What followed was chaos, discord, and self-destruction—not always through direct satanic action, but through the internal unraveling of a world severed from its Source of order. This view fits perfectly with what we read next:

“ The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. 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 them with the earth.” (Genesis 6:11-13)

This is a deeply revealing passage. Notice that the earth itself was corrupt—not just its human inhabitants. The Hebrew word for corrupt is:

H7843 – *shachath*, and it means to decay, to ruin, to destroy.

Nature had become polluted, distorted, and unstable.

Moses is describing not merely human wickedness but the condition of creation itself—“corrupt and filled with violence.” However, this corruption came through the people. Humanity’s relentless rebellion had set off a chain reaction, sowing the seeds of destruction in the very fabric of nature. The earth was on the brink of collapse—not because God arbitrarily sent destruction, but because creation, wounded and destabilized by man’s defiance, could no longer hold together.

It was the hand of God behind nature that restrained the earth’s descent into destruction and decay—delaying humanity’s ruin and granting a season of grace in which to repent. In that window of mercy, Noah was entrusted with a dual mission: to proclaim a warning of the devastation to come, and to construct an ark—a refuge God would offer to all who chose to return and receive His protection.

This was no divine extortion scheme played out through Noah. The Flood was not an arbitrary punishment hurled down from heaven, but the chaotic consequence of a world that persistently rejected its Creator. Scripture captures the mindset of that generation with piercing clarity:

“**Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose **foundation was overflown with a flood**: Which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them?” (Job 22:15-17)**

I’ve seen and heard of situations where, in the heat of emotional turmoil, some ladies have resorted to dramatic outbursts: thumping their chests and shouting at their husbands with phrases like, “Go on, hit me if you’re a man! What can you do? Hit me!”

Now, what is a gentleman to do in such a moment? Should he rise in anger and deliver a slap to “reset her to factory settings,” just to prove his masculinity? Or should he quietly walk away, leaving her to ride out the storm of her own emotions? (No offense, my sisters—I share this only to illustrate a deeper point.)

The ancient people rebelled and removed themselves from beneath God’s protective shield—they pushed Him away. That was why His heart was stirred with pity for them. It wasn’t that God sent the Flood

in response to their rejection. No—He had no need to do that. Isaiah reveals how God truly responded. For clarity, let us read:

“ For a small moment have I **forsaken** thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. 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. 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)

Notice how Isaiah links God’s “forsaking,” His “wrath,” and “hiding of His face” as expressions of the same divine act. And this, Isaiah says, is precisely what God did in the days of Noah. That should settle the matter: God did forsake them—not in cruelty, but in respect for their free choice to live without Him. He withdrew, allowing them to experience the result of their wishes.

Yet even the devil trembled during the Flood—a detail that reveals something profound: ***Satan was not the one who unleashed the waters!*** The chaos was neither orchestrated by God nor by Satan; it was the natural unraveling of a world that had cast off its Creator.

You may wish to explore this theme further—perhaps drawing parallels to Romans 8 and the groaning of creation, or contrasting divine restraint with human self-destruction.

The antediluvians believed that nature operated under fixed laws and thus dismissed the Flood as merely a natural occurrence. In a way, they weren’t entirely wrong—God does not annul His laws. But what they failed to grasp was that those laws are only sustained by God Himself. Without His active presence, nature does not hold together on its own. It is only when God fully withdraws that the chaos and disorder introduced by human rebellion are allowed to run their full course. The Flood wasn’t a suspension of natural law—it was the unraveling of creation in the absence of its Sustainer.

After 120 years had passed, God instructed Noah and his family to enter the ark. Not a single other person was willing to step into God’s vessel of mercy. Despite more than a century of preaching, Noah’s message was dismissed—mocked as madness and rejected as unscientific.

Yet God, unwilling to abandon them without one final appeal, performed a miracle to stir any lingering sense of reason. Animals came two by two, and the birds of the air followed likewise—drawn not by instinct, but by divine summons. Still, even this extraordinary sign failed to move their hearts. The door of mercy stood open, but they chose to remain outside.

Seven Days of Momentous Changes Preceding the Flood

Noah and his family finally settled inside the ark—and then, silence. For seven days, life outside continued as if nothing were about to change. The world moved on, indifferent. Those beyond the ark must have scoffed at Noah's warnings, recalling them with mockery and dismissing them as foolishness. They were convinced that all things continued as they always had, unchanged since the beginning.

Yet, as it will be with the promise of Christ's return, they were unaware of the great shifts already unfolding in that final week—the last days of the old world.

“ Moreover the **light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun**, and the **light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days**, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.” (Isaiah 30:26)

This verse envisions the restored state of creation, when God will return all things to their original perfection. If the moon will shine like the sun, and the sun with the brilliance of seven days, then such radiance must once have belonged to the pre-Flood world. According to Apostle Peter, the ancient world came to its end through the waters of the Flood.

“ 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 3:7)

In the glorious new earth, the sun will be restored to its *full strength*—shining with the light of seven days. Is it not striking, then, that *seven days passed* after Noah entered the ark before the rain began to fall? The parallel suggests a profound connection. During that final week, something cosmic was unfolding: *the light of the two great luminaries—the sun and the moon—was fading.*

Such a weakening could only occur if the divine energy that sustains them was being withdrawn. Their dimming was not merely atmospheric. It reflected the departure of the sustaining presence of God. Creation itself seemed to mourn, as the old world prepared to pass away.

“**Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself:** for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.” (Isaiah 60:20)

The “going down” speaks of a loss—not merely of light, but of strength and brilliance. It marks a regression, a cosmic dimming that mirrored the unseen changes unfolding in the final days of the antediluvian age. The people, convinced that all things continued as they always had, remained blind to the shift. They did not perceive that the very forces sustaining creation—the sun and moon themselves—were held together by the word of God, the same word they rejected through Noah’s message.

By rejecting that word, they pushed back the divine power that upheld all creation. And since the sun had become an object of their worship, their hearts clung to the thing created while forsaking the Creator. The consequence was devastating. The brilliance faded, the heavens mourned, and the earth itself bears the scars of that rupture—a rugged, broken landscape that still whispers of a world once radiant, now marred. One author observed:

“**Through the light of the sun all the forces of the earth are kept in operation.** It is difficult to form any conception of the mighty power manifested in the operations of nature taking place silently around us.”¹³⁸

Do you see, then, how even a slight decline in the sun’s energy could spell disaster for life on earth? This cooling wasn’t merely environmental—it had cosmic implications. As the sun’s strength waned, the watery canopy—the “firmament” placed above the earth on the second day of creation (see Genesis 1:6,7)—began to condense.

Before the Flood, rainfall was unknown. The earth had not yet developed the dust particles, temperature fluctuations, or atmospheric instability necessary to produce rain. That’s why Noah’s warning of water

¹³⁸ Ellen G. White, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, February 19, 1897, par.3

falling from above was dismissed as absurd. To the scholars of his day, it was madness—unprecedented and unscientific.

With the dimming of the sun and moon, the resulting drop in temperature allowed water vapor to condense and gather into clouds. It must have been a startling sight—the first dark masses forming in a sky that had never known storms. In a world untouched by pollution or atmospheric turmoil, such a vision could only signal a dramatic and ominous shift in the climate.

What followed was the descent of the waters that had been suspended above the earth since the dawn of creation—what Scripture calls “the opening of the windows of heaven” (Genesis 7:11). This was no ordinary rainfall. It was the release of the primeval waters, long held back by the firmament, now fully unleashed.

Yet even as the storm approached, it is vital to remember that God had long desired to save them—but they would not let Him. He yearned to be their refuge, to shield all who were willing to trust Him. Entering the ark was not merely a physical act—it was a declaration of faith, a visible surrender to the unseen word of God.

But faith cannot flourish where trust is absent. You cannot rely on the word of someone whose character you do not know or believe. The people of the ancient world rejected God’s warning not because it lacked clarity, but because they had embraced the enemy’s lies about Him.

Their rejection grieved God deeply. His heart was crushed with sorrow for those who would not receive His mercy. In a profound sense, the Flood can be seen as symbolic of God’s tears—tears shed for His children who were lost, though a way of escape had been lovingly provided. He had offered them a vessel of rescue, a place of refuge, but they chose instead to believe the deceiver’s voice over the Creator’s.

The waters that fell were expressions of divine grief. The “windows of heaven” opened not just to release rain, but to unveil the anguish of a God whose love had been spurned. What more could He have done?

It is the same aching question God has asked every generation since—and the same tender appeal He whispers to you through the pages of this book. What more could He do to rescue humanity from the deception of the great enemy? What greater evidence could He offer of

His unchanging, compassionate heart—forever yearning “to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” in faith (Hebrews 7:25)? He has poured out His love to humankind in every conceivable form. And yet, many still turn away—not because God has failed to speak, but because they have believed the lie that He is not good.

Like the appeal in Deuteronomy 30:19,20, God may well “call heaven and earth” to bear witness between Himself and us. We hope that, through the chapters of this book, your heart has been reconciled to the image of the loving God—so often misrepresented, so often misunderstood.

And now, as the voice of this book begins to fall into silence, may its final echoes linger in your soul. The pages no longer turn, but their cry remains—gentle, pleading, alive. Like the twilight hush after a long day’s call, this message does not end—it waits. Waits for an answer from the heart it sought all along.

This was never just Noah’s flood. It is every closed door, every missed call of mercy. Yet even as the door shuts in this story, the door of grace still stands open in yours.

The ink may dry. The book’s voice may fall silent. But the Voice behind it—still knocks. Can you hear it?

“ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... 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)

May each of us hear the voice of our Beloved knocking at the door of our hearts—and may we never again confuse His voice with the thousand deceptive echoes of the enemy, who for so long has cloaked our God in garments of dark shadow and distortion. ••••

Amen

