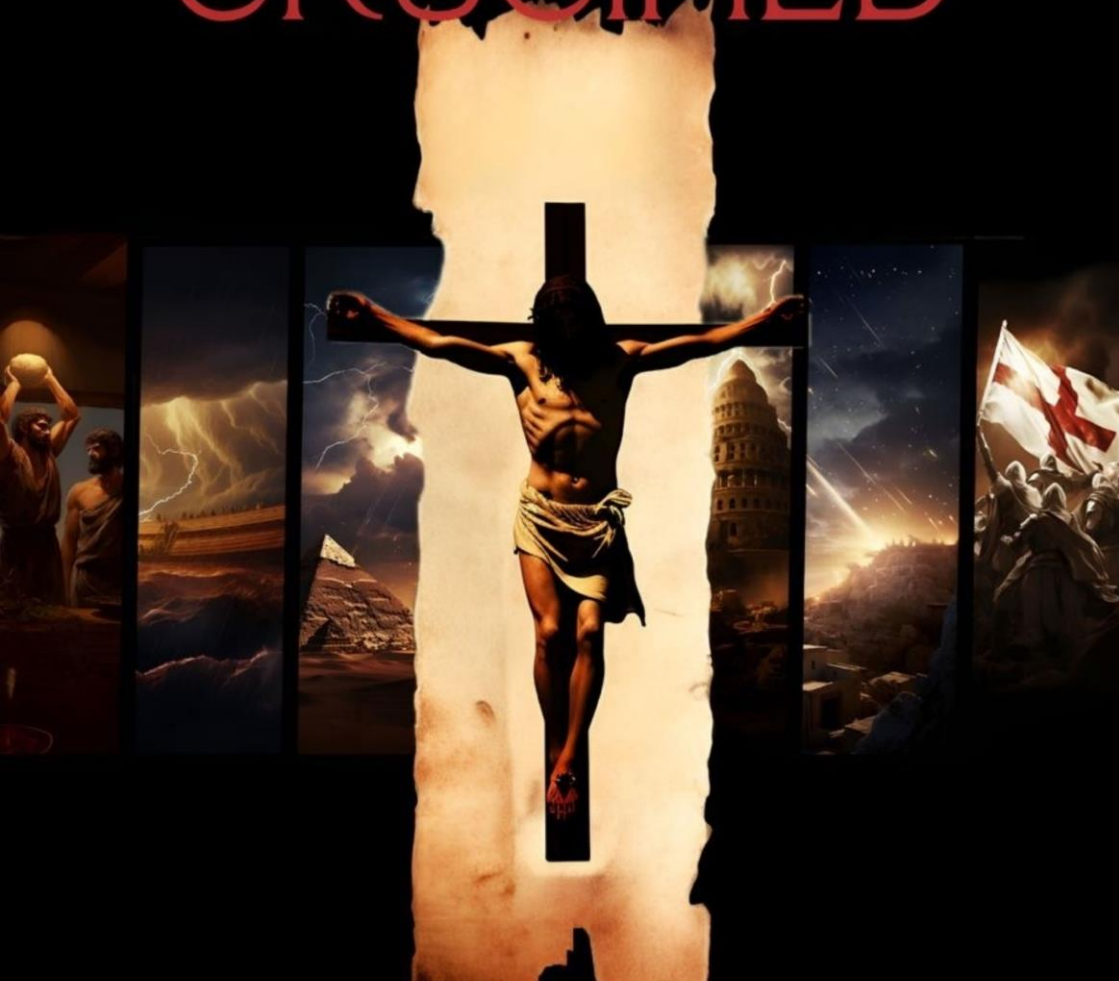


JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED



HOW EVENTS THROUGHOUT
HISTORY REVEAL **THE EVER-
PRESENT CROSS**

BY KEVIN J. MULLINS

Jesus Christ And Him Crucified

Kevin J. Mullins
February 2024

Edited by Danutasn Brown
Front and back cover illustrations by Sean Sutton



*Discovering the light of the character of God which shines
out of darkness in the face of Jesus Christ
(2 Corinthians 4:6)*

Although I use multiple commentaries from various authors, I do not necessarily endorse all their individual teachings.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are from
the *New King James Version*.

CONTENTS

GOD IS LOVE	1
JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED.....	4
“I Am the Alpha and the Omega”	6
IN ALL THEIR AFFLICTION HE WAS AFFLICTED	11
SATAN, A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING.....	14
ENMITY BETWEEN THE SERPENT AND THE SEED	22
THE LAMB SLAIN	28
CAIN AND ABEL	32
The Earth Reflects the Sufferings of Christ.....	35
THE FLOOD.....	38
“I Will Destroy.”	44
“In My Anger.”	47
THE TOWER OF BABEL.....	50
NIMROD’S LEGACY	57
SODOM AND EGYPT	60
Part One: The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah	60
• The Fire of God?	62
• “As in the Days of Lot”	65
• “We Will Destroy This Place”	69
Part Two: The Plagues of Egypt	70
• God Does Not Work Through Force.....	74
• The Destroyer	77
• Christ, Our Passover Lamb	85
COMPLAINTS IN THE WILDERNESS	87
“Why Have You brought Us Up Out of Egypt to Kill Us and Our Children?”	88
“Who Will Give Us Meat to Eat?”	89
“Why Do You Exalt Yourself Above the Assembly of the Lord?”	92
“Why Have You Brought Us Up Out of Egypt to Die in the Wilderness?	93
• The Bronze Serpent.....	95
“Hear Now, You Rebels!”	99
THE TWO COVENANTS	102
The Law as a Mirror.....	111
“Let Every Man Kill His Brother, Every Man His Companion, and Every Man His Neighbor”	115
“Send Men to Spy Out the Land of Canaan”	117
“All the Congregation Shall Stone Him With Stones”	118
• “He Who is Without Sin, Throw the First Stone”	120
• “Surely Be Put To Death.”	123
“You Shall Conquer Them and Utterly Destroy Them”	128

Jesus Also Used the Mirror Method.....	138
How Do You Read?	141
HAVE WE LEARNED ANYTHING?	144
THE FALLING AWAY.....	148
A Time of Persecution.....	152
Another Flight into the Wilderness	162
A Misconception of God’s Law.....	164
Changing the Times and Laws.....	167
Penal Affliction in Place of Cause and Effect.....	171
Baal Worship in the Church	177
Who Do You Say that I Am?.....	179
THE RISE OF ANTICHRISTS.....	182
Denying Jesus Came in the Flesh.....	183
Denying the Father and the Son	186
A Different Jesus, Spirit, and Gospel.....	192
THE RISE OF ATHEISM.....	194
“Crush the Wretch!”	197
• A Deadly Wound	198
• The Deadly Wound Healed.....	201
A Fire-Breathing Lamb.....	205
• “Remember What Amalek Has Done to You”	213
THE RISE OF THE REMNANT	217
The Cleansing of the Sanctuary	222
The 144,000	227
A Greater Exodus	230
THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES	234
THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS	243
Consumed By the Breath of His Mouth.....	243
Destroyed By the Brightness of His Coming.....	246
THE LAKE OF FIRE AND THE SECOND DEATH.....	250
More Fire From God	250
Tormented	253
Forever and Ever.....	255
God’s “Strange Act”	262
Man Crucified in Christ = Sins Consumed by Fire	264
Christ Crucified in Man = Man Consumed by Fire	270
The End of the Lost (Those Without Christ).....	273
THE NEW EARTH.....	282
THIS GOSPEL	285
By His Stripes We Are Healed.....	288
“I Am the Beginning and the End”	291

GOD IS LOVE

In 1 John chapter 4, we read these words which ring throughout the vast creation:

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for **God is love.**” (1 John 4:7-8)

Please take note that John does *not* say, “God is loving” (even though He is). John is not discussing God’s *behavior* here, but instead His *nature*. God’s nature is love, and since His nature is love, His behavior is loving. God’s nature of being love is not dependent on His behavior, but His behavior is most definitively dependent upon His nature.

The Greek word John uses for “love” here is ἀγάπη (*agapḗ*). This love is an others-centered love, which finds value in others at the cost of oneself. In his first letter to the Corinthian believers, Paul defines what *agapḗ* is:

“Love [*agapḗ*] is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, *New International Version*)

Because His nature is *agapḗ*, these are all the character traits of God. Therefore, we can easily replace each occurrence of the word “love” and “it” in this passage with “God.”

In the very next sentence after John says "God is love", he gives us the proof we need in order to believe that God's nature is purely patient, kind, and not self-seeking etc.:

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that **God has sent His only begotten Son into the world**, that we might live through Him."
(1 John 4:9)

"God is love" is proven by the fact that God "sent His only begotten Son into the world." In his gospel account, John quotes Jesus as saying:

"For **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."
(John 3:16)

Again, we see that God's nature of love is demonstrated by giving to the world His only begotten Son, even when they have fallen into sin. Paul says it this way:

"But **God demonstrates His own love toward us**, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

So, Christ dying for us "while we were still sinners" demonstrates God's selfless love and therefore it is clear that Christ did not die in order to change God's mind to grant us forgiveness as is commonly taught. Instead, Christ demonstrated that God's love is unconditional and that He *freely* forgives. In other words, the forgiveness came even before Jesus was sent; God indeed "keeps no record of wrongs" because "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting" (Psalm 103:17).

"The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: 'Yes, **I have loved you with an everlasting love**; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.'" (Jeremiah 31:3)

God did not, nor could not, wait until we repented, asked for forgiveness, and turned our lives around before forgiving us. Scriptures says our minds

are so full of a deadly disease called sin that we have become “hateful [or, hostile] towards God” (Romans 8:7). In this delusional condition, it is impossible for us to understand the love of God; therefore, God must first demonstrate His true nature of love, for it is “the goodness of God that leads you [us] to repentance” (Romans 2:4). This repentance is the work of Jesus in changing *us* who “were alienated and enemies in your [our] minds” towards God (1 Corinthians 1:21)— “And I [Jesus], if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself” (John 12:32); “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

John also echoed this truth:

“In this is love, **not that we loved God, but that He loved us** and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

Thus, after giving us the Good News that “God is love”, John then foretells of the change which takes place in the believer of this Good News. He says, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (Verse 11); for “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us” (Verse 12). This perfection comes about because God, through His Son, “has given us of His Spirit” (Verse 13). Therefore, not only will we love one another, but with God’s Holy (selfless) Spirit (Presence, Attitude, Life) abiding in us, our hostility and distrust towards God melts away and “We love Him because He first loved us” (Verse 19).

JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED

Believing that God giving us His Son demonstrated His self-sacrificing love, Paul wrote this to the Corinthian believers:

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. **For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)

At first glance, we can assume that Paul is only speaking about the physical crucifixion of Christ in 31AD and all that entails. However, is this the only Christian doctrine Paul knew and preached about to the Corinthians? Did he not teach concerning ...

- Living healthy because our bodies are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).
- How the Christian should conduct themselves during the Festivals (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).
- That God is the source of all life who created everything through His only begotten Son (1 Corinthians 8:6).
- The family unit (1 Corinthians 11).
- Spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12).
- The true definition of love (1 Corinthians 13).
- By beholding Christ, we become changed into the same image (2 Corinthians 3).
- Being a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9).
- Christians do not fight with the physical weapons of this world (2 Corinthians 10).

Of course, this list could go on and on, but I am sure you get the point. Paul knew and taught a lot of doctrine, so how is it he could say he determined not to know anything except Jesus Christ and Him crucified? Could it be that Paul was teaching that the true understanding of the cross of Christ explains all other doctrines in relation to God's everlasting love?

While on earth, Jesus said this to the religious leaders of the day:

"You pore over the Scriptures because you presume that by them you possess eternal life. **These are the very words that testify about Me**, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life." (John 5:39-40, *Berean Standard Bible*)

When Jesus says, "the Scriptures", He is referring to what is commonly called today "the Old Testament." So, not only does the New Testament testify of Jesus, but He also says the words of the Old Testament testify about Him as well. In fact, on the day of His resurrection, Jesus appeared to two of His disciples who did not recognize Him at first. Responding to their misguided grief and unbelief, we read:

"Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' **And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.**" (Luke 24:25-27)

In order to teach them about His sufferings, He began "at Moses and all the Prophets", explaining to them "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Beginning at Moses means from the very first book of the Scriptures— Genesis, which was written by Moses. Moses had written the first five books of the Bible, called "the Torah" (instructions) by the Jews, but most commonly known as "the Law" to Christians today. Therefore, Jesus taught about His sufferings from the Torah and the prophetic writings (such as Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, etc.).

In verses 44 and 45 of Luke 24, Christ continues His lesson:

“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms** concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.”

Here we see that, not only does Scripture testify of Christ in the Law and the Prophets, but in the Psalms as well, which would include the Proverbs, or as the Jews call it, “the Writings.” Thus the entire “Old Testament”, called “the *TaNaK*”, which is a Hebraic acronym meaning, *Torah* (Law/Instructions), and *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings) testify of Jesus.

“I Am the Alpha and the Omega”

To further teach this truth, Jesus tells John, “I am the Alpha and the Omega...” (Revelation 1:8^a). Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. However, considering that Jesus’ native language was Hebrew (and secondly Aramaic), the Hebrew equivalent would be “Aleph and Tav.” In the *Aramaic Bible in Plain English*, it reads like this, “I am The Alap and The Tau.”

Interestingly, the Aleph and Tav appear together nearly 7,000 times throughout the Hebrew Scriptures forming a little word pronounced as “*et*” (אֶת). Due to its unclarity of meaning, the word is usually not translated. However, Jesus seems to be claiming that this אֶת refers to Himself! Since Jesus expounded to His disciples all the things concerning Himself beginning at Moses, it is not surprising that the first place in Scripture where the Aleph-Tav appears is in Genesis 1:1:

“In the beginning, God אֶת created the heavens אֶת the earth.”

As you can see, there is an additional Hebrew letter on the second occurrence (which is most often translated as “and”) but we will discuss this

shortly. First, notice that the אל appears between the words “God” and “created.” In Genesis 1:26, we see that this Creator says, “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image.” To whom is the Creator speaking? The author of the book of Hebrews tells us that God has “in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, *through whom also He made the worlds*” (Hebrews 1:2). In addition, Paul tells us, “For us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord *Jesus Christ, through whom are all things*, and through whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6). Even though God (the Father) is the source of creation, He created all things through (or, by) His Son Jesus.

Therefore, the Being whom God is speaking to in Genesis 1:26 is non-other than His only begotten Son— “For *by Him* [the Son] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created *through Him* and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16-17).

Concerning creation we read, “By **the word** of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Psalm 33:6). John tells us that Jesus is that “Word” which created all things:

“**In the beginning was the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. **All things were made through Him**, and without Him nothing was made that was made ... **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us**, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1-3, 14)

Therefore, since Jesus refers to Himself as the Aleph-Tav, we can read that first sentence in Genesis as, “In the beginning, God (through His Son) created the heavens and the earth.”

In addition, a few ancient Aramaic translations (called *Targums*) use the word *memra* in several places. *Memra* means, “word, decree, or speech.” After the Babylonian captivity, the Jewish priests had to read the Torah in

both Hebrew and Aramaic since most of the people now spoke Aramaic. Here's how one Aramaic Targum translates Genesis 1:1:

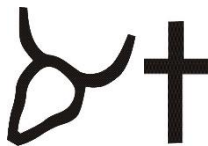
"From the beginning with wisdom **the Word** of the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth." (*Targum Neofiti*)

This is most likely an additional reason why John chose the words He did when referring to Jesus as "the Word." Jesus is that little word— **תא**

The third occurrence of the Aleph-Tav is when God says, "'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw **תא** the light, that it was good" (Genesis 1:3-4). Referring to "the Word" (Jesus) who "became flesh", John reveals that "The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought *light* to everyone. The *light* shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it" (John 1:4-5, *New Living Translation*). Moreover, Jesus Himself said, "*I am the light of the world*. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have *the light of life*" (John 8:12). In the *Aramaic Targum Neofiti* it reads:

"And **the Word** of the LORD said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light by His **Word**."

Now, before we move on to that second תא which appears back in Genesis 1:1, I should mention that, in its original form, Hebrew was written in pictographs. The pictograph for תא is shown below:



Aleph (א) Tav (ת)

The Aleph is the shape of an ox head, and its meaning is power, authority, leader, and strength. You may remember the story of the Israelites worshipping a golden calf at the base of Mt Sinai. This is because many

cultures use this symbol to depict their powerful gods, and the Israelites, who had become enslaved to the Egyptians' worship of the Apus Bull-god, sadly desired to worship the one true God by using this symbol while sporting pagan revelry.

To Christians, the second pictograph of the Tav should peak our interests, as it is clearly a cross. This crossbeam which oxen bare is called a *yoke* and represents "the yoke of my [our] transgressions" which Jesus bore (Lamentations 1:14).

Now to that addition Hebrew letter in Genesis 1:1. It is a *vav* (י) and appears with the Aleph-Tav between the words "the heavens" and "the earth." The Hebrew pictograph of this letter is a peg or nail. Since the Aleph-Tav represents Jesus, then the nail fastens Jesus to the Tav (cross) as our Burden-Bearer, to reconnect (reconcile) heaven and earth back into harmony (2 Corinthians 5:19). In a prophecy written by Isaiah concerning God's anointed Servant (Jesus), God says:

"The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open. **I will fasten him as a peg [nail] in a secure place**, and he will become a glorious throne to his father's house." (Isaiah 22:22-23)

In another well-known prophecy written by Isaiah concerning Jesus, we again see the Aleph-Tav appear:

"... He [Jesus] was numbered with **תנ** transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isaiah 53:12)

Here we see the word תנ appearing between an anointed Intercessor (Jesus) and the transgressor, revealing Jesus' connection with fallen humanity who lights the way back to the Father who is longing for His wayward children to come home.

“Although a single animal can be yoked, most yokes are designed for more than one animal. However, one animal is always the leader and, therefore, a more experienced ox. Christ, the leader, has chosen to yoke Himself with us in our humanity and invites us to come under His leadership. He leads by His example of submission to the yoke of His Father.

‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.’— Matthew 11:28-30.” (Tamarajo, *The Aleph and Tav in the Hebrew Scriptures*, owlcation.com, Nov. 3, 2023)

To the Hebrew mind, the pictograph of a cross represents a sign or covenant. Scripture tells us that before the world was, the Father and His Son had entered into a “council of peace” together to save humanity if the human race were overcome by Satan’s sophistry (Zechariah 6:13). This council of peace (or everlasting covenant of mercy if you will) between the Father and the Son involved Jesus being our substitute and surety who would stand between the living and the dead.

“... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. **He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world**, but was manifest in these last times for you.” (1 Peter 1:18-20)

Most people view the cross Christ bore as a one-day event that happened in the first century about 2,000 years ago. But we have seen that Moses, under inspiration, inserted the Aleph-Tav in the very beginning of human existence. After all, as Peter said above, we were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”; and John describes Jesus as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth” (Revelation 13:8). With that in mind, is the Aleph-Tav appearing at the beginning of Scripture a mere prophecy looking forward from creation to the cross in the first century AD, or is Moses trying to redirect our thoughts to the actual beginning of Christ’s afflictions?

IN ALL THEIR AFFLICTION HE WAS AFFLICTED

In another portion of the book of Isaiah, we again see this principle of Jesus baring (carrying) us:

“In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and **He bore them and carried them all the days of old.”** (Isaiah 63:9)

Throughout “all the days of old” Jesus was afflicted every time His people were afflicted by their enemies. He feels our pain. Not a sigh is breathed, not a pain felt, not a grief pierces the soul, but the throb vibrates to the Father’s heart. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice (Matthew 10:29).

How sad it is then when His people, whom Jesus is carrying, rebel and grieve His Holy Spirit. In fact, Isaiah mentions this in verse 10, along with the inherent consequence of such an act:

“But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them.” (Isaiah 63:10)

Is Christ being a vindictive tyrant here? No. When Jesus lived upon the earth “He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered” (1 Peter 2:23; *New Living Translation*). And since we know that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), we can be confident that He never retaliated or threatened revenge back then as well.

What's going on here is that sin infects the mind causing us to distort the character of God. We begin to see and even experience God differently. Through our confusion, Isaiah says that sin brings a separation from God by hiding (veiling) His merciful face to the point that we believe God is against us and begins to shun us (Isaiah 59:2).

When man spiritually "nails" the protective hands of Christ down by grieving His Holy Spirit, we inherently reap the deadly consequences of a life without Christ, only to *assume* it is Christ afflicting us with vengeful wrath. We then *perceive* Him as an enemy who is against us— "We are ruined by our own stupidity, though we blame the LORD" (Proverbs 19:3, *Contemporary English Version*).

Remember, Paul tells us that our self-centered minds are "hateful towards God" (Romans 8:7^a) and that *we are the enemies* who need to be reconciled to God (Romans 5:10), not the other way around.

"What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? **If God is for us, who can ever be against us?** ... I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love ... No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, **nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"
(Romans 8:31, 38-39, *New Living Translation*)

Paul says, because of our self-centered minds being hateful towards God, "it [our mind] is not subject [submissive] to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7^b). Instead, our minds are subject (submissive) to sin, which is "the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Therefore, every act of sin is a demonstration of our natural hatred towards God, revealing our resistance of allowing Him to be our Lord— our only Source of life. In other words, choosing to sin is our desire to want God dead and out of the way!

Could this be the key to unlocking all the dreadful events that have played out throughout history? Was sin found in Satan because he had

murderous thoughts against Christ from the beginning? Was the condemning of Jesus to death the falling point of Adam and Eve? And what about tragic events such as the Flood, the fiery fate of Sodom and Gomorrah and the plagues of Egypt? Have we misinterpreted these events, assuming that Christ became their enemy, turned His back on them, and therefore lashed out in vengeful anger and retaliation against them? Is it possible to go back, read these stories again, and, instead of seeing what we presume to be "divine justice", we see "Christ and Him crucified"?

SATAN, A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. **He was a murderer from the beginning**, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." (John 8:44)

Here Jesus is speaking to the people who desired to kill Him. Jesus says this hatred of Him comes directly from the devil, stating that he was a murderer from the beginning. In 1 John 3:15 it says, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer." In addition, Jesus tells us that murder begins in the heart (Matthew 5:21-22).

Another name for the devil is Satan (Revelation 12:9), meaning "adversary" or "enemy." Satan has had hatred (murder) in his heart against Christ, not only from the beginning of Christ's ministry on earth, but from the beginning of sin, which was conceived in his heart before the world was. How do we know this? From reading two ancient, and widely debated, prophecies. The first one we'll look at is found in the book of Ezekiel:

"You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. **You were in Eden, the garden of God**; every precious stone was your covering ... The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. **You were the anointed cherub who covers**; I [God] established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. **You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.**" (Ezekiel 28:12-15)

Although these passages are literally speaking about the wicked king of Tyre, I, as well as many others, tend to believe they have a dual application and therefore can be interpreted symbolically, giving us a behind-the-scenes-look at the fall of Satan. There are many places in Scripture where the writers use this dual application. Psalm 45, for example, begins by speaking of a literal king, but ends up speaking of Jesus, the ultimate King. In Proverbs chapter 8, the author is speaking about wisdom, but when we look deeper we see that it is referring to Jesus who is “the Wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). Another example is found in Isaiah chapter 7, a famous prophecy that is read during the Christmas season by many Christians:

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14)

Literally, this prophecy is about the birth of Mahershalhashbaz (how’s that for a name?), the son of Isaiah through a prophetess as a sign to King Ahaz (Isaiah 8:1-4). However, Matthew speaks of this prophecy as ultimately referring to the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:20-23), confirming its dual application.

Even in the ancient sanctuary (or Temple), we see that God uses physical furniture, animals and ceremonies as object lessons to teach us spiritual truths about His plan of salvation. All these things were “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He [God] said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’” (Hebrews 8:5).

With that last point in mind, take notice that, in the prophecy of Ezekiel, it describes a being who used to be “the anointed cherub [angel] who covers” who was also “in Eden, the garden of God.” So, we are dealing with an angel who was in the garden of Eden and who once held a prominent position as a covering cherub (angel). This definitely does not apply to the King of Tyre, and so it is encouraging us to think deeper about who this prophecy applies to.

A covering angel is biblically called a Seraph. While in vision, Isaiah saw “the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. *Above it stood seraphim* [plural form of seraph]; *each one had six wings*: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew” (Isaiah 6:1-2). Here we see the covering angels as they stand above the throne of God. This was shown to Moses in the pattern when He instructed Moses to build the Ark of the Covenant:

“You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width. And you shall make **two cherubim of gold**; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat.

And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I [God] will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, **from between the two cherubim** which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.” (Exodus 25:17-22)

Since the sanctuary objects were “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things”, we see that these covering cherubim upon the Mercy Seat are a representation of the seraphim who stand above the throne of God in heaven. It appears that God is telling us that Satan once held that position. After all, the word *seraph* in Hebrew means “fiery serpent.” Satan indeed was a fallen angel, who became full of iniquity—the tempting serpent in the Garden of Eden who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). The second prophecy we’ll look at is found in the book of Isaiah:

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne

above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.” (Isaiah 14:12-14)

Again, although these verses are literally speaking of the wicked king of Babylon (see verses 3-4), many, including myself, believe they have a dual application referring to the fall of Satan. The Hebrew word for “Lucifer” here in the *New King James Version*, is הֵילֵל (*Hēlēl*), meaning, “shining one” which does correlate to Satan being a seraph— a fiery serpent. When Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” in Luke 10:18, could He be referring us to this prophecy in Isaiah?

The belief that Satan’s proper name being “Lucifer” before his fall is of Christian tradition based off the *Latin Vulgate* translation written by Jerome between A.D. 383 and 404. Other translations say, “morning star” or “day star” which still correlates to something (or someone) being shiny or fiery. Referring to the angels, the book of Job mentions that at the time of Creation, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

A morning star is a star that appears just before, and ushers in, the rising sun. Thus, in this allegory, the angels (a word meaning *messengers*) appear and usher in the glory of God. Interestingly, in 2 Peter 1:19, Peter speaks of *Jesus* as being “the morning star” who rises in your heart. In the *Latin Vulgate* it again uses the word, “*lucifer*.” Therefore, if our interpretation is correct, and that Satan is indeed the ultimate subject of the prophecy in Isaiah, both Satan and Jesus are referred to as being a “*lucifer*” (at least in the Latin translation), which is an adjective. Therefore, although there’s nothing seemingly wrong with calling Satan *Lucifer*, is it highly unlikely that it is referring to Satan’s proper name, but as something, or some status, Satan desires to usurp from Jesus. Let’s take a closer look at this concept.

When we combine the two prophecies found in Isaiah and Ezekiel, we see that Satan was one of these covering angels— Seraphim (fiery serpents) who was “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty”, but began to exalt himself

in his own heart. The prophetic poem in Isaiah states that, because of the mind-warping effect of iniquity entering into his heart, Satan began to desire the position of authority. In this authority, he would rule the universe through force and coercion and thus “be like God”, implying that God rules His kingdom by force instead of selfless love and freedom.

It is through this ideology that Satan, “the deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9) would misrepresent God’s character and “weaken the nations” (Isaiah 14:12). He would cause the whole world to see God the way he sees (or portrays) God, thus justifying his own selfishness and we justifying ours! This is called *psychological projection*.

“Psychological Projection: A defense mechanism in which the human ego defends itself against unconscious impulses or qualities (both positive and negative) by denying their existence in themselves while attributing them to others.” (*Wikipedia*)

Fortunately, there was one being who knew God better than Satan and wasn’t deceived into seeing a wrong picture of God. He is the only Being who was truly equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection—Jesus “the Son of the Most High God” (Mark 5:7).

Scripture says that God had “appointed Jesus heir of all things” and through Jesus “He made the worlds”; and that Jesus is “the brightness of His [God’s] glory and the express image of His person”— the One “upholding all things by the word of His power.” Therefore, Christ is “so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (Hebrews 1:1-4). When Satan realized this, he became jealous, desiring all the prerogatives God had invested in His only begotten Son.

“For to which of the angels did He [God] ever say: **‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’?** And again: ‘I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son’? But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: **‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’** And of the angels He says: ‘Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame

of fire.’ But to the Son He says: **‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.’** ... But to which of the angels has He ever said: ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?’” (Hebrews 1:5-8, 13)

Keep in mind that Scripture tells us that all the angels are called “sons of God” (Job 38:6-7). Adam, as representative of this world, is also called “the son of God” (Luke 3:38), as well as his descendants who are forgiven sinners (Genesis 6:1-2; 1 John 3:1-2). Even though they are all called “sons of God”, there has only been one *begotten* Son— Jesus.

Jesus is not a Son by *creation*, as were Adam and the angels, nor a Son by *adoption*, as is the forgiven sinner, but He is a Son *begotten* in the express image of the Father’s person, who “came forth and proceeded from God” (John 8:42) “in the days of eternity” (Micah 5:2). Again, He is not a created being (i.e., a different species than God, like humans and angels), but is a Son begotten (i.e., of the same species— divine), therefore, He is the only Being in the entire universe who could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God (Zechariah 6:13).

Jesus has declared that the only way to the Father (“the Most High”) is through Him (John 14:6). It was God’s plan that, through His beloved Son, He would reconcile the world unto Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). How? Christ would demonstrate His Father’s true character of pure selfless love, correcting the satanic view that God is sitting upon His majestic throne commanding us to be selfless, when He is selfish. He would reveal that God is not a dictator who has selfishly exalted Himself to control His created subjects but is an endearing Father who desires to reunite the family and serve His children with tender loving kindness.

Having faith in His Father’s goodness, Jesus loves to do the Father’s will (Psalm 40:8). He lives to honor His Father and declares that reflecting God’s

goodness is the way all the “sons of the Most High” who are filled with His Holy Spirit will live (Luke 6:35-36). Jesus’ very life is a rebuke to Satan’s selfishness as well as ours; for God has said, “These things [sins/selfish deeds] you did, and I kept silent, because *you assumed that I was like you*. But now I am going to rebuke you,¹ and I will set forth My case before your very own eyes” (Psalm 50:21, *International Standard Version*). How will God set forth His case before our very eyes? Through Jesus— “the faithful Witness” (Revelation 1:5). As John wrote: “No one has seen God at any time; [yet] the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, *He has revealed Him*” (John 1:18).

The truth that no one comes to the Father except through Jesus includes Satan. In order for anyone to truly see and know the Father, we must “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). This applies to both fallen and unfallen creatures.

This is why Satan refused to bow the knee to Jesus. Thus, from the day iniquity (i.e., hatred towards God and His Son) was found in this fallen seraph, it has been his evil plan to murder and usurp the Son of God. Remember, referring to Satan, God said, “Every precious stone was your covering.” Due to sin and iniquity, Satan has lost his shiny covering, which represents his God-given character that he had forfeited; for God had said, “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.”

In his madness, Satan wants to replace Jesus as “the morning star” therefore, “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). However, no matter how bright he pretends to be, Jesus will always be “the Bright and Morning Star” (Revelation 22:16) because He alone is “the brightness of [God’s] glory” (Hebrews 1:3).

¹ “Those whom I [dearly and tenderly] love, I rebuke and discipline [showing them their faults and instructing them]; so be enthusiastic and repent [change your inner self—your old way of thinking, your sinful behavior—seek God’s will]” (Revelation 3:19, *Amplified Bible*).

As we have seen, when God's presence hovered over this dark, void, and empty earth at the time of creation and said, "Let there be light", there stood the Aleph-Tav— Jesus, "the Light of the world" (John 9:5), ushering in the glory of God amidst the darkness. Throughout Scripture, "light" represents "truth" (Psalm 43:3; 119:105; John 3:21), which dispels "darkness" (lies, confusion, and misapprehensions) concerning God's glory. What is God's glory? When Moses asked God to show him His glory, God responded by revealing His character:

"And he [Moses] said, 'Please, **show me Your glory.**' Then He [God] said, 'I will make all My **goodness** pass before you, and I will proclaim the **name [character]** of the LORD before you. I will be **gracious** to whom I will be gracious, and I will have **compassion** on whom I will have compassion.'" (Exodus 33:18-19, words in brackets added)

God's "glory" is His character of goodness, grace, compassion etc. The means as to how this character was to be fully demonstrated is revealed in Moses' initial question: "Please, show me ~~the~~ Your glory." Thus, even in the creation account we see the gospel foretold as Jesus, "the Bright and Morning Star", ushers in the light (truth) of God's glory (character) into our darkened (confused) hearts that are full of the lies of Satan who spreads misapprehensions concerning God's character.

"For God, who said, 'Let there be light in the darkness,' has made this light [truth] shine in our hearts so we could know the glory [true character] of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6, *New Living Translation*, words in brackets added)

This is why John could boldly state, "And the Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

With these examples, it is not hard to conclude that, through literal objects and events that we can see and experience in our humanness, God is teaching us a deeper and spiritual meaning, which involves how He and His Son are dealing with the hatred, lies, and actions of Satan.

ENMITY BETWEEN THE SERPENT AND THE SEED

But how does one go about murdering someone who is divine? Satan's plan of attack was in the Garden of Eden against Adam and Eve. Satan knew that if he could get Adam and Eve to sin, Jesus, the Savior of the world, would step down from His glory to become one with humanity in order to provide the Remedy for our sinful condition. This was his opportunity.

As briefly mentioned earlier, by getting Adam and Eve to sin, a separation between humanity and God occurred. Not that God or His Law had changed, but man's mind had changed the way it viewed our Creator and thus sin has hidden (veiled) God's merciful face from us (Isaiah 59:2). Because of the disease of sin warping their minds, Adam and Eve interpreted God's loving warning, which said, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die", into a violent threat.

Instead of acknowledging that sin itself would lead to their natural death (James 1:14-15), they now believed it was God who would strike them dead. Now having the mind of fear, they ran from the presence of God and hid themselves within the trees when they heard "the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8).

"Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?' So he [Adam] said, 'I heard Your voice in the garden, and **I was afraid** because I was naked; and I hid myself.'" (Genesis 3:9-10)

What a sad state of mind this is. Adam and Eve became afraid of their loving Creator who desires nothing more than to rescue His children from their folly. Scripture teaches us "there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5), thus the One whom Adam and Eve were now conversing with was the Son of God.

In the Hebrew, we see the Aleph-Tav: "They heard **אָ** the voice of the LORD God." In an Aramaic translation, called *Targum Jonathan*, it says, "they heard the voice of **the Word** of the Lord God." In Deuteronomy 4:26 it says, "... He let you hear **אָ** His voice ..."

"And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?' Then the man said, '**The woman whom You gave to be with me**, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'" (Genesis 3:11-12)

Can you see what just happened? Instead of Adam acknowledging and confessing his sin and trusting in the Lord to forgive and cleanse him of that sin, his misplaced fear overtakes him and he begins to accuse and condemn, not only his wife, but Jesus— "The woman whom You gave to be with me ..." When God turns to Eve, how does she respond?

"And the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'" (Genesis 3:13)

Again, no acknowledgment nor confession, instead Eve's distrust in her Maker causes her to shift the blame, not only directly to the serpent, but indirectly to Jesus— the Creator of the serpent. Keep in mind that thousands of years later, the prophet John referred to "that serpent of old" as "the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). Satan had deceived the human race to sin, causing us to distrust our heavenly Father and cast blame upon His Son. Through the infection of sin, our minds became "hateful towards God" and we treated Jesus as a scapegoat, condemning Him to death.

As we can see, from the very conception of sin, Jesus was crucified from the hearts and minds of not only Satan and his angels, but from sinful man. As soon as there was sin, there was a Savior— a Savior condemned to die, not by His Father’s justice, but by Satan and man’s fallen sense of justice. Because of sin warping the mind, man began to believe that true justice demands a legal payment for sin, which is death. Since fallen humanity believes God is the One who had turned against us and condemned sinners to death, we therefore no longer had loving trust toward God but rather “hostility towards God.” Here again we see the concept of the rebellious mind projecting its own hostility and condemnation onto Christ.

Paul wrote, “the judgment was *by one* [man, Adam] to condemnation” (Romans 5:16, *King James Version*). The word “by” is the Greek word “ἐκ” meaning “out from within”, thus condemnation came out from within Adam, not God. The Hebrew word for “Adam” is אָדָם, which means “man” or “mankind.” Therefore, Adam’s judgment to condemnation was not only against himself, but all mankind as one corporate body. As Jesus said, “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged” (Matthew 7:2).

Adam received this condemning attitude from his father the devil, “the prince of this world” (John 14:30); “the accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12:10), who condemned God as unjust and unwise in how He had structured the universe. Likewise, we have all inherited this condemning attitude towards our fellow man as can be seen by our violent history.

To save us from this condemnation, Jesus became a man and willingly submitted Himself to the injustice and condemnation that came out from (ἐκ) Adam, the representative of fallen humanity. Thus, “there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1) because the condemnation *from Adam* against humanity, and therefore against Christ, has been satisfied in Christ. He satisfied the death penalty that *we* (through Adam) judged sinful humanity legally deserved. In this grand spectacle —before God, angels and men— Jesus revealed Himself as the perfect representative of man, or as Paul says, “the second Adam” who has

become "a life-giving Spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45), imparting to the believer His character of selfless love. Now, if we remain "in Christ", we will no longer condemn our fellow man (and therefore not condemn ourselves) but walk in the footsteps of Christ who condemns no one (John 3:17; 8:10-11, 15; 1 Peter 2:21-23).

"So the Lord God said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.'" (Genesis 3:14-15)

Here we see God's salvation plan laid out before the serpent and our first parents, resulting in God redirecting sinful man's enmity (hostility) from being against Him to being against the condemning works of the Devil. Throughout Scripture, a woman represents a church system in Bible prophecy. God has said, "I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate woman" (Jeremiah 6:2) and then says, "... Zion, 'You are My people'" (Isaiah 51:16).

Picking up on this symbolism, Paul wrote: "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you [the church] as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). So, when God says that enmity will be between the serpent and "the woman", He's ultimately talking about His people. He also says this enmity will be between the serpent's seed and the woman's Seed. This Seed of the woman ultimately represents Christ:

"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." (Galatians 3:16)

The Seed of the woman also points to all those who are Christ's followers:

"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29)

So again, we witness this enmity of Satan and his followers (his seed) towards Christ and His followers. Always remember, there is no hatred or condemnation from Christ toward Satan. As with any sinner, Christ loves Satan, but does not love his sinful life, which is a life outside the boundaries of His law (1 John 3:4)— His design protocol for which life operates. Christ isn't offended that Satan and man have decided to live a life of sin, as if it is some sort of legal *crime*, but Christ is sorrowful, knowing that sin is a harmful and deadly *disease* within the sinner whom He loves.

Many people ask why God did not just destroy Satan in the beginning to stop the spread of sin. If God did this, then everyone would react like Adam and Eve did. They would run and hide from God out of fear, and any form of obedience would be based on that fear instead of love and admiration for their heavenly Father. We would be mere robots.

The truth is, the kingdom of God is not founded upon force, which involves *imposed punishments* on lawbreakers. God's law is founded upon freedom of choice, which involves *inherent consequences* upon choices made. God's kingdom is not based upon performance, but upon the family relationship of selfless love— He being our Father and we being His beloved children.

Satan's kingdom is the exact opposite of God's. His kingdom is founded upon force and is based upon your performance, resulting in him deciding arbitrary *imposed punishments* upon lawbreakers. Satan's kingdom treats sin as a crime, which angers the lawgiver who now has to punish, torture or kill the offender. His kingdom is not concerned with the family relationship, but with the relationship of government and citizen.

From the very beginning, it has been Satan's plan to misrepresent the character of God and lead humanity and angels to cherish a false conception Him. Through Satan and sin, our Creator has been presented to our minds as being clothed with the characteristics of Satan and his kingdom— as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving. He has done this so our heavenly Father might be feared, shunned, and even hated by men.

Thus, all force and violence in the world points to the utter hatred Satan has for God and His Son. He would have man hate and kill each other just as he hates and wants to kill God and His Son. Satan delights in this because he knows how much it hurts God to see His human children suffer. Just as the pagan kings of Babylon and Tyre that we looked at earlier are a manifestation of the mind and actions of Satan, every act of war, fighting, and killing is a manifestation of the hostile (satanic) mind which is against Christ and seeks to destroy Him.

The plan of salvation not only involves Satan bruising Christ's heel, but Christ bruising Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). Bruising the heel involves the attempt to trip up Jesus, tempting Him to distrust His heavenly Father and lead Him into sin. Bruising Satan's head involves destroying his power and lordship (headship) over humanity, turning them from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18). This would be accomplished by "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" and, instead of condemning man (John 3:17), He would "condemn *sin* in the flesh" so "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Romans 8:3). Although Christ would be "tempted in all points like we are" (Hebrews 2:15), He would remain faithful and "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8) so "that through death He might destroy him who has the power of death— that is the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

Notice again that Christ does not destroy the devil by an imposed punishment— torture, killing etc., but by laying down His own life. The prophecy foresaw that Jesus' heel would be "bruised" as He crushes the controlling power (the head) of serpent. He would prove that God would rather be killed than to kill, and therefore does not exercise violence and death to destroy sinners. Instead, God will destroy sinners by exercising His selfless love for them, thus transforming them from enemy to friend.

God gives to every man the freedom of choice to receive the Remedy found in Christ and be healed from the disease of sin, or to crucify Christ and let sin run its deadly course.

THE LAMB SLAIN

After Adam and Eve sinned “they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings” (Genesis 3:7). However, to show the impossibility of covering their own sin, “for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). Many assume here that God Himself killed an animal and covered them with its skin, but a more logical understanding is that Adam was the one who wielded the knife.

It was fallen humanity who had condemned Christ to death, and to magnify our now satanic mind, God instituted animal offerings. But why would God want to magnify our sinful mind?

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

Because of sin warping our thinking, fallen man is unaware of our enmity against God. In order for us to see ourselves as we are, God gave us His written law; “for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

“I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” (Romans 7:7)

How does the law reveal sin? By the righteousness it expresses: “for all Your commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:172); “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12). The law is the expression of God’s righteousness— the transcript of His character. The more righteousness it reveals, the more sin it exposes.

“Moreover the law entered [meaning privately into the heart] that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” (Romans 5:20)

It is not God’s purpose to make sin abound to accuse and condemn us. No, there is only one condemning accuser— Satan (Revelation 12:10). For humanity to be healed properly, we must be aware, acknowledge and confess that our heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. This is why the law brings us to Christ:

“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:24)

“For Christ is the end [end-objective] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:4)²

We must pray as did Job: “How many are my iniquities and sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin” (Job 13:23); “Teach me what I cannot see. If I have done evil, I will do so no more” (Job 34:32).

The results of sin was revealed to Adam and Eve as they witnessed the victim shed its blood and breathe its last. In this awful display they were to see what their sin had done to the Son of God who became “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

In God’s mind, these offerings were not meant as an appeasement to calm Him down from any wrath He had against man, but were to magnify (expose) man’s wrath against God. Just as a doctor takes x-rays to expose an unseen fracture to proceed with the healing process, fallen humanity

² The Greek word for “end” here (τέλος/*telos*) does not mean “termination” as if Christ ended or terminated the law. It means “end-objective” or “goal.” The law does not *point* us to Christ, it *brings* us to Christ. The *King James Version* of James 5:11 says, “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen *the end [telos] of the Lord*; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” Is this verse saying that the Lord has come to an end? Of course not. It’s saying that the *end-objective*, or *goal*, of the Lord is to show us that He is “pitiful, and of tender mercy.” In fact, the *New King James Version* of this verse says, “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the *end intended* by the Lord.” See also, 1 Timothy 1:5.

had been numbed by sin and God needed to reveal the sin for man to acknowledge it, confess it, and be cleansed (healed) from it. We know from Scripture that God never required a sacrifice in order to forgive man:

“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.” (Psalm 40:6)

Yet we also read this from the book of Hebrews:

“Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (Hebrews 9:22, *English Standard Version*)

How do we read this apparent contradiction? Is it true that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness? The answer is yes and no.

- No, because all Adam and Eve had to do was believe, accept, and receive God’s forgiveness because God never desired nor required a sacrifice in order for Him to forgive us.
- Yes, because fallen humanity was so deeply numbed by sin, which warped our view of God’s character, we began to believe the pagan/satanic idea that blood must be shed in order for a Deity to forgive us. Therefore, Jesus had to shed His blood to break Satan’s “spell” so that we would believe, accept, and receive God’s forgiveness.

The fact is, animal offerings were not meant to reveal that God desired a sacrifice, which we provide to receive forgiveness, but that fallen man desired a sacrifice (a scapegoat), and “for God so loved the world”, He provided one— “You open Your ~~thy~~ hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16).

Satan knew by attacking God’s character that the One Being who was begotten in the express image of the Father would “become flesh” so we could behold the glory (true character) of His Father.

Remember, Peter tells us that we “were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). The Greek word for “redeemed” here is λυτρόω (*lutroó*), which *Strong’s Concordance* defines as, “release by paying ransom, liberate.” Jesus said He came “to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Moreover, Paul, in his letter to Timothy, says, Jesus “gave Himself a ransom for all ...” (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

It is extremely important to know that this ransom price was *not* demanded by God; for He is the One whose children have been kidnapped. No, no, the ransom price is always demanded and received by the kidnapper. In this case, the kidnapper is sin, resulting in our sinful nature of fear (distrust) and selfishness, which leads to death. Jesus is not the price paid *to* the Father; He is the price that *the Father paid* to rescue us from sin’s grasp and free us from our warped understanding of the Father’s character.

Christ was the free Gift of God *to us*. The purpose was to reveal His love and that He *freely* pardons. What did we do with this Gift? We crucified Him, revealing our utter hatred of God and His kingdom of self-sacrificing love. Jesus did everything possible to show man a better way, but “paid with His life.” What Christ paid was not the price of appeasement to an angry God, but the price of love submitting to angry man. The goodness of God, revealing through the cross the evil that is in our hearts toward Him and His Son, leads us to understand we need help, yes, a Savior; this brings us into a sound mind and attitude toward our heavenly Father. This is the atonement God is seeking!

CAIN AND ABEL

“When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.” (Genesis 4:3-5, *New Living Translation*)

The reason why God accepted Abel’s offering instead of Cain’s is not that God needed to see blood, but that Cain was missing the true intent of the lesson. Abel’s offering was a demonstration of faith (Hebrews 11:4). In contrast, by bringing an offering of crops Cain was relying upon his own works, exalting himself, instead of humbly acknowledging that he had inherited the same judgmental and condemning nature from his father Adam. Cain’s heart could not have been broken and softened by simply offering a fruit basket. In order for God to reach fallen humanity where we are, we needed to see blood.

God did not go into a frenzy when He rejected Cain and his offering, but when Cain heard the still small loving whisper of correction, he became enraged and his true character came to the surface.

“So the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’” (Genesis 4:6-7)

If only Cain had trusted and accepted God’s grace, he would have ruled over the sin that was tempting him (Romans 6:14). His anger led him to hatred, which led him to kill his brother.

"Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." (Genesis 4:8)

By permitting sin to rule over him, Cain acted like the religious leaders in Jesus' day. When God spoke to Cain, warning him that "sin lies at the door, and its desire is for you", He could have easily said, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth" (John 8:44).

Cain carried on the enmity between the serpent and the woman. Just as the religious leaders killed Jesus because His righteous life was a constant rebuke and a thorn in their side, of Cain it is written:

"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as **Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother.** And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous." (1 John 3:10-12)

Notice carefully why Cain killed his brother. John says it was because Cain's "works were evil and his brother's [works] righteous." Abel's faith was demonstrated by his works. Many Christians today separate faith and works as being opposites, but Scripture says they go hand in hand.

"But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and **I will show you my faith by my works** ... But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:18, 20)

James goes on to describe Abraham's faith, but we can easily apply it to Abel— "Do you see that *faith was working* together with his [Abel's] works, and *by works faith was made perfect?*" (Verses 21-22).

We must remember that Jesus is the author of faith (Hebrews 12:2),³ and since “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6), Jesus always does things that please God (John 8:29). He is the only Being in the universe who has perfectly demonstrated righteousness by faith. Therefore, in order for us to truly practice righteousness by faith and please the Father, we must be imparted with the same faith that Jesus has:

“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and [or, ‘by’] **the faith of Jesus.**” (Revelation 14:12, *King James Version*)

We can only possess Jesus’ unfailing faith by allowing Jesus Himself to live in and through us:

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

The reason why God accepted Abel and his offering is because Abel denied himself and was crucified with Christ, thus demonstrating “the faith of the Son of God” which is a “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6)— “For without Me” says Jesus, “you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The rash act of Cain murdering his brother was a shadow of Satan’s and fallen humanity’s hostility against the faith of Jesus. Cain could have reached out to grasp the protective hand of Christ, but he instead chose to nail it down and crucify Him as demonstrated by his murder of Abel— “In all [our] afflictions He is afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9). Jesus confirms this by saying, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, *you did it to Me*” (Matthew 25:40).

³ Most translations say, “the author and finisher of our faith” but the word “our” is not in the Greek.

The Earth Reflects the Sufferings of Christ

It is not a coincidence that Adam and Cain's sin not only affected their fellow man, but also affected the earth from which humanity was created.

"And to the man [Adam] he [God] said, 'Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, **the ground is cursed because of you**. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow **thorns** and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.'" (Genesis 3:17-19, *New Living Translation*)

"And He [God] said, 'What have you [Cain] done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now **you are cursed from the earth**, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. **When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you**. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.'" (Genesis 4:10-12)

As the earth swallowed up the innocent blood of both the firstborn lambs of the flock and Abel, the earth itself began to reflect the corruption of sin and the violence of man. Because of sin, *thorns* and *weeds* began to grow among the lush vegetation. When Abraham climbed Mt Moriah to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God, "Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a *thicket* [thorns/brambles] by its horns. So Abraham went and took **אִיִּם** the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son" (Genesis 22:13).

It was here that God delivered Abraham from the culture he had grown up in while living in "Ur of the Chaldeans" (Babylon) and ancient Canaan (Genesis 11:31), which was steeped in animal and human sacrifices to appease their gods. Here, Abraham finally realized that "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8) that *we* required, but mistakenly believed *He* required (Psalm 40:6).

After Abraham offered the ram, "Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it will be seen [or, provided]" (Genesis 22:14). Was that which the Lord provided seen?

Two thousand years later, Jesus was arrested by the unbelieving religious leaders and Romans; "and the soldiers twisted a *crown of thorns* and put it on His head" (John 19:2). Jesus, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), was caught in the *thicket* of angry and violent men. Indeed, He was delivered over to "the heart [hatefulness] of the earth [i.e., people]" (Matthew 12:40)— "In heart you work wickedness; you weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth" (Psalm 58:2).

No wonder Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56) for God "proclaimed the gospel to Abraham beforehand" (Galatians 3:8). Going back to the Hebrew of Genesis 22:13, indeed we see what Abraham saw:

"... So Abraham went and took the **אֵילִם** ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son" (Genesis 22:13)

God Himself had indeed provided the Lamb for the burnt offering that we required.

"But they [the mob] cried, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him. And he [Pilate] said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him: I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go. And they were instant with loud voices, **requiring that He might be crucified**. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be **as they required**. And he released unto them him [Barabbas] that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus **to their will**." (Luke 23:21-24, *King James Version*)

At the moment of Christ's physical crucifixion upon the cross, nature again mourned the execution of her Creator:

“Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour **there was darkness over all the land** ... And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and **the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.**”
(Matthew 27:45, 50-51)

“... **there was darkness over all the earth** until the ninth hour. Then **the sun was darkened** ...” (Luke 23:44-45)

Repeatedly, we see the effects of humanity’s sinful enmity against Christ being displayed by nature. If one man’s sin could cause thorns and thistles, and a small mob of men crucifying Jesus cause darkness and earthquakes, how much more would the earth reflect man’s violence if the wickedness of the whole world was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually?

THE FLOOD

During the days of Noah, roughly 1,600 years after Adam's sin, we read:

"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart ... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth." (Genesis 6:5-6, 11-12)

We see yet again the connection between "the wickedness of man" and "the earth" which "also was corrupt" and "filled with violence." Again, notice:

"So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt;
[why?]
for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth."

The Hebrew word for "corrupt" here actually means "destroyed" or "ruined." Notice how verses 11 and 12 are translated in the *New English Translation*:

"The earth was **ruined** in the sight of God; the earth was filled with violence. God saw the earth, and indeed it was **ruined**, for all living creatures on the earth were sinful."

The earth was already in a state of destruction or ruin before the Flood came. Because of this, Scripture says, "The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Genesis 6:6). The word for "sorry" here" (נָחַם, *nacham*; sometimes translated as "repented") means, "To be moved with pity, have compassion"; therefore, it was not fully

destroyed at that time because of God's Spirit— His abiding and protective presence. In Noah's day, the earth itself was stirring up violence from beneath due to the wickedness and violence of man. The prophet Isaiah also speaks of this concept:

"The earth mourns and fades away, the world languishes and fades away; the haughty people of the earth languish. **The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants**, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore **the curse has devoured the earth**, and those who dwell in it are desolate ..." (Isaiah 24:4-6)

Moreover, the apostle Paul wrote, "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:22). Thus the curse, which came from Adam and passed on to all his descendants, includes inanimate nature. The reason for this was that Adam, as the head of the earthly creation, was in a divine pattern relation with nature:

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; **let them have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:26)

After Adam had fallen, the earth and everything in it started reflecting his rebellion against God. In the divine pattern, the earth and everything upon it is a mirror of man. God did this so that man would be able to look at occurrences in nature and recognize that something was wrong in his relationship with God and righteousness due to sin.

Chaos in nature was a manifestation of chaos in the psyche of man, done so that man would have a visual aid to help him recognize there was a problem, and then repent (similar to pain in our body, when we hurt, we know something is wrong). If humanity were in harmony with God, the earth would also reflect that in bringing forth good fruit. This is why, when the nations surrounding Israel insisted on remaining in their idolatry, they

received the following reflection of their own rebellion back from the earth they were living upon:

“For **the land is defiled**; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and **the land vomits out its inhabitants**. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus **the land is defiled**), lest **the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.**” (Leviticus 18:25-28)

Therefore, from the days of Adam’s fall, the earth reflects Adam’s character of rebellion toward God through the influence of his new master— Satan.

In Luke 17:26, Jesus compares the “days of Noah” to the time of His second coming. As evidence that His coming is soon, Jesus said, “there will be great earthquakes in various places” (Luke 17:11). Therefore, we can conclude that earthquakes played a part in causing the Flood. Discussing what the state of the earth was like just before the Flood, Dr. Kurt Wise suggests:

“It’s also very likely that there was an increase in earthquakes leading up to the Flood. If we’re right about the mechanisms of the Flood that we’ve been able to deduce geologically, it’s not likely that the Flood was in one sense a very sudden event. It was led up to (the earth was deforming) ready to break at the time of the Flood.

Even if the break itself (the breakup of the fountains of the great deep) was a very sudden event, the tension in the earth that led up to that event may have been gradual (an additive) until the day that they finally actually broke.

This tensional motion was likely to have been associated with earthquakes and those earthquakes probably would have increased in frequency leading up to the Flood.” (Dr. Kurt Wise, *How Was the Pre-Flood World Different from Our Own?* YouTube channel: *Is Genesis History?*)

This understanding of what took place at the time of the Flood is contradictory to mainstream Christianity, who believe and teach that the Flood came as an arbitrary imposed punishment upon the disobedient. However, if it had not been for God's grace through Christ, *Satan* would have destroyed all his prey. Satan takes advantage of people only when they become agents of his philosophy— sin. Thus, during the time before the Flood, he delighted that humanity reflected his character.

People so much united and sealed themselves in their sins that this would lead, not to God *imposing* His mighty power upon the people, but to the *withdrawal* of His sustaining power:

"And the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.'" (Genesis 6:3)

Remember, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth" (Psalm 33:6). Take note that "the word of the LORD" is synonymous with "the breath of His mouth." The Hebrew word for "breath" here is the same word for "Spirit" found in Genesis 6:3— רוח (*ruach*). Therefore, it is God's Word, which He speaks by the breath (Spirit) of His mouth, that will not strive with man forever.

We have already seen that this "Word" is Jesus and that "all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3) and that this same "Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us" (Verse 14). "For by Him all things were created ... and in Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16-17).

The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). In Proverbs 8, we read that God "set a boundary for the sea, so that the waters would not surpass His command [or, His word]" (Proverbs 8:29, *Berean Standard Bible*, words in brackets added). Therefore, if Jesus were not to "strive" with wicked man, what would happen?

Instead of “upholding all things”, He would *let go* of all things, including the “boundary for the sea.” But why would Jesus ever let go of this boundary?

“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 [or, for us]” (Job 22:15-17, *King James Version*, words in brackets added)

The antediluvians had demanded that God depart from them. Peter tells us that the Spirit of Christ preached unto the antediluvians through Noah for 120 years while the ark was being prepared:

“For **Christ also suffered once for sins**, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, **when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared**, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.” (1 Peter 3: 18-20)

Please do not misunderstand the phrase “spirits in prison.” Many erroneously believe Peter is teaching that, at Christ’s death, He descended into a spirit world and preached the truth to lost souls (spirits) whose bodies died in the Flood. However, this is not talking about deceased people’s souls who have migrated to a spirit world. David, *while still alive*, prayed, “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise **יהוה** Your name [character] ...” (Psalm 142:7). In addition, Isaiah says:

“For Sheol [the grave] cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; **Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth.** The living, the living man, he shall praise You, as I do this day; the father shall make known Your truth to the children.” (Isaiah 38:17-18)

Therefore, these “spirits in prison” were those people who were held captive in the prison house of sin during the time of Noah. The hearts of men were

completely hardened in their total rejection of the pleadings of Christ, and their final response was to drown out the pleadings of His Spirit. When Christ heard the words “Depart from us!” He was grieved; for it was the same as saying, “Crucify Him!”

It is of no coincidence that Psalm chapter 18 prophetically speaks of the sufferings of Christ on the cross in the context of a flood:

“The pangs of death surrounded me, and the FLOODS of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol [the grave] surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress **I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God** [Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46]; **He heard my voice from His temple,** and my cry came before Him, even to His ears [Psalm 22:24]. Then **the earth shook and trembled;** the foundations of the hills also **quaked** and were **shaken,** because He was angry⁴ [Matthew 27:51] ... He bowed the heavens also, and came down with **darkness** under His feet ... He made **darkness** His secret place; His canopy around Him was **dark waters** and **thick clouds of the skies** [Matthew 27:45].”
(Psalm 18:4-7, 9, 11, references in brackets added)

The people before the Flood did not recognize that the power of Christ was that which rallied the elements of the world. They thought that the processes of nature were sustained by an inherent power contained in nature itself and therefore Noah’s warning for the coming flood seemed irrational to them. However, Scripture tells us that the power, which sustains everything, is Christ— the living Word of God.

“They [scoffers] willfully ignore this: Long ago the heavens and the earth were brought about from water and through water by **the word of God [Jesus]**. Through these waters **the world of that time perished when it was flooded.**” (2 Peter 3:5-6, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*)

The antediluvians were pushing Christ (the Word which created and sustains all things) away, and since God does not interfere with our free

⁴ We’ll discuss God’s anger (wrath) in a bit.

choice, He knew that at this rate the earth would vomit out her inhabitants in 120 years' time. At this rapid pace of going deeper into wickedness, the people would completely crucify Christ in themselves and thus the sustaining power of God in Christ would be removed/crucified, and in the inherent consequence of this, the earth itself would fully manifest the character of their fall. "But wait a minute," someone might object, "didn't God say *He* would destroy them?"

"So the Lord said, '**I will destroy** man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'" (Genesis 6:7)

"And behold, **I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy** from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die." (Genesis 6:17)

"I Will Destroy"

"I will destroy." What exactly does this mean when God says this phrase? Can a God of love ever be the direct cause of destruction? John writes that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Paul writes, "Love does no wrong to others" (Romans 13:10, *New Living Translation*), or as the *New King James Version* says, "Love does *no harm* to a neighbor." Since God is love, and love never does anything harmful to others, then God does not ever harm others.

Therefore, when God says, "I will destroy", it must mean something different than our preconceived ideas want to think.

When it comes to God, the phrase "I will destroy" is used as a Hebrew idiom. There are two classes of idioms that can be used. 1. Causative. 2. Permissive. The writer's (not the translator's) use of the phrase is most often in the permissive form when it comes to quoting God— especially when the verb is negative, such as destruction and sickness. This permissive verb form in Hebrew is called *Hiph'il*, to which William Lowth explains:

"...the form called Hiphil in Hebrew often denotes only permission, and is rendered elsewhere to that sense by our translators." (*A Commentary Upon the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 501)

So, when God says, "I will destroy", it is to be understood that He will *permit* the destruction to come, which is caused by someone or something else besides God. Please keep in mind, when I say God "permits" the destruction, I am referring to God's hands being tied (or nailed down) because God gave mankind free will and will never do anything to usurp or retract that promise. Other commentators have also seen this concept of "permission":

On page 194 in his book, *Lectures on the Four Last Books of the Pentateuch*, Richard Graves writes: "All who are conversant in the language of the Old Testament know, that it speaks of every event which God permits, as proceeding directly from him ..." Commenting on 2 Chronicles 25:16 which says, "... I know that God has determined to destroy you ...", Robert Young described this particular idiom as: "... the well-known scripture idiom whereby what God allows he is said to do." (Young, Robert, 1868, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible, as Literally and Idiomatically Translated out of the Original Languages*, p. 315). Echoing Young's commentary, John Goodge Foyster wrote:

"In the language of scripture, natural consequences are sometimes spoken of as though they were pre-ordained and irrevocable decrees. **What happens solely through the permission of the Almighty**, in the ordinary course of his Providence, **is described as though it had taken place through some special and irresistible intervention of his hand**. This is a mode of writing peculiar to the Hebrew idiom; an idiom which prevails everywhere throughout the New Testament, as well as the Old. Thus ... their meaning generally is that **he does not powerfully interfere to prevent those evils which are the natural fruits of our own folly, perverseness, and impenitence.**" (John Goodge Foyster, *Sermons*, p. 90, 1826)

Even today we use this type of language when we refer to “acts of God” on our insurance claims. A great biblical example of this can be found when we read what is written concerning the death of King Saul:

“So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. But he did not inquire of the Lord; therefore **He [God] killed him**, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.” (1 Chronicles 10:13-14)

Here we clearly read that God killed Saul. However, is this in the causative or permissive sense? The answer is in verses 3-6:

“The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armorbearer, ‘Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and abuse me.’ But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore **Saul took a sword and fell on it**. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died. So Saul and his three sons died, and all his house died together.”

Clearly it is in the permissive sense. Like the antediluvians, Saul had turned his back on God (1 Chronicles 10:13). This is the same as telling God to get lost. He spiritually crucified the Son of God, which naturally resulted in His protective hand being removed (nailed down). God “killed” Saul by not preventing him from committing suicide— He reluctantly permitted Saul to cut off his own Life-Support because Saul had free will.

The following translations of Isaiah 54:9 make it clear that God’s “anger” during the time of the Flood was not exercised by any arbitrary imposed punishment, but exercised by Him *permitting* the inherent destruction:

“Just as I swore in the time of Noah that I would never again **LET** a flood cover the earth, so now I swear that I will never again be angry and punish you.” (Isaiah 54:9, *New Living Translation*)

“Just as in the time of Noah I swore that I would never again **PERMIT** the waters of a flood to cover the earth and destroy its life, so now I swear that I will never again pour out My anger on you.” (Isaiah 54:9, *The Living Bible*)

“In My Anger”

It is true that the “letting” or “permitting” is linked to God’s “anger” (or wrath) in these passages. But in order to truly understand this, one must understand that God’s anger is the complete opposite fallen man’s:

“My beloved brothers, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, **for man’s anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires.**” (James 1:19-20, *Berean Standard Bible*)

Man’s anger is always about using force and power to lash out to cause others harm, but God’s anger is holding *back* His power and removing His divine protection at the persistent sinner’s request.⁵ For example, because the Israelites were persistent in having an earthly king like all the other nations, God told them, “I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath” (Hosea 13:11). We’ve already discussed how God “took away” king Saul by not preventing him from committing suicide, but as you can see, He also gave them a king in His anger by reluctantly permitting them to have what they selfishly desired.

“Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.’ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to judge us.’ So Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, ‘**Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not**

⁵ The Hebrew word for God’s anger is אַף (*aph*) which is the same root word for His “longsuffering” (*anaph*) toward sinful humanity. It means an intense heavy breathing (grief) through the nostrils. Jesus, being the brightness of God’s glory, demonstrated this in Mark chapter 3 when confronted by the Pharisees: “And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts ...” (see Mark 3:1-6 for the full context).

rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also.” (1 Samuel 8:4-8)

During the time of Christ on earth, the people reiterated their demand to reject Christ as their King:

“Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he [Pilot] said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’ But they cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, **‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’** Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away.” (John 19:14-16)

Likewise, the people living before the Flood did not submit to the pleadings of Christ’s Spirit and rejected His loving and protective reign over them. God Himself did not drown these men, women and children out of vengeful spite. The Flood came as a *natural result* of the absence (removal) of His presence, just as darkness is the natural result of the absence of light. It is an error to believe that the world and its inhabitants were so corrupt that God *had* to destroy them. God never works through force or coercion. He never makes threats such as, “Obey Me or I will kill you!” He is not an extortionist, and His law is not arbitrary. His law is a hedge of protection by design. If we step out from within the hedge, we reap the *natural consequences* of our own choices. The antediluvians were so corrupt that they willfully drowned out (suppressed/held down) the Spirit of truth pleading for them. Paul explains just how God’s wrath operates:

“For **the wrath of God is revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness ... Therefore God also **gave them up** to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts ... For this reason God **gave them up** to vile passions ... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God **gave them over** to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.” (Romans 1:18: 24, 26, 28)

Thus, by cutting themselves off from the only Source of life, they drowned themselves in the water, fulfilling the Scripture, which warns:

“See the one who is pregnant with wickedness, who conceives destructive plans, and gives birth to harmful lies – he digs a pit and then falls into the hole he has made. **He becomes the victim of his own destructive plans and the violence he intended for others falls on his own head.**” (Proverbs 7:14-16, *New English Translation*)

We all must follow the instruction Jesus gave to the lawyer who asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What is written in the law, *How* do you read it?” (Luke 10:25-26). The key is “how” we read the Bible. We must read Scripture through a certain lens, which is consistent with what Jesus revealed about His Father.

“The bottom line is that, however we explain violent portraits of God in the OT [Old Testament], and even if we can’t explain them, we must never allow anything we find in the OT to compromise or in any way qualify the revelation of God we have in Christ. Jesus isn’t part of what God is like, the *fullness* of God’s deity was in Christ (Col. 2:9). And Jesus reveals a God who chooses to die on behalf of enemies rather than to use force against them ... **Whenever we find portraits of God in the OT that fall below the character of God revealed in Christ — all portraits that have God commanding or engaging in violence — we should see a reflection of the cross in them.** That is, we should view these portraits as an example of God humbly stooping to enter the limited and fallen worldview of the authors. They reflect God meeting people where they are, working through the limited and fallen worldviews that they hold, in order to bring humanity to the place where he could reveal what he is really like — which is what he does in Christ.” (Greg Boyd, *Would God Kill a Baby To Teach Parents a Lesson?* *reknew.org*, October 9, 2012)

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Sometime after the Flood, as man began to multiply, we read, “Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there” (Genesis 11:1-2). In Genesis 10, we learn that “Cush begot *Nimrod*; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord ... And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar” (Genesis 10:8-10).

Scripture refers to Nimrod as “a mighty one on the earth.” The Hebrew word used here for “mighty one” or “mighty man” is גִּבּוֹר (*gibbor*). The plural form of this same root word is found in Genesis 6 when referring to the “mighty men [*gibborim*] ... men of name [or, renown]”, otherwise known as “the giants” or “the Nephilim” who were violent leaders before the Flood. The word *Nephilim* comes from the root word נָפַל (*naphal*), which means: “to fall.” *Nephilim* is defined as, “fallen ones, bullies or tyrants.” Nimrod became one of these fallen tyrannical bullies.

Nimrod is also referred to as being “a mighty hunter before the Lord.” The word “before” is in the sense of “against,” or “in place of” because he was worshipped as a tyrannical god in place of the God of love a freedom. It is more literally “a mighty tyrant in the face of Jehovah.”

“Nimrod was against God; he was facing the Lord in battle, in antagonism rather than in submission. That is shown in the context by his conquests. The beginning of his kingdom was Babel. There is more here than meets the eye. He conquered Babel. He conquered Erech, Accad, and Calneh in

the land of Shinar. He was bringing what were probably city-states under his control and forming them into one nation. Nowhere did God give the right to dominion over other men by conquering them, and that was what Nimrod did. The Sperling Translation renders this phrase, 'He began to be a despot.' He was a despot against God; and he deceived, manipulated, and controlled those he brought under his dominion. Satan and his demons, through Nimrod, conspired against God to bring mankind into one government against God." (*Forerunner Commentary*)

Nimrod was worshipped as a god who led the people away from the one true God and into a government of tyranny.

"Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it [strength/life] to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to believe it was their own courage which procured that happiness. **He [Nimrod] also gradually changed the government into tyranny, seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his [Nimrod's] power ...**" (Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 1, Chap. 4, Par 2)

Nimrod had enforced a government/citizen relationship, with the government controlling or guiding the citizen by force through imposed laws. However, as we have seen, God's system of government is based on the family relationship, with the parents controlling (lovingly guiding) the children.

"With the setting up of Nimrod's kingdom, the entire ancient world entered a new historical phase. **The oriental tradition which makes that warrior the first man who wore a kingly crown**, points to a fact more significant than the assumption of a new ornament of dress, or even a conquest of a province. **His reign introduced to the world a new system of relations between the governor and the governed.** The authority of former rulers had rested upon the feeling of kindred, and the ascendancy of the chief was an image of parental control [i.e., guidance]. Nimrod, on the contrary, was a sovereign of

territory, and of men just so far as they were its inhabitants, and irrespective of personal ties. Hitherto there had been tribes - enlarged families - Society; now there was a nation, a political community - the State." (A.T. Jones, *Empires of the Bible*, p. 51)

As we read, Nimrod established the land of Babel (Babylon), which was in southern Mesopotamia and known as "the land of Nimrod" (Micah 5:6). It was Nimrod who was the great architect of the famous tower of Babel.

"Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, 'Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.'

So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth." (Genesis 11:1-9)

As Nimrod "gradually changed the government into tyranny", he oversaw the building of the tower, which was a national symbol of "turning men from the fear of God, [and] to bring them into a constant dependence on his [Nimrod's] power." He had persuaded them that life is not dependent upon God, but by their own survival of the fittest. Like the fallen mind of Satan, the tower was a metaphor for the idea that man could reach heaven without God's help. Most of them believed that God was the direct cause of

the Flood; and with their feelings of discontent, like Cain's, rose the spirit of murmuring and rebellion against God. Nevertheless, while they murmured and projected their own character of oppression, violence, and brutality upon God, believing He was arbitrary and severe, they were accepting the rule of the cruelest of tyrants.

The Hebrew word for "Babel" comes from the word *balal*, which means "confusion." In Assyrian, it is written *Bab-ilu*, meaning "gate of god." Thus, in their confusion, they believed there was another gate that leads to the God of heaven, not realizing they were serving another god— their father, the devil. Their master plan was to build their tower to a much greater height than the waters prevailed in the time of the Flood; and they would be as gods and rule over the people by displaying their greatness in building such a great structure. They would do this in order to turn the attention of others to join with them in their idolatry and thus feel secure in their sins.

The Hebrew word used for "tower" here is *migdal*. Scripture refers to the God of heaven as our only *migdal*:

"For You [God] have been a shelter for me, a strong tower [*migdal*] from the enemy." Psalm 61:3)

"The name [character] of the Lord is a strong tower [*migdal*]; the righteous run to it and are safe." (Proverbs 18:10)

Jesus taught us to be fully dependent upon our heavenly Father (Matthew 6:25-34). Even Jesus was given life from the Father: "For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself" (John 5:26). We humans do not possess this life in ourselves. It must be given to us through the Son.

"God has also said he gave us eternal life and this life comes to us from his Son. And so, if we have God's Son, we have this life. But if we don't have the Son, we don't have this life." (1 John 5:11-12, *Contemporary English Version*)

In the beginning, Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God and His only begotten Son (Genesis 1:26). They were then commissioned to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" with His image and likeness through their descendants (Verse 28). However, like the antediluvians before them, the builders of the tower of Babel crucified the Spirit (the Presence, Attitude and Life) of the Son of God who, after the Flood, had told Noah and his family, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). Nimrod and his associates disobeyed this instruction and built a city and tower exclaiming, "Let us make a name for ourselves, *lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.*" God desired that His name [character/image/likeness] be scattered all over the earth, but they rejected this and said, "let us make a name for ourselves."

In seeing this, God and His Son saw how deep man was still drowning in sin and thus confused their languages out of pity in order for this work to stop. After this, there was no harmony in their work. Angry at one another and unable to account for the misunderstanding and strange words among them, they left the work and separated from each other and scattered abroad. This harmonizes with what Genesis chapter 10 says:

"From these the coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, **everyone according to his language**, according to their families, into their nations ... These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood." (Genesis 10:5, 32)

Had not God interposed, Satan and man would have entered into an alliance against heaven, and the whole human family would have been united in opposition to God.

"All of the people were under a single dictator (Nimrod). So that if that dictator became evil, then evil would disseminate throughout all people. However, as the people formed into nations and distributed across the world, under multiple leaders and kings, this made it much more difficult for the entire world to become evil via a single corrupt leader. This is

the same reason why Jesus called for the formation of multiple, independent churches not under a single authority. This would help prevent the corruption of all churches, by poisoning a single authority that dictates all churches under a single authority structure.” (Brian Leung, *quora.com/Why did God confuse the language at the tower of Babel?*)

A little over 2,000 years later, Jesus promised His disciples that they would receive “another Comforter.”

“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” (John 14:15-17, *King James Version*)

In verse 26, Jesus says the Comforter is the Holy Spirit. Many are confused at the term “another Comforter”, believing Jesus is referring to a completely separate being than Himself. But take note He tells His disciples “ye know him; for he dwelleth with you” then adds, “and shall be in you.” Therefore, His disciples already knew who this Comforter was because He had been dwelling *with* them in the flesh but would eventually dwell *in* them in Spirit form. In fact, in the very next verse, Jesus says, “I will not leave you comfortless: *I will come to you*” (Verse 18). If Jesus Himself does not come to them, then they would be “comfortless”— “without the Comforter.” Thus, Jesus Himself is the Comforter who would dwell in His people.

“And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam [Jesus] **became a life-giving spirit.**” (1 Corinthians 15:45)

“And because you are sons, **God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts**, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Galatians 4:6)

Later, Jesus promised His disciples that on the Day of Pentecost they would “receive power” after His Holy Spirit would fill them and they would “be witnesses” to Him “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. **And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.**

At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and **they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.**

They were completely amazed. ‘How can this be?’ they exclaimed. ‘These people are all from Galilee, and yet **we hear them speaking in our own native languages!** Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And **we all hear these people speaking in our own languages** about the wonderful things God has done!’” (Acts 2:1-11, *New Living Translation*)

The inhabitants of ancient Babylon crucified the Spirit of Christ, resulting in a language barrier. Without the Spirit of Christ, separating into various nations was the best way to not have all humans unite in evil. God would let empires rise and fall until humanity reached a point when the spirit of domination is (relatively) exhausted, and man is ready for another way. That was when God sent Jesus into the world.

Jesus’ disciples being filled with His Spirit resulted in the language barrier being broken down. In the Spirit of Christ, men can unite together while still respecting each other’s differences and without feeling the need to dominate and control others. Rather than nations separated by their various gods modeled after human kings, Christians across nations are bound together as a family under a God who is a Father with the example of Jesus of how to be a son/daughter.

NIMROD'S LEGACY

As already noted, according to the legend, Nimrod was worshiped like a god by the inhabitants of the kingdom, but unfortunately for the ancient Babylonians a sad event occurred— their god Nimrod died. Some legends state that his body was divided into pieces and his wife Semiramis gathered all the pieces she could find, but one piece remained unfound— his reproductive organ. Semiramis wanted to comfort the people, so she called for a meeting near a newly built obelisk (long pointed statue, much like the Washington Monument) which was built to represent Nimrod's lost reproductive organ.

At this meeting, Semiramis told a story that would change the course of worship. She said that her husband had ascended into the sun and he was now to be referred to as the sun god. She also gave instructions on how to pay homage to their sun god. Every man, woman and child were to bow before the sun every morning and give thanks. So began the satanic practice of sun worship. Notice carefully how Satan is working here. He is drawing the people's attention away from "the Son of God" toward "the sun god."

Approximately two or three years after Nimrod's death, another unusual event took place. Semiramis was found to be in the early stages of motherhood. To explain this, she called for another meeting. In this meeting, she explained how she had been blessed with a child from the father sun god, claiming that the sperm from Nimrod actually came through the rays of the sun. She also announced that, since the child's father was worshiped, the child would also be worshiped because she

claimed that her son was Nimrod reborn. Henceforth, she was exalted and worshipped as “the mother of god.” Because they believed “Tammuz was Nimrod reborn”, both names were used interchangeably and took on different forms when “the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language.”

- Shamash (Babylon)
- Ra (Egypt)
- Baal (Assyrian)⁶
- Moloch (Canaanite)
- Mithra (Persians)
- Helios/Adonis (Greek)
- Hu (Druids)
- Sol Invictus (Roman)

As noted earlier, Scripture tells us that Nimrod had built the kingdoms of “Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar” (Genesis 10:10). Then “from that land [Shinar] he went to Assyria and built Nineveh” (Verse 11). Nineveh stood on the eastern shore of the Tigris River, two hundred and fifty miles north of Babylon. It is also the city where the legends of Semiramis (also known as Ishtar) were born.

Some legends state that after Semiramis died, Nimrod (the sun god) sent her back to earth in a giant egg. After this egg landed in the Euphrates River and settled onto the river’s floor, a large school of fish came and rolled the egg onto the shore. Then a group of doves flew down onto the egg and the warmth from their bodies hatched it. After the egg cracked wide open, out popped Semiramis, reborn into the fertility goddess Ishtar, or Astarte.

Again, because of the dispersion of the people “according to his language”, Semiramis became known by other names among the various cultures:

⁶ Baal (bah'-al) is the most common form of this name used throughout the Bible.

- Ishtar (Babylon)
- Ashtoreth (Phoenician)⁷
- Astarte (Canaanite)
- Aphrodite (Greek)
- Venus/Diana (Roman)⁸
- Eostre (German)
- Eastre (Saxon)

I pray you can see what Satan has been doing to deter our hearts and minds from the Son of God to the sun god. By placing himself as the sun, he's desperate to veil the true "Sun of Righteousness", which refers to the Messiah/Jesus (Malachi 4:2, see also Psalm 84:11). He is placing the creature above the Creator, as Paul warned when he spoke of those "who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). In fact, when Paul first became a Christian, he says the presence of Jesus was, "brighter than the sun" (Acts 26:13). So again, Satan will always fall short of his selfish goal. Sadly, even ancient Israel kept falling into this false worship:

"Again the Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight. They served the images of Baal and Ashtoreth, and the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia. They abandoned the LORD and no longer served him at all."
(Judges 10:6, *New Living Translation*)

As a result, God "turned them over" to the gods they had chosen (Verse 7). When they selfishly cried out for help, God, in order to magnify their sin, responded in loving discipline, "Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen! Let them rescue you in your hour of distress!" (Verse 14). Even here, while they were crucifying Him in their hearts, God's everlasting love for His children did not waver as "his soul was grieved with the misery of Israel" (Verse 16, *New Heart English Bible*).

⁷ Ashtoreth: See 1 Kings 11:5,33; 2 Kings 23:13.

⁸ Diana: See Acts 19:24,27-28,34-35.

SODOM AND EGYPT

Part One: The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

According to Scripture, Abram (Abraham) and his nephew Lot were natives of "Ur of the Chaldeans" (Genesis 11:27-28), which was an "important city of ancient southern Mesopotamia (Sumer), situated about 140 miles (225 km) southeast of the site of Babylon and about 10 miles (16 km) west of the present bed of the Euphrates River" (*Britanica.com*).

In order for God to fulfill His work through Abraham, He called him out of Babylon, and thus Abraham, being a believer in the one true God, did not hesitate to go (Genesis 12:1-4). As time went on, we read, "there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock" (Genesis 13:5-7). Being a humble man, "Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left'" (Verses 8-9).

"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere ... Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as **Sodom**. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord." (Genesis 13:10-13)

Lot coveted the land of Jordan due to it being "well watered everywhere", but his bad judgment got the best of him as he settled in Sodom where the men of the city "were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord."

The well-known story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (and the other three cities with them) perplexes many people. If Jesus is the perfect revelation of God, how is it that Jesus appears to act so differently towards sinners than “the God of the Old Testament”?

“Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.” (Genesis 19:24)

This does not fit the description Jesus revealed about His Father’s character. Jesus spoke of His Father as someone who is always “kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35) and bids us to “be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Verse 36). How do we reconcile this?

Well for starters, what have we learned happens when the inhabitants of a certain land are wicked? The land itself becomes defiled. We find this same principle at work here; for within this region was the Valley of Siddim where a battle took place between Chedorlaomer and his allies against the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar (Genesis 14:8-11). In verse 10, we see that “the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt [or bitumen] pits.” What does this mean?

“Bitumen: A type of asphalt or mineral pitch either occurring naturally or found as a by-product of burning coal or wood. This black sticky substance was used as an adhesive or a caulk. It could also be used for waterproofing, as in the construction of Noah’s ark (Gen 6:14) and the bulrush basket of Moses (Exod 2:3). **References are made to pitch oozing from the earth (Gen 14:10) near the Dead Sea, where it occurs naturally.**” (*Bible Oddysee.org*)

The cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar were already situated directly upon a landscape ready to be ignited. These pits caused great distress to these soldiers during their battle against Chedorlaomer and his allies. Was God attempting to warn them of the coming fiery destruction upon their cities due to their wickedness?

- **The Fire of God?**

Most assume that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is forewarning us that, when God's pent-up anger comes to a boiling point, He (in accordance with divine justice) rains fire down upon those who do not obey His rules. The historian, Josephus wrote:

"About this time the Sodomites grew proud, on account of their riches and great wealth; they became unjust towards men, and impious towards God, insomuch that they did not call to mind the advantages they received from him: they hated strangers, and abused themselves with Sodomitical practices. **God was therefore much displeased at them, and determined to punish them** for their pride, and to overthrow their city, and to lay waste their country, until there should neither plant nor fruit grow out of it. ... **God then cast a thunderbolt upon the city, and set it on fire, with its inhabitants; and laid waste the country with the like burning, as I formerly said when I wrote the Jewish War.**"
(Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 1, Ch. 11)

Furthermore, isn't it true that Elijah convinced God to reign fire down upon his enemies?

"So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, 'If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.' **And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.** Then he [the king] sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty men. And he [the captain] answered and said to him [Elijah]: 'Man of God, thus has the king said, 'Come down quickly!' So Elijah answered and said to them, 'If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.' **And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.**" (2 Kings 1:10-12)

However, when we turn to the New Testament, we see a completely different picture from Jesus when the Samaritans rejected Him:

"And when His disciples James and John saw this [the Samaritans' rejection], they said, '**Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?**' But He

turned and **rebuked them**, and said, '**You do not know what manner of spirit you are of**. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' And they went to another village." (Luke 9:51-55)

Here, Jesus teaches us that violent vengeance is not of God's Spirit, but of another spirit. James tells us "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are" (James 5:17, *Webster's Bible Translation*). Could he therefore have been of this other spirit, as were James and John, when he commanded fire to come down and devour his enemies? To answer this, God demonstrated to Elijah that He was *not* in the fire:

"Then He [God] said [to Elijah], 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.' And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake **a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire**; and after the fire a still small voice." (1 Kings 19:11-12)

However, if God is not in the destructive fire, why does it say, "the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty"? Is it possible that the people of that time, including the author, *perceived* that the fire came from God, but it really came from another source? The book of Job may give us a clue.

In the first chapter of Job we read, "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them" (Job 1:6). During this encounter, Satan accuses Job of only obeying God because of God's protective hedge around him (Verse 10). In other words, Job is only serving God because things are going well for him now, but take away this protection, and then Job would be cursing God. Replying to this God says, "Behold, all that he [Job] has is in your [Satan's] power; only do not lay a hand on his person" (Verse 12).

All the calamities that come upon Job from that point on are from Satan. Since God will not interfere with our free choice, Job could have exercised

his faith in God's divine protection and Satan would have had to respect the hedge of protection that God had built up around Job. However, Job's fear and worry that bad things would happen to him and his family (Job 1:5) indicated a lack of faith in God. Therefore, Satan gained access into Job's life due to Job's own fears. After calamity struck, Job confessed:

"For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came." (Job 3:25-26, *King James Version*)

In Job 2:16, we read that fire burned up all of Job's sheep and servants. Clearly, Satan caused this fire, but notice what one servant says to Job:

"**The fire of God** fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" (Verse 16).

The people living during this event, who did not know what we know was happening behind the scenes, perceived that the fire came directly from God; this is Satan's goal.

"'Blame God' is the devil's subterfuge: and how many thousands of Christians today attribute to God what Satan is doing. If calamity comes to them, they say 'it is God's hand,' and they either passively yield or else they rebel, with the result that the heart is heavy and the spirit dulled and oppressed." (Charles H. Usher, *Satan: A Defeated Foe*, p. 53)

John tells us that in the last days most people will believe God is making "fire come down from heaven" when it will be the deceitful acts of Satan (Revelation 13:13). Sure, this "fire" is symbolic of the works of the Holy Spirit, but it still uncovers the truth that even we in this day in age can also attribute to God what Satan is doing. Job himself was tempted to believe this in his day.

Going back to Elijah, we see that the fire was a mirror of the violence that was inside Elijah as it clashed with the gentle character of God. The closer God came to Elijah, the more his sinful character was exposed. Of this

account, Albert Barnes writes, "The teaching is a condemnation of that 'zeal' which Elijah had gloried in, a zeal exhibiting itself in fierce and terrible vengeance ..." (*Barnes' Notes*, 1 Kings 19:12).

Because of Satan's violent character (Ezekiel 28:16), God said: "I shall send out *fire from within you*, and it shall devour you" (Verse 18). Reflecting Satan's character, Elijah had killed many with the sword, however, when God showed him his sin, he confessed and repented saying, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kings 19:4).

- **"As in the Days of Lot"**

As we saw earlier, in Luke chapter 17, Jesus compares the "days of Noah" with His second coming. Expanding upon this revelation, Jesus also says:

"Likewise **as it was also in the days of Lot**: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. **Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.**" (Luke 17:28-30)

The "days of Noah" and the "days of Lot" are connected; therefore, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah must have happened by the *same process*— the crucifixion (suppression/rejection) of "the Word of God" (Jesus), who upholds (preserves) "all things by the word of His power." The overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah took place as the Son of God was crushed under the burden that was inflicted upon the creation by the Sodomites. Like the antediluvians, the more the Spirit of Christ pleaded for them to repent, the more hardened their hearts became.

When we look closer at the Hebrew of Genesis 13:10, the land of Sodom "was well watered everywhere, before the LORD **אֱלֹהִים** destroyed Sodom **אֱלֹהִים** and Gomorrah." The Aleph-Tav reveals that Christ **אֱלֹהִים** was grieved, feeling great sorrow as He was pierced **אֱלֹהִים** in the midst of Sodom and Gomorrah as they chose death instead of life— "He who sins against Me [Jesus] wrongs his own soul; all those who hate Me love death" (Proverbs 8:36).

When Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem, knowing of her coming destruction, He cried:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! **How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!** See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Matthew 23:37-39)

Like the unbelieving Jews, the inhabitants of Sodom had willingly rejected being gathered under the protective wings of Christ. Can't we ignore our preconceived ideas, look into Jesus' heart, and hear Him say:

“O [**Sodom and Gomorrah**], the ones who kill the prophets and kill those who are sent to them! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate.”

What happened to these cities was not done by God forcing His will upon anyone; for the Lord is “longsuffering toward us, *not willing that any should perish* but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

“And the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the reward of the sin of **Sodom**, which was overthrown as in a moment, and **no hands were violently laid upon her.**” (Lamentations 4:6, *Darby Bible*)

It is an oxymoron to believe that God would directly use violence to destroy violent people. God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah by *giving them up* to their own reprobate minds, which breaks His heart. This is exactly what the Lord said of the pending doom of Ephraim, comparing it to the destruction of Admah and Zeboiim, which were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah:

“How can I **give you up**, Ephraim? How can I **hand you over**, Israel? How can I make you like **Admah**? How can I set you like **Zeboiim**? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.” (Hosea 11:8)

And again, we read:

“The expressions on their faces give them away. **They parade their sin around like Sodom**; they don't even try to hide it. How horrible it will be for them, because **they have brought disaster on themselves!**” (Isaiah 3:9, *International Standard Version*)

Please keep in mind the precept we have learned concerning how humanity's sin affects the earth itself. Just as God “heard” Abel's blood cry unto Him from the ground (Genesis 4:10), God said, “I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant” (Genesis 20).

If Cain spilling his brother's blood caused the ground to be cursed, is it not possible that the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was stirring up the bitumen pits? This principle is alluded to elsewhere:

“Because they sow the wind, they will reap the windstorm.” (Hosea 8:7, *International Standard Version*)

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. **For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption**, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” (Galatians 6:7-8)

Could this be the same principle in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Did the earth respond in *burning fire* due to their *burning lusts*?

“This then is the reason why **God gave them up to vile passions**. For not only did the women among them exchange the natural use of their bodies for one which is contrary to nature, but the men also, in just the same way—neglecting that for which nature intends women—**BURNED with passion** towards one another, men practising shameful vice with men, and **receiving in their own selves the reward which necessarily followed their misconduct.**” (Romans 1:26-27, *Weymouth's New Testament*)

The earth itself was ripe to be ignited by the burning passions of Sodom and Gomorrah. Since, “the days of Noah”, “the days of Lot”, and the second coming are connected, could earthquakes have played a part in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Here is one theory:

“Today ‘the shores around the Dead Sea are covered with lava, sulfur, and rock salt. Gases escape from the surface of the water.’ [*World Book Encyclopedia*, 1954, p. 1891]. Note the existence in this scenario of all the ingredients necessary to destroy these cities in a great fiery conflagration. Bitumen, asphalt, oil, gas—even salt to turn Lot’s wife into a pillar. Another name for ‘brimstone,’ which Scripture says God ‘rained’ upon these cities is sulfur, a major export of this region today. One need only consider the swiftness with which the ancient city of Pompeii met its doom via volcano to know something similar could have happened to these cities in such a volatile location.

Modern archeologists have concluded that a massive earthquake occurred in this region sometime in the ancient past which not only ruptured some of the cities and altered the landscape significantly, but also likely caused the sulfur, bitumen, and other lethal elements to explode high into the air and come back down burning with intense fire that rained on everything in sight. **God did not personally hurl fireballs at Sodom and Gomorrah. Rather, He did not prevent this natural disaster, because the free-will choice of the people had denied authority for God to block this disaster from coming on them.** (Marilyn. M. Cambell, *Light on the Dark Side of God*, p. 53)

On pages 61-62 in his book, *Acts of Our Gentle God*, Jay A. Schulberg writes:

“Now, let’s take another look at this same event with the understanding that God does not take an active role in destruction. Picture the two cities with the self-serving inhabitants enjoying their prosperity and pleasures. ... The people are unaware that beneath their cities (which are built in a geologically unstable area) volcanic forces are building. They are also unaware that the invisible God, whom they are rejecting, is also the same God who has, up to this point in time, protected them from calamity. The day finally arrives when God must acknowledge their desire for

independence from him. To uphold their freedom, he reluctantly lets them go, leaving them unshielded from the forces of nature out of his control. **The fissures beneath the earth's surface rip upward spewing molten rock thousands of feet into the air and raining down 'brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven' (Gen. 19:24), destroying Sodom and Gomorrah in a matter of minutes.** God's act in destroying the two cities was giving the inhabitants genuine freedom—including the freedom to make choices with catastrophic consequences."

- **"We Will Destroy This Place"**

One more point before we close this section. The two angels sent to Sodom told Lot, "*We will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it*" (Genesis 19:13).

Here again we are to read this in the sense of *permission* and not causation. The two angels were not sent to personally destroy the city themselves, but the reaction of the inhabitants of Sodom to those angels shut the door of mercy in their own faces because they did not believe in mercy.

Like Jesus who "came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11), these angels went to try to move upon the hearts of the straying inhabitants of Sodom and bring them back into the fold. Unlike the inhabitants of Nineveh who repented when hearing the message of Jonah, resulting in their city being saved (Jonah 3:4-10), the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah hardened their hearts and spiritually crucified Jesus from their conscience.

The inhabitants' response to the angels caused them to pass the boundary of believing in mercy due to their "debased mind" (Romans 1:28) and "having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). This resulted in their *inability* to repent; not that God would *refuse* any repentance, but their minds were not even *capable* of repenting at this point. Like the antediluvians, they had sealed themselves in their sins.

Paul picks up on this concept and says that God “uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. *But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing.* To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume” (2 Corinthians 2:14-16, *New Living Translation*).

To further prove this point, in Revelation 7:2, we read about “four angels to whom it was granted to *harm* the earth and the sea.” However, in verse 1 we see that they are “holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.” At first glance, the language seems to suggest that it’s the angels who would “harm the earth and the sea”, but it’s actually the “winds” that would directly harm the earth and the sea *after* the angels let go.

Thus, these four angels will be “granted to harm the earth and the sea” in the sense of “letting go” (submitting to have their hands nailed down) after everyone makes their final choice. These events take place during the seven last plagues just before Jesus’ second coming, to which we have already seen Jesus compares to “the days of Lot.”⁹ Therefore, the destruction upon Sodom and Gomorrah was not the direct cause of the angels but came after they “let go” resulting in the inherent destruction.

Part Two: The Plagues of Egypt

You may remember the story of how Joseph, one of Abraham’s great-grandsons, was sold by his brothers as a slave and carried off to Egypt. There, Joseph gains favor with the Egyptian Pharaoh and given great authority to be second in command under Pharaoh. As time goes on, there is a great famine throughout the lands and Joseph’s brothers seek help in Egypt. They end up cutting a deal with Joseph (although not recognizing him) and Joseph gives permission for the entire family to live in Egypt.

⁹ We will discuss these plagues in a later chapter.

Over the centuries, many scholars have drawn parallels between Joseph and Jesus. Here are a few as mentioned by *onepagebiblesummary.com*:

Joseph	Jesus
Was a shepherd (Gen. 37:2)	Is the good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11)
Was the beloved of his father (Gen. 37:3)	Is the beloved of the Father (Matt. 3:17)
Lived with his father in honor before going down to Egypt (Gen. 37:2-4)	Lived with God His Father before coming to earth (Jn. 1:2)
Was sent by his father to his brothers for their welfare (Gen. 37:13-14)	Was sent by His Father to save the world (Jn. 3:16-17)
Master was well pleased with him (Gen. 39:4)	Heavenly Father was well pleased with Him (Matt. 3:17; Jn. 8:29)
Was tempted by Potiphar's wife and did not sin (Gen. 39:7-12)	Was tempted and did not sin (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 2:18; 4:15)
Was hated by his brothers (Gen. 37:4, 5, 8) because of: 1) His father's (Jacob's) special love for him; 2) his words	Was hated by His brothers (Jn. 15:25; Lk. 19:14) because: 1) He claimed God as His Father (Jn. 5:18); 2) His Words (Jn. 7:7; 8:40)
His brothers plotted to kill him (Gen. 37:18-20)	The Jews also plotted to kill Him. (Matt. 12:14; 26:4)
Was sold into Egypt at the proposal of Judah (Gen. 37:26-27)	Was betrayed and handed over to the Jews by Judas (Matt. 27:3)
Was sold for the price of redemption (Gen. 37:28)	Was sold for thirty pieces of silver (the price of a slave) (Matt. 26:15)
Was falsely accused (Gen. 39:16-18)	Was falsely accused (Matt. 26:59-61)
Attempted no defense (Gen. 39:19)	Gave no defense at His trials (Is. 53:7)
Although innocent he was jailed with prisoners (Gen. 39:20)	Although innocent He was crucified with criminals (Lk. 23:33)
Was taken out of the pit, alive (Gen. 37:28)	Was resurrected from the tomb (1 Cor. 15:4)

Even in the Hebrew of Genesis 37:28 we read, "... and they [Joseph's brothers] sold **וַיִּמְכְּרוּ** Joseph to the Ishmaelites."

After the generation of Joseph died off, so did their influence and the Israelites became slaves under Egyptian tyranny (Exodus 1:6-14). This is why God met Moses at the burning bush and called him to deliver His people.

"Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:9-10)

Just as God heard (was deeply affected/afflicted by) the cry of Abel's blood and the cry of Sodom, God heard "the cry of the children of Israel." In his gospel, Matthew recorded the events of Joseph and Mary when they fled into Egypt with the baby Jesus in order to escape King Herod's death decree upon every child under the age of two. He then refers to the prophecy in Hosea 11 by saying they remained in Egypt "until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, '*Out of Egypt I called My Son*' (Matthew 2:15).

Here we see that Jesus is the true Israel (cf. Isaiah 49:3). When Jacob's name was changed to Israel, we read, "... and He called **יִשְׂרָאֵל** his name Israel" (Genesis 35:10). The Pharaoh exclaimed, "I do not know **יִשְׂרָאֵל** the LORD, nor will I let **יִשְׂרָאֵל** Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). Thus, when God heard the cry of Israel in ancient Egypt, He heard the cry of His Son who suffered in all their affliction (Isaiah 63:9). "For He [God] has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him [Jesus/the afflicted]; but when He [Jesus/the afflicted] cried to Him [God], He heard" (Psalm 22:24).

Moses replied to God's call saying, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10). The Lord's answer to this was:

"Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." (Exodus 4:11-12)

This in no way means God makes people mute, deaf and blind. It simply means God creates the people who are (or become) mute, deaf and blind. While God is a perfect Creator, the presence of sin in this world has a negative effect upon His design. After this, Moses then begs, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send" (Exodus 4:13).

"So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: 'Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look,

he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do." (Exodus 4:14-15)

Please notice once again how God expresses anger. He did not raise His voice or lash out against Moses to cause him any harm or to force him to do something against his own choice. No, God's anger was revealed by giving Moses, who lacked faith in God's will, exactly what he desired—someone else to speak for him. This is very important in the context of the plagues that were about to fall upon Egypt.

When Moses and his brother Aaron appeared before Pharaoh declaring, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness'" (Exodus 5:1), Pharaoh replied, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go" (Verse 2). In Proverbs 30:9 we read that those who boastfully say, "Who is the Lord?" are those who "deny" that their livelihood comes from Him.

Speaking on behalf of Egypt, Pharaoh denies the God of the Hebrews and denies their request to observe a feast to the Lord. The *New King James Version* translates the next verse like this:

"So they [Moses and Aaron] said, 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days' journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God, **lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.**'" (Exodus 5:3)

When the writer uses the phrase "lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword", he is not saying God will be the cause of this pestilence, but that God would *give them over* to pestilence. The *Septuagint* (Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) explains it more clearly, removing any doubt:

“And they say to him, ‘The God of the Hebrews has called us to Him: we will go therefore a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, **lest at any time death or slaughter happen to us.**” (Exodus 5:3; *Brenton’s Septuagint*)

Describing the plagues of Egypt, the Psalmist wrote, “... He did not spare their soul from death, but *gave their life over to the plague*” (Psalm 78:50). God did not cause the plagues; He gave them over to the plagues according to their free choice to afflict and crucify Christ— their only Protector.

• **God Does Not Work Through Force**

If they had been able to keep this feast and return, then the plagues could have been averted a little longer, if not prevented all together. The Lord wanted to save the Egyptians from destruction. Let me say that again, *the Lord wanted to save the Egyptians from destruction*. If Pharaoh would give his permission for Israel to keep a feast, then he would be responsible for the action they took and would therefore benefit from the feast the Israelites engaged in. Let’s look at this concept in a little more detail.

At the burning bush, God gave Moses the words to say to Pharaoh. Moses was to say, “*Please*, let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God” (Exodus 3:18). In Exodus 5:3, we see that Moses and Aaron carried out God’s desire to be respectful and polite by saying “please.” They did not just kick the door down and barge in demanding things because this is not the character of God. Christ stands at the door of our heart and politely “knocks” (Revelation 3:20). Later, during the plague of flies, God says this:

“And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the land. I will make a difference between My people and your people. **Tomorrow** this sign shall be.” (Exodus 8:22-23)

Here, God tells the people that the flies are coming “tomorrow.” Is He not giving everyone, including the Egyptians, time to prepare? If God is going to prevent the flies from plaguing the land of Goshen, then everyone who trusts in God’s word should go there. God says this again just before the death of the livestock (Exodus 9:4-5) and the plague of locusts (Exodus 10:4). The day before the plague of hail, God tells Moses to “Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh” (Exodus 9:13) and say to him:

“Behold, **tomorrow** about this time I will cause [permit] very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now. Therefore send now and **gather your livestock and all that you have in the field**, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die.” (Exodus 9:18-19, words in brackets added)

Not only is God giving the Egyptians “time” to prepare, but also tells them what to do— gather all your remaining livestock and bring them to a shelter. We then read:

“He who feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses. But he who did not regard the word of the Lord left his servants and his livestock in the field.” (Exodus 9:20-21)

Does this sound like God is a vindictive tyrant that many have made Him out to be? Several times throughout the plagues, God makes it clear that He is answering Pharaoh’s question: “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?” As each plague continues, God says, “By this you shall know that I am the Lord” (Exodus 7:5,17; 8:22; 9:29; 10:2) and “that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God” (Exodus 8:10; 9:14). In fact, in the *International Standard Version* of Exodus 9:15-16 we read:

“Indeed, by now I [God] could have sent forth [removed] my hand [protective power] and struck you and your people with a plague, and **you would have been destroyed from the earth.** However, I’ve kept you standing in order to show you my power and to declare my name in all the earth.” (Exodus 9:15-16, words in brackets added)

God is not like all the false pagan gods who operate through force and coercion; God is a God of love and mercy, “not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9), which is the whole purpose of God permitting the plagues in the first place. He desired to work with and bring peace and prosperity to Egypt and its Pharaoh as He did in the time of Joseph.

However, just as the two angels knew the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah would harden their hearts, God knew His merciful invitation would harden Pharaoh's heart (cf. Exodus 7:3; 8:15). Pharaoh denied God and exalted the gods of Egypt, and thus nature would again express her sympathy with her injured Maker by raining down ten plagues upon Egypt.

The first plague of the waters turning to blood indicated that God had given His Son, “the Living Water” (John 7:37-39), as a ransom to the demands of Satan who had dragged the Egyptians deep into idolatry and wickedness— “He turned ~~תן~~ their waters into blood ...”(Psalm 105:29).

The Egyptians had rejected the wisdom of Joseph and despised the grace of God in saving them from the drought and famine which were warnings that the Spirit of God was being withdrawn due to their refusal to acknowledge Him and His Commandments (Deuteronomy 11:13-17). Christ was crucified in the Egyptians’ rebellion and thus God later told His people Israel, “I gave Egypt for your ransom” (Isaiah 43:3). Just before the tenth and final plague, God said:

“For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.” (Exodus 12:12)

God was going to execute judgment against “all the gods of Egypt” which resulted in all the firstborn being killed. When reading this verse at face value most conclude that God is the one who directly killed all the firstborn in Egypt. But how does God “execute judgment”?

“The LORD is known by the judgment He executes; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.” (Psalm 9:16)

God executes judgment by reluctantly permitting the wicked to be snared in the work of their own hands. But doesn't God say *He* would strike all the firstborn? Yes, but remember the Hebraic idiom of *permission* where God is said to “do” that which He reluctantly “permits” to be done. Because God's mercy is everlasting, He told the people, including the Egyptians, how to escape this final plague:

“Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, ‘This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household ... **Your lamb shall be without blemish**, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. **And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses** where they eat it ... For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and **not allow the destroyer** to come into your houses to strike you.” (Exodus 12:1-3, 5-7, 23)

- **The Destroyer**

Here we see that the one doing the killing was a completely different being— The Destroyer. Of course, God's desire was to prevent the Destroyer access into their homes, but His judgments (decisions) are always based on freedom of choice. Therefore, He accepted the free choice of the individual family. If the blood was on the doorpost, God accepted their choice and did not permit the Destroyer to enter. If there was no blood, then God accepted their choice and did not prevent the Destroyer to enter.

It is important to note here that God and the Destroyer are not working together as a team:

“How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-15, *New Living Translation*)

It is also noteworthy that modern Jewish Hebrew scholars are suggesting that the English verb “pass over”, in Exodus 12:13 for example, may be an incorrect translation. Here’s how the *Septuagint* translates verse 13:

“And the blood shall be for a sign to you on the houses in which ye are, and I will see the blood, and will **protect [σκεπάσω]** you, and there shall not be on you the plague of destruction, when I smite in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 12:13)

The translators of the *Septuagint* translated the Hebrew verb *pasach* as σκεπάσω (*skepázō*) which means, “protect”, “contend over”, “cover over”, or “shelter” in English. So rather than God “passing over” (i.e., deciding *not* to kill the firstborn), He is actually “standing guard” promising to “shelter” and “protect” them from the Destroyer. This shows that, the “shelter” during each plague that God instructed them to run to, is the Lamb of God (Jesus). This “shelter” was introduced to the antediluvians at the time of the Flood in the form of an ark, and to the Sodomites in the form of the two angels.

Many refer to this Destroyer as “the destroying angel”; however, this destroying angel does not work for God. The destroying angel is Satan (or at least one of his angels). In Revelation 9:11, we read about “the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.” Abaddon means, “Destroyer (i.e. Destroying Angel) or place of destruction,” and Apollyon means, “The Destroying One.” This is the very character of the devil himself:

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary **the devil** walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

In John chapter 10, Jesus contrasts His character with Satan's:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it in all its fullness. I am the good shepherd. **The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.**" (John 10:10-11, *Berean Standard Bible*)

In the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus teaches that the one who sows tares (or weeds/difficulties in life) upon the earth is "an enemy" (Matthew 13:24-30). Scripture teaches that all suffering and death are work of an antagonistic power. Satan is the Destroyer; God is the Restorer.

"... pain, calamity, sickness, and death are not to be attributed to God as causing them, and as sending them upon us, but that they and all other evils have entered into the world as the fruits and consequences of sin." (Charles Cutbert Hall, *Does God Send Trouble?* pp. 25, 80, 1894)

"Is it any wonder, then, when the spirit is in such a state of moral disorder, that the body, which has its life from the spirit, should be filled with impurity and disease also? and that, when a whole people or all mankind is in such a state, pestilences should break out and ravage whole countries and go through the world? **Let not men, then, (as they are too apt to do) ascribe these scourges of humanity to the Hand of their Heavenly Father above, who is Love and Goodness itself, -who is a Saviour, not a destroyer,** -but to their own state of corruption and sin, which is the sole cause of their suffering." (Oliver Prescott Hiller, *God Manifest: A Treatise on the Goodness, Wisdom, and Power of God, as Manifested in His Works, Word, and Personal Appearing*, p. 280)

Keeping this in mind, Scripture is clear that it was "evil angels" attacking the Egyptians, not God's righteous angels:

"They remembered not His hand, nor the day when He delivered them **from the enemy.** How He had wrought His signs in Egypt, and His wonders in the field of Zoan: And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. He sent [permitted] divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed

them. He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust. He destroyed [gave up] their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He **gave up** their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. He cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending **EVIL ANGELS** among them." (Psalm 78:42-49, *King James Version*, words in brackets added for clarity)

As we saw with the four angels holding back the winds of strife, Jesus' protective hands were rejected (nailed down), so He was forced to give them over to their own desires, resulting in the "sending" of "evil angels among them." Again, the Hebrew idiom appears in the phrase "by *sending* evil angels" which means God "let loose" or "permitted" evil angels to destroy.

In Judges 9:23 it says, "Then *God sent an evil spirit* between Abimelech and the men of Shechem." In 2 Thessalonians 2:11 we read that, because people reject truth, "*God will send them strong delusion*, that they should believe a lie." Do you really believe God is directly sending evil spirits and delusions?

"For pray, take notice, **God is said in scripture to send what He can but doth not hinder from being sent.**" (Edward Bird, *Fate and Destiny, Inconsistent with Christianity: or, The Horrid Decree of Absolute and Unconditional Election and Reprobation Fully Detected*, 1726)

In his book, *Acts of Our Gentle God*, Jay A. Schulberg gives us some profound insights:

"When God met Moses in the wilderness, he gave him an object lesson that Moses and Aaron would later demonstrate before Pharaoh that would show the ruler exactly what God's role would be in the coming catastrophic events:

'And the LORD said unto him [Moses], What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And **he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent**; and Moses fled from before it. And

the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and **it became a rod in his hand.**' (Ex. 4:2–4).

'And he [God] said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. ... And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God. **And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.**' (Ex. 4:14,16–17).

Moses was to go before Pharaoh as God's representative. God's purpose in this demonstration was for it to be more than a mere display of power; it was an illustration to identify the real destroyer. **When Moses, as God's representative, held the rod in his hand, it symbolized the forces of nature under God's control.** No harm could come to Egypt as long as God's protective hand held back the destructive forces of nature. **When Moses cast down the rod, it became a serpent, the symbol of evil and destruction. This symbolized the forces of nature out of God's control and under the control of Satan—the destroyer.**" (Jay A. Schulberg, *Acts of Our Gentle God*, pp. 27–28)

With this in mind, we must remember Scripture says all "power belongs to God" (Psalm 62:11); "For there is no power but of God" (Romans 13:1), and that Christ is "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Satan, nor we, can do anything, including sin, kill or destroy, without Christ sustaining us by His power— "He bore them [us] and carried them [us] all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:9). Here is how A.T. Jones explains this concept:

"Earthly power is the power of God, perverted by sin. The Creator so respects man's free will, that he gives him power to do that which is contrary to the divine will. This power however is limited." (A.T. Jones, *American Sentinel*, August 25, 1898)

A contemporary of Jones named E.J. Waggoner explains it like this:

"This is absolutely true, without any exception. The Roman power, even in the days of the infamous and brutal Nero, was as much derived from God as was the Jewish power in the days of David. **When Pilate told Christ that he had power to crucify Him or to let Him go, Christ replied, 'Thou couldst have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above.'** John xix. 11." (E.J Waggoner, *Present Truth*, March 21, 1895)

Therefore, to say that the plagues were "out of God's control", and thus delivered by Satan, is still in line with God's *submission* to free will as He gave the people over to the one they chose to worship. The evidence of this is in the fact that God was able to stop each plague and put up a hedge according to the choice of the individual's trust in Him. It's the same as when God said to Satan, "All that he [Job] has is in your power" but then adds, "only do not lay a hand on his person" (Job 1:12).

But what about the killing of all the firstborn during the tenth plague? Was this an arbitrary imposed punishment issued by God? No. Remember, Jesus is God's true Israel. After showing Moses all that he should do with the rod in the presence of Pharaoh, "Moses took the rod of God in his hand" (Exodus 4:20) while God informed him what to say:

"You shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: **Israel is My son, My firstborn.** So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.'" (Exodus 4:22-23)

How would God "kill" the firstborn? The same way He "killed" King Saul—by giving the Egyptians over to their own selfish desires and therefore not preventing "the Destroyer" from taking life. Jesus says something similar in the book of Revelation when referring to "that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess" (Revelation 2:20):

"I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. Look! I will throw her into a sickbed and those who commit

adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her practices. **I will kill her children with the plague.** Then all the churches will know that I am the One who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works.” (Revelation 2:21-23, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*)

Now, we must admit here this is all symbolic, with Jezebel representing a false church system and “her children” representing churches/people that follow her, so the killing being done is also symbolic. However, we can see that Jesus accomplishes this killing “with the plague” by remembering what the Psalmist wrote: “... He did not spare their soul from death, but *gave their life over to the plague*” (Psalm 78:50).

Jesus also said to the followers of Jezebel, “I will give to each of you according to your works”, meaning their own actions will condemn them and come falling back upon them. As it is written: “As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head” (Obadiah 1:15, *English Standard Version*). This we have seen is God’s justice (Psalm 9:16) which is always measured in mercy (Psalm 89:14).

At face value, reading the story of the plagues of Egypt with a veil over our eyes, we see a God who’s furious and He strikes out to destroy those “wicked Egyptians.” However, in the actions of Moses, we see a glimpse into the way God exercises anger: “Then Moses, hot with anger, *left* Pharaoh” (Exodus 11:8). A similar situation happened later when Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses and “the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and *He departed*. And when the cloud *departed* from above the tabernacle, *suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow*” (Numbers 12:9-10).

Again, as in the case of the antediluvians who demanded God to “depart from us!” (Job 22:15-17), we see that God’s anger is exercised by Him *departing* at the persistent sinner’s request, leaving them to reap the consequences they had sown. Concerning God’s justice, and how God will give to each of us according to our works, E.J. Waggoner explains:

"God's mercies endure forever, even though there are some who will have none of it. In His mercy He bears long with them, but God could not tolerate rebellion forever in His dominions and be just to His loyal subjects.

So in justice no less than mercy to those who willingly yield to His control, He must let the wicked suffer the punishment which they have worked for. Indeed, it would be doing the wicked an injustice not to give them that for which they have so long and diligently laboured. They have 'taken counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.' [Psalm 2:3]. **All their desire has been to be left to themselves and now God gives them their desire.**

But as there is no place in the universe where God is not, the only thing for them is extinction. So we read, 'For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. Ps. 37:9, 10.' (*Justice and Mercy*, p. 22)

Although a small group of Egyptians accepted the true God and were among the "mixed multitude" who came out of Egypt with the Israelites (Exodus 12:38), many Egyptians had refused to acknowledge their idolatry and held onto their hatred against God. Their sinful desires came to the fullness as they rejected and spiritually crucified Christ who is "the *Firstborn* of all creation" (Colossians 1:15), meaning He is the preeminent One "by whom" God created all things (verses 16-17; 1 Corinthians 8:6) and to whom the Father has given all things (Matthew 28:18).

In the death of the firstborn, God would hold up a mirror to reveal that man surely "becomes the victim of his own destructive plans and the violence he intended for others falls on his own head" (Proverbs 7:14-16, *New English Translation*).

The Hebrew word for "rod" in Exodus 4 is the word מִטָּה (*matteh*), which is the same Hebrew word used for a prophecy concerning Jesus in the book of Psalms: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your

enemies Your footstool.' The Lord shall send **the rod** [*matteh*] of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!" (cf. Psalm 110:1-2; Hebrews 1:13; Acts 2:34-36).

When the Egyptians rejected Christ's pleading Spirit, God let go of His rod (Jesus) into the hands of the serpent (Satan). Thus, the Egyptian's rejection and crucifixion of Christ (the Firstborn of all creation) opened the way for the destructive evil angel to enter, pervert the sustaining power of Christ, and kill all their firstborn sons. Christ could not help them because they had willfully crucified Him. He did not interfere with their free choice of rejecting their only Source of life.

Thus, once again we see "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" during the events of ancient Sodom and Egypt; for the prophet John tells us that Christ was not only crucified in Jerusalem but was "spiritually" crucified in "Sodom and Egypt" (Revelation 11:8).

- **Christ, Our Passover Lamb**

Yet in the symbolism of the "lamb without blemish" (Exodus 12:5) and its blood upon the doorpost, Christ, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19), shed His blood and was bearing their sins. Paul wrote that "He [Jesus], by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9); "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

It was "the blood" that saved them. Blood is a symbol of *life* (Leviticus 17:11). We are saved by the faithful obedient life of Christ, who "was oppressed and afflicted [by sinful humanity], yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Demonstrating His Father's character, "He had done no violence" (Isaiah 53:9); "He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when He was insulted, nor threaten revenge when He suffered" (1 Peter 2:22-23).

The blood being applied upon the doorposts represents Jesus' others-centered life, as transcribed in the law, being applied to the doorposts of our hearts and minds (Deuteronomy 11:18-20; Hebrews 8:10). Taking another look at Exodus 12:12, we see the Aleph-Tav appear, connecting the blood on the doorpost with Jesus:

"Now the blood [life] shall be a sign for you ... and when I see **תא** the blood [life], I will pass over [protect] you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you." (Exodus 12:13, words in brackets added)

When we look at verse 23 again, we not only see Jesus connected with the blood (life), but we see Jesus crucified (stricken) among the Egyptians who chose the Destroyer over the saving blood (life) of Jesus.

"For the Lord will pass through to strike **תא** the Egyptians; and when He sees **תא** the blood [life] on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over [protect] the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you." (Exodus 12:23, words in brackets added)

When we allow the Spirit (Life) of Christ (the Lamb) to enter in, "we shall be saved by His life", represented by the blood (Romans 5:10). Not just His life He lived 2,000 years ago, as if it were some legal payment to pacify God, but His *present life* working in and through us, leading us in repentance today. Hallelujah, we can and will overcome a life of sinning (Revelation 3:21) as well as the deceptions of Satan (the Destroyer) "by the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 12:11); for "the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one" (1 Thessalonians 3:3).

COMPLAINTS IN THE WILDERNESS

After the Israelites escaped from Egypt, they began to reveal where their hearts still were— back in Egypt.

“They said to Moses, ‘Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us into the wilderness to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Did we not say to you in Egypt, Leave us alone so that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’” (Exodus 14:11-12, *Berean Standard Bible*)

Even though they physically had left Egypt, God was still working on delivering their hearts from Egypt. Concerning all the complaining, we read:

“And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in.’” (Numbers 14:26-30)

Keep in mind that the words, “just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you” mean that God would *give them over* to their complaining. He’s not saying He’s going to cause them any harm. Their minds were fixed on fear, which caused a breach in the hedge of protection God had

provided. God was then forced to give them over to their own thoughts and they perished in the wilderness. Does this not echo what happened to Job?— “For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me” (Job 3:25). Thus, the book of Proverbs states: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

“Why Have You brought Us Up Out of Egypt to Kill Us and Our Children?”

In Exodus 17 we read, “Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water that we may drink.’ So Moses said to them, ‘Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?’ And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, ‘*Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?*’” (Exodus 17:2-3).

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on **the rock in Horeb**; and you shall **strike the rock**, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.’ And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.” (Exodus 17:5-6)

God told Moses to take the same rod he used when he struck the Nile River in Egypt, turning it to blood, and to “strike the rock” that was before him. Not only does the bloody river represent the shed blood of Christ, but the apostle Paul tells us that this Rock does as well:

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For **they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.**” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

Here we see that Christ was at the center of their wilderness journey. Paul confirms that this “Rock that followed them” represents Christ being struck

(crucified) by the complainers who distrusted His leadership throughout the entire wilderness journey. They had “tempted the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” (Exodus 17:7).

“Who Will Give Us Meat to Eat?”

At one time, the Israelites began to complain about the manna they were given, saying, *“Who will give us meat [flesh] to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!”* (Numbers 11:4-6). Because of this, “the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused” (Verse 10). God then summoned a meeting with Moses and 70 of the elders and said:

“Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, ‘Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.’ Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, ‘Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?’” (Numbers 11:18-20)

A little further on, we read the sad results of this complaining and craving:

“Now a wind went out from the Lord, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and about a day’s journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.” (Numbers 11:31-34)

Here again we read the Hebraic idiom, "the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague." In our study concerning the plagues of Egypt we concluded that God is not the one directly responsible for plagues. We have also learned that God's anger or wrath is God reluctantly giving to sinful humanity that which he selfishly desires. Notice how the Psalmist brings this out when referring to this same incident:

"He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; and by His power He brought in the south wind. He also rained meat on them like the dust, Feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; and He let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings. So they ate and were well filled, For **He gave them their own desire**. They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, the wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel." (Psalm 78:26-31, see also Psalm 106:13-15)

With this in mind, we can confidently know that God was not the cause of their sickness. Since they had become accustomed to the simple diet of manna and water in the wilderness, the sickness came as a *natural consequence* of not having the proper amount of enzymes to digest the quail. This is a common occurrence among vegetarians who partake of meat for the first time or after a long absence, or to those who go on a period of fasting then jump right in and engorge themselves with food.

But if this is the only reason for their sickness, would this really cause the people to die? Not necessarily. However, quail are known to be extremely poisonous during migration, especially while they are flying certain routes. Is it not possible that they just so happened to complain and crave the quail during this migration route when the quail were poisonous?

"One of the most widely known and studied poisonous birds is the European quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) in Eurasia and North Africa. Cases of quail poisoning have been reported since antiquity, although scientific evidence for the presence of poison in their tissue is still inconclusive to this day. **In the Old Testament, the Book of Numbers recounts that**

many Israelites died after the consumption of this poisonous bird during their exodus from Egypt. In addition, human poisoning after eating European migratory quail, known as coturnism, was so common in the Roman Empire that quail consumption was prohibited during the 1st century AD.

... **Interestingly, quails are poisonous only during migration, and more specifically, while they are flying certain routes.** For example, quails are not poisonous when they travel from East Africa to Europe during spring, but they are poisonous when they return to Africa in autumn. It is as if quails are going for vacation to Europe and returning home to Africa with their poison as a souvenir.

But how do they acquire the poison? Since the Middle Ages, many have proposed that quails obtain the poison through their diet based on poisonous plants. If this is correct, it is likely that the poison is ingested by quails during migration. Over the years, many plants - such as hemlock and henbane - have been accused of being responsible for coturnism as quails feed on them and/or their seeds. However, the exact source of quail poison remains unknown to this day.

It is worth noting that toxicity of quails cannot be determined from their taste or smell and, **furthermore, the meat of the bird cannot be detoxified by cooking.** Therefore, it is important that people are properly informed about the safety concerns of quail consumption and how to avoid intoxication." (Guérin Nicolas, *When poison takes flight: these birds might kill you – if you eat them*, *Sciencenordic.com*, Thursday, September 1, 2022)

The bottom line here is that the Israelites "despised the Lord" who was among them (Numbers 11:20). The *Targum Onkelos* says, "because you have rejected **the word** of Adonoy [Lord]." The *Targum Jonathan* says, "because you have been contemptuous against **the Word** of the Lord." Who is "the Word of the Lord"? Yes, Jesus! They rejected Jesus by rejecting *the manna* that God had been giving them. Later they boldly said, "Our soul loathes this worthless bread" (Numbers 21:5). In John chapter 6, Jesus tells us exactly what or "who" they were rejecting and ultimately calling "worthless":

“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. **I am the living bread which came down from heaven.** If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” (John 6:48-51)

When Jesus spoke these words, the people did not fully understand and “at this point many of His disciples turned away and deserted Him” (John 6:66). Yes, Jesus is both the Rock and the Manna who was and is today “despised and rejected of men” (Isaiah 53:3)— “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

“Why Do You Exalt Yourself Above the Assembly of the Lord?”

Another group of complainers involved Korah and his two main associates Dathan and Abiram. They began to consistently “complain” or “murmur” about Moses and Aaron saying, “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. *Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?*” (Numbers 16:3). They accused Moses and Aaron of lifting themselves up higher and holier than everyone else. Korah’s argument was, since his family (the Korahites) have also been chosen of the Lord to serve in the Tabernacle, then they should be lifted up as equally holy. Is this not the mind of Satan against Christ, which caused his fall?

“And Moses said: ‘By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord.’ Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the

earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly.” (Numbers 16:28-33)

Keep in mind that “these men have rejected the Lord.” Thus by rejecting Him (crucifying Him), He was forced to reluctantly give them over to their own peril. As it is written, “He who digs a pit will fall into it” (Ecclesiastes 10:8^a). We’ll see exactly who killed them next.

“Why Have You Brought Us Up Out of Egypt to Die in the Wilderness?”

“Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: **‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?’** For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.’ So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.” (Numbers 21:4-6)

Once again we see complaining followed by destruction. We also see the Hebrew idiom that says the Lord “*sent* fiery serpents” that killed many people. Just as God desired to protect the people from the poisonous quail, God had been protecting them from these poisonous serpents which already existed in the wilderness as they journeyed (Deuteronomy 8:15). Their fear had yet again caused a breach thus cutting off God’s protection. Referring to the wandering Israelites after they left Egypt, Paul writes:

“Nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were **destroyed by serpents**; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were **destroyed by the destroyer**.” (1 Corinthians 10:9-10)

So, the destruction came as they were tempting Christ. In his *Bible Exposition* on this verse, John Gill notes, “Neither let us tempt Christ, as all such persons do, who, presuming on the power and grace of Christ to keep

them, or upon what they have received from him, *unnecessarily expose themselves to snares and temptations, and so to danger.*" In their constant complaining, condemning Christ for bringing them out into the wilderness to die, they willingly stepped out from under the hedge by spiritually nailing His protective hands down. As it is written, "Whoever breaks through a wall [hedge] will be bitten by a serpent" (Ecclesiastes 10:8^b).

Paul also tells us exactly who directly destroyed all the complainers in the wilderness— "the Destroyer." Yes, the same "Destroyer" who killed all the firstborn in Egypt. In all these examples, God was tearfully and reluctantly giving them over to the master-murderer they had chosen— Satan.

"We find Paul re-reading the Old Testament in the light of Christ along these lines. In 1 Cor. 10:5 he refers to the 'grumblers' who were slain by 'the destroying angel' in the OT — referring to the judgment of Korah and his followers when the earth opened up and some rebels fell into it and when fire came down from the sky and incinerated others. If you read the OT account of this judgment, however, there's no mention of a destroyer. It simply looks like Yahweh did it. And I don't doubt that the author of the OT narrative believed Yahweh did this. But in the light of Christ, Paul had more insight into how God judges than people in the OT had. With a grieving heart he allows evil to run its course, but he does not kill." (Greg Boyd, *reknew.org*, October 9, 2012)

As Mr. Boyd points out, instead of "the Destroyer", some translations say, "the angel of death" or "the destroying angel." Again, do you really think one of God's good angels is a killer? Would a God of righteousness create an angel for the purpose of destroying and killing? The Greek word Paul uses for "destroyer" here is ὀλοθρευτής (*olothreutés*) which comes from the word ὀλοθρεύω (*olothreúō*) which *Strong's Concordance* defines as "a ruiner, i.e. (specially), a **venomous serpent** – destroyer." Who have we learned is this venomous serpent? Is it not that fallen seraph (fiery serpent) whom John calls "that serpent of old ... the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9)? Commenting on 1 Corinthians 10:10, Cotton Mather (1663-1728) writes:

"It is said of the Israelites, in 1 Cor. 10.10. They were destroyed of the destroyer. That is, they had the Plague among them. **'Tis the Destroyer, or the Devil, that scatters Plagues about the World.'**" (Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, p. 52)

Just as God was initially protecting the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities from the flammable bitumen, God was initially protecting the Israelites from the fiery serpents which were already in the wilderness (see again, Deuteronomy 8:15). Likewise, as God "gave them [Sodom and Gomorrah] up to their vile passions" and their burning lusts, which naturally resulted in their fiery destruction, the Israelites in the wilderness distrusted Christ's protection by their murmurings, thus grieving His Spirit (presence) by pushing Him away, resulting in God "sending" (i.e., "giving them up to") the fiery serpents (Numbers 21:6).

• **The Bronze Serpent**

In order to remedy the venom from the fiery serpents, God tells Moses to do something very strange:

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived." (Numbers 21:8-9)

So, by looking at a serpent (a symbol of Satan) hanging on a pole they were healed? Now notice what Jesus says about this:

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:14-17)

If the serpent is a symbol of Satan, why would Jesus compare Himself to the serpent which was hung up on the pole? Jesus is likened to the serpent on a pole because, by being lifted up on the cross, He would be exposing Satan as a "murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). Satan's unmerciful justice system, based on His hatred of Christ, would be laid wide open.

Just before Judas betrayed Jesus, Scripture says, "Satan entered Judas" (Luke 22:3). Judas then leaves the Passover meal and finds the Jewish leaders. A little later, Judas, along with the Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers, come to the Garden of Gethsemane to take Jesus away. When they arrive, Jesus says this to the mob: "this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

Throughout His whole life on earth, God had protected His Son from being killed by man. However, from the betrayal of Judas to resurrection morning, God offered up His Son, giving Him over to man's fallen system of justice which proclaimed, "It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (John 11:50).

Contrary to mainstream Christianity, God did not kill His Son upon the cross instead of killing us;¹⁰ He permitted Satan and man to kill His Son. Jesus dying on the cross exposed the character of Satan, "that [fiery] serpent of old," in order for us to see how satanic we really are. We must understand that it wasn't God's justice that was satisfied on the cross, it was our faulty system of appeasement-justice that was satisfied in the hopes that we would turn to God in true repentance (2 Corinthians 5:21), finally accepting His forgiveness. Again, the death of Christ wasn't to appease God, but *us*.

The reason God told Moses to make the serpent from bronze is because bronze is a *man-made alloy* of copper and tin invented by the first blacksmith named "Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools" (Genesis 4:22).

¹⁰ Baptist Theologian John Piper writes: "The ultimate answer to the question, Who killed Jesus? Is: God did. It is a staggering thought. Jesus was His Son! But the whole message of the Bible leads to this conclusion." (*Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Had to Die*, p. 11).

In Scripture, tin is identified with “dross”, or “impurities” which needs to be cleansed: “And I will turn My hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross (impurities), and take away all thy tin” (Isaiah 1:25). Tubal-cain has a place of honor and respect in Freemasonry as a forefather of all master craftsmen. Likewise, the Greeks and Romans took their smith-god Vulcan from Tubal-cain whose wife was Venus, the goddess of beauty.

When God instructed Moses and the Israelites to build the sanctuary, the two pieces of furniture erected in the courtyard were to be made of bronze. These two pieces were the Altar of Burnt Offerings and the Laver.

It is very significant that these were made of bronze while the objects inside the sanctuary were made of gold. Bezalel oversaw creating the furniture for the sanctuary and “he made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze, from the *bronze mirrors* of the serving women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting” (Exodus 38:8). Why from the bronze mirrors? To reveal that the rituals carried out in the courtyard were a witness against man— a *reflection* upon our own *impure* understanding of the atonement— and how God and His Son lovingly gave Themselves over to satisfy that false understanding.

Isaiah prophesied that mankind would misunderstand the cross, thinking God was the one who was afflicting His Son as punishment for our sins, but in reality, we were to see that it was our sins, our enmity, which killed Jesus, and not our loving Father. In the *New American Standard Version* of Isaiah 53:4, it says:

“... we ourselves **assumed** that He had been afflicted, struck down by God, and humiliated.”

We assume this due to our “bronze-thinking” which believes in “serpent-justice”— that all sin must receive imposed legal punishments by the Lawgiver.

Contrasting this assumption, Isaiah tells us who was afflicting the Son of God:

Verse 3:

- "He was despised and abandoned **by men.**"
- "He was despised, and **we** had no regard for Him."

Verse 4:

- "It was **our** sicknesses that He Himself bore."
- "And **our** pains that He carried."

In Verse 5, when it says, "but He was wounded *for* our transgressions" and "bruised *for* our iniquities", the Hebrew word translated "for" is ׀ן (*min*) which denotes "from" or "out of." Jesus was wounded and bruised "from" or "out of" our transgressions. Another way to read it is "He was wounded by our transgressions"; "He was bruised by our iniquities" and not by God. This is what God wanted us to understand: Jesus was hurt by our sins, and whenever our sins hurt us, Jesus is afflicted at the same time.

Here, someone might object, pointing out Verse 10, which says, "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief." Again, this should be understood as God giving Jesus over to be bruised by man possessed with the spirit of Satan. In the Garden of Eden, God told the serpent (Satan), "You shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).¹¹

The bronze in the courtyard revealed that God would send His Son in the form of a man to accommodate *our* faulty view of what we think constitutes divine justice. The cross was not to reveal God's justice, but man's hidden treachery against God we all inherited from Adam. The prophet Hosea tells us, "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me" (Hosea 6:7, *Amplified Bible*). However, in Adam's blindness due to sin, he hid this treachery (this hatred towards God) in his bosom. Job, wanting God to reveal his sins, prayed, "Have I concealed my transgressions like Adam or like other men, by hiding my wickedness in my bosom?" (Job 31:33, *Amplified Bible*).

¹¹ For more info concerning this, see my book, *Did God Kill Jesus Instead of Killing Us?*

We have all hidden this treachery against Jesus by projecting our judgment and condemnation towards Jesus onto God, assuming He is the one who judged, condemned and killed Jesus instead of killing us.

“Condemning judgment demanding death as coming from man rather than God will probably be a new idea to the reader ... Let us make it clear. Adam’s fear of God, which all men have inherited due to sin, caused in us terrible mental trauma. In self-defence, man projects his hidden sin onto the character of God and makes God the one with the character flaw. This causes us to believe reconciliation is held back by God’s need for blood, when actually it is our need for blood. If this indeed be the truth, then it follows that atonement for man is realised in two things:

1. A restored understanding of the character of God.
2. A true understanding of man’s own evil condemning nature that leads to repentance in the light of the truth of God’s character.” (Adrian Ebens, *At-One-Ment*, p. 25)

The physical death of Christ upon the cross revealed the love of God as it clashed with the hatred of man. It revealed a loving Father who would rather die for His hateful children than to retaliate and kill them. It is the realization and acceptance of this truth concerning the love of God in the believer that results in true biblical atonement by destroying the enmity (hostility) that is in man towards God and others. This is why “it pleased the Lord” to permit man to bruise His Son!

“Hear Now, You Rebels!”

In Numbers chapter 20, we not only witness the complaints of the Israelites, but of a weary Moses. Sometime after the death of Moses’ wife Miriam, we read:

“Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: ‘If only we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! Why have you brought up the assembly of the Lord into

this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink” (Numbers 20:2-5)

In response to this we read:

“So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. **Speak to the rock** before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.’” (Verses 6-8)

Back in Exodus 17, at the beginning of their wilderness journey, we saw that God instructed Moses to “strike the rock” and water came out of it. Now 40 years later at the end of their journey just before entering into the promised land, God instructs him to only “speak to the rock” to receive water. However, here is where Moses loses his temper:

“So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘**Hear now, you rebels!** Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted his hand and **struck the rock twice with his rod**; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’” (Verses 9-12)

Striking the rock represented their faulty justice system which believed Christ (the true Rock) had to be “stricken, smitten by God” in order for God to forgive us and set us free from sin. The instruction to only speak to the rock at the end of their journey was to illustrate whether or not God’s people have matured in their understanding of His character.

Did they still believe in Satan's justice system, represented by the bronze serpent and the bronze furniture? Did they still believe that someone (Jesus) had to be struck as a scapegoat in order for God to forgive them? Or have they matured to the point where they believe they only have to speak to the Rock (Jesus) and receive His forgiveness by faith freely? Do we fully believe Jesus when He says, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37); "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14)?

"Sadly, Moses was not able to reveal the beauty of simply speaking to the rock at that time. The cruelty of the people in blaming him for everything tested him to act according to the justice system that we received from Adam inspired by Satan. Moses struck the rock in anger twice reflecting the need for punishment and the use of force. We dare not blame Moses for his failure. Do we think we would have done any better with those people grumbling all the time?

... Many are puzzled as to why God did not allow Moses to walk into the promised land with Israel. But Moses had judged himself under the false justice system. After striking the rock, he knew that he had not obeyed the voice of God. He knew that he had made a mistake. Now having struck the rock, he judged himself according to how he had judged the people ... He wanted to go over into the land, but inwardly he condemned himself for not doing what the Lord had asked him to do.

... The story of Israel receiving water from the rock at the beginning and ending of their travels gives to us the two-step process of the atonement. The striking of the rock (Christ) had to occur for the people to accept that the water (life) would be given to them. At the end of the journey, they were tested again to see if they could enter into God's way of atonement and that is simply to speak to the rock (Christ). Sacrifice and offering are not required in the second or New Covenant step of atonement." (Adrian Ebens, *At-One-Ment*, pp. 52-53)

THE TWO COVENANTS

Just before God spoke His law from upon Mount Sinai, He met with Moses:

“And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” (Exodus 19:3-6)

The word for “obey” in verse 5 above is שָׁמַע (*shema*) which means “to hear, to listen, to give attention, to understand, to submit to, and to obey” (pathofobedience.com/words/shema). God was asking them to “hear” Him, thus putting all their *trust* into His power of grace. The biblical principle of “obedience” is to submit. We are to hear and submit to God’s indwelling Spirit; “for *it is God who works in you* both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

However, after the Israelites passively hear these words, they respond by saying, “All that the Lord has spoken *WE* will do” (Exodus 19:8). Like Abraham of old, they fell into the mindset that they could perform what God had promised to do for them. In his distrust in God’s promise, Abraham tried to fulfill the promise of a son by having relations with Hagar. Even though a son was born through this union, he was not the son of the promise. Paul uses this story to illustrate the Old and New Covenants:

“For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For **these are the two covenants**: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” (Galatians 4:22-26)

Most people view the two covenants as two long eras of time, the Old Covenant spanning the time-period known as “Law” before the cross, while the New Covenant spanning the time-period known as “Grace” after the cross. However, we see from the writings of Paul that Abraham experienced *both* covenants within his own lifespan. He experienced the New Covenant when he surrendered and “believed God, and it [belief] was accounted to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3). However, he slipped back into the Old Covenant when disbelieving and thus trying, in his own strength and reasoning, to fulfill that which God had promised to do.

Therefore, the two Covenants are not two long eras of time, but two *conditions* or *mindsets* within the individual. In his book, *Faith Journey*, which explains the two covenant mindsets, Ruben Olschewsky writes:

“Abraham believed God and received the gift of Christ’s righteousness [thus He was in the New Covenant], only to find himself later exercising unbelief at the promises of God and have an Old Covenant experience concurrently.

... **There is a time when both Hagar and Sarah lived with Abraham, when he was stuck in two minds, flipping back and forth between the two types of covenant experiences.** This is the same for every man, who also ‘walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham’ (Romans 4:12).

... Because mankind is, by virtue of his fallen and deceived nature, in league with Satan, his natural tendency is to want to do things himself and not rely upon God. This guarantees that mankind will always be in an

Old Covenant relationship when he first begins his relationship with God. When man comes into a better understanding of God and his dependence upon Him becomes clearer, then he will begin to experience the New Covenant.

... When we trust in God's promises to be fulfilled as He has promised, then we will experience true rest, for we will not worry about how these promises will be fulfilled. We will believe that what God has said He will also accomplish.

'He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And **being fully persuaded that, what he [God] had promised, he [God] was able also to perform.** And therefore it [faith] was imputed to him for righteousness.' (Romans 4:20-22).'" (Ruben Olschewsky, *Faith Journey*, pp. 32-33)

The Old Covenant condition is trying to fulfill God's promises in your own way and thereby causing self-inflicted pain and sorrow instead. The people in Christ's day were stuck in this condition, which Jesus desired to correct:

"Then they said to Him, '**What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?**' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you **believe in Him** whom He sent.'" (John 6:28-29)

Notice the people are putting themselves in the place of God— "What shall *WE* do, that *WE* may work the works of God?" However, when we *shema* (listen and submit) to God's covenant promises, we allow *Him* to do the work of righteousness in us and through us. This is the only way that "we will" be victorious.

Jesus confirms this when He said our "work" is to "*believe* in Him [Jesus] whom He [God] sent." The Greek word for "believe" here is πιστεύω (*pisteuó*) which comes from the same Greek word translated as "faith" (πίστις/*pistis*). Hebrews 11:6 says, "without faith [*pistis*] it is impossible to please God." In his letter to the Romans, Paul points out that "faith [*pistis*] comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Jesus is “the Word of God.” When Jesus was transfigured on the Mount, they heard a voice from heaven say, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Luke 9:35). This is why we need to possess “the faith OF Jesus” because His Faith is a “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6).

“The biblical way of thinking according to Hebrew is that we have not yet truly understood until we have **put what we have heard into our hearts and allowed it to transform the way we live** ... When we approach God and His word, it isn’t simply about an academic study so we can recite truth. It’s about having our lives changed and transformed. If my life isn’t changing because of His words, then I haven’t learned anything, and by biblical definition, I haven’t heard.” (pathofobedience.com/words/shema).

When we truly *shema*, we view God’s law in a completely different light. The Ten Commandments, for example, will no longer be viewed as arbitrary rules that we slaves are obligated to observe to keep our master happy so we can either receive a reward (i.e., salvation) or escape an imposed punishment. Instead, motivated by pure selfless love, they become ten beautiful *promises* from an endearing Father of what He will do in us if we permit Him to. “Thou shalt not” is therefore transformed in our minds from being a command to a promise— “You will not.”

Instead of arbitrary rules, we will see His law for what it really is— the design protocol upon which life operates. With Jesus’ faith in you, working through love, you will be filled with the life and character (Spirit) of God.

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory [character], to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**” (Ephesians 3:14-19)

When this healing process takes root within the believer, Jesus says, “I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me” (John 15:15, *New Living Translation*). God’s law was never meant to place people under bondage; instead, His law gives instructions on how to live as *free* people— “So shall I keep *Your law* continually, forever and ever. And I will *walk at liberty*, for I seek Your precepts” (Psalm 119:44-45, see also, James 2:11-12). Therefore, when “Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19) through faith, our heavenly Father promises

1. “You *will not* have any other Gods before Me.”
2. “You *will not* make graven images and bow down to them.”
3. “You *will not* take My name in vain.”
4. “You *will* remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”
5. “You *will* honor your mother and father.”
6. “You *will not* kill.”
7. “You *will not* commit adultery.”
8. “You *will not* steal.”
9. “You *will not* bear false witness against your neighbor.”
10. “You *will not* covet your neighbor’s wife or his belongings.”

The prophet Daniel foretold that the Messiah would “confirm the covenant with many for one week” (Daniel 9:27). The word “confirm” means to *strengthen*. Jesus would *strengthen* God’s everlasting covenant (His promises)— commonly known as the New Covenant.

“Confirm the Covenant”: “Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision [Jews] for the truth of God, to **confirm the promises** made to the fathers.” (Romans 15:8)

“With Many”: “For this is My blood of **the new covenant, which is shed for many** for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:28)

When Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent”, He was teaching the way in which the covenant is confirmed (strengthened). When we submit ourselves to God’s promises, we allow Him

to do the work in us and through us, just as Jesus confirmed the covenant by allowing His Father to work in and through Him:

“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge [discern/choose]; and My judgment is righteous, because **I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father** who sent Me.” (John 5:30)

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but **the Father who dwells in Me does the works.**” (John 14:10)

Paul states the reason for a New Covenant experience:

“But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of **a better covenant, which was established on better promises.**

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because **finding fault with them**, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because **they did not continue in My covenant**, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (Hebrews 8:6-10)

The “better covenant” that is “established upon better promises” is the everlasting covenant, which God and His only begotten Son cut between Them before the world was. Before Jesus came to this earth, God spoke to His beloved Son saying:

“I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and **give You as a covenant to the people**, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.” (Isaiah 42:6-7)

Jesus is the everlasting covenant! To Abraham, God said, “I have established **MY** My covenant between Me and you, and your seed after you” (Genesis 17:7). In the beginning, God made promises; in Jesus, we see His promises kept. Jesus is the personification of the law, and He fulfilled it by living it out, not by putting it away. God was pleased with His Son because through His Son He would “magnify the law and make it honorable [or glorious]” (Isaiah 42:21). While we put Christ (the living law) away through our enmity against Him, He remained faithful and fulfilled the law through His unconditional love towards us.

This again is why Paul said, “Christ is the end [fulfillment] of the law [promises] for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4), and when the Spirit of Christ dwells in us by faith, “the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:4). Amen! God has promised, “I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:27, *New International Version*). Another version says, “I’ll place my spirit within you, empowering you to live according to my regulations and to keep my just decrees” (*International Standard Version*). God has made it clear—the natural result of being filled with the Spirit of God is to keep His commandments. We will begin to love others as Jesus loves others for “Love does no harm to a neighbor” [even while they are harming us]; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10).¹²

The “New Covenant” is called “new” because of where it is now written. Moses said, “So He [God] declared to you *His covenant* which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and *He wrote them on two tablets of stone*” (Deuteronomy 4:13). The Ark in which the tables of stone were placed is called, “The Ark of the Covenant.”

However, Paul says God’s covenant was never meant to be “on tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart”, which includes our mind—our

¹² Scriptures says, “God cannot lie” (Titus 1:2), therefore God does not “declare” anyone righteous when they are not, just as a doctor cannot declare a terminally ill patient healthy.

reasoning (2 Corinthians 3:3; Hebrews 8:10). Many are out looking for the lost Ark of the Covenant, when the true Ark of the Covenant is the believer's heart and mind— right where God has always wanted His promises:

"And these words which I command you today **shall be in your heart**. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and **they shall be as frontlets between your eyes**. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

Let us look at this a little more closely:

- **"Shall be in your heart."** When God's law is truly in our hearts, we will echo Jesus' words, "I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your instructions [laws] are written on my heart" (Psalm 40:8, *New Living Translation*). The *International Standard Version* says, "Your Law is part of my inner being." In other words, God's law is no longer viewed as a list of external rules, but a joyful inner experience.
- **"As a sign on your hand."** The hand is a symbol of "work", and with the law in our heart, that "work" becomes loving service. As Psalm 40:8 above says, "I take joy in *doing* your will."
- **"As frontlets between your eyes."** Another way of saying the "mind" of man, the frontal lobe of reasoning in the brain. Our understanding of God's law highly effects our hand (our work, service). Paul says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed *by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). With our minds renewed, we now view God and His law (which has been shadowed in darkness by the enemy) through the face (loving expression) and light (truth) of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).
- **"On the doorposts of your house and on your gates."** When all the above takes root in the heart and mind, we are standing within God's hedge (His boundaries of abundant life) and protected from the wiles of the devil— the Destroyer.

The word "new" in "New Covenant" is not in the sense of *time*, but in the sense of *quality*, because it is based on *God's promises* which are far better than ours. The Greek work for "new" here is *καινός (kainos)* which means:

καινός (kainos): "Previously unused, fresh, properly, **new in quality (innovation)**, fresh in development or opportunity ... new (especially in freshness; while *neos* [a totally different Greek word] is properly so with respect to age." (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*)

The same word is used in John 13:34 where Jesus said, "A *new* commandment I give to you, that you *love one another*; as I have loved you, that you *also love one another*." Is "love one another" really a "new" commandment in the sense of time? No. When Jesus was asked what the greatest command (or instruction) in the law was, He replied:

"The first of all the commandments is: **'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'** This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: **'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'** There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31)

In giving these two commandments, Jesus wasn't stating anything "new"; he was quoting Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18. Notice the first word—"Hear." This is the Hebrew word *shema*. In fact, this whole section in Deuteronomy is known among the Jews as "The Shema."

"The Shema is the centerpiece of the daily morning and evening prayer services and is considered by some the most essential prayer in all of Judaism. An affirmation of God's singularity and kingship, its daily recitation is regarded by traditionally observant Jews as a biblical commandment. The first verse of the Shema, from the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, is among the best-known in all of Jewish liturgy. It is recited at the climactic moment of the final prayer of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, and traditionally as the last words before death. Traditionally, it is recited with the hand placed over the eyes."
(myjewishlearning.com)

Referring to this discussion, Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40). In other words, the entire law *depends* upon these two commandments. Thus, we see that the first four commandments in the Ten Commandments are motivated by our love for God while the last six commandments are motivated by our love for our neighbor.¹³

Going back to Hebrews chapter 8, take note as to who broke the old covenant. The author said, “because finding fault with them”, God established a new covenant. The “them” is the people and their faulty promises— “All that the Lord has spoken *WE* will do.” Again, this is *not* a covenant which God desired, but in meeting the people where they were, He accommodated them and entered into this covenant, which is why it was ratified with the blood of animals, knowing full well that “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4).

In saying, “we will do”, the people entered into a covenant mindset where they desired to “do the works of God” that only God could do. However, God has made it known: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways ... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). In accommodating this old covenant mindset, God planned on magnifying man’s sin in order for us to see our own sinfulness and repent by receiving His wonderful grace (Romans 5:20).

The Law as a Mirror

As you may recall, God Himself formed the two stone tablets and wrote the Ten Commandments upon them with His own finger (Exodus 31:18). A little later however, Moses, in an angry rage against the Israelites, threw these

¹³ Keep in mind that the Ten Commandments are an outline of the entire law, which is spelled out in more detail in the Statutes and Judgments throughout Scripture.

tablets down, breaking them. After this, God told Moses to make a new set of tablets and He would write on them what He had written on the first set (Exodus 34:1).

As a result, we now have a set of tablets made by Moses (man) and writing from God. This is to show that the law has two purposes, working like a mirror which would reflect both divine attributes and fallen humanity's attributes. It would show us our old covenant mindset of trying to perform the works of God instead of allowing God to do His work within us, and when we realized this, we would be brought to Christ. Then we would begin to see the glory and character of God in the law.

Paul said, "I would not have known sin except through the law" (Romans 7:7), because "sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead" (Verse 8). He then concluded, "The commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death" (Verse 10). This is because when we try to fulfill the law by our own efforts we will inevitably fail, and then, because our carnal hearts are deceitful and we will not admit what Paul said there in Romans, we will come up with all manner of defense mechanisms to push away the guilt of this failure. We will begin to believe what we want to believe about God.

James tells us, "If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was" (James 1:23-24).

What did God tell His people to "do"? *Shema*— hear (listen) and submit. Those who read the law and do not listen and submit to the fact that "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure", will only come to the wrong conclusions about God. They will forget what kind of person they are because, even though they are only seeing their own "natural face" (sinful character) reflecting back at them, they will perceive they are witnessing God's holy character, which gives them a false sense of security.

Thus, upon careful reading, you will notice that throughout Scripture God commands things that fallen man desires. He does this because He will not interfere with man's freedom of choice "so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful" (Romans 7:13).

Many are confused at the love of God when they read such commands to His people to "destroy" the inhabitants of other lands including women and children. Some try to defend this by saying the wicked people who are killed must be cut off like a cancer to save His people. Viewing and carrying out the command in this light only proves God's point that self-righteous people must declare others as more sinful, and therefore less valuable, than themselves. It would also encourage the view that God is willing that some should perish when Scripture says the exact opposite (2 Peter 3:9).

The command to "Go destroy" is a reflection of *our* hearts and character. God is exposing the sins of His professed people just as much as exposing the unbeliever's. He's allowing sin to destroy sin. On page 28 in his book, *Cross Examined & Cross Encountered*, Adrian Ebens explains this concept:

"When a person has sin in their heart the first work of God is to show the person their sin. The human heart has the capacity to deceive itself. It is blind to its own sinfulness. **When we are outside of the desires of God, He will command the things that we desire in order for them to grow and that we might begin to see why they are sinful.** But He does not do these things without the opportunity for the person to know that these things are wrong. The commands are interpreted by men to mean God desires them because men are blinded to their own sinfulness. They also choose to believe this because then it makes God look like them and this justifies their sinfulness. [See, Psalm 50:16-21]."

In light of what we have learned concerning the two covenants, we see that, in order to lead us to reconciliation of what *He* is really like, God will accommodate man's desire to push Him aside and perceive they are doing the works of God. They crucify Christ, preventing Him from doing that

which He has promised to do, and carry on in the mindset of “we will do.” But is there any Scriptural evidence to back up this claim? Yes! In the book of Ezekiel, we read:

“But I [God] said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am the Lord your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.’ Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me.

... Also, I raised My hand in an oath to those in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries, because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers’ idols. **Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live.**” (Ezekiel 20:18-21, 23-25)

Because they desired to observe and enforce their ancestors’ corrupt statutes, judgments and idols (ideologies), God gave them up, or gave them over to those statutes and judgments that were *not good*.

In Ezekiel chapter 14, we read that, when these idolatrous people inquired of the Lord, He would answer them according to *their* idols (ideologies):

“Therefore speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, **I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart**, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.’” (Ezekiel 14:4-5)

Here’s a few other translations of the above words in bold:

New Living Translation: “So I, the LORD, will give them the kind of answer their great idolatry deserves. I will do this to capture the minds and hearts of all my people who have turned from me to worship their detestable idols.”

New American Standard Bible: “I the LORD will let Myself answer him in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols, in order to take hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who have turned away from Me due to all their idols.”

Brenton’s Septuagint: “I the Lord will answer him according to the things in which his mind is entangled, that he should turn aside the house of Israel, according to their hearts that are estranged from me in their thoughts.”

Now that we know that God will in fact “command” things that sinful man desires, do we see any examples of this in Scripture?

“Let Every Man Kill His Brother, Every Man His Companion, and Every Man His Neighbor”

It is understandable why many will reject this line of thinking, especially because the chosen priesthood, the Levites, were instructed to slay those who would not stand on the Lord’s side after the golden calf incident:

“Then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, ‘Whoever is on the Lord’s side—come to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, ‘**Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’** So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.” (Exodus 32:26-28)

But in order to fully understand what God is doing here, we must do a little background check on the original leader of the Levites— Levi.

When Levi and his brother Simeon heard the report that their sister had been raped by Shechem, they responded in the cruelest way. They took violent revenge against the whole city, tricking the men to circumcise themselves in an act of peace but then killing them with the sword when these men were still in pain from the procedure (Genesis 34:1-29). Their father Jacob (Israel) did not approve of their behavior and said, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me" (Verse 30). Later, upon his deathbed, Jacob said this concerning Levi and Simeon:

"Simeon and Levi are brothers; **instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place.** Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honor be united to their assembly; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. **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)

The *New International Version* says, "Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence." Like the earth itself being cursed, which builds up until it "vomits out its inhabitants", the cruel anger of Levi would infect his offspring until 3,000 men at the base of Mt Sinai were killed by his "instruments [swords] of cruelty." Moses, who was a Levite, wrestled with this anger all his life, even killing an Egyptian who had abused an Israelite (Exodus 2:11-12). If this rash act was the method for how God would deliver His people from Egypt, don't you think He would have used this to get things going? We also see this anger manifested in Phineas (also of the tribe of Levi) who put a Javelin through the sinners who were causing a plague to descend on them (Numbers 25:7-8).

God had told His people, "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:5). "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" means God would oversee the snowball effect of iniquity passed down from one generation to the next.

In the story of the slaying of the 3,000, the iniquities of the father (Levi) that were inherited and renewed by the children unto the third and fourth generation were now visited. God wrought through (or navigated) the cruelty of Levi to punish (expose) the sins of Israel.

The characteristics of the priesthood that Israel as a nation envisioned were just the characteristics found in the tribe of Levi and thus were visited upon Israel. In "commanding" the Levites to slay the rebels, God was giving them over to their own corrupt "statutes and judgments that were not good" in order that He "may seize the house of Israel by their heart."

Just as God later gave them a king endowed with the characteristics *they* had desired (1 Samuel 12:13), Israel received the priests *they* wanted, that *they* would accept and respect. In doing this they rejected Christ, who had, at the very inception of sin, been inaugurated by God as "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:21) who is "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them [us]" (Hebrews 7:25).

"Send Men to Spy Out the Land of Canaan"

Another example of God commanding things that man desires is found in Numbers chapter 13:

"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.' So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel." (Numbers 13:1-3)

If all we had was this scenario recorded in the book of Numbers, we would be forced to conclude that God is the One who initiated the idea to send out twelve spies due to the people's unbelief. However, in the book of Deuteronomy we read Moses' recounting of the story:

“And every one of you came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.’ The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe.” (Deuteronomy 1:22-23)

It was the Israelites who first initiated the plan to spy out the land. God responded to them “according to the things in which [their] mind [was] entangled.” Again, “we will do” took the place of “He will do.”

“All the Congregation Shall Stone Him With Stones”

“Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘The man must surely be put to death; **all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.**’ So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.” (Numbers 15:32-36)

Here we have a plain and simple direct command from God to stone a Sabbath-breaker to death. However, have we not learned that this is contrary to God’s way of justice? Does sin really require an outside force to impose punishments upon it, or do the punishments of sin come as natural consequences of the choices made? Whose justice system is God exposing here— His or Satan’s? Do the Israelites have any forgiveness in their heart for the sin (does any man want to plead on their behalf?), or do they think that every sin must be legally punished— with stoning?

Earlier we learned how the Israelites complained to Moses about lack of water saying, “why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” (Exodus 17:2-3). Right after this, Moses prays to God saying, “What shall I do with this people? They are

almost ready to stone me!" (Verse 4). This is the second time stoning is mentioned in the Bible. The first time is in Exodus 8:26 when Moses anticipates that the Egyptians would stone them if they performed sacrifices near them. Therefore, we see that the Israelites adopted the practice of stoning from the Egyptians, and God desired to "answer [them] according to the things in which [their] mind is entangled" in order to "seize the house of Israel by their heart." They would also feel that justice was served, and that God still was with them, which was important because their connection to Him was extremely fragile.

In the previous chapter in Numbers, the people were complaining about their wilderness journey again and said, "'Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt'" (Numbers 14:3-4). Their hearts were back in Egypt. Upon hearing all these complaints, God responded saying: "just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you" (Numbers 14:28). In other words, Since the Israelites desired to return to Egypt, God gave them over to the Egyptian way of justice, which involved strict capital punishment if someone broke the law. Whenever mercy is presented as inconsistent with justice, you know that it is the mindset of Satan at work (Psalm 89:14).

In an article on *theblaze.com* entitled, *fact-check: does the bible really condone stoning?*, they asked Rabbi Aryeh Spero concerning this statute:

"... When it comes to perceived Biblical mandates or issues like stoning, the rabbi noted that it's important to view the holy book through a specific lens. 'It is our duty to, with reverence and humility, demarcate between that which God intended as eternal and that which was a time-period-necessity later to be eased-out—animal sacrifices, for example ... Things regarding human nature and sexual discipline and limitations undoubtedly are eternal, as are the Sabbath and need for holiness. ... Certain procedures were never meant to be permanent and were, instead, based on the habits and mindsets of the original society that God spoke to. The culture, thus, had a major impact on how these procedures were implemented and played out.'"

This makes it clear that God will mirror back to us our own thoughts to magnify our sinfulness and take us in our own heart. He never does this to condemn us, but so that we will finally see our self-destructive thoughts and actions and turn to Him for healing and restoration.

Take note that the rabbi in the above quote says, "When it comes to perceived Biblical mandates or issues like stoning, it's important to view the holy book through a specific lens." What lens should the Christian view these mandates? Through the lens of Christ. Paul speaks of this:

"And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. [cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; Romans 6:6-11].

... Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech— unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But **their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.**" (2 Corinthians 3:4-6, 12-16, references in brackets added)

Keep in mind, where it says, "Old Testament", it refers to the Old Covenant. Paul says that many still read these things with a veil over their eyes. Without Christ, no one can fully understand the old covenant mindset. He is the special lens. We must allow Him to remove the veil that is blinding true discernment. When we do this, we will never read the Bible the same again!

- **"He Who is Without Sin, Throw the First Stone"**

With this in mind, we must remember how Jesus, our perfect example, responds to the same scenario in John 8:2-19. Instead of the leaders bringing to Him a Sabbath-breaker, they bring to Him a woman accused of

adultery and say, "Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" (Verse 5). Verse 6 makes it clear that they asked Him this to test Him "that they might have something of which to accuse Him." However, although Jesus does "command" her to be stoned, He does it in such a way as to expose (magnify), not only her sin, but *the sins of the accusers!* And remember, this was not so He could condemn, but a way as to save both the woman and the accusers— yes, the same accusers who desired to trap Him so they would have the "legal right" to execute Him!

"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first ... Then those who heard it, **being convicted by their conscience**, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last." (John 8:7, 9)

Throughout all of this, we read that Jesus was busy writing in the dust of the ground of the temple floor with His finger (verses 6-7). To fully understand this, we must refer to something Jesus said the day before while He was at the temple on the last great day of the Feast of Tabernacles as the priests would dump jugs of water upon the temple floor:

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38)

After Jesus said this, "there was a division among the people because of Him" as to whether He was the promised Messiah or not (verse 43). The chief officers and Pharisees, rejecting what Jesus had just said concerning Himself, were the most outspoken against Him and sought for His death. The next day "early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them" (John 8:2). This is when "the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery" (Verse 3).

Keep in mind, this was an elaborate setup by the religious leaders to trap Jesus to violate the law. However, Jesus knew their minds, and this is why

He wrote in the sand upon the temple floor, and why the scribes and Pharisees were so ashamed when He did:

“O Lord, the hope of Israel, **all who forsake You shall be ashamed.**
“Those who depart from Me shall be **written in the earth**, because **they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters.**” (Jeremiah 17:13)

Connecting what Jesus said the day before with Jeremiah’s prophecy, these self-righteous scribes and Pharisees had to think twice about their scheme as they saw their deceitful characters written in the earth by Jesus’ own finger. It’s unclear as to exactly what Jesus wrote, but perhaps He referred to the law where it states, “both the man and the woman who have committed adultery must be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10). Where was the man? It’s very likely that the man was one of the accusers who desired to trap Jesus. Having been caught in their own trap, these leaders became so ashamed of their sin that they left the area without throwing any stones.

When the woman heard the words of Christ, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first”, it caused her to lose all hope of life. After the scribes and Pharisees fled, Jesus, the One who was without sin, was left alone with her. Like Adam and Eve after they had sinned, she heard the voice of Jesus calling to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” (Verse 10). The woman replies, “No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more’” (Verse 11). Was not our heavenly Father seeking this same outcome in the Garden of Eden and when the accusers picked up stones to kill the Sabbath-breaker?

Jesus was not abolishing the fact that adultery is a sin, which hurts and demoralizes both parties but was bringing out the true intent of why God accommodated the statute of stoning. Instead of being condemned and literally stoned to death, the woman fell upon Jesus— “the *stone* which the builders rejected” (Matthew 21:42), “and whoever falls on this *stone* will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder” (Verse 44).

Those who stumble and fall upon the stone (Jesus and His message) are those who (like this woman) hear the gospel, are convicted of their sins, and with a broken (sorrowful) and contrite (remorseful) heart come to faith in Jesus as their personal Savior. Our old life (our old self-centered ego) is broken to pieces (stoned to death) in order for the spiritual man to live.

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:19-20, *King James Version*)

Those upon whom the stone falls, grinding them to powder, are those who (like these scribes and Pharisees) persistently resist Christ. The Greek word for “grind to powder” in Matthew 21:44 is λικμάω (*likmaō*) which is the same Greek word used in the *Septuagint* translation of Daniel 2:44-45, referring to the “stone” that is “cut out of the mountain without hands” that “shall break in pieces” (*likmaō*) the imposed penal legal ideologies of all other man-made kingdoms.¹⁴

Like those who were attempting to trap Jesus, the weight of truth that is embodied in Jesus falls upon the heart and mind resulting in self-condemnation and guilt. Will you be like the unbelieving Jews and “reject it [free salvation from self-condemnation and guilt], and *judge yourselves* unworthy of everlasting life” (Acts 13:46, words in brackets added)?

- **“Surely Be Put To Death”**

Going back to the Sabbath-breaker who was put to death, let’s read what God says in Exodus chapter 31:

¹⁴ We also see here another analogy of Jesus (the stone) being cut out of the mountain (God, the Father) without hands (uncreated). Jesus is the “express image” of the Father’s person who “came forth” [out from within] the Father” (Hebrews 1:1-3; John 8:42) and thus He is of the very same substance— divine.

“You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall **surely be put to death**; for whoever does any work on it, that person **shall be cut off** from among his people.” (Exodus 31:14)

Let me ask this question: What lens are you reading this through? Are you reading this as an endorsement for capital punishment, or as a natural consequence?

The phrase “surely be put to death” in Hebrew is simply the word מוּת (*muwth*) repeated twice. The repetition of Hebrew words like this shows emphasis. Instead of repeating the words twice, the English translators inserted the word “surely” to reveal the emphasis. This same construction is also found in Genesis 2:17 where God told Adam and Eve that in the day they ate of the forbidden fruit “you will surely die [*muwth, muwth*].” Again, when read through the correct lens, this is a warning and not a threat. The natural consequence of their sin would lead to their death. God is not saying, “In the day you eat of the tree, I will kill you!”

Going back to Exodus 31:17, the phrase, “shall be cut off”, simply means the Sabbath-breaker (sinner) will be *separated* from his people— on the outside of God’s covenant. It does not mean “killed” by his people. The death comes *naturally* as a result of separating oneself beyond the boundaries of God’s protection. Psalm 2:2-3 speaks of persistent sinners who come “against the LORD and against His Anointed one [Messiah/Jesus]” who desire to be separated from Them (the Father and Son) and say, “Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.”

Thus, we see that a Sabbath-breaker (i.e., persistent sinner) is one who desires to cut the life-support cord from, not only God, but also from His Son Jesus who is “The Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). Jesus taught us, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). In other words, as with all of God’s law, the Sabbath was made for our good (Deuteronomy 10:13). Death and separation come naturally when this *goodness* is rejected. Let us now read Exodus 31:17 through our new corrected lens:

"You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall **surely die**; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall **separate themselves** from among his people." (Exodus 31:14)

But how exactly is not observing a holy day and death connected? Keep in mind the "death" that is mentioned here does not necessarily mean a physical sudden death. After all, Adam and did not physically die "in the day" that they ate of the forbidden fruit. To answer this, let us turn to the book of Hebrews:

"For He [God] has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works' ... For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His." (Hebrews 4:4, 10)

We are to enter His rest "as God did from His" on that first Sabbath. Since God is never "wearied nor fatigued" (Isaiah 40:28) then "His rest" must have been spiritual rest, and since it was spiritual rest, then the death we receive from cutting ourselves off from that rest must also be spiritual. To the born again believer, Paul says, "And you He made alive, *who were dead in trespasses and sins*, in which you once walked according to the course of this world ..." (Ephesians 2:1). And again, he says, "And you, *being dead in your trespasses* and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Colossians 2:13).

Commenting on the relation of spiritual rest and the Sabbath, A.T. Jones explains how rejecting the Sabbath is the same as rejecting Christ:

"Why was the Sabbath made? It was made for man. Mark 2:27. Well then, God rested and put His spiritual rest upon the day for man, did He? God's refreshing, His rejoicing in that day was for man. The blessing with which He blessed it was for man. The holiness which His presence brought to it and which His presence gave to it, was for man. His presence sanctifying it was for man. Well then was it not that man through the Sabbath might be a partaker of His presence and be made acquainted by living experience with the spiritual rest of God, the

spiritual blessing, the holiness, the presence of God to make holy, the presence of God to sanctify him? [Exodus 33:14; Ezekiel 20:12]. Is not that what God intended the Sabbath to bring to man? Well, the man who gets all that in the Sabbath is the man who is a Sabbath-keeper. And he knows it too. He knows it and he is delighted to know it.

Now another thing: Who was the real present agent in creating? **Christ**. Who was it that rested? **Christ**. Who was refreshed? **Christ**. Who blessed? **Christ**. Whose presence made it holy? **Christ's**. Whose presence is in the day? **Christ's**. Then the man whom the presence of Jesus Christ does not sanctify, and does not make holy and does not bless and to whom it does not bring rest, why, he can't keep the Sabbath [Matthew 11:28]. **Don't you see, it is only with Christ in the man that the Sabbath can be kept; because the Sabbath brings and has in it the presence of Christ.**" (A.T Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, Sermon 20, March 2, 1893, Bible verses in brackets added)

Echoing this connecting between Christ and the Sabbath, we again see the Aleph-Tav. Exodus 20:8 says, "Remember **תא** the Sabbath day." In Exodus 31:16 it says, "Therefore the children of Israel shall keep **תא** the Sabbath, to observe **תא** the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant." Therefore, when we receive Christ in the Sabbath, we receive the blessing of His presence— "Therefore the Lord blessed **תא** the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:11).

To further show this, God gave instructions to Israel as to the number of sacrifices and offerings to be offered daily (Numbers 28:3-6). Upon the weekly Sabbath, they were to add the number of offerings for that day to what they would normally offer daily (Numbers 28:9-10). As we keep reading through Numbers 28 and 29, we see that the offerings increase as each of the monthly (New Moon) and yearly festivals arrive.

Since Jesus is being represented here by all the sacrifices and offerings (1 Peter 1:18-19; John 6:32-33; Hebrews 10) then we can conclude that we receive increased blessings of the Spirit (presence) of Christ upon these "times of refreshing" throughout the year (Acts 3:19).

Consequently, by refusing to observe these appointed times, man is cutting off (crucifying) a great fountain of blessing that God desires to bestow. Ezekiel was shown this blessing in vision by seeing the river of life flowing from under God's temple (Ezekiel 47:1-2), increasing up to his ankles (verse 3), to his knees (verse 4), to his waist (verse 4), then completely over his head (verse 5). Since the blessings of Sabbath-keeping are inherent and not imposed, so are the curses that come from Sabbath-breaking:

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that **I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply** ... But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish ... I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; **therefore choose life**, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him [you won't sever yourselves from Him],¹⁵ **for He is your life and the length of your days.**" (Deuteronomy 30:15-20, words in brackets added)

God always gives the sinner the opportunity to repent and live, even though "you shall surely die" was pronounced from His lips. God's justice is not about executing the sinner, but about healing and restoring the sinner—"A bent reed He will not break off and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice" (Isaiah 42:3).

"**The soul who sins shall die.** The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. **But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.** None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live." (Ezekiel 18:2-22)

¹⁵ Notice how all these blessings are spoken of as promises.

The command to stone the Sabbath-breaker accomplishes two things:

1. By magnifying *the sin*, God is leading the sinner to repentance, thus magnifying His goodness, mercy, grace, and justice.
2. By magnifying *the results of sin*, God is leading the accuser to repentance, thus magnifying His goodness, mercy, grace, and justice.

In conclusion to this section, let us read what Jesus said concerning people condemning others for not tithing, but apply it to the Sabbath-breaker:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because, although you [outwardly observe the Sabbath], yet you neglect the weightier things of the law—judgment [true discernment], and kindness [mercy], and faith [by condemning and executing Sabbath-breakers]. These [true judgment, kindness, and faith] you should practice, without neglecting [true Sabbath observance] ... you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Matthew 23:23, 28, words in brackets added)

“You Shall Conquer Them and Utterly Destroy Them”

“When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, **you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them.**

You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.” (Deuteronomy 7:1-4)

It's no wonder statements like this fuel atheists with hatred against God. It's understandable how many perceive a huge difference in the character of “the God of the Old Testament” versus the Character of Jesus in the New.

In the above passages, we see God commanding His people to utterly destroy the people of other nations showing no mercy upon them. However, the keen Bible student should see some major red flags here knowing that Scripture makes it abundantly clear that God's mercy "endures forever" (see Psalms chapters 118 and 136).

Could this be yet another example of God commanding things that sinful man desires that He may "seize the house of Israel by their heart"? Did they not perceive God to be "a Man of war" in the same way they were men of war (Exodus 15:3)? Is the spirit of God behind a people who boast of killing, not only men, but also women and children?

"We took all his cities at that time, and **we utterly destroyed the men, women, and little ones of every city**; we left none remaining. We took only the livestock as plunder for ourselves, with the spoil of the cities which we took ... there was not one city too strong for us; **the Lord our God delivered all to us.**" (Deuteronomy 2:34-36)

It is quite clear that at the beginning of their journey to the promised land, God never intended for His people to take over any land by force and warfare. In regard to the possession of Canaan by Israel, the Lord told them how this would be accomplished:

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

Here in the *King James Version* God says He is the One who will "destroy all the people." This is proof to most that, in His pent-up anger, God will indeed take matters into His own hands and kill all the people in these heathen nations.

However, the Hebrew word for “destroy” here is חָמָם (*hamam*), which actually means, “to make a noise, move noisily, confuse, discomfit.” This is why the majority of other translations use the word “confusion.”

“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, *New King James Version*)

This makes sense as we consider what God said next about sending “hornets” to drive the people out. Why send hornets if the people are all destroyed (i.e., dead)? In the book of Joshua, we read that two kings of the Amorites were driven out of the land by these hornets, revealing that God has never needed to rely on man’s use of the sword or bow:

“I sent the **hornet** before you which drove them out from before you, also the two kings of the Amorites, **but not with your sword or with your bow.**” (Joshua 24:12)

In his Commentary on Exodus 23:28 (regarding the hornets), Adam Clarke refers to the above passage found in Joshua 24:12:

“How distressing and destructive a multitude of these might be, any person may conjecture; even the bees of one hive would be sufficient to sting a thousand men to madness, but how much worse must wasps and hornets be! No armor, no weapons, could avail against these. A few thousands of them would be quite sufficient to throw the best disciplined army into confusion and rout. **From Joshua 24:12, we find that two kings of the Amorites were actually driven out of the land by these hornets, so that the Israelites were not obliged to use either sword or bow in the conquest.**” (*Clark’s Commentary*, Exodus 23:28)

Whether these are literal hornets that God permits to harass the people or used as a metaphor is debated among scholars. In his Commentary, Albert Barnes writes, “The word [hornets] is used figuratively for a cause of terror and discouragement. Bees are spoken of in the like sense, Deuteronomy 1:44; Psalm 118:12” (*Barnes’ Notes*, Exodus 23:28).

Echoing this, John Gill says:

“And I will send hornets before thee Which **may be interpreted either figuratively**, and so may signify the same as fear before which should fall on the Canaanites upon hearing the Israelites were coming; **the stings of their consciences for their sins, terrors of mind**, dreading the wrath of the God of Israel, of whom they had heard, and terrible apprehensions of ruin and destruction from the Israelites ...” (*Gill's Exposition*, Exodus 23:28)

We see something similar in the book of Acts where Jesus says to Saul (aka Paul); “... it is hard for you to kick against the pricks [or, goads]” (Acts 9:5). The Greek word for “pricks” here is κέντρον (*kentron*), which is defined as “a sting, as that of bees ... scorpions, locusts.” Saul was not literally being stung by bees, locusts or even hornets, so it is referring to the prick/sting (or conviction) of his conscience. Therefore, God would send “hornets” in the sense of the conviction of sin among the heathen nations. This in turn would cause “fear” and “confusion” among them since they already had a preconceived idea about God, wrongly equating His wrath and anger to their pagan gods (cf. Deuteronomy 2:25; Joshua 2:11).

If the children of Israel believed God and were filled with His Spirit, they would have cleansed Canaan in the same way that Jesus cleansed the temple. They would not have needed to strike one person. The Canaanites would have fled before them and left, or accepted God’s forgiveness and been converted to the truth, which is how God “destroys” sinners.

Keep in mind, God is talking about driving out “all your enemies” (Exodus 23:27). Do you really believe it was God’s desire for Him or His people to kill their enemies? The true Christian cannot believe this for a moment when they consider the words of Jesus:

“But I say to you who hear: **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also.**

And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And **just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise**. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.

But **love your enemies**, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and **you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.**" (Luke 6:27-36)

We are to love our enemies, do good to them, and be merciful to them because our heavenly Father— "the Most High" —is always "kind to the unthankful and evil" for "His mercy endures forever." Remember, it is the Son of God saying these things— the only Being who is one with the Father, who said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Neither the Father's nor His Son's character ever changes (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). They are not kind to their enemies at one moment, but then unkind at another. Their mercy never ends towards the foulest of sinners— "For He gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust alike" (Matthew 5:45, *New Living Translation*). The only reason a man does not receive mercy is because they have not recognized and acquired the gift, or they have deliberately thrown it away.

When Jesus was upon the earth, He resisted the use of carnal weapons. When the high priests and Roman soldiers came to arrest Jesus, John writes:

"Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, '**Put your sword into the sheath**. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?'" (John 18:10-11)

Matthew says it this way:

“... Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus [Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, **‘Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.’**” (Matthew 26:50-52)

“But wait a minute!” Someone might object, “Isn’t Jesus the one who told His disciples to go and buy swords?” Notice what Luke says about this:

“Then He said to them, ‘But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and **he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one**’ ... So they said, ‘Lord, look, here are two swords.’ And He said to them, ‘It is enough.’” (Luke 22:36, 38)

A superficial reading of this may lead the reader to believe Jesus accepted their use of the sword by simply saying two swords were enough. However, take note that when Jesus says, “he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one”, He’s speaking to every individual in attendance to “buy a sword.” How then could Jesus say two swords among them all was enough? Clearly, the quantity of swords is not the way it is intended in the Greek. Notice how the *International Standard Version* translates verse 38:

“So they said, ‘Lord, look! Here are two swords.’ He answered them, **‘Enough of that!’**” (Luke 22:38)

In other words, “That’s enough of that kind of talk!” This is the true intention of Jesus’ words. Clearly, the disciples had misunderstood Him. What comes next reveals Jesus’ true attitude toward the sword as we read Luke’s version of the story of Peter cutting off the servant’s ear:

“When those who were around Jesus saw what was about to take place, they asked, ‘Lord, should we attack with our swords?’ Then one of them [Peter] struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. **But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ So He touched the wounded man’s ear and healed him.**” (Luke 22:49-51, *International Standard Version*)

Is Jesus going against the commands of His Father? No, of course not. Again, Jesus is "the Word of God" (John 1:1) who said, "He [the Father] who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him ... I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things" (John 8:26, 28).

With that understanding, we must conclude that it was the Father speaking through Jesus saying, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword." So, what type of sword was Jesus referring to for them to take with them?

"And take the helmet of salvation, and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**" (Ephesians 6:17)

"For **the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword**, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

In his *Expositions Of Holy Scripture*, Alexander MacLaren explains:

"As to the difficulty felt in the injunction to buy a sword, **our Lord would be contradicting His whole teaching if He was here commanding the use of arms for the defence of His servants or the promotion of His kingdom.** That **He did not mean literal swords** is plain from His answer to the Apostles, who produced the formidable armament of two ... **The expression is plainly an intensely energetic metaphor**, taking line with purse and scrip. The plain meaning of the whole is that we are called on to provide necessary means of provision and defence, which He will bless. **The only sword permitted to His followers is the sword of the Spirit.**" (*Alexander MacLaren's Expositions Of Holy Scripture*, Luke 22:36)

How does God conquer His enemies in war? Not by inflicting punishment, torture, or killing them, but by converting His enemies into friends. Righteousness does not destroy the person; it kills "the old man" of sin (Deuteronomy 32:39; Romans 6:6-11) and "delivers *from* death" (Proverbs 11:4-6). God conquers and gets His "revenge" upon evil by always doing what is right and good— never by violence.

“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good [see Proverbs 25:21-22]” (Romans 12:17-21)

Here, Paul is not saying, as many suppose, for us to treat our enemies with love and kindness and let the violent vengeance upon sinners be carried out by God. He’s talking about vengeance in the same sense as Jesus did when He said, “love your enemies” and do good to them so that you will be “sons of the Most High.” In other words, this is the same way God treats His enemies and executes His “vengeance” upon those who hate Him. It’s called taking up your cross daily— just as Jesus does! (Luke 9:23). Commenting on vengeance in Romans chapter 12, Adam Clarke writes:

“If thine enemy hunger, feed him - Do not withhold from any man the offices of mercy and kindness; **you have been God's enemy, and yet God fed, clothed, and preserved you alive: do to your enemy as God has done to you.** If your enemy be hungry, feed him; if he be thirsty, give him drink: **so has God dealt with you.**

And has not a sense of his goodness and long-suffering towards you been a means of melting down your heart into penitential compunction, gratitude, and love towards him? How know you that a similar conduct towards your enemy may not have the same gracious influence on him towards you? **Your kindness may be the means of begetting in him a sense of his guilt; and, from being your fell enemy, he may become your real friend!** This I believe to be the sense of this passage ...” (*Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Romans 12:20)

The Israelites themselves misunderstood the character of God. Could it be that taking up swords and stones was simply a manifestation of the god that Israel had imagined based on their years of experience with a tyrannical leader and caretaker— the Pharaoh of Egypt?

The instruction from God to utterly destroy their enemies without mercy, while being in harmony with a warrior-god that Israel had imagined, was not reflective of the true God of heaven but a reflection of *themselves* and *their* desire to go to war. It was the “we will do” mentality of the Old Covenant mindset as Fred Wright explains in his book, *Behold Your God*:

“It follows then that it was never in God’s purpose that Israel or anyone else should ever carry the sword. It has no place in His character and corresponding methods, and therefore is to find no acceptance in the character and behavior of His people ... **The institution of this form of defense was entirely the people’s work, the expression of their having more faith in themselves than in God. It was the establishment of human principles and procedures in place of the divine** ... The commands given by God were to a people who had already chosen the way they would go and who, if left completely unguided, would use those weapons in the worst way. God’s commands were designed to minimize the evil effects of what they had chosen to do. In this, He was acting out the role of a Saviour. The people insisted on taking up the sword. Now God would try to save them from its worst effects.” (Fred Wright, *Behold Your God*, pp. 510-512)

Remember, God had instructed them to avoid intermarriage with the surrounding pagan nations “for they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods.” Although they were to be a light unto the Gentiles, they were to refrain from their pagan practices:

“Hear [*shema*] the word which the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the Lord: ‘Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them.’” (Jeremiah 10:1-2, words in brackets added)

The more they mingled together, the more the Israelites would be influenced by the heathen customs around them. God had no desire to kill off the people of the surrounding nations, but for the people to be drawn to Him by the kind words and non-violent actions of His people. If the glory of God’s character was too much for them, they would run away in fear.

God never wanted His people to go to war against the nations to wipe them off the planet. To show Israel this, God refused to allow King David to build the temple because he was a man of violence— “You [David] have shed much blood and have made great wars; you shall not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight” (1 Chronicles 22:8).

God would cause the proper separation His way and would build His true temple (church/people) made up of both Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Zechariah 6:12; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17). This would be accomplished “‘not by [human] might, nor by [human military] power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). God repeatedly informed the people He had no need of their swords:

“Then everyone gathered here will know that **the LORD can save without sword or spear**, because the LORD determines every battle’s outcome. He will hand all of you over to us.” (1 Samuel 17:47, *God’s Word Translation*)

“**Your people did not conquer the land with their swords**; they did not win it by their own power; it was by Your [God’s] power and Your strength, by the assurance of Your presence, which showed that You loved them.” (Psalm 44:3, *God’s Word Translation*)

“Tell them what I, the Sovereign LORD, am saying: You eat meat with the blood still in it. You worship idols. You commit murder. What makes you think that the land belongs to you? **You rely on your swords**. Your actions are disgusting. Everyone commits adultery. What makes you think that the land is yours?” (Ezekiel 33:25-26, *God’s Word Translation*)

“Of course we are human, but we don’t fight like humans. **The weapons we use in our fight are not made by humans**. Rather, they are powerful weapons from God. With them we destroy people’s defenses, that is, their arguments and all their intellectual arrogance that oppose the knowledge of God. We take every thought captive so that it is obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5, *God’s Word Translation*)

If Israel had total faith in God, He would have completely cleared out the entire land *His way* and there would have been no fear of His people adopting pagan practices. However, since they chose to attempt to do the works of God *their way*— by force, in their own strength with swords— God had to command them to destroy everyone, otherwise they would have mingled with them and adopt their abominations. In other words, God was saying, "If you are going to do it *your way*, then you must carry it out all the way through. You will need to "kill everyone so that they will not make you sin against the LORD by teaching you to do all the disgusting things that they do in the worship of their gods" (Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

"It is interesting to note, through the perspective of time, that even here, **following what may have been their own wayward choice**, Israel proved unfaithful [even to their own wayward choice] and ultimately reaped the predicted results of noncompliance with God's clear and positive instructions. They failed to 'utterly destroy' the Canaanites, who led them into idolatry and consequent separation from God from which the nation never fully recovered." (Marilyn. M. Campbell, *Light On the Dark Side of God*, Ch. 9, words in brackets added)

Jesus Also Used the Mirror Method

Just as King Solomon had no intention of cutting a baby in half, but only spoke that "command" to draw out the true mother of the child (1 Kings 3:16-28), Jesus had no intention to support the prejudiced mindset of the Jews towards foreigners when He indirectly called the Canaanite woman a dog (Matthew 15). After a long silence at her request to heal her daughter, Jesus said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Verse 24) and "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (Verse 26).

The Jews and Gentiles in Christ's day would often insult each other using the term "dog." Jesus only said this to bring His disciple's unmerciful prejudice to the surface, which happened when they said to Him, "Send her away, for she cries out after us" (Verse 23). Here again we see the words

and actions of Jesus acting as a mirror to reveal what is in the hearts of those around Him.

Although the Canaanite woman also perceived that Jesus was calling her a dog, she held on still believing that He would help her by saying, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Verse 27). This woman's love for her daughter and her response to the drawing of the Spirit gave her the victory of faith:

"Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour." (Verse 28)

This answer tested everyone to see whether they were truly listening. The Savior was introduced by John the Baptist with these words: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Jesus is the Savior of the *whole world*, not only of the physical Jews. The term *Israel* is a reference to all those who would accept the gift of salvation as it is in Jesus, whom we have learned is God's true Israel.

"For **you are all sons [i.e., children] of God through faith in Christ Jesus**. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And **if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**" (Galatians 3:26-29, words in brackets added)

Can you see that, although the apostle Paul had more light concerning the truth due to the earthly ministry of Jesus, Abraham was as much a Christian as Paul was? Remember, Scripture says, "God ... proclaimed the gospel to Abraham beforehand" (Galatians 3:8). By coming to Jesus in faith, this woman was responding to the call of the Spirit, revealing whose child she really was— "those who are of faith are sons [i.e., children] of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7, words in brackets added).

In Romans 9:6, Paul says, "... For they are not all Israel who are of Israel", meaning that not all who make up God's true Israel need to be literal descendants of Jacob (Israel), Abraham's grandson. On the other hand, in verse 7, Paul says, "nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.'" In other words, just because one is a literal descendant of Abraham, doesn't automatically make them part of God's true Israel.

To show why this is, Paul restates the concepts of the two covenant mindsets as he did in Galatians 4.

"Those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed." (Romans 6:8)

Those who are "children of the flesh" are those who, like Abraham, lack faith by trying to fulfill God's promises in their own strength. However, those who are "children of the promise" are those who, also like Abraham, die to self and practice faith and trust in God. It doesn't matter if you are a Jew or Gentile, you can find yourself in each group at any given time.

The Canaanite woman, a Gentile, embraced the New Covenant mindset of having complete faith in Christ, proving she was a child of the promise. Like Ruth (a Moabite) centuries before, who told her Israelite mother-in-law, "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16), the Canaanite woman accepted the God of Israel, and with her newfound faith in Jesus, came her citizenship in "the commonwealth of Israel" (Ephesians 2:11-13).

"As He [God] says also in Hosea: 'I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved.' 'And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons [i.e., children] of the living God.'" (Romans 9:25-26, words in brackets added)

How Do You Read?

A man claiming to be an expert of the law (the Torah) asked Jesus, "Teacher ... what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Pay careful attention to Jesus' reply, "What is written in the law? *How* do you read it?" (Verse 26). Jesus isn't simply asking *what* the law says, but *how* the man understands what is written. The *New English Translation* says, "What is written in the law? How do you understand it?"

We need to be careful *how* we read the Bible, praying always for Jesus to remove the veil so we don't misread it like the Jewish leaders did, which ended in their participation in killing the Messiah they had been waiting for.

We all have things we misunderstand about God. Let us analyze why we believe what we believe. Is it because God is really like that? Or is God showing us what *we* are like? What things do we, like the disciples, need to learn? What evil is God revealing in our heart? When we desire to do things our own natural way or continue to read the word of God with the veil over our eyes, we are not allowing our "old man" to be crucified *with* Christ (Romans 6:6) but allowing our "old man" to crucify Christ, which hinders us in becoming a "new man" *in* Christ (Ephesians 2:15).

The children of God are called to be "a royal priesthood" to show others the goodness of God who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). With the Spirit of Christ dwelling within, we will be like Ezra and the other priests in Nehemiah's day who "read from the Book of the Law of God, explaining it and giving insight, so that the people could understand what was being read" (Nehemiah 8:7-8, *Berean Standard Bible*).

One quick, but important, example of this is found in the story of David's census of the people of Israel.

"Again **the anger of the Lord** was aroused against Israel, and **He [God]** moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" (2 Samuel 24:1)

Here we read a plain statement that, in His anger against Israel, *God* motivated David to take a census of the people. Therefore, David's obedience to God's desire is a good thing, right? Not according to verse 10:

“And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.'”

Why was David feeling guilty, saying he had sinned when it was God who moved him to number the people? Wasn't he doing what God wanted him to do? Knowing what I have previously explained about God's anger, could I suggest to you that God's anger here was expressed by giving David over to his own distrustful desire to take the census? Would that be a fair conclusion? What if I went as far to say that it was actually *Satan* who was inspiring David? Would I be accused of going too far and that I was adding and changing the Word of God to fit my own preconceived ideas? Most would conclude that this is what I am doing.

However, the two books of First and Second Chronicles repeat many of the historical accounts of Israel. Most scholars agree that Ezra the priest wrote the two books. Since Ezra and his fellow priests helped the people to receive deep insights from God's Word “so that the people could understand what was being read”, what does Ezra say concerning David's census?

“Now **Satan** stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.”
(1 Chronicles 21:1)

According to Ezra, it was *Satan* who moved David to number the people. No wonder David felt guilty and referred to his actions as sin. Is Ezra guilty of adding and changing the Word of God to fit his own preconceived ideas?

No, both statements are to be taken literally; for they are both correct and do not contradict each other. Ezra is simply giving us insight and

understanding to how the anger of God works. David already had submitted to the enticement of Satan thus God's hands were nailed down. Because God never interferes with our free choice, God's anger was executed by reluctantly and tearfully giving David over to his wrong choices. Afterwards, David repented of his sin, knowing that he had bowed to the authority of Satan who wanted to claim his life, which, unlike King Saul, closed the breach in the hedge he had made between he and God and protection was restored.

The law of God is important to understand correctly because it is the very transcript of God's character personified in Jesus Christ— "the Word of God" who "became flesh and dwelt among us." This is why Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

Many misunderstand the words "destroy the Law" and "fulfill the Law." In Hebrew, the phrase "fulfill the law" is *Kayim Torah*, which is an idiom meaning "to properly interpret the law." When a religious teacher thought someone was interpreting the law correctly, they would say *kayim* (fulfilled). However, when they thought someone was misinterpreting the law, they would say, *vatel* (abolish). In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was about to say some radical things, but He assures His listeners that He had come to interpret the law correctly (fulfill it) because it had been so long misinterpreted (destroyed/abolished).

Let us pray and ask Jesus to help us. We are sinful humans who by nature misunderstand our Father, but Jesus knows His Father perfectly because He is the only begotten Son of God. We can have *His* mind if we realize we need it— "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5)— "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

HAVE WE LEARNED ANYTHING?

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul warns those of us who are following Jesus out of darkness into the light not to fall back into the same mindset as those who came out of Egypt and “were overthrown in the wilderness” (Verse 5). Although they were being led by Christ, “that spiritual Rock”, through the wilderness (Verse 4), they “tempted Christ” (Verse 9) by their continual fear and distrust, based on their misconceptions of God’s character, resulting in their desire to go back to Egypt instead of forward to the promised land. Respecting their free will, God gave them over to the leader they had chosen, “the Destroyer” (Verse 10), and most of them died in the wilderness. Paul then emphasizes the fact that “These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age” (Verse 11).

Echoing this, the book of Hebrews, says, “So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding ... And so, God willing, we will move forward to further understanding” (Hebrews 6:1,3, *New Living Translation*). Unlike those who died in the wilderness, we are to keep moving forward and not backwards. As we learn more and more about the love of God as revealed in Jesus, we are to mature in our understanding and thus in the way we live and treat others. This is the true “Promised Land.”

Those who reject a more mature understanding of the character of God, they too reject Jesus who reveals this character, and “by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame” (Hebrews 6:6, *New Living Translation*).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" (Galatians 3:1). This again is a reference to the ever-present cross of Christ.

Commenting on this, E.J. Waggoner writes:

"Jesus was set forth before the Galatians, when Paul preached to them, as openly crucified before their eyes. So vivid was the presentation, that they could actually see Christ crucified. It was not skillful word-painting on the part of Paul, nor imagination on the part of the Galatians, for then it would have been only deception. No; it was an actual fact; **Christ was there, crucified, before their eyes,** and Paul by the Spirit enabled them to see Him.

We know that it was not Paul's skill in making beautiful word pictures that enabled them to fancy that they saw the crucifixion, for elsewhere Paul says that he determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and that he purposely and carefully refrained from using the wisdom of words, for fear that he should make the cross of Christ without effect. 1 Cor. 1:17, 18; 2:1-4.

The experience of the Galatians in this matter was not peculiar to them. **The cross of Christ is a present thing. The expression, 'Come to the cross,' is not an empty form of words, but an invitation that can be literally complied with.** Christ is crucified before us, and each blade of grass, each leaf in the forest, reveals the fact. Yea, we have the testimony in our own bodies, in that, although sinful and corruptible, we yet live. **Not until one has seen Christ crucified before his eyes, and can see the cross of Christ at every turn, does one know the reality of the Gospel."** (E.J. Waggoner, *Glad Tidings*, pp. 100-101)

Obviously, like those of old, we are not literally dragging Jesus down from heaven and physically nailing Him back onto a cross. However, we do see that every time we reject the promptings of His Spirit, Jesus surely feels the heartache of the nails being driven into His hands and feet, therefore, as Elijah once said, "[we are] no better than [our] fathers!" (cf. 1 Kings 19:4).

Earlier in his letter to the Galatians, Paul warned, "As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9). Most view the gospel as representing a 24-hour period of when Jesus was physically crucified on the cross for our salvation. But we are beginning to see that 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 and that every sin, every act of violence, hatred, and the like, brings grief to Him— God feels it all!

Whenever we are afflicted, or whenever we afflict others, "He is afflicted" and "carries us [them]" (Isaiah 63:9). Those who have gone before us did not need to look *forward* to the cross, nor do we need to look *backward*; all anyone has ever needed to do is simply "*look up* and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28).

*They tell me Jesus died for my transgressions,
that He paid that price a long, long time ago,
when He gave His life for me on a hill called Calvary.*

But there's something else I want to know:

*Does He still feel the nails every time I fail?
Can He hear the crowd cry, "Crucify" again?
Am I causing Him pain? Then I know I've got to change.
I just can't bear the thought of hurting Him.*

*It seems that I'm so good at breaking promises,
and I treat His precious grace so carelessly.
But each time He forgives, what if He re-lives
the agony He felt on that tree?*

*Do You still feel the nails every time I fail?
Have I crucified You Jesus with my sins?
Oh, I'm tired of playing games. I really want to change.
I never want to hurt You again.*

(Feel the Nails, by Ray Boltz)

Here's how Jesus Himself defined the gospel of the cross:

"Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'" (Luke 9:23)

Jesus taught that if we are to follow Him, we are to take up our cross "daily" by denying ourselves, just as He has been doing. Jesus did not teach that His cross was a one-day event which happened on a specific Passover 2,000 years ago. Nor is the cross we bear a one-day event when we kneel at the church altar and say a quick prayer and accept Jesus into our hearts. Jesus bearing His cross has been a *daily* suffering that has been going on for over 6,000 years from the inception of sin in the heart of Satan. He is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). It has been a *daily* denial of Himself for the sake of all His creation. Pastor Greg Boyd explains this concept in an online sermon:

"Judging is when you ascribe worth to yourself at the cost of another. Love is the opposite. Love is ascribing worth to others at the cost of ourselves. The cross is the perfect example of this."

Are we truly ready to take up our cross daily and bear it for others who hate and persecute us? Are we ready to say with Christ, "I can of Myself do nothing ... I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30)? Will we be dependent upon the divine power of grace in our time of need, just as Jesus was (Hebrews 4:15-16)?

"To take up the cross of Christ means to be dependent on Him alone for everything, and that is the humiliation of all human pride. People love to think they are independent ... But let the cross be preached; let it be known that nothing good dwells in man, and that everything must be received as a gift ..." (E.J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, P. 211)

THE FALLING AWAY

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; **for that Day [the second coming] will not come unless the falling away comes first**, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, words in brackets added)

Contrary to popular belief, Paul is not here describing some future “man of sin” (son of perdition/Antichrist) exalting himself and sitting in a newly rebuilt temple somewhere in Jerusalem after a so-called “secret rapture” of the church. If we allow Paul to explain himself, he tells us exactly what he means when he refers to “the temple of God” when he says, “Do you not know that *you are the temple of God* and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Therefore, what Paul is teaching us is that “the son of perdition” desires to replace the Spirit of God that dwells in *us* through Christ (Galatians 4:6) with himself. In other words, Satan’s desire is for us to crucify “the Son of God”, replacing Him with “the son of perdition.”

The phrase “son of perdition” is used only once more in Scripture, referring to Judas (John 17:12) who, although he walked with Christ, indirectly betrayed Him to the religious and political leaders for 30 silver coins. Like most of the people at that time, Judas believed the Messiah was going to

overthrow the Romans and free His people by force. Giving Jesus over to the authorities was Judas' attempt at pushing Jesus to fulfill the mission he had envisioned. Therefore, we can see the connection between "the son of perdition" desiring to set up his throne and his own characteristics within our soul temples, with Judas who projected his own character upon Christ, crucifying Him in the process.

Going back to 2 Thessalonians, Paul continues by asking, "Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?" (Verse 5). What Paul is writing to the Thessalonian believers concerning this "son of perdition", he had previously taught them while visiting them in person. In Acts 17, we read of this meeting:

"Now when they [Paul and his companions] had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to **Thessalonica**, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths **reasoned with them from the Scriptures**, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ [Messiah] had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ [Messiah].'" (Acts 17:1-3, words in brackets added)

Although we do not directly see what Paul said concerning the son of perdition who would exalt himself and oppose God, we do see that what Paul did teach them must have come right from "the Scriptures." The only "Scriptures" at that time is what is commonly called today "the Old Testament", and by careful comparison, the only place where Paul could have derived his teachings from the Old Testament is from the prophetic book of Daniel:

"And out of one of them came **a little horn** which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. **He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host**; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down." (Daniel 8:9-11)

The interpretation of the above:

“And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, **A king shall arise, having fierce features**, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and **he shall exalt himself in his heart**. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. **He shall even rise against the Prince of princes**; but he shall be broken without human means.” (Daniel 8:23-25)

Daniel even refers to *the sanctuary* (Temple) being trampled underfoot by the “transgression of desolation” (Verses 13 and 14). In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul is therefore extracting this prophecy and placing it in its proper timeframe. Although he is placing the ultimate fulfillment of these things in the *future* from his time, he says it will come during “the falling away” period *before* the second coming of Jesus. Even the angel Gabriel told Daniel that the vision “refers to many days in the future” (Daniel 8:26) from his time while also telling him that the sanctuary (Temple) would begin to be cleansed from the “transgression of desolation” during “the time of the end” (Verses 14 and 17). In fact, when Jesus refers to the same prophecy found in Daniel, He too places its fulfillment in the future from His time on earth:

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” (Matthew 24:15-16)

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her.” (Luke 21:20-21)

Clearly, Jesus is referring to the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in 70AD. Putting all the pieces together, we see that “the falling away” period that Paul mentions would begin after the

destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD by Rome. This period, known as “the Dark Ages”, would span all the way through to “the time of the end” at which time the “Temple” (God’s people) would begin to be cleansed from all the ill-founded dogma and philosophies of the Dark Ages, perpetrated by the “son of perdition.” With this understanding, Daniel’s “little horn” (the fierce king) is the same as Paul’s “son of perdition” (the man of sin) and Rome plays an important role in all this.¹⁶ To validate this, in another vision, Daniel sees four ferocious beasts rising out of the sea. Upon the fourth beast are ten distinct horns, and while Daniel is watching these horns, he sees the same “little horn” (fierce king/man of sin) rise from among them:

“I was considering the horns, and there was **another horn, a little one**, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, **in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words** ... I was watching; and the same horn was **making war against the saints, and prevailing against them.**” (Daniel 7:8, 21)

The angel Gabriel then tells Daniel:

“ ... **The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth**, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: **and another shall rise after them**; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And **he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High**, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.” (Daniel 7:23-25, *King James Version*)

This fourth beast is described as being “the fourth world power.” These four world powers are discussed and defined throughout the book of Daniel.

¹⁶ This is important because there are many who teach that the prophecies of Daniel 8 were fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes who desecrated the temple in Jerusalem in 167BC. (Please see the study entitled *The Little Horn – Part One* in the *Questions Concerning Bible Prophecy* section at lastmessageofmercy.com for more details).

Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8	Kingdom
Golden Head	Lion w/Wings		Babylon
Silver Chest/Arms	Bear	Ram w/Two Horns	Medo-Persia
Bronze Belly/Thighs	Leopard w/Wings	Goat w/One Huge Horn	Greece
Iron Legs	Beast w/Ten Horns		Rome
Ten Toes	Ten Horns		10 Divisions of Rome/Ten kings

Since “the little horn” power rises “after” and “among” the previous ten horns found upon the fourth beast, we can confidently conclude that this fierce king who would “rise against the Prince of princes” and “sits as God in the temple of God”, rises from the kingdom of Rome.

Obviously, the “Prince of princes” is “Messiah the Prince” mentioned in Daniel chapter 9. This Roman power would rise against Jesus, not only by carrying out His physical crucifixion, but also by exalting itself as high as Jesus (i.e., projecting its methods as coming from Jesus), thus it would “cast truth down to the ground”, causing “deceit to prosper under his rule.” This power would also “oppress the holy people of the Most High” who dared to go against its imposed authority.

A Time of Persecution

Around 95AD, the prophet John wrote about the trials that were to come upon God’s people after the death and ascension of Christ.

“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.” (Revelation 12:1-5)

As we saw in a previous chapter, in Bible prophecy, God symbolically describes His people by using the figure of a pure woman. In this vision, John sees a woman about to give birth to a male Child when a fiery red dragon appears and stands before the woman ready to devour the Child. However, the Child survives and is “caught up to God and His throne.” Clearly, this male Child is Jesus. In Revelation 22:1, John speaks of “The throne of God [the Father] and of the Lamb [the Son/Jesus].”¹⁷

The “fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns” is the same ten-horned beast Daniel saw, thus it represents the Roman Empire being led by Satan; for verse 9 tells us that this red dragon represents the administrative power of “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan.”

Please note that we are reading the final fulfillment of what is written back in Genesis 3:15 concerning “the woman”, “the serpent” and the “Seed” (Child). Ever since the promise of the Deliverer who would bruise the serpent’s head, Satan has been at work all throughout history attempting to prevent the birth of Jesus.

The promise was given through the ancestral line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16), thus the Bible gives us the history of that ancestral line of which Satan had been attempting to destroy in order to hinder the birth of the promised Messiah. His last-ditch effort is through the Roman Empire who at first tried to stop the development of the male Child through a death decree which ordered all male children under the age of two to be killed (Matthew 2:1-18).

After that plan failed, Satan went back to work possessing the minds some of the religious leaders who united with the Roman government to crucify Jesus. Again, this plan backfired as the on-looking universe saw Satan for who he really is— a liar and murderer.

¹⁷ Not only does John say the Child was “caught up to God and His throne” (cf. Hebrews 8:1), but also says He will rule the nations with a “rod of iron” and then plainly declares this is Jesus in Revelation 19:11-16. In Isaiah 6:1 we read, “I saw **יהוה** Lord sitting on His throne.” Could this be a reference to the Father and Son on the throne?

“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” (Revelation 12:7-9)

After the Child is “caught up to God and His throne” (referring to the ascension of Jesus) we read, “war broke out in heaven.” The Greek word translated as “war” here is πολεμέω (*polemeó*) which comes from the word πόλεμος (*polemos*) which is where the word for “polemical” or “politics” comes from.

“**Polemical** is the adjective form of the noun polemic, which itself comes from the Greek word, **polemos**, meaning ‘war.’ Use polemical to describe **a controversy or argument** that could end up as a huge conflict, because polemical refers to **a major disagreement**. The word is often used to describe **speech and writing** — a polemical discussion or a polemical essay — that usually starts **a war of words.**” (*Vocabulary.com Dictionary*)

“When **polemic** was borrowed into English from French polemique in the mid-17th century, it referred (as it still can) to a type of **hostile attack on someone's ideas**. The word traces back to Greek polemikos, which means ‘warlike’ or ‘hostile’ and in turn comes from the Greek noun **polemos**, meaning ‘war.’” (*Merriam Webster.com*)

This “war in heaven” has nothing to do with physical weapons and bloodshed, but is a controversy between ideas, between two systems of government. Jesus told us that Satan has been the liar from the beginning (John 8:44). He has been lying about God's true character and projecting his own fallen character upon God, deceiving us into believing that God is the one against us, who afflicts us, and demands our death.

However, Satan was exposed at the cross when he murdered the Son of God, which resulted in the great “war in heaven”— or at least another phase of that war which begun when sin was found in the heart of Satan.

The idea of a “war in heaven” does not necessarily mean that it is restricted to some geographical area outside of this world. It is a Hebrew expression referring to the unseen realm— “the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10). Paul further explains this in Ephesians chapter 6:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12)

Earlier we learned from Isaiah chapter 14 that it was Satan’s selfish desire to “ascend” and “exalt” himself, thus beginning “the war in heaven.”

- “I will *ascend* into heaven.”
- “I will *exalt* my throne *above* the stars of God.”
- I will also sit on the *mount* of the congregation on the farthest sides of the *north*.”
- “I will *ascend* above the *heights* of the clouds.”

We saw that Satan projected his own desire for self-exaltation onto God, claiming God, His government and law, is founded upon selfishness. However, through His only begotten Son, God revealed that, instead of ascending higher and higher, He would rather descend and die to save His lost children:

“Let the same disposition [mind] be in you which was in Christ Jesus. Although from the beginning He had the nature of God **He did not reckon His equality with God a treasure to be tightly grasped**. Nay, He **stripped Himself of His glory**, and took on Him the nature of a bondservant by **becoming a man** like other men. And being recognized as truly human, He **humbled Himself** and even **stooped to die**; yes, to **die on a cross**.” (Philippians 2:5-8, *Weymouth New Testament*)

As a result, Satan’s lies were exposed and there was no more place found for him and his angels in heaven. Before this time, the book of Job tells us that Satan still had access to the heavenly inhabitants to spread his

ideologies (Job 1:6; 2:1). Now, after the ascension of Jesus, Satan no longer has a foothold to deceive the inhabitants of that realm. They had witnessed what Satan had done to the Son of God and he indeed was exposed as a deceitful destroyer.

The angels were touched deeply by how God and His Son dealt with the sinfulness of man. They saw that it truly was love that was Their guiding principle, not an overbearing need to dominate. They were also deeply disturbed by how Satan had inspired men to respond to Jesus' mission as a man. Satan had portrayed his rebellion as noble and seeking fairness, but now its true spirit of desolation and malice had been revealed. Love and hatred were clearly contrasted. All sympathy for his ideas was stripped away, and his lies found no more place in heaven. Jesus had bruised the head of the serpent as far as these heavenly intelligences were concerned.

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.’” (Revelation 12:10-12)

But the controversy was not over! Seeing that he failed to kill the Son of God, and now held no power to deceive the heavenly inhabitants, Satan turned his attention strictly to Christ’s followers here on earth. Paul warned, “I know that after I am gone fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). He referred to these “fierce wolves” as ...

“...false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

Nevertheless, we are not to fear, for “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen” (Romans 16:20).

“Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.” (Revelation 12:13-16)

The water being spewed out of Satan’s mouth like a flood represents his deceit prospering under his rule— his lies being spread by those “fierce wolves” and “deceitful workers” attempting to flood out the truth held by God’s people. Again, Satan went to work through the Roman Empire to persecute and “oppress the holy people of the Most High.”

Sadly, as the Jews used the Romans to hang Christ on the cross, they became the victim of their own violence as the Romans returned a generation later and hung tens of thousands of Jews on crosses after the same order. In pleading for their salvation, Jesus had warned of the inevitable consequence to their desire to reject Him:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! **Your house is left to you desolate**; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Matthew 23:37-39)

“And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’” (Mark 13:2).

One of the best commentaries I have read concerning the destruction of Jerusalem was written by Ellen G. White:

“The Jews had forged their own fetters ... In the utter destruction that befell them as a nation, and in all the woes that followed them in their dispersion, **they were but reaping the harvest which their own hands had sown.** Says the prophet, ‘O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;’ ‘for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.’ [Hosea 13:9; 14:1]. Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work. By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, **the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will.** The horrible cruelties enacted in the destruction of Jerusalem are a demonstration of Satan's vindictive power over those who yield to his control.

We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan ... But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. **God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but he leaves the rejecters of his mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.** Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown, which yields its unfailing harvest.

The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan. The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace, and 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. ... [In the future] the restraining Spirit of God shall be wholly withdrawn from the wicked, no longer to hold in check the outburst of human passion and Satanic wrath! The world will then behold, as never before, the results of Satan's rule.” (*The Great Controversy*, 36-37)

By rejecting the Cornerstone, the unbelieving Jews at that time had cut themselves off from Christ and thus judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life. Thus, death and destruction came as a *natural consequence* of their self-induced separation from the Source of Life, and they were scattered throughout the world.

“Though some Jews remained in Israel, most fled the country, thus beginning a two-thousand-year odyssey in the Diaspora [scattering]” (*jewishvirtuallibrary.org*).

By rejecting Him as “the Chief Cornerstone”, Jesus had forewarned them:

“... ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits [characteristics] of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” (Matthew 21:42-44, words in brackets added)

We have previously learned that the Greek word for “grind to powder” in verse 44 is λικμάω (*likmaō*). The word *likmaō* means, “to winnow [chaff from grain],” “to scatter,” or “to crush to pieces.” The same word is used in the *Septuagint* translation of Ruth 3:2 referring to “winnowing.” Jesus’ allegory is of a heavy stone crushing something which causes the fragments to scatter. Just before His death, Jesus reiterated this warning to His disciples by referring to the prophecy written in Zechariah 14:12— “Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (see Matthew 26:31).¹⁸

This prophecy was fulfilled exactly the way Jesus had said. In August of 66AD Cestius attacked Jerusalem and, for some unknown reason, withdrew his troops. Then in 67 and 68, Vespasian attacked and subdued the cities of

¹⁸ Many refer to this prophecy in Zechariah as proof that God struck (killed) Jesus instead of killing us. However, for a more biblical understanding of the prophecy, please see my book, *Did God Kill Jesus Instead of Killing Us?*

Galilee and Judea. However, due to the death of the Emperor Nero, he delayed the attack of Jerusalem. Remembering Jesus' warning of when they see "Jerusalem surrounded by armies" they would "know that its desolation is near" and to "flee to the mountains" (Luke 21:20-21), His followers migrated to a town in Perea called Pella (see *Ecclesiastical History*, by Eusebius). Then in 70AD Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by Vespasian's son Titus. Not one Christian died during the destruction of Jerusalem! Unfortunately, over 1,000,000 non-Christian Jews were killed and about 97,000 made captive. However, Christians at this time were still greatly persecuted by Rome.

"Under Roman rule, Christians were denied business opportunities and status in society, prohibited from worshiping, attacked by mobs, persecuted, tortured and killed in organized campaigns by the Roman government. The Roman historian Tacitus accused them of 'hatred of the human race.' The Book of Revelation was written in response to the Roman persecutions. Christians sometimes had their foreheads tattooed by Romans (some Christian slaves carried religion symbols to counteract images inscribed on them by their Roman masters) or were condemned to work in mines.

In the worst cases, they were arrested and given the choice of recanting their faith or facing execution, with some being thrown to hungry lions in the Coliseum and other arenas. Tacitus wrote Christians, 'were nailed on crosses ... sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and exposed to the fury of dogs; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the night.'" (*factsanddetails.com, Martyrs and the Persecution of Christians in Rome*)

Just as it was Satan's desire to stop the physical birth of Jesus in order to hinder the truth that Jesus would reveal about God's true character, he now turns his attention to those who desire to have Christ's Spirit living in and through them (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27) and desire to spread the Gospel. He knows they have been given "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17-19) to share with the rest of the world by their teaching and example.

Paul spoke of the effects of this ministry, which Satan is desperate to stop:

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory [character] of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image [character] from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."
(2 Corinthians 3:18, words in brackets added)

Satan does not want this veil (which exposes him as a liar concerning God's character) removed. Although his wrath is focused on believers, his attack is still against Christ, for as we have learned, Jesus says, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40). Following this concept, Paul says:

"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. **Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus** so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies."
(2 Corinthians 4:8-10, *New Living Translation*)

In the beginning of the book of Revelation, John himself tells us why he was exiled to the Island of Patmos:

"I am John, your brother, and as a follower of Jesus I am your partner in patiently **enduring the suffering that comes to those who belong to his Kingdom**. I was put on the island of Patmos because I had proclaimed God's word and the truth that Jesus revealed." (Revelation 1:9, *Good News Translation*)

Other believers, who were not exiled, were tortured and killed. Like Jesus, who "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (2 Philippians 2:8), they "did not cling to their lives even in the face of death" (Revelation 12:11). Manifesting the character of those who inhabit the kingdom of God, these believers were willing to be killed, rather than to kill. The question remains: Will we too be part of that number?

Another Flight into the Wilderness

Because of this fierce persecution, John says, "the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14). Before we have a look at that mysterious timeframe, let us see how this flight into the wilderness parallels the Exodus story:

"In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to **the Wilderness** of Sinai. For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to **the Wilderness** of Sinai, and camped **in the wilderness** ... And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how **I bore you on eagles' wings** and brought you to Myself.'" (Exodus 19:1-4)

This should again remind us of what Paul said about those things being "examples for us" and "written down to warn us who live at the end of the age." Concerning this wilderness, Albert Barnes explains, "A wilderness or desert is often represented as a place of safety from pursuers. Thus David (1 Samuel 23:14-15) is represented as fleeing into the wilderness from the persecutions of Saul. So Elijah (1 Kings 19:4) fled into the wilderness from the persecutions of Jezebel. The simple idea here is, that the church, in the opposition which would come upon it, would find a refuge" (*Barne's Notes*, Revelation 12:14).

Like ancient Israel being fed the manna in the wilderness, representing the consumption of Jesus (the Word of God) as "the true Bread" from heaven (John 6:32-35), modern Israel is nourished in the wilderness by the same. However, just as the mixed multitude in the ancient wilderness led the people astray by rejecting the manna and desiring to go back to Egypt, the fierce wolves in sheep's clothing led the majority of people astray by suppressing the true Manna (the Word of God) and uniting with Romanism during the Dark Ages.

Consequently, as God's people went into obscurity, pagan ideologies and traditions crept into the imperial Church, and she emerged from the wilderness as a harlot:

"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me [John], saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of **the great harlot who sits on many waters**, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

So he [the angel] carried me away in the Spirit into **the wilderness**. And I saw **a woman sitting** on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and **ten horns**. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.

And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, **BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH**. I saw the woman, drunk with **the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus**. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement." (Revelation 17:1-5)

Instead of seeing a pure woman, here in Revelation chapter 17 we see a harlot. Therefore, this is a corrupt religious system that has departed from the Lord. Through the prophet Hosea, God teaches us this lesson:

"When the LORD first began speaking to Israel through Hosea, he said to him, 'Go and marry a **prostitute [harlot]**, so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution. **This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the LORD and worshiping other gods.**" (Hosea 1:2, *New Living Translation*)

This woman represents the mother of confusion (Babylon) and all false doctrines. Overtaken by the "flood from the serpent's mouth", this woman "sits on many waters" (Revelation 17:1), of which the angel says, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues [languages]" (Verse 15).

By using this woman (apostate church system), Satan will be successful in exalting himself and spreading false teachings (intoxicating wine) all over the earth among the many different cultures and languages, bringing them into unity with himself. Revelation 17:14^a tells us that the sole purpose for Satan establishing this worldwide-united false religious system (Babylon) is to spread his hatred for the only begotten Son of God and to cause all to “make war with the Lamb [Jesus].” He wages this war by persecuting the followers of Christ and, in addition to being found “drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus”, modern Babylon infiltrated the minds of the people with pagan concepts of sun worship in order to hinder the progress of pure Christianity.

Since John describes this system as a woman seated upon the ten-horned beast, “with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication” (Revelation 17:2), we can conclude that we are seeing a religious-political power seated in Rome. This “woman” is thus a counterpart to “the little horn”— “the man of sin”; “the son of perdition.”

There is no doubt that we are talking about the *Roman Catholic Church system* (i.e., the Papacy; the office and authority of the Pope), however, John does say she is “the mother of harlots”, therefore she has daughters. This would include *Protestantism* which, although claims to “protest” against the Mother, is still infected with much of her ideologies and methods. In short, we are discussing *mainstream Western Christianity* as a whole, and not the individual people within the system.

A Misconception of God’s Law

John describes this harlot woman as being “arrayed in *purple* and *scarlet*, color, and adorned with *gold* and precious stones and pearls” (Revelation 17:4). These same three colors are mentioned together all throughout the book of Exodus to describe the garments of God’s priests (Exodus 28:5-6, 8, 15, 33; 39:2-3, 5, 8). However, there is one color missing from the woman’s attire that God’s priest have— *blue*. Why is this color missing from the harlot’s attire?

In Numbers 15, God tells His people to make tassels (*tzitzit*) and attach them to the four corners of their garments. Each of these tassels had to have at least one strand of blue (Verse 38). Why blue? God declared:

“And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all **the commandments of the Lord** and do them, and that you may not follow **the harlotry** to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all **My commandments**, and be holy for your God.” (Numbers 15:39-40)

When we look back at the time Moses received the Ten Commandments from God, we read that Moses and the elders “saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of *sapphire stone*” (Exodus 24:10). Sapphire is blue. In verse 12 we read, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you *tablets of stone*, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.” The phrase in Hebrew could be written, “tablets of *the stone*.” What stone? The blue/sapphire stone.

The blue strand represents God’s law written upon the sapphire stone, which seems to be missing from the harlot woman. This should draw our attention back to Daniel 7:25 where it says the little horn power would “think to change times and laws.” Since this power is described as speaking blasphemy against God, and that the missing blue represents God’s law, then these “times and laws” are referring to God’s set times and laws.

However, in order to even “think” God’s law can be changed is to view His law as operating like human law with arbitrary rules that are enforced by arbitrary *imposed punishments*. In this Old Covenant view, we forget the fact that God’s law is built upon the unchanging design protocols upon which life operates where sickness, death, and destruction are the *inherent consequences* of breaking said protocols.

To further show this, on page 168 in his book, *A History of the Reformation*, Thomas Lindsay, explains the infiltration of Roman thought in the church:

“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.”** (Thomas Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*)

Thus, Western Christianity as a whole has “changed” God’s law in their thinking, therefore teaching it is a list of legislative rules, which require strict punishment from law-enforcers. Consequently, the Church of Rome believes the Pope has been given authority to change God’s law:

“The Pope has power to **change times,** to **abrogate laws,** and to dispense with all things, **even the precepts of Christ’s ...** The Pope has authority, and has often exercised it, to dispense with the command of Christ.” (*Decretal, de tranlatic Episcop. Cap. [The Pope can modify divine law], Ferraris' Ecclesiastical Dictionary*)

This is nearly the same quote found in Daniel 7:25. But why would the church believe this? Teaching that the Pope is “the representative of Jesus Christ” and is “forever a priest of the Most High” (*The Catholic National*, July 1985), one of the official titles for the Pope is VICARIUS FILII DEI, which is Latin for “Vicar of the Son of God”, meaning, “in place of the Son of God.”

“The letters inscribed in the Pope’s miter are these ‘Vicarious Filii Dei’ which is Latin for **‘Vicar of the Son of God.’** Catholics hold that the church, which is a visible society, must have a visible head.” (*Our Sunday Visitor*, April 18, 1915)

So, we see again, “the son of perdition” (“forever a priest”) taking the place of “the Son of God” (“a Priest forever”; Hebrews 7:21-22). Where does a priest officiate? In a temple! What temple does the “son of perdition” desire to sit in? God’s temple— “and *you* are that temple” (1 Corinthians 3:17). This false priest wants to replace Christ as head of the church and sit (minister) in the temple of God (our hearts and minds).

Changing the Times and Laws

Taking a closer look at the word “times” in Daniel 7:25, we learn what major portion of the law this power set out to change. Daniel is writing in Aramaic here and the word for “times” is ܙܡܢܐ (*zeman*), which, not only means “times” in general, but *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* says it specifically means “holy times (feast days)” in Daniel 7:25. Note these alternate translations:

Holman Christian Standard Bible: “He will speak words against the Most High and oppress the holy ones of the Most High. He will intend to change religious festivals and laws ...”

Good News Translation: “He will speak against the Supreme God and oppress God’s people. He will try to change their religious laws and festivals ...”

New Living Translation: “He will defy the Most High and oppress the holy people of the Most High. He will try to change their sacred festivals and laws ...”

So, the Roman Papacy, not only believes the Pope is “forever a priest”; “in place of the Son of God”, but would also think to change God’s sacred festivals, which we have learned bring the presence of Christ in greater measure. This is the length Satan will go to crucify the Son of God from our hearts and minds and sit himself upon “the mount of the congregation” (Isaiah 14:13). The Hebrew word for “congregation” here is מועד (*moéd*), meaning “appointed time”; “appointed feast/festival” and is the same word used for God’s feasts in Leviticus 23. But did the Papacy ever attempt to change God’s festivals?

On page 802 in his book, *History of the Sabbath*, Thomas Enright boldly claimed, "It's the mark of our authority to over-rule God's law." What does *The History of the Sabbath* have to do with over-ruling God's law?

"We have made the change from the seventh day to the first day, from Saturday to Sunday, on the authority of the holy, Catholic, apostolic church of Christ." (Bishop Symour, *Why We Keep Sunday*)

"We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday." (Peter Geiermann, *CSSR, A Doctrinal Catechism*, 1957 edition, p. 50)

"It is well to remind the Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and all other Christians, that the Bible does not support them anywhere in their observance of Sunday. Sunday is an institution of the Roman Catholic Church, and those who observe the day observe a commandment of the Catholic Church." (Priest Brady, Elizabeth, N.J. "News" of March 18, 1903)

Although most Protestants and Catholics claim that the apostles began observing Sunday in honor of the resurrection, the real reason goes much deeper. The major god of ancient Rome was Mithra, which we have seen is a Roman version of Nimrod/Baal/Tammuz. Through Mithraism, the days of the week were named after the German gods of the planets. Our own weekdays today retain the Teutonic (German) names of these same planet deities.¹⁹ It is a known fact that ancient sun worshippers observed Sunday as a weekly holiday in honor of the sun god.

"Sunday was a name given by the heathens to the first day of the week, because it was the day they worshipped the sun." (*Eadie's Biblical Cyclopedia*, 1872, p. 561)

"[The name] Sunday is the first day of the week, adopted from the Roman calendar because it was dedicated to the worship of the sun." (*Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Article: "Sunday")

¹⁹ The Sun [Sunday], Moon [Monday], Mars [Tiu, Tuesday], Mercury [Woden, Wednesday], Jupiter [Thor, Thursday], Venus [Frigg, Freya, Friday], and Saturn [Saturday].

The online *Britannica Dictionary* says, "Mithra was associated with the Greek sun god, Helios, and the Roman Sol Invictus" (*Britannica.com*). Renowned historian and Egyptologists, Arthur Weigall wrote:

"As a solar festival, **Sunday was the sacred day of Mithra**; and it is interesting to notice that since Mithra was addressed, as Dominus, 'Lord,' Sunday must have been 'the Lord's Day' long before Christian times ... The [Western] church made a sacred day of Sunday ... largely because it was the weekly festival of the sun; for **it was a definite Christian policy to take over the pagan festivals endeared to the people by tradition and give them Christian significance.**" (*The Paganism in Our Christianity*, pp. 136, 145).

In a paper read before the *New York Ministers' Conference* on November 13, 1893, Baptist Minister, Dr. Edward Hiscox confessed:

"Of course I quite well know that Sunday did come into use in early Christian history as a religious day, as we learn from the Christian Fathers and other sources. **But what a pity that it comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god**, when adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism!"

Can you see how Christ, "the Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28) is crucified and replaced with Mithra (*Dominus*— "lord" of the Sunday)?

"... why should that chief of the fallen angels hold such hatred toward the Sabbath? This will be easily answered when we remember that Christ was the Creator, the one to whom God said, 'Let us make man,' and of whom it is written, 'And Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thy hands.' Heb. 1:10. The Sabbath thus becomes the memorial of Christ's creative power. **Since the rebellion in heaven, it has been Satan's studied plan to hide Christ from the eyes of humanity**, and, whether by having it [the Sabbath] forgotten, despised, or exchanged for a rival, he would have that ever-returning memorial of the glory and power with which God has invested the Son, erased from the memory and history of man..." (Robert Hare, *The Bible Echo*, October 1, 1893)

Keep in mind that the prophecy in Daniel says, "He will try to change their sacred festivals and laws" (plural). Has the Roman Papacy attempted to change other festivals as well? In a letter dated April 26, 1902, Thomas Enright wrote:

"... The Catholic Church abolished not only the Sabbath, but all the other [so-called] Jewish Festivals." (Words in brackets added)

In question-and-answer format, Reverend Dr. Challoner admits:

Q. Has the church power to make any alterations in the commandments of God?

A. ... Instead of the seventh day, and other festivals appointed by the old law, the church has prescribed the Sundays and holy days to be set apart for God's worship; and these we are now obliged to keep in consequence of God's commandment, instead of the ancient Sabbath." (*The Catholic Christian Instructed in the Sacraments, Sacrifices, Ceremonies, and Observances of the Church By Way of Question and Answer*, p. 204)

Falsely claiming that "God simply gave His Church the power to set aside whatever day or days she would deem suitable as Holy Days", Vincent J. Kelly adds: "The Church chose Sunday, the first day of the week, and in the course of time added other days, as holy days." (*Forbidden Sunday and Feast-Day Occupations*, p. 2).

What other festivals has "the church" replaced or added? There's been quite a few, but let's briefly zoom in on a couple of major ones:

"Practically everything Protestants regard as essential or important they have received from the Catholic Church ... The Protestant mind does not seem to realize that in accepting the Bible and observing the **Sunday**, in keeping **Christmas** and **Easter**, they are accepting the authority of the spokesman for the church, the Pope." (*Our Sunday Visitor*, February 5, 1950)

Regarding Christmas, David Wilcoxson explains how this festival replaced the Feast of Tabernacles:

"The birthday of the Babylonian sun god of Tammuz, the Egyptian sun god Ra, the Greek sun god Helios, and the Roman sun god Mithra, are all celebrated on 12/25 ... Bible scholars agree that Christ was born in the Fall. **Our Messiah was born during the Feast of Tabernacles, which corresponds to the September – October time frame of our present calendar.**²⁰

... So how did 12/25 get selected as the Messiah's birthday? Prior to this, December 25th had been the Roman feast of Sol Invictus (open unconquered Sun), where they celebrated Sun worship. In 350 A.D. Pope Julius I declared December 25 the official date of Christmas. By 529 A.D., after Christianity had become the official state religion of the Roman Empire, Emperor Justinian made Christmas a civic holiday. (David Wilcoxson, *Christmas Replaces The Father's Feast Of Tabernacles*, christianitybeliefs.org)

Explaining how Easter replaced Passover, we read:

"The term 'Easter' is not of Christian origin. It is another form of Astarte, one of the titles of the Chaldean goddess, the queen of heaven. **The festival of Pasch [Passover] held by Christians in post-apostolic times was a continuation of the Jewish feast ... From this Pasch the pagan festival of 'Easter' was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt pagan festivals to Christianity.**" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, "Easter", words in brackets added)

Penal Affliction in Place of Cause and Effect

Remember, the title, "son of perdition" is connected to Judas, who claimed to be a follower of Christ, but misunderstood His mission. His desire, as many of the disciples, was for Jesus to rise as a political leader who would

²⁰ Most translations of John 1:14 say, when Christ was made flesh, He "dwelt" among us, which is fine, but the Greek word σκηνώω (*skénoó*) literally means "to tabernacle" and is the same Greek word used in the Septuagint version referring to the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23. The Feast of Tabernacles is an eight-day feast (Leviticus 23:33-36). Jesus was most likely born on the first day of Tabernacles and circumcised on the eighth and last day of the Feast which is called *Shemini Atzeret* (Luke 2:21).

build armies to wipe out Rome. But this is not how Christ's kingdom operates. In the time of Constantine, the Church led out in the same understanding by persecuting, torturing, and killing the protesters of their creed. This is mainly because they worshipped Mithra— "the god of the sun, justice, contract, and war" (*Wikipedia*).

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, who had projected the character of Pharaoh upon God, the Roman church did the same by projecting upon God the character of Mithra, resulting in the many "holy wars" and crusades.

"The Crusades were a series of major military campaigns initiated, supported, and sometimes directed by the Latin Church between the 11th and 13th centuries to secure holy sites under Christian control primarily in the Middle East. The Crusades led to a series of religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land. The First Crusade commenced in 1095 after the Pope called on the kingdoms of Christendom to march in defense of the beleaguered Byzantine Empire and drive the Muslims out of the Holy Land ... Those who took up the sword in the Crusading cause were promised absolution from their sins and eternal glory by the Pope." (Alexander Gale, *The Most Brutal Holy Wars in History*, *greekreporter.com*, April 6, 2023)

Like the Jewish leaders before them, and most Protestant reformers after them, the Roman Church of the Dark Ages believed God's law operates under penal affliction instead of cause and effect. In this understanding, sin is not the direct cause of sickness and death; it instead angers the Lawgiver who in turn must demand imposed punishments upon lawbreakers for His justice to be satisfied. Thus, wherever there is religious persecution to any degree, it springs from the mistaken idea that God demands a victim.

Even in these modern times, we have witnessed these threats. In 1998, the *Detroit News* quoted Pope John Paul II as saying, "A person who violates the sanctity of Sunday is to be punished as a heretic" (*Detroit News*, July 7, 1998, p. 1). If his plan to reestablish world-wide Sunday laws, enforced by

the state, goes into effect,²¹ how does the Roman Church plan to punish those heretics? The same way she always has:

“The Catholic Church is a respecer of conscience and of liberty ... Nevertheless, when confronted with heresy ... she has recourse to **FORCE**, to corporal **PUNISHMENT**, to **TORTURE**.” (Catholic Professor Alfred Baudrillart, *The Catholic Church, Renaissance, and Protestantism*, pp. 182- 183)

“Heretics may not only be excommunicated [from the church], **but also justly put to death**.” (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1911 edition, vol. 14, pp. 766, 768)

“Wherever and whenever there is honest Catholicity, there will be a clear distinction drawn between truth and error, and Catholicity and all forms of heresy. **When she thinks it good to use physical force, she will use it** ... But will the Catholic Church give bond that she will not persecute at all? Will she guarantee absolute freedom and equality of all churches and all faiths? The Catholic Church gives no bonds of her good behavior.” (*The Western Watchman* [A Catholic Publication], December 24, 1908)

Did you know that one of the main reasons they crucified Jesus was because of the way He kept Sabbath? The unbelieving Jewish leaders accused Jesus of not keeping the Sabbath because He healed people upon that Day, which was against their own *man-made requirements* that they had added to the Sabbath Commandment (called the Oral Traditions).²² The Pharisees would falsely claim, “This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath...” (John 9:16).

They treated Jesus as a Sabbath-breaker when, in fact, He kept the Sabbath the way God originally intended it to be observed. After all, Jesus is the One who created the Sabbath and it’s His presence that makes the Sabbath

²¹ The 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “In respecting religious liberty and the common good of all, Christians should seek recognition of Sundays and the Church’s holy days as legal holidays.” See also, Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato si’*, paragraphs 236-237, published May 24, 2015.

²² See, *The 39 Melachos of Shabbos*.

holy. If you crucify the Spirit (presence) of Christ, then, no matter what day you observe, there is no true rest.

“God’s rest comes only from His perfect work, which is found only in Christ. Therefore no Jew, so-called, as distinguished from a believer in Christ, keeps the Sabbath of the Lord, even though he apparently rests on the seventh day of the week. His rest is his own rest, and not the rest of the Lord. Do you see the difference? **The Jewish Sabbath falls on the same day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord, but it is not by any means the same thing.** It represents only the man himself, and his own work. **Instead of being the sign of justification by faith in the work of the Lord [Jesus], it is the sign of self-righteousness ...** Their obedience was not the obedience of faith, but only of form ...

The Jewish Sabbath represents the vain attempt of zealous and self-confident humanity to do the works which God Himself does, and which God alone can do. **The Sunday Sabbath signifies the substitution of our work for God’s work,** as being not only as good, but even better. It dispenses with the form of the commandment of the Lord. **The Sunday Sabbath, therefore, stands as the sign of humanity’s pretended power to make things holy.”** (E.J. Waggoner, *The Three Sabbaths*)

Jesus healing people upon the Sabbath, giving them rest from their burdens and handicaps is in perfect harmony with what the Sabbath is all about. Christ was not performing any works for self-gain but was performing the healing works of redemption. It was in this context that Christ said, “My Father is always working, and so am I” (John 5:17, *New Living Translation*).

Christ and His Father are always working to heal us. Paul wrote, “And I am certain that God, *who began the good work within you,* will continue *his work* until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns” (Philippians 1:6, *New Living Translation*).

Unfortunately, due to Jesus’ selfless love, which was a constant rebuke and agitation towards their self-righteousness (especially upon the Sabbath),

the religious leaders counted Him as a heretic and sought recourse to force, to corporal punishment and to torture carried out by the state in the form of Roman flagellation and crucifixion.

“For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, **because He had done these things on the Sabbath.**” (John 5:16)

Jesus warned of this ideology when He said, “... the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2). Do you remember what Jesus asked while Saul was on his way to Damascus to punish, persecute and kill Christians?— “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 26:14).

The first church historian, Eusebius, recounts how the Roman Church monarchy was believed to be the express image of the monarchy in heaven when he wrote: “With the Roman Empire monarchy had come on earth as the image of the monarchy in heaven” (S. L. Greenslade, *Church and State from Constantine to Theodosius* (London: SCM Press, 1954). Thus, the church established her own standards against “heretics” and enforced arbitrary punishments, claiming these punishments were “divine justice.”

“Besides the condemnation of divine justice, they must expect to suffer the severe penalties which our authority, guided by heavenly wisdom, shall think proper to inflict.” (Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Ch. 27, par. 6)

Since Pope Leo said, “We [the Popes] hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty” (*Encyclical Letter*, June 20, 1894), when they enforce these penal decrees, they believe they are advancing the kingdom of God.

“The Pope is at it were God on earth, sole sovereign of the faithful of Christ, chief king of kings, having plenitude of power, **to whom has been entrusted by the omnipotent God direction not only of the earthly but also of the heavenly kingdom ...**” (*Prompta Bibliotheca Canonica* [Roman Catholic Dictionary] vol. 4, pp. 438, 442, article “Pope”)

Believing the misconception that the Old and New Covenants are eras of time (before the cross/after the cross), many teachers proclaim that those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath today are under the Old Covenant and are therefore not practicing faith in Christ.

However, as we have seen, the Sabbath is designed as a channel of divine blessing (a magnification of *Christ's presence*) bringing to humanity rest (freedom) *from our own works* and rest in Christ's creative and redemptive works (cf. Exodus 20:11; Deuteronomy 5:15). It stands as a mark (or sign) of design-law and how God governs His creation, leaving the sinner free to step outside of the design and reap the inherent consequences.

"I am the Lord your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be **a sign** between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God." (Ezekiel 20:19-20)

The transfer from Sabbath to Sunday observance, however, came through *legislative force* and decreed by Roman church magistrates, and thus is a mark (or sign) of imperialism.

"Of course the Catholic church claims that the change [from Saturday to Sunday] was her act. And the act is **the mark** of her ecclesiastical power and authority in religious matters." (C.F. Thomas, Chancellor of Cardinal Gibbons, *Faith of Our Fathers*, p, 14, words in brackets my own)

"In order to fully appreciate Sunday as **a mark** of Christian unity we must expand our definition of unity." (Reverend Dr. Demetrios Toniaf of *The Lord's Day Alliance* of USA, April of 2015)

Instead of God's law being viewed as "the law of liberty" (James 2:11-12), it was viewed and used as a law of bondage, a demonstration of Satan's throne of iniquity, which frames "wicked things through misuse of the Law" (Psalm 94:20, *International Standard Version*). Therefore, those who align themselves with the ideology that elected Sunday in the place of the Sabbath, position themselves under the *Old Covenant* mindset of replacing God's works *with their own*.

Baal Worship in the Church

The infiltration of Baal worship into the church was foretold in the book of Ezekiel when he refers to Tammuz:

“And He [God] said to me [Ezekiel], ‘Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing.’ So He brought me to the door of the north gate of **the Lord’s house**; and to my dismay, **women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz**. Then He said to me, ‘Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these.’

So He brought me into the inner court of **the Lord’s house**; and there, at the door of **the temple of the Lord**, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and **they were worshiping the sun toward the east.**” (Ezekiel 8:13-16)

Also speaking of Baal worship within the church, God spoke through Jeremiah concerning Semiramis (Astarte):

“Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for **the queen of heaven**; and they pour out drink offerings to **other gods**, that they may provoke Me to anger. Do they provoke Me to anger?’ says the Lord. ‘Do they not provoke themselves, to the shame of their own faces?’” (Jeremiah 7:17-19)

This is not about a denomination, but about the influence of *Romanism* in the church— both Catholic and Protestant. This system of Romanism is the modern equivalent to Baal worship. The ten-horned beast is indeed an amalgamation of all the pagan kingdoms and ideologies that came before:

“Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast [Rome] rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and **ten horns**, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name [Papacy]. Now the beast which I saw was like a **leopard** [Greece], his feet were like the feet of a **bear** [Medo-Persia], and his mouth like the mouth of a **lion** [Babylon]. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.” (Revelation 13:1-2)

The dragon transferred its power, seat, and authority over to this new power. Remember, the “dragon” ultimately represents Satan (Revelation 12:9), but also represents his workings through the Roman Empire. This transfer of power was done within the same kingdom, from Pagan Rome to Papal Rome. Thus, in *Stanley's History* we read, “The Popes filled the place of the vacant emperors of Rome, inheriting their power, prestige, and titles from paganism” (p. 40).

This is why Daniel saw that the little horn would be “different from the first ones” (Daniel 7:24). It is not a mere political power but a religio-political power— a church-state, with the church controlling the state! (A woman riding/controlling the beast). Hence, on page 24 in *Wharey's Church History*, we read, “Christianity as it existed in the Dark Ages, might be termed, without much impropriety of language, ‘Baptized Paganism.’”

“Rome, pagan and papal, is regarded as one power. ‘The literal Babylon was the beginner and supporter of **tyranny and idolatry** ... This city and its whole empire were taken by the Persians under Cyrus; the Persians were subdued by the Macedonians [Greeks], and the Macadonians by the Romans; so that **Rome succeeded to the power of old Babylon**. And it was her method to **adopt** the worship of the **false deities** she had conquered; so that **by her own act she became the heiress and successor of all the Babylonian idolatry ... and consequently of all the idolatry of the earth.**’ Rome, or ‘mystical Babylon,’ is ‘that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth’ [Revelation 17:18].” (M.G. Easton, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p. 73)

So, along with the transfer of paganism, came the worship of *false deities* into the church thus reviving the legacy of Nimrod (i.e., Baal worship), which Satan fostered to replace the worship of Jesus.

“Baal was ... A god who was often called ‘Almighty’ and ‘Lord of the Earth.’ A god who brought rain, thunder, and lightning and who fertilized the earth, controlled the sun, and brought the harvest. A god who fought the great serpent Leviathan, as well as battled against Mot, the god of

death. Most amazing of all, it was taught that in his battle with Mot, Baal died and was resurrected to bring life to Earth ... Baal required sacrifice to be offered to him in order for him to provide blessings. **Baal eventually became Zeus to the Greeks, Jupiter to the Romans, Thor to the Norse people—and he became Jesus Christ to all Christians who worship a god who requires the blood of a human sacrifice be offered to him in order for him to provide blessings.**” (Tim Jennings, *comeandreason.com*)

Who Do You Say that I Am?

To make sure His disciples were not tempted to mingle His identity, character, and mission with false deities, Jesus brought His disciples to Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13). At this site is a cliff. At the base of this cliff is a cavern which people believed led to the underworld thus it was named “the gates of Hades” (aka, “the gates of hell”). Because of this, it became a center for Baal worship where superstitious ceremonies including human sacrifices were made to entice the favor of the gods. Later it became the religious center for worship of the Greek god, Pan, and was also a shrine to the Roman Caesar (hence the name, *Caesarea*).

In contrast to these pagan gods, Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” (Verse 15). After Peter (Simon) replies, “You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God” (Verse 16), Jesus says:

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Verses 17-18)

Some claim that Jesus is saying He would build His church upon Peter himself. Others go as far to say that Jesus is inaugurating Peter as the first Pope. The Greek word for “Peter” here is Πέτρος (*Petros*) which means “a rolling stone”, a name Jesus gave to him when they first met (John 1:42). However, when Jesus says, “on this rock I will build My church”, Matthew

purposefully uses a different Greek word, πέτρα (*Petra*), which means “a mass of rock”, contrasting the mass of rock (the cliff) at Caesarea Philippi and all that it represents.

The Greek work for “build” Matthew uses is οικοδομέω (*oikodomeó*), which *Strong’s Concordance* not only defines as “to build or erect a building” but figuratively as “the building up of character: I build up, edify, encourage.” In other words, “‘build someone up,’ helping them to stand (be strong, ‘sturdy’)” (see, *HELP’S Word Studies*). *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* says it is equivalent to “restore by building, to rebuild, repair” (see, Matthew 26:61). It is a common misconception that Jesus started a completely new religion called “Christianity.” He instead came to restore, rebuild, and repair His church, that had long been polluted with the lies of the devil and the disease of sin, and reframe it within the truth. As Jesus said, “No one puts new wine into old wineskins” (Luke 5:37). Jesus, who had led the church into the figurative wilderness shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD (Revelation 12:6), is “He who was in the church in the wilderness” that fled from ancient Egypt (Acts 7:38); for He is, and always has been, “the head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18).

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone**, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22, words in brackets added)

Jesus did not say He would strengthen His church upon Peter, but upon “a mass of rock”, clearly referring to Himself (Isaiah 28:16; Acts 4:10-12; 1 Corinthians 10:4). Therefore, it was the strength and solidity of Peter’s *confession* that would build up the church. Peter was not only confessing that Jesus is “the Son of God” but also exalting the Father as “the *living* God” to distinguish Him from the dead idols (false deities) of paganism.

Jesus came to demonstrate the everlasting love of God and that, unlike all these false deities, He *freely* forgives and desires to heal His wayward children instead of condemning them. Christ would demonstrate that God is a loving Father who, instead of torturing and killing His enemies, He dies for them!

Therefore, when Jesus says, "the gates of Hades shall not prevail" against His church, He is saying all pagan ideologies and false sun god deities will be overcome by the foundational truth that He is the Messiah, the only begotten Son of *that* "living God" whose true character He came to reveal.

THE RISE OF ANTICHRISTS

When the Papacy of Rome began to exalt itself as high as Jesus (“the Prince of the host”), many began to protest, labeling the Papacy as “the Antichrist.” Martin Luther (a devoted Catholic monk and the founder of the Lutheran Church) said this warning concerning the church he loved in the 1500’s:

“This teaching [of the supremacy of the Pope] shows forcefully that the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ, because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his [the Pope’s] power ...” (*Smalcald Articles*, II, words in brackets added)

The word “Antichrist”, not only means “against Christ”, but it also signifies “in place of Christ.” As we saw in our last chapter, the Pope of Rome is known as the “Vicar of the Son of God”, which means “in place of the Son of God”— the very position Satan began to covet. Thus he is the modern Nimrod— “the mighty hunter before [in place of] the Lord” (Genesis 10:9). By using Scripture as his foundation, Luther had accepted what countless others were claiming years before him concerning the Roman Papacy.

The Waldensians, 1100 A.D.: “Antichrist, the predicted murderer of the saints, hath already appeared in his true character, seated monarchally in the seven-hilled city [Rome].” (*The Noble Lesson*, 1100 A.D.)

John Wycliffe (1324-1384): “Why is it necessary in unbelief to look for another Antichrist? Hence in the seventh chapter of Daniel Antichrist is forcefully described by a horn arising in the time of the 4th kingdom ... the ten horns are the whole of our temporal rulers, and the horn has

arisen from the ten horns, having eyes and a mouth speaking great things against the Lofty One, and wearing out the saints of the Most High, and thinking that he is able to change times and laws. [Daniel 7:8, 25 quoted] ... For so our clergy foresee the lord Pope, as it is said of the eighth blaspheming little head." (Translated from Wycliffe's, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae* [*The Truth of Scripture*], vol. 3 pp. 262-263)

Westminster Confession of Faith (1664): "There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalts himself in the Church and against Christ, and all that is called God."

Cotton Mather (1663-1728): "The oracles of God foretold the rising of an Antichrist in the Christian Church: and in the Pope of Rome, all the characteristics of that Antichrist are so marvelously answered that if any who read the Scriptures do not see it, there is a marvelous blindness upon them." (*The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 113)

Denying Jesus Came in the Flesh

John refers to "antichrists" in the plural, describing people already living in his day (1 John 2:18). One of the definitions of an antichrist John gives is someone who denies that Jesus came in the flesh (1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7). This is not talking about simply believing Jesus came here as a human. John is talking about the fact that Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3) and in that flesh He overcame sin, being our example of what God the Father can and will do in the submitted believer (Hebrews 2:9-18). Jesus did not come in some super-human flesh which could "not sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

This gives us assurance that, if we permit His Spirit to dwell in us (our flesh), Jesus will continue to overcome sin through us, and bring us to righteousness. In other words, just as "God was revealed in the flesh" through Jesus (1 Timothy 3:16), He will be "revealed in the flesh" through us (Ephesians 3:10-19).

This truth concerning Christ's human nature strikes most powerfully at the erroneous Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception, which is not about Jesus' conception, but about *Mary's conception* from her own mother. According to this doctrine, Mary is believed to have been born with a human nature "very different from the rest of mankind" which "surpassed by far the cherubim and seraphim [the angels] in purity"; that she "is truly the mother of God, and virgin before and after childbirth; and she was created in a condition more sublime and glorious than that of all natures, whether intellectual or corporeal" (see, Reverend Joseph Faa Di Bruno, *Catholic Belief*, pp. 216-217).

Thus, we see that Mary, who is also called "the Queen of Heaven", is the modern version of Semiramis/Astarte (see again, Jeremiah 7:11-19).

"Queen of Heaven was a title given to a number of ancient sky goddesses worshipped throughout the ancient Mediterranean and the ancient Near East. Goddesses known to have been referred to by the title include Inanna, Anat, Isis, Nut, Astarte, and possibly Asherah (by the prophet Jeremiah).

In Greco-Roman times, Hera and Juno bore this title. Forms and content of worship varied ... Queen of Heaven (Latin: *Regina Caeli*) is one of many Queen titles used of Mary, mother of Jesus. The title derived in part from the ancient Catholic teaching that Mary, at the end of her earthly life, was bodily and spiritually assumed into heaven, and that she is there honored as Queen." (*Wikipedia*)

This then leads to the assumption that Jesus was born in "a human nature of the same substance with hers" (Cardinal Gibbons, *Faith of Our Fathers*, pp. 198-199). Thus, they believe, when Jesus was born, He was born with a human nature that was "very different from the rest of mankind" and "surpassed by far the cherubim and seraphim in purity" because He inherited this nature from Mary. However, Scripture says, "He had to be made like His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17) and was made "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3).

Jesus partook of the same flesh— the same sinful flesh fallen humanity has with all its propensities toward sin. Scripture also says that Jesus, while on earth, “was made for a little while lower [not higher] than the angels” (Hebrews 2:9); and the reason for this is because “Jesus clearly did not come to help angels, but He did come to help Abraham’s descendants” (Hebrews 2:16). In other words, Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh because the only flesh that needed salvation is sinful flesh.

So yes, it is true that Jesus inherited a nature like that of Mary’s, but it was not a sinless nature, but a fallen nature bent towards sin (Galatians 4:4). Although He had propensities *toward* sin, He did not have any cultivated propensities *from* sin as we do.

Jesus is the only human to resist all temptations of sin and live a sinless life. He is the only being who ever-perfectly lives by faith in the Father (John 8:29; Hebrews 11:6). Remember, Jesus is the author of faith (Hebrews 12:2); and while partaking of our sinful nature, He partook of His Father’s divine nature by faith to overcome every temptation.

No wonder the ten-horned beastly power seeks to persecute and kill those who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith *OF* Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). The *Complete Jewish Bible*, which uses the Hebrew name *Yeshua* instead of Jesus, translates it as “those who observe his commands and exercise Yeshua’s faithfulness.” Thus Jesus is our perfect example of what we may accomplish by denying our self (sinful nature) and “share [partake of] His divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires” (2 Peter 1:4, *New Living Translation*).

Through this divine Remedy, Jesus promises that we will overcome “even as [just like] I [Jesus] also overcame” (Revelation 3:21). One way for Satan to put a stop to this restoration in man, which would glorify God (Colossians 1:27), is to get man to deny that this is even a possibility. Therefore, he had to attack the truth concerning the human nature of Jesus.

"If Christ had side-stepped the law of heredity through an immaculate conception or a special creation to make Him like Adam before he fell, we who are under that law could never hope to be saved from our inherited tendencies. We are to overcome our inherited tendencies by faith in Christ. However, if Christ came in sinless nature with no tendencies toward sin, and we must overcome inherited tendencies, then we must do something that Christ would not dare to do. There is better News than this. Christ had to die to redeem us. He had to take mortality upon Himself. Mortality comes because of a nature with an inherent tendency to die. Only a sinful fallen nature is subject to death. Adam was not subject to death until he sinned. Since he sinned, every person, without exception, inherits the tendency to die. ... **Any teaching that affirms that Christ came in sinless human nature denies the blood, the death, of Christ. It is a denial of the cross of Christ and thus against the 'everlasting gospel.'** Babylon denies and does away with the blood of Christ." (Gerald L. Finneman, *The Crucifixion of Christ And Its Opposition*, pp. 17, 18)

Denying the Father and the Son

John gives another definition of an antichrist when he says, "anyone who denies the Father and the Son is an antichrist" (1 John 2:22, *New Living Translation*). Therefore, anyone who denies the literal Father and Son relationship is an antichrist. The Greek word used for "only begotten" in John 3:16 is μονογενής (*monogenés*) which literally means "only offspring," yet the modern idea in "Christianity" is that the word means "unique Son" but this is not accurate:

"Monogenés – Definition 2: As the only-begotten Son he shares all things with the Father. His glory is not merely like that of an only child; it is that of the only-begotten Son (Jn. 1:14). **He is not just unique; he is the Son,** for combined with *huios* [Son] **the term describes his origin.** The risen Lord is also **the preexisting Lord,** who is with God, is loved by him, and shares his glory from all eternity (17:5, 24). Whether or not this implies **actual begetting by God** is debated by some, but **1 Jn. 5:18 definitely teaches this, for sonship is here presented in the terms of begetting.**" (Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*)

Scripture is clear that Jesus is the *literal* Son of God. His Sonship is not meant as a metaphor as many claim. For example, referring to Psalm 2:7, where God says to Jesus, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You", Baptist pastor John MacArthur says, "The temporal language should therefore be understood as figurative, not literal" (*gracetoyou.org, Reexamining the Eternal Sonship of Christ*).

Islamic teacher Azhar Goraya notes, "Looking at both how the Jews used the term ['Son of God'] at the time and how Jesus himself used it, it becomes clear that the term is metaphorical" (*reviewofreligions.org, Was Jesus Really the 'Son of God'? – Examining the Historical Context*). Modern Seventh-day Adventist teachers claim the same:²³

"The name 'Son of God' is a metaphor, a figure of speech." (Eric Livingston, *ericlivingston.com, The 'Son of God': Literal or Metaphor?*)

"In order to eradicate sin and rebellion from the universe and to restore harmony and peace, one of the divine Beings accepted, and entered into, the role of the Father, another the role of the Son." (Gordon Jenson, *Adventist Review*, October 31, 1996, p.12. *Week of Prayer readings*, article *Jesus the Heavenly Intercessor*)

"The father-son image cannot be literally applied to the divine Father-Son relationship within the Godhead. The Son is not the natural, literal Son of the Father ... The term 'Son' is used metaphorically when applied to the Godhead." (Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *adventistbiblicalresearch.org, A Question of Sonship*)

Larry Wilson, from *wake-up.org*, explains how he imagines the scene of how each member of the Godhead received their roles:

"We need to consider one more point to fully appreciate the untold story of Jesus. After agreeing how their rights, powers, and prerogatives would

²³ I say "modern" Adventist teachers because the founding leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church believed Jesus is the literal begotten divine Son who came forth from God uncreated "in the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2).

be divided, I believe the three Gods cast lots to see which role each God would take on. As distinct, separate, coeternal deities, any one of the three Gods could perfectly fill any of the three roles. Assuming lots were cast, they chose one God to serve as 'Ruler of the Universe' [1 Timothy 6:15] who would sit on the throne and be called 'Holy Father' ... Another God was chosen to serve as the Holy Spirit. He also agreed to remain invisible for all eternity and to never speak of His own accord ...

... Of course, He speaks privately with the other two Gods when they have meetings, but He does not speak on His own to created beings ... Finally, the remaining God was appointed to serve as 'Creator and Speaker of the House.' Today, we call this God, 'Jesus.' In addition, the Three agreed the Creator would live in the visible form of a created being. They wanted a member of the Godhead to live and experience life as would one of their created beings. By doing this, their offspring could observe what God would do in any situation as He had 'walked in their shoes.'

At the end of the meeting, the three Gods were satisfied with their agreements, plans, limitations, and roles. A new organization was established called The Godhead or Trinity." (Larry W. Wilson, *Untold Story of Jesus – Three Roles of the Godhead Decided*, Ch. 3)

However, this pagan idea of role-playing deities "denies the Father and the Son." If They are only acting out certain roles, then the Father is not really a Father, and the Son is not really a Son. John warns, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father" (1 John 2:23). Why is this? Jesus explained, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

At Jesus' baptism, the Father spoke from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!" (Matthew 3:17, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, cf. Proverbs 8:30). After this, Jesus went into the wilderness and fasted for forty days and forty nights. Satan took this opportunity to tempt Jesus. He began by saying, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Matthew 4:3). Satan was trying to get Jesus to distrust the words of His Father spoken at His baptism forty days earlier.

Would Jesus use divine power and turn the stones into bread to *prove* He was the Son of God, or would He simply *trust* His Father's testimony? "He answered and said, 'It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Verse 4). Jesus chose to believe His Father's word! How about you?

"All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about His Son."
(1 John 5:10, *New Living Translation*)

As we can see, true reconciliation between sinful humanity and God is not only accomplished by the testimony of Jesus concerning His Father's true character, but by the Father's testimony concerning His only begotten Son. This is why Jesus prayed to His Father saying, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Do we fully believe Jesus when He said, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17)?

By getting people to deny the true Father-Son relationship, Satan has deceived them into believing the Sonship of Christ is based upon age, power, and performance (miracles, healings, walking on water, turning water into wine etc.). However, none of these things defines Jesus' identity as the Son of God. His identity is defined straight from His Father who said, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You", and again: "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son" (Hebrews 1:5).

Earlier we spoke of Rome as the ferocious ten-horned beast. These ten horns represent the ten powers which became divided by the year 476AD. Seven of the ten became the nations of modern Europe.

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Alemanni (Germany) | 5. Visigoths (Spain) |
| 2. Franks (France) | 6. Lombards (Italy) |
| 3. Burgundians (Switzerland) | 7. Anglo-Saxons (England) |
| 4. Suevi (Portugal) | |

What happened to the other three? When Daniel saw the rise of the little horn, he saw “three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots” (Daniel 7:7). Most of the nations had bowed to the authority of the Bishop of Rome, however, the three nations of the Heruli, the Vandals, and the Ostrogoths rejected it, mainly due to their belief in *Arianism*.

Arianism stems from one individual named Arius who believed in a literal Father who begat a literal Son. He had charged the church of “blurring the distinction of nature between the Father and the Son.” This went against the Roman Catholic teaching, thus they forcefully opposed Arianism to promote and establish their belief of Trinitarianism— that God consists of three co-eternal beings (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) who chose amongst themselves who would play each role.

“[The Trinity] idea was only adopted by the Church three hundred years after the death of our Lord; and the origin of the conception is entirely pagan ... The ancient Egyptians, whose influence on early religious thought was profound, usually arranged their gods or goddesses in trinities: there was the trinity of Osiris, Isis, and Horus, the trinity of Amen, Mut, and Khonsu, the trinity of Khnum, Satis, and Anukis, and so forth.

... The early Christians, however, did not at first think of applying the idea to their own faith. They paid their devotions to God the Father and to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and they recognized the mysterious and undefined existence of the Holy Spirit; but there was no thought of these three being an actual Trinity, co-equal and united in One.

... The application of this old pagan conception of a Trinity to Christian theology was made possible by the recognition of the Holy Spirit as the required third 'Person,' co-equal with the other 'Persons' ... Today a Christian thinker ... has no wish to be precise about it, more especially since **the definition is obviously pagan in origin and was not adopted by the Church until nearly three hundred years after Christ.**” (Arthur Weigall, Egyptologist, *Paganism in Our Christianity*, pp. 97-203)

The Church of Rome held a council in 325 A.D. (called the Council of Nicea) to deal with this issue. They falsely accused Arius of believing that Christ was a created being and thus was not divine, since he believed Christ was literally “begotten” of the Father. As a result, the church and the state persecuted Arius and all those who adhered to his teaching, while Constantine ordered that his books be burned. Consequently, the three-horn-Arian-powers were uprooted by the Papacy.

1. Heruli (subdued in 493AD)
2. Vandals (subdued in 534AD)
3. Ostrogoths (subdued in 538AD)

Thus, the Papal power gained complete control in the year 538AD.

“The legally recognized supremacy of the Pope began in 538 AD when there went into effect a decree of Emperor Justinian, making the bishop of Rome head over all the churches, the definer of doctrine and the corrector of heretics. Vigilius ... ascended the papal chair (538 AD) under the military protection of Belisarius.” (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, p, 327)

In our last chapter, we read from Jesus who warned, “... the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2). Now let us read verse 3: “And these things they will do to you *because they have not known the Father nor Me.*” Likewise, in our last chapter we saw one of the reasons the religious leaders sought to kill Jesus was due to the way He observed the Sabbath (John 5:16). Now let us read verse 18:

“Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, **because He not only broke the Sabbath** [according to their own standards], **but also said that God was His Father**, making Himself equal with God.” (John 5:18, words in brackets added)

In 1861, J.N. Loughborough wrote concerning the intimacy between the Trinity and Sunday observance:

“This doctrine of the trinity was brought into the church about the same time with image worship, and keeping the day of the sun, and is but Persian doctrine remodeled. It occupied about three hundred years from its introduction to bring the doctrine to what it is now. It was commenced about 325 A.D., and was not completed till 681 ... It was adopted in Spain in 589, in England in 596, in Africa in 534.” (J.N. Loughborough, *Review & Herald*, November 5, 1861)

In addition, on page 143 of *The Douay Catechism* of 1649, the false claim is made that Sunday “is a day dedicated by the Apostles to the honour of the most holy Trinity.”²⁴ Is it any wonder then that the Trinity and Sunday observance (two doctrines established by the Roman Church through force) are the central doctrines of the “Christian” faith?

“The Trinity is the term employed to signify the central doctrine of the Christian religion ...” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, article: *The Blessed Trinity*)

“By definition, each and every Sunday is a call to Christian unity since it is on this day that we are called to communion with the Lord, by the Lord ... In order to fully appreciate Sunday as a mark of Christian unity we must expand our definition of unity.” (Reverend Dr. Demetrios Toniaf of *The Lord’s Day Alliance of USA*, April, 2015)

A Different Jesus, Spirit, and Gospel

In the context of Paul’s warning of the “deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ” as being Satan’s servants who “disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15), he writes:

“But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent. You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach **a different Jesus** than the one we preach, or **a different kind of Spirit** than the one you received, or **a different kind of gospel** than the one you believed.” (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, *New Living Translation*)

²⁴ For a verse-by-verse study of this question, see the article, *Didn’t the Disciples Observe Sunday as the New Sabbath?* located at lastmessageofmercy.com.

The First Commandment in the Ten Commandments is:

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me."
(Exodus 20:2-3)

The words "before Me" in the Hebrew mean "before My face." What God is saying here is for us not to put another god before His face, or not to mask God's face with another god. The commandment is promising us that once we know the true God and His Son, we will not put a mask on God's face that makes Him look (act) like other gods, thus we will not break the Third Commandment by profaning His name (character).

In their false perception, "Christianity" exalts and displays a metaphorical Son (a different Jesus), believing He rules His kingdom by power and force (a different Spirit), in addition to the pagan idea of the necessity of placating an angry God whose law and justice demands imposed punishments and requires bloodshed in order to forgive— i.e., Penal Atonement Theory (a different Gospel).²⁵

In denying the true Sonship of Jesus, we deny the true "Son of God" and "Lord of the Sabbath" and therefore crucify Him from our knowledge, resulting in Jesus being portrayed as a Greco-Roman Caesar/god instead of the humble and non-violent Jewish Messiah. Thus, those who look at "Christianity" only see the *corrupted view* portrayed and taught by the Roman Papacy and mainstream apostate Protestantism.

²⁵ A good example of how those who profess to be God's people can honor the wrong Jesus is when the people made the fateful choice to free Barabbas and crucify Jesus. In Matthew 27:17, we learn that Barabbas' full name is Jesus (*Yeshua*) Barabbas. The name *Yeshua*, means "salvation." Interestingly, the name "Barabbas" means "son of the father." The people desired a warrior-Messiah to save them from Rome, so they chose "Jesus (*Yeshua*), son of the father" who, like the Pharisees of his day, believed he was doing the works of God the Father but instead was doing the works of his true father (the Devil). However, it was the gentle "Jesus (*Yeshua*), Son of the Father", who would "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21) and set us free from *Romanism* by truly and faithfully revealing the one true God, the Father.

THE RISE OF ATHEISM

It is important to remember how the Papacy perceives itself, and why it was that so many people were angry with it and wanted it done away with. The Papacy believes she has the power to decide who rules and who doesn't, and that for the good of man they must be subject to it. This is boldly stated in the bull *Unam Sanctum* ("One Holy"), issued by Pope Boniface VIII on November 18, 1302:

"For by the witness of truth the power spiritual [Papacy] must institute the power temporal [State] and must judge it if it be not good ... Therefore if the temporal power errs it shall be judged by the power spiritual ... This authority, though it be given to a man and exercised by a man, is not human but rather divine, granted by God's word to Peter, confirmed to him and his successors in whom Christ called the rock²⁶ ...

In consequence of which we declare, assert, define and pronounce that it is entirely necessary for salvation that all human creation be subject to the Pope of Rome." (*Unum Sanctum*, p. 12)

When it seemed like this power was going to be broken in the 1500s by the Reformation and by kings and nobles unwilling to submit, the Papacy authorized a new order to turn back the tide. This was the Society of Jesus (the Jesuit Order), an organization of such infamy that if you look up the word "Jesuit" in a dictionary it means: "a crafty, intriguing, or equivocating person." They became central in reclaiming Papal power, promising "special obedience to the sovereign pontiff in regard to the missions' to the effect that a Jesuit is expected to be directed by the Pope '*perinde ac cadaver*' ('as if he was a lifeless body')" (*Wikipedia*).

²⁶ Refer to pages 179-181 for a brief discussion of this belief.

In his work, *Defensio Fidei Catholicae, et Apostolicae* (i.e., *Defence of the Catholic and Apostolic Faith*), Jesuit Francisco Suarez, states this in the year 1614:

“It is an article of faith that the Pope has the right to depose heretical and rebellious kings, and a monarch dethroned by the Pope is no longer a king or legitimate prince. When such an one hesitates to obey the Pope after he is deposed, he then becomes a tyrant, and may be killed by the first corner. Especially when the public weal is assured by the death of the tyrant, it is allowable for anyone to kill the latter.” (Theodore Greisinger, *History of the Jesuits*, 1892)

During the Jesuit initiation ceremony, they must agree to infiltrate the many Christian denominations and political parties to restore the Papacy to world dominance:

“You have been taught your duty as a spy ... to ingratiate yourself into the confidence of the family circle of Protestants and heretics of every class and character, as well as that of the merchant, the banker, the lawyer, among the schools and universities, in parliaments and legislatures, and the judiciaries and councils of state, and to be all things to all men, for the Pope's sake, whose servants we are unto death.” (Charles Didier, *Subterranean Rome*, 1843)

Below is a portion of the Jesuit oath:

“I do further promise and declare that I will, when opportunity present, make and wage relentless war, secretly and openly, against all heretics, Protestants and Liberals, as I am directed to do, to extirpate them from the face of the whole earth; and that I will spare neither age, sex, or condition, and that I will hang, burn, waste, boil, flay, strangle, and bury alive these infamous heretics; rip up the stomachs and wombs of their women, and crush their infants' heads against the walls, in order to annihilate their execrable race. That when the same cannot be done openly, I will secretly use the poisoned cup, the strangulating cord, the steel of the poniard, or the leaden bullet, regardless of the honor, rank,

dignity, or authority of the persons, whatever may be their condition in life, either public or private, as I at any time may be directed so to do by any agent of the Pope or Superior of the Brotherhood of the Holy Father of the Society of Jesus." (Burke McCarty, *The Suppressed Truth About The Assassination Of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 23)

Part of what the Jesuits did was act an intelligence gathering spy network; a precursor to modern organizations like the CIA (which was founded by a Catholic Knight of Malta, William Donovan). It was their nefarious actions in this sphere that so infuriated the Catholic monarchs of Europe that they acted against them. Portugal suppressed them first in 1759, France in 1764, and then Spain in 1767. They then pressured the Pope to abolish the Jesuits in 1773. The seeming end of the Jesuits in 1773 gave great hope to Europe for a new era. Historians refer to this new era as "The Reign of Terror", during which anarchy prevailed.

"The Reign of Terror was characterized by a dramatic rejection of long-held religious authority, its hierarchical structure, and the corrupt and intolerant influence of the aristocracy and clergy. Religious elements that long stood as symbols of stability for the French people, were replaced by views on reason and scientific thought.

The radical revolutionaries and their supporters desired a cultural revolution that would rid the French state of all Christian influence. This process began with the fall of the monarchy, an event that effectively defrocked the State of its sanctification by the clergy via the doctrine of Divine Right and ushered in an era of reason. Many long-held rights and powers were stripped from the Catholic church and given to the state.

In 1789, church lands were expropriated and priests killed or forced to leave France. Later in 1792, 'refractory priests' were targeted and replaced with their secular counterpart from the Jacobin club ... The leaders of the Terror tried to address the call for these radical, revolutionary aspirations, while at the same time trying to maintain tight control on the de-Christianization movement that was threatening to the clear majority of the still devoted Catholic population of France." (Wikipedia)

“Crush the Wretch!”

Without going into detail, some Bible students have seen a connection of these events with those of Revelation chapter 11. In verse 8, John says this time-period “spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified”, revealing that the same immoral and atheistic attitude that was seen in Sodom and Egypt arose again during the French Revolution.

- **Sodom:** “Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.” (Ezekiel 16:49-50).
- **Egypt:** “And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.’” (Exodus 5:2).

Like Sodom and Egypt, John said it would also be the place where “spiritually ... our Lord was crucified.” Speaking of Voltaire (the French Enlightenment writer and philosopher, 1694-1778), George. F. Dillon writes:

“It was in his [Voltaire’s] day and by his means that Atheism became perfected, generalized, and organized for the destruction of Christianity, Christian civilization, and all religion. He was the first, and remains still, the greatest of its Apostles ... His real name was Francis Mary Arouet, but, for some reason which has never been clearly explained, he chose to call himself Voltaire.

... His ruffian pen attacked the fair fame of the Maid of Orleans with as little scruple as it cast shame upon the consecrated servants of Christ. **For Christ he had but one feeling—eternal, contemptuous hatred.** His watchword, the concluding lines of all his letters to his infidel confederates, was for fifty years *ecrasons nous l’infame, ‘let us crush the wretch’, meaning Christ and his cause.*” (*War of Anti-Christ with the Church, heritagehistory.com*)

In November 1793, the Legislature of France passed a decree that abolished Christianity and banned the Bible by law. Christ was publicly denied, while

the Goddess of Reason (an image of a vile woman) was set up and paraded down the streets and worshipped.

- **A Deadly Wound**

This only lasted about three and half years when the Bible was again legalized in June of 1797. However, eight months later, on February 10, 1798, General Berthier, under the leadership of Napoleon, entered Rome proclaiming a Roman Republic. Due to his resistance, Pope Pius VI was arrested and all his property sold, taking away his temporal authority and thus ending the Papacy's 1,260-year reign (538AD – 1798AD).

“When, in 1797, Pope Pius VI. fell grievously ill Napoleon gave orders that in the event of his death no successor should be elected to his office, and the Papacy should be discontinued ... But the Pope recovered; the peace was soon broken; Berthier entered Rome on 10th February **1798**, and proclaimed a Republic.

The aged Pontiff [Pope] refused to violate his oath by recognizing it, and was hurried from prison to prison into France. Broken with fatigue and sorrows, he died ... [in] August 1799, in the French fortress of Valence, aged 82 years.

No wonder that half of Europe thought Napoleon's veto would be obeyed, and that **with the Pope the Papacy was dead.**” (Joseph Rickaby, *The Modern Papacy, in Lectures on the History of Religions*, vol. 3, [Lecture 24, p. 1] (London: *Catholic Truth Society*, 1910)

Bible students began to see this as an answer to John's prophecy concerning the beast: “And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded...” (Revelation 13:3^a), again fulfilling the inherent consequence of whatsoever man sows, that shall he reap (see, Revelation 13:10). In his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Adam Clarke wrote:

“In **1798** the French republican army under General Berthier took possession of the city of Rome, and entirely superseded the whole papal power. **This was a deadly wound ...**”

In the 1941 edition of the *Encyclopedia Americana*, it says:

“In **1798** he [General Berthier] ... made his entrance into Rome, abolished the papal government **and established a secular one.**”

Here we see that Berthier, not only “abolished the papal government”, but also “established a secular one.” Again, Bible commentators of the past saw a clear connection of these events with John’s prophecy about “the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit” in Revelation chapter 11. They saw the “secular government” that resulted from this reign of terror as the rise of Atheistic Communism. One author wrote:

“One prison massacre saw three bishops and 220 priests slaughtered. A new method of execution was invented, drowning priests bound in pairs, dubbed ‘de-Christianization by immersion.’ **This was the first full frontal attack on Christ since the Roman Empire ... The new rulers of France sought to remove and replace Christianity.** They were the forerunners of Karl Marx, the Bolsheviks, and Chairman Mao. Perhaps 40,000 priests fled France; up to 5,000 were executed, and another 20,000, including 23 bishops, renounced Christ to save their skins.” (James A. Watkinsoc, *The French Revolution: Cause and Effect*, owlcation.com, Oct. 6, 2022)

As you can see, along with this came the progression of new world ideologies such as man’s thoughts on our origin, devoid of a divine Creator. Think about it, since the seventh-day Sabbath is a memorial to the Creator (Exodus 20:8:11), if it had always been kept, there would never have been an evolutionist. However, denying the work of a Master Designer, Charles Darwin (1809-1882) advanced the theory of evolution with his book, *The Origin of Species*, which he began accumulating information on in the year 1837. He then began to draw up short notes, which he enlarged in 1844, and the book was published in 1859. People praising this work have written:

“Next to the Bible no work has been quite as influential, in virtually every aspect of human thought, as *The Origin of Species*.” (Ashley Montagu)

"It is clear that here is one of the most important contributions ever made to philosophic science; and it is at least behooving on scientists, in the light of the accumulation of evidence which the author has summoned in support of his theory, to reconsider the grounds on which their present doctrine of the origin of species is based." (*The New York Times*)

"Darwin was one of history's towering geniuses and ranks with the greatest heroes of man's intellectual progress." (George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*)

Other people who rose at this time were:

- **James Hutton (1726–1797)** whose book, *The Theory of the Earth*, was published in 1788. Hutton is believed to be the father of modern geology who made open attacks on the Flood story and ridiculed the idea of a young earth.
- **George Cuvier (1769-1832)** was put in charge of French science in 1789. Cuvier developed new ideas about the layers of the strata in the earth's crust. He proposed the ideas of *Sedimentology*, which teaches that all sedimentary layers were put down over millions of years.
- **Charles Lyell (1797-1875)** magnified the theories of Hutton and Cuvier to an all-new level in the 1830s. He was a proponent of *Uniformitarianism* which teaches the geological phenomenon could be explained in terms of currently observed natural processes operating gradually over long periods time.
- **Karl Marx (1818-1883)** joined the "League of the Just" in 1842 which later became known as "The League of Communists." Marx began writing *The Communist Manifesto* in 1844, which was published in 1848 and teaches, "There is no God."
- **Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)** was the father of psychoanalysis, who redefined the concepts of the unconscious mind and sexuality. He believed God was a fantasy, based on the need for a dominant father figure. This has led to the sexual revolution and gender confusion.

These philosophers of the past paved the way for modern liberalism and socialism. It is a master strategy by the enemy to create two political rivals— the far Right vs. the far Left in order to destroy each other, paving the way for the resurrection of the papal power.

- **The Deadly Wound Healed**

After John writes of the beast's deadly wound, he says, "... and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast" (Revelation 13:3^b). The first part of the healing process began in 1801 when an agreement was drawn up between Napoleon and the Papacy. From there the Papacy aimed to redeem its religious power while leaving its political power on the back burner. Then a shiver went down the spine of all lovers of freedom of conscience and national sovereignty when the Pope restored the Jesuits in 1814— thus healing the Jesuit's deadly wound.

President John Adams states the general feeling at the time among those who did not want to submit to papal authority:

FROM JOHN ADAMS TO THOMAS JEFFERSON May 6, 1816:

"I do not like the late resurrection of the Jesuits. They have a general now in Russia, in correspondence with the Jesuits in the United States, who are more numerous than everybody knows. Shall we not have swarms of them here, in as many shapes and disguises as ever a king of the gypsies, Bampfylde Moore Carew himself, assumed? In the shape of printers, editors, writers, schoolmasters, etc..? I have lately read Pascal's letters over again, and four volumes of the History of the Jesuits. If ever any congregation of men could merit eternal perdition on earth and in hell, according to these historians, though, like Pascal, true Catholics, it is this company of Loyola [referring to Ignatius Loyola, the leader of the Jesuits]."

THOMAS JEFFERSON TO JOHN ADAMS August 1, 1816:

"I dislike, with you, their restoration, because it marks a retrograde step from light towards darkness."²⁷

²⁷ See, [americanmagazine.org/John Adams and the Jesuits](http://americanmagazine.org/John_Adams_and_the_Jesuits). Words in brackets added.

Furthermore, in chapter 60 of his book, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, Pastor Charles Chiniquy recites a personal interview he had with Abraham Lincoln concerning the Jesuit's plan to assassinate him. President Lincoln said:

"The Pope and the Jesuits, with their infernal Inquisition, are the only organized powers in the world which have recourse to the dagger of the assassin to murder those whom they cannot convince with their arguments or conquer with the sword. **Unfortunately, I feel more and more, every day, that it is not against the Americans of the South, alone, I am fighting, it is more against the Pope of Rome, his perfidious Jesuits and their blind and blood-thirsty slaves**, than against the real American Protestants, that we have to defend ourselves."

It wasn't until the turn of the century that the Papacy regained her political power on February 11, 1929, when Mussolini and Rome signed *The Lateran Treaty*, which re-established the Vatican as a state under its own political power.

At that time, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published an account of this peace treaty on the front page of its newspaper. The heading read: "Mussolini and Gasparri Sign Historic Roman Pact ... *Heal Wound of Many Years.*" In the newspaper article, the writer also used this same wording:

"Rome, Feb. 11 (AP) - The Roman question tonight was a thing of the past and the Vatican was at peace with Italy. The formal accomplishment of this today was the exchange of signatures ... by two noteworthy plenipotentiaries, Cardinal Gasparri for Pope Pius XI and Premier Mussolini for King Victor Emmanuel III ... affixing the autographs to the memorable document, **healing the wound** ..." (*San Francisco Chronicle*, Tuesday, Feb. 12, 1929, p. 1)

Now in an age where the Roman Papacy has won back its respectability, much of what the Jesuits have done has been forgotten. Still, it is remarkable how many countries have expelled them from their territory throughout the history of the organization. It is worth looking up what

exactly happened at those times, and you will see an alternate history of world politics. This happened also with secular Italy, which gave more power back to the Vatican. The Vatican was also the first power to recognize the Nazi government with a treaty called the *Reichskonkordat*, proving that it had become an important player once again on the world stage.

“Hitler himself admits that he was helped by the methods of the Jesuit counter-Reformation to carry on his ideological war ... [We] have witnessed Catholicism’s open support of every step taken by the Nazi-Fascism to impose authoritarian regimes upon the people.” (Leo H. Lehman, *Behind the Dictators*, pp. 36, 38, 39)

“I [Hitler] learned much from the Order of the Jesuits ... Until now, there has never been anything more grandiose, on the earth, than the hierarchical organization of the Catholic Church. **I transferred much of this organization into my own party...** I am going to let you in on a secret ... I am founding an Order ... In my ‘Burgs’ of the Order, we will raise up a youth which will make the world tremble...” (Hermann Rauschnig, former national-socialist chief of the government of Dantzig: *Hitler m'a dit*, Ed. Co-operation, Paris 1939, pp. 266-267, 273 ss)

In fact, on page 84 of Hitler's political autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, he boldly claimed he was doing “the Lord’s work” by killing off the Jews:

“I believe today that I am acting in the sense of the Almighty Creator. By warding off the Jews, I am fighting for the Lord's work.”

Here again we see psychological projection at work as Hitler projected his satanic hatred and violence against the Jews onto God in order to justify his actions. Referring to Jesus, Hitler said:

“My feelings as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter. It points me to the man who once in loneliness, surrounded by a few followers, recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to fight against them...” (Speech on April 12, 1922)

However, is this really the character of Jesus? Does Jesus really summon men or angels to physically fight against those who do not believe in Him? What did Jesus say?

“... ‘My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.’” (John 18:36, *New Living Translation*)

Jesus’ kingdom does not use the methods employed by earthly kingdoms such as force, violence, retaliation and coercion. This is why the kingdoms of this world are represented in prophecy as ferocious beasts, while a meek and humble lamb represents Jesus’ kingdom. Remember, the pictograph of the Aleph א is an ox, which unlike the bull, is gentle and safer to work with.

Ironically, like the Jews before him, Hitler believed “the LORD is a man of war” in the same sense that fallen man is (Exodus 15:3). Believing God demands a sacrifice for atonement, Hitler offered up the Jews as a scapegoat, convinced that if he did so it would solve the world’s problems and God would bless Germany again.

In this, Hitler followed his father Adam who scapegoated his wife Eve, not understanding God who said, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6; cf. Matthew 12:7). As millions of Jews were murdered, Jesus bore the affliction with them. In pity and great sorrow, He cried out to their afflicter— His deluded, wayward child— “You think you offer God service, but by killing these brethren of Mine, you killed Me!” (John 16:2; Matthew 25:40).

When at the end of the 1800s the famous Russian writer Leo Tolstoy wrote his famous Christian anti-war book, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, church leaders and theologians mocked him as foolish and out of touch. Ironically, it was a young Hindu man who was influenced to take these unfashionable Christian principles of nonviolence and prove to the world their power— that man was Mahatma Gandhi, who influenced Martin Luther King— but we killed them too!

Jesus said, "I am the way, *the truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). In order to get humanity to "suppress *the truth* [Jesus] in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18), Satan had to "crush the wretch" from our minds and replace Him with "shallow and misleading philosophy ... human traditions and the world's way of doing things rather than following Christ" (Colossians 2:8; *God's Word Translation*). Thus again, Christ was "bruised by our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5) or, as other translations say, "He was *crushed*."

A Fire-Breathing Lamb

When we step back and look at history without the veil over our eyes, it is easy to see that man's confusion and hatred of Christ, displayed by our hatred and violence towards one another, has been mirrored by all the major world wars.

Nevertheless, Sharita Forrest (quoting Jonathan Ebel) writes that after WWI "the American Legion— which was founded by Theodore Roosevelt III to 'keep alive the spirit of the Great War'— vigorously promoted ...

- Religion-infused beliefs about the redemptive power of struggle and war.
- Perceptions of America as a nation with divine status.
- Military veterans ... [as] martyrs and imitators of Christ."

Earlier in the same article, Forrest writes:

"Indeed, without the powerful influence of Christianity, America's involvement in the war is hard to imagine, Ebel said. In the early 1900s, **Christianity was being masculinized by characterizations of Christ as an active, often militant man, and Protestant leaders encouraged men to live lives of 'Christian action' by becoming warriors against evil.**" (Sharita Forrest, *Role of religious faith in World War I examined in new book*, news.illinois.edu, April 21, 2010)

Interestingly, the prophet John mentions a second beastly power in Revelation chapter 13, which not only gains world dominance for itself, but also is integral in completing the healing process of the Papacy's deadly wound:

"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon." (Revelation 13:11)

John says this beast (kingdom) would begin to rise at the time the first beast (the Papacy) goes into captivity and receives its deadly wound (Verse 9). Thus, this other kingdom would rise around the year 1798 and was foretold to appear gentle "like a lamb" (Christ/Christian) but would speak (legislate/use force) "like a dragon" (Satan/Romanism). In verse 12, John goes on to say that it will eventually "exercise all the authority of the first beast [Papacy] in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship [mimic] the first beast [Papacy], whose deadly wound was healed." This will be accomplished by "telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast [Papacy] who was wounded by the sword and lived" (Verse 14).

Recent history tells us it was the Pope, in union with the United States, who was central to ending the Cold War and closing the chapter on Communism. On February 24, 1992, *Time Magazine* published an article entitled, "Holy Alliance: How Reagan and the Pope conspired to assist Poland's solidarity movement and hasten the demise of Communism." In the article, Carl Bernstein reported: "Reagan and the Pope agreed to undertake a clandestine campaign to hasten the dissolution of the Communist empire." Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the collapse of the wall, an article in the Roman newspaper, *La Repubblica*, cites Joaquín Navarro-Valls:

"Pope John Paul's support for the Polish labor union Solidarity [was] a key development in the pro-democracy movement in the region. ...Gorbachev saw that the political movement in Eastern Europe was popular and unstoppable, and the Soviet leader avoided military

repression and even verbal opposition. ...when Gorbachev first met with Pope John Paul in December 1989, less than a month after the wall's collapse, the two leaders understood each other immediately. ... Both clearly understood the direction that history had begun to take. Both felt that freedom was not a political fact but a human dimension that was essential and not able to be suppressed." (November 5, 2009)

Further on in the article, it states: "A transcript of that 1989 meeting showed St. John Paul and Gorbachev expressed broad agreement on the need for greater religious freedom in the Soviet Union, for a renewal of ethical and moral values, and for improved Catholic-Orthodox relations." (See, *americanmagazine.org*, 08/31/2022).

We have come a long way from the time that the Catholic Church was seen as being a dead global power! Surely its influence is back. The United States of America, which had long been a bastion of Protestantism and wanted to separate from the power struggles of Europe, has now also come to be highly influenced by Catholicism. In 1979, Evangelist Billy Graham stated: "In the short time he has been Pope, John Paul II has become the moral leader of the world" (*The Religious News Service*, September 27, 1979). It is interesting that Billy Graham was a "Protestant"— a title that originally was used for Bible students who *protested* papal ideology.

Today we can see the wound is almost healed. All political leaders of the world's nations seek the Papacy in mutual support of the Papacy's New World Order agenda. Former U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, Thomas P. Melady, predicted: "I believe that the United States, as the world's only superpower, and the Holy See [the Papacy], as the only worldwide moral-political sovereignty have roles to play in the future. Their actions will impact the lives of people in all parts of the globe."

In 2001, former U.S. president George Bush stated: "The best way to honor Pope John Paul II, truly one of the great men, is to take his teachings seriously, to listen to his words and put his words and teachings into action here in America" (*Catholic News Service*, March 24, 2001).

Current president Joe Biden is a Catholic, five justices of the Supreme Court are Catholic, and a huge portion of the ministers in government and generals in the army are either Catholic or studied in Catholic universities. All this at the same time Francis is the first ever Jesuit Pope.

In order to incite the conservative religious right to force the pendulum in their direction, the pendulum must be swung to the very far left— it is the Jesuit scheme of accomplishing *order out of chaos*. Thus, since the French Revolution, the popularity of atheism is growing rapidly. Any true Bible student would have to understand the concerns of these atheists who reject a God who would commit genocide with a worldwide flood; burn people alive to set an example of what's coming upon the ungodly at the final judgment; command the slaying of thousands of people with the sword; use the pagan penal atonement process to save fallen humanity; and has a reputation for "gay bashing." Renowned atheist Richard Dawkins wrote:

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of 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." (*The God Delusion*)

The famous comedian and outspoken atheist, George Carlin said:

"Religion has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man living in the sky who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever 'til the end of time!" (*goodreads.com, George Carlin Quotes*)

Can anyone really blame Mr. Dawkins or Mr. Carlin for believing this? This is exactly how mainstream conservative "Christianity" presents God, due to

the fact they refuse to fully believe and teach the testimony of Jesus concerning His Father. Not to mention “Christianity’s” track record of how she cruelly treats those who disagree with her dogma, reflecting the “god” her loyal members worship. Just listen to how professed Christians have taught the pagan concept of hell (then compare to Ezekiel 18:32):

Peter Lombard (1100-1160) “Therefore the elect shall go forth...to see the torments of the impious [wicked people], seeing which they will not be grieved, but will be satiated with joy at the sight of the unutterable calamity of the impious.”

Johan Gerhard (1582-1637) “...the Blessed will see their friends and relations among the damned as often as they like but without the least of compassion.”

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) “It is not a terrible thing to a wretched soul, when it shall lie roaring perpetually in the flames of hell, and the God of mercy himself shall laugh at them; when...God shall mock them instead of relieving them; when none in heaven or earth can help them but God, and he shall rejoice over them in their calamity.”

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) “The view of the misery of the damned will double the ardour of the love and gratitude of the saints of heaven. The sight of hell torments will exalt the happiness of the saints forever ... Can the believing father in Heaven be happy with his unbelieving children in Hell ... I tell you, yea! Such will be his sense of justice that it will increase rather than diminish his bliss.”

Catholic Truth Society (1960) “What will it be like for a mother in heaven who sees her son burning in hell? She will glorify the justice of God.”²⁸

This pagan concept of “hell” has either led millions to reject God or caused millions to accept God out of fear and coercion. Consequently, this one-world order will “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Revelation 13:15). Why? Because this is the “god” they

²⁸ Quotations from tentmaker.org/Quotes/hellfire

worship. Paul says they have an outward “form of godliness although they have denied its power” and to “avoid such people as these” (2 Timothy 3:15). Through projection, they perceive the one true God to be this way, therefore they continue to act this way.

Believing and teaching that our heavenly Father will burn and torture people for any amount of time is utter madness. This false teaching has made the church loads of money from those who believed they could buy forgiveness.

To put this in perspective, consider the incident that happened on February 19, 2020 in Brisbane Australia when Rowen Baxter (42) set his estranged wife Hannah (31), along with their three children, Aaliyah (6), Laianah (4), and Trey (3), on fire burning them all to death. Rowan and Hannah had separated late the previous year and Rowen’s friend Joey Abraham said that Rowan “had not been doing too well.”

On the day of the incident, Rowan jumped into Hannah’s SUV while she was strapping her children into the vehicle in preparation to drop them off at school dousing them all with gasoline and setting them on fire. Hannah managed to get out of the vehicle screaming “He’s poured petrol on me” as neighbors tried to douse the fire with a hose. Aaron Snell, another neighbor, revealed that Rowen had attempted to stop rescuers from reaching his children, just before he fatally stabbed himself in the chest. All three children burned to death in the vehicle. Hannah succumbed to her burns at the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital early.

Here we have a husband and father, so angry that his wife had separated from him that he burned his whole family to death. Do you really believe this is what God will do to those who have separated themselves from Him? Joey Abraham had also told reporters, “If you knew Rowan when he was at his best and to see him like last week then you know how far he’d fallen.”²⁹

²⁹ Source for this incident by Akshay Pai, *MEAWW.com*, updated February 19, 2020.

Again, is this how we are to view our heavenly Father?— Loving and kind one minute, but angry and vengeful the next? Would this not also show “how far He’d fallen”? Or does this truly reveal the character of the one who was perfect from the day he was created, but had “fallen from heaven”?

“In discussions of God’s character, it is often said that **‘God is love but He is also just.**’ That saying is found nowhere in the Bible. It does say that God is love and it does say that God is just (Deut 32:4, Isa 45:21). However, **combining them with the ‘but’ puts the two in opposition. It suggests the idea that God is love but if you cross Him, watch out – He will change His attitude towards you and show His just side.**

As I said, the Bible does say God is just, but every use of just or justice reflects a loving action. It will say to show justice to the poor, to widows or the old. **Never does it reflect the idea of retribution as many suggest.**

... God’s justice in the Traditional Legal Model and the thinking of most Christians is all about payment for sin. Someone has to pay the penalty. You do the crime, you do the time. Such a view diminishes God’s mercy and forgiveness; it makes Him subject to justice itself, which must be satisfied.

According to the Biblical Healing Model, God’s justice is doing the right thing according to the law of love which is to restore to a right state, to heal and to save. Justice, if it is truly done in love, is first seeking the good of others, it is not about keeping track of wrongs in order to even the score. **Justice is restorative but, if it is not able to restore, it simply releases the offender to the inevitable results of sin which is death.”** (Ray Foucher, *Justice, characterofgod.org*)

In Jeremiah 3:8, God accommodates Israel’s choice to divorce Him and says, “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries” (*New International Version*). Does God then turn around and douse all the ones who refuse to come back with divine gasoline and set them ablaze with “everlasting fire” to burn them for an endless amount of time? Would He be any better than Rowen Baxter, or would He be even worse?

Before anyone judges and condemns Rowen Baxter, we must realize it is a biblical fact that we are changed into the same image of who or what we behold. Paul says, as we behold Christ, we are changed into the same image (2 Corinthians 3:18). It all comes down to *how* you behold Christ. Remember, the book of Proverbs says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). If you worship God as an authoritative dictator and punisher, then you will become what you behold. This is why the data shows that in *Christian homes* there is no difference than non-Christian homes in spousal abuse rates and child abuse rates. Could this be because most "Christians" have a pagan view of Christianity? Like Israel of old, God warns His modern Israel by saying:

"When they came to the nations, **wherever they went, they profaned My holy name [character]** ... But I had concern for My holy name [character], which the house of Israel had **profaned among the nations** wherever they went" (Ezekiel 36:22-21, words in brackets added)

This is why Jesus has not returned yet; for John tells us "when Christ appears, *we will be like Him*, for we will see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). In order for us not to be like Christ, Satan had to attempt to destroy the Father-Son relationship and suppress (crucify) Christ's testimony that He is the perfect image of His Father.

"And we know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us understanding so that we can know the true God [the Father]. And now we live in fellowship with the true God [the Father] because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He [the Father] is the only true God, and he is eternal life." (1 John 5:20, *New Living Translation*, cf. John 17:3)

Jesus is none of those things listed by Mr. Dawkins (Galatians 5:22-24) therefore neither is His Father (James 1:17). Likewise, contrary to what Mr. Carlin and the others say about God, Jesus is completely against the idea of burning and torturing people (Luke 9:54-56), therefore so is His Father (Leviticus 18:21).³⁰

³⁰ There is a whole chapter coming up which discusses the "fiery" fate of the lost.

- **“Remember What Amalek Has Done to You”**

At this present time, all eyes are on the Middle East as the war between Israel and Hamas rages on. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has recently used the Hebrew Scriptures to justify Israel’s actions in this war:

“... Netanyahu announced Saturday that they were moving into a ‘second phase’ of the war that includes ground troops entering Gaza. Pledging that Israel would ‘completely eliminate this evil from the world,’ he then argued it’s a war of biblical proportions.

‘You must ‘remember what Amalek has done to you,’ says our holy Bible. And we do remember and we are fighting,’ Netanyahu declared.

The prime minister quoted from Deuteronomy 25, part of Moses’s long speech of rules and advice for the ancient Hebrew people. In it, Moses referred back to a surprise attack on the people by the Amalekites as he led the people from Egypt to Canaan ...

That’s the command Netanyahu used to explain and justify what Israel is going to do in Gaza. **It’s a call for what the United Nations and international law today would consider genocide. A call to kill everyone. Not just enemy combatants but even infants. It’s a call not for a ‘just war’ but for a total war in the name of God ...** Netanyahu wasn’t the first person to cite the biblical texts about the Amalekites since the terrorist attack by Hamas. **Multiple Christian Zionist groups referenced Amalek in messages defending Israel’s bombing of Gaza.**”
(Brian Kaylor, *A Call for ‘Biblical’ Genocide*, wordandway.org)

Just as James and John used their misunderstanding of Scripture to justify their desire to send fire down upon the Samaritans and devour them in Luke 9, Israel and Christian Zionist groups are doing the same today to justify their sense of justice. The instruction to “remember what Amalek has done to you” has been greatly misinterpreted.

Throughout Jewish history and tradition, this instruction has been number 603 of 613 laws that Jews adhere to from the Torah. Giving their preconceived interpretation upon this command, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1135-1204) wrote the following:

"It is a positive command to constantly remember their evil deeds and ambush, **to arouse hatred for them**, as the verse states, 'Remember what Amalek did to you' (v.17). According to Oral Tradition we are taught: 'Remember'—with your mouths; 'Do not forget' (v. 19)—in your hearts,' **for it is forbidden to forget the hatred we have for them.**"
(*Laws of Kings* 5:5)

But is this really why God gave this command? It is evident that the modern state of Israel, who do not believe Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, miss out completely on His words from the Father. For example, as we have just read, religious leaders throughout history have taught that the command to remember what Amalek did to them means "to arouse hatred for them" and that God was forbidding them to forget "the hatred we have for them." Could Jesus, as "the Word of God", be referring to these leaders when He cautioned ...

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:43-45)

When Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, "for He [the Father] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust", it is the same idea we read from Luke's account of this sermon when He wrote, "For He [the Father] is kind to the unthankful and evil" (Luke 6:35).

Wouldn't it make more sense that the instruction to "remember what Amalek did to you" was not to maintain hatred and prejudice towards them, but for our own struggle against unethical and devious behavior? In other words, remember how evil the Amalekites acted against you so that you do not follow the same course and treat others in the same manner. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” (Matthew 5:38-39)

“Not to resist an evil person” doesn’t mean to do nothing, it means “do not reciprocate in like manner.” Jesus refers to the concept of “an eye for an eye” by quoting directly from the law (the Torah, Exodus 21:22-25). Is Jesus changing the law here? Is He going against His Father? No. God did not speak of this concept as a prescription for justice, but more so of a limit upon the human application of it. The people desired retributive justice in their own heart, and most often, this would be taken way too far. Even though God is against this form of justice, He understood their level of character being slaves in Egypt for many years, thus He accommodated them by setting limits, as He did with other statutes such as slavery, divorce, sacrifices, and stoning etc. The apostle John wrote:

“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.” (3 John 1:11)

In Mark 3:4 Jesus makes the distinction of doing good and doing evil by saying that to “do good” is “to save life” but to “do evil” is “to kill.” Likewise, earlier we read, “See, I [God] have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15). I pray you know that God nor His Son would ever desire us to do anything evil. The Psalmist wrote, “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14).

We must keep in mind that when Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments in the law are love towards God and love towards our fellow man, He adds, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40). Remember, “the Law and the Prophets” is a reference to the entire Hebrew Scriptures (commonly known as “the Old Testament”). The law concerning “an eye for an eye” is there to deter us from doing any evil— if you do not want someone to poke out your eye, then don’t poke out theirs. Likewise, Matthew quotes Jesus as saying:

"Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12, *New American Standard Bible*)

This eternal design protocol can also be seen written in the Proverbs, which proves that God never desired His children to cherish hatred and retaliation in our hearts:

"Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; wait for the LORD, and He will deliver you."
(Proverbs 20:22)

"Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles." (Proverbs 24:17)

Do not say, 'I will do to him as he has done to me; [nor say] I will pay the man back for what he has done.'" (Proverbs 24:29)

"If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink." (Proverbs 25:21)

Clearly, the political nation of Israel and "Christian Zionists" we know today who stand on the side of violent vengeance (retaliation) must be out of harmony with "the Law and the Prophets" and therefore out of harmony with God's true character. Speaking of Israel, Paul warned, "For I bear witness that they possess an enthusiasm for God, but it is an unenlightened enthusiasm. Ignorant of the righteousness which God provides and building their hopes upon a righteousness of their own, they have refused submission to God's righteousness" (Romans 10:2-3, *Weymouth New Testament*). The success of God's true Israel solely depends on our union with Christ and His methods (Galatians 3:27-29).

THE RISE OF THE REMNANT

It is quite interesting that when Joseph's brothers first came to Egypt to ask for food, they did not recognize Joseph who had become governor of the land. This is not only because it had been several years since they had seen him, but because Joseph was dressed in Egyptian garb. The Egyptian dress was a reflection of the gods of Egypt, with the sun god Ra being chief. As noted earlier, Ra is nothing more than an Egyptianized Nimrod/Tammuz. In order to remain unrecognized for the time being, Joseph spoke "roughly" (harshly) to his brothers:

"Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, 'Where do you come from?' And they said, 'From the land of Canaan to buy food.' So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him." (Genesis 42:7-8)

Likewise, the unbelieving Jews of today do not recognize their Messiah because He has been "dressed" and portrayed as a Greco-Roman god by mainstream Christianity. Although Jesus never spoke a harsh word to anyone, He did speak in a way that the Messiah was not expected to speak. The Messiah was expected to come and condemn their Roman oppressors, but instead He came and welcomed all to follow Him. He went against the norm, and rebuked all by the life He lived, thus He was a "stranger to them."

We must therefore consider, in order for Jews and Gentiles to fully unite and become "one new man [humanity]" in Jesus, He (Jesus) must be stripped (cleansed) from all the "pagan attire" (lies) and beheld in His true self/character, and His teachings be set-right in their proper framework.

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he said:

"I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here ... God sent me before you to preserve for you **a remnant** on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors." (Genesis 45:4-7, *English Standard Version*)

First, notice that Joseph had no condemnation in his heart towards his brothers. In fact, verse 15 tells us, "Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him" (*New Living Translation*). Likewise, Jesus has no condemnation towards any who have physically or spiritually crucified Him. Instead, upon the cross we hear Him pray, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Second, God worked through Joseph's troubles to preserve a remnant of believers. God has been working through the ever-present cross to lead people unto Himself. Paul wrote:

"... has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew ... Even so then, **at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.**" (Romans 11:1-2, 5)

The first century followers of Christ were not only called *Christians* by those in Antioch (Acts 11:26) but were also called *Nazarenes* of which Paul was one of the ringleaders (Acts 24:5). Writing about these believers, W.D. Davies writes:

"They still observed the feast of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles; they also continued to be circumcised, to keep the weekly Sabbath and the Mosaic regulations concerning food. According to some scholars, they must have been so strong that right up to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 they were the dominant element in the Christian movement." (W.D. Davies, *Paul and Jewish Christianity*, p. 72)

We have already learned that, during the destruction of Jerusalem, these believers first fled to a town in Perea called Pella. Referring to the Nazarenes, church historian Epiphanius of Salamis wrote of "when the disciples were living in Pella, having left the city [Jerusalem] according to Christ's word [Luke 21:20-24] and migrated to the mountains because of its imminent siege" (*Panarion*, later named *Adversus haereses*, [*Against Heresies*] p. 42). On page 41, Epiphanius describes their lifestyle:

"... They practice the customs and doctrines prescribed by Jewish Law; except that they believe in Christ. They believe in the resurrection of the dead and that the universe was created by God. They preach that **God is one and that Jesus Christ is His Son**. They read the Law ... Therefore, they differ ... from the true Christians because they fulfill until now Jewish rites as the circumcision, **Sabbath** and others."³¹

Keep in mind, Epiphanius was Catholic and wrote this in the 4th century AD, therefore, when he refers to "true Christians", he is referring to Catholic Christians and condemning the sect of Nazarenes.

Augustus Neander states that it was "the opposition to Judaism" which "led to the special observance of Sunday in place of the Sabbath" (*General History of the Christian Religion and church*, Vol. 1, p. 402). However, Joseph Bingham assures us that "The ancient Christians ... held religious assemblies on the Sabbath, not because they were infected with Judaism, but to worship Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath" (*Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Vol. 2, Book XX, Ch. 3, sec. 1, 66, pp. 1137-1138).

When Hadrian reigned as Roman Emperor from 117-138AD, he harshly persecuted Jews throughout the Roman Empire. He prohibited the study of Torah, including the observance of the Sabbath and other festivals. These oppressive measures influenced many early Christians in Alexandria and Rome to abandon the seventh day in favor of Sunday. Writing in the 5th century AD, Socrates Scholasticus observed:

³¹ I have only bolded the points that are of particular interests to our current study.

“For almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, bk. 5, Ch. 22; *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, Vol. 2, p. 132)

As we’ve already noted, while being persecuted by the Imperial Church, the true followers of Jesus were “given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time,³² from the presence of the serpent” during the Dark Ages (Revelation 12:14). Being nourished by the spiritual Manna (the Word of God) prevented them from becoming like the harlot. Remember, the act of harlotry is “turning against the LORD and worshiping other gods” (Hosea 1:2, *New Living Translation*). However, speaking of nourishing His faithful people who wander through the wilderness, God says:

“And his people Jacob became the portion of the Lord, Israel was the line of his inheritance. **He maintained him in the wilderness**, in burning thirst and a dry land: he led him about and instructed him, and kept him as the apple of an eye. As **an eagle** would watch over his brood, and yearns over his young, receives them having spread his wings, and takes them up on his back: the Lord alone led them, **there was no strange god with them.**” (Deuteronomy 32:9-12, *Brenton’s Septuagint*)

In churches in Central Africa and in the Armenians of Asia, God’s truth survived for many centuries from the Papal power. The Waldensian Christians were among the first people of Europe to possess a translation of the Scriptures. Since the Waldensian Christians believed the Papal system was “the little horn” spoken by Daniel, they denied the authority of the Popes. They often had to retreat into caves to hide from the Roman armies.

³² This period is calculated as “time” = one Hebrew prophetic year (360 days); “times” = two years (720) days; “half a time” = half of a year (180 days) for a total of 1,260 days. Considering a day equals one full year in Bible prophecy, the total would be 1,260 years. This is the same time-period that Daniel saw the little horn power (the Papacy) persecute and oppress God’s people during the Dark Ages (Daniel 7:25). We have seen this timeframe as being 538-1798.

“Seen by the Roman Catholic Church as unorthodox, they [the Waldensians] were formally declared heretics by Pope Lucius III in 1184 at the Synod of Verona, and by Pope Innocent III during the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. In 1211, more than 80 Waldensians were burned as heretics at Strasbourg, beginning several centuries of persecution that nearly destroyed the movement.” (*Wikipedia*)

As these believers went underground and were nourished by the spiritual Manna (the Word of God), the Papacy made it illegal for laymen to possess a copy of the Scriptures:

“We prohibit laymen possessing copies of the Old and New Testament ... We forbid them most severely to have the above books in the popular vernacular [non-Latin version] ... The Lords of the districts shall carefully seek out the heretics in dwellings, hovels, and forest, and even their underground retreats shall be entirely wiped out.” (Pope Gregory IV, *Council Tolosanum*, Anno. Chr. 1229, words in brackets added)

“No one may possess the books of the Old and New Testaments in the Romance language, and if anyone possesses them, he must turn them over to the local bishop within eight days after promulgation of this decree, so that they may be burned lest, be he a cleric or a layman, he be suspected until he is cleared of all suspicion.” (The Council of Tarragona, 1234 A.D. Source: D. Lortsch, *Historie de la Bible en France*, 1910, p.14. See also: *The 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia article on Scripture*)

Could this be the time-period that the prophet Amos spoke of?

“Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord God, ‘That **I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.** They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but shall not find it.” (Amos 8:11-12)

Through the prophet Isaiah, however, we have the promise “that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover *the remnant* of His people who are left” (Isaiah 11:11). In chapter 21 we read:

"The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them will return." (Isaiah 10:21-22)

And again:

"Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory [character] of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness [confusion] shall cover the earth, and deep darkness [misapprehensions of God's character] the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory [character] will be seen upon you. The Gentiles [unbelievers/those out of covenant] shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." (Isaiah 60:1-3, words in brackets added)

Since we have seen that God's people were forced to retreat "into the wilderness" during the same 1,260-year period of papal dominance (Revelation 12:6, 14), then the rise of the remnant would begin around the year 1798, possessing much of the same characteristics and teachings as she did when she went into the wilderness. Here is how John describes them:

"And the dragon [Satan] was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with **the remnant** of her seed, which **keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.**" (Revelation 12:17, *King James Version*)

The Cleansing of the Sanctuary

In Daniel chapter 12, Daniel overhears an angel ask, "How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?" (Verse 6). Then a "man clothed in linen" (whom I believe to be Jesus) answered:

"... It shall be for **a time, times, and half a time**; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished ... Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till **the time of the end**. Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." (Verses 7, 9).

This purification of God's people during "the time of the end" parallels what the angel Gabriel told Daniel concerning the cleansing (setting right) of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14-17. Therefore, this setting right of the sanctuary (temple) of God is linked to the setting right of God's people, "which temple *you* are" (1 Corinthians 3:17), from all the paganism (i.e., "the abomination of desolation") enthroned in our minds by "the little horn"; "the son of perdition"—the Papacy/Romanism (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

The act of cleansing the sanctuary draws our attention to the yearly solemn festival of *Yom Kippur* (*The Day of Atonement*, believed to be a time of judgment). Upon this holiest Day of the year, the high priest would minister inside the inner most portion of the sanctuary, called the Holy of Holies, and cleanse the blood that had accumulated throughout the year.

During this ceremony, the high priest would "cleanse it [the blood], and consecrate it [the sanctuary] from the uncleanness of the children of Israel" (Leviticus 16:19). Notice the *blood*, represents "the uncleanness" of *the people*. In order for the sanctuary to be cleansed (i.e., set right), the blood had to go. Why is this?

"'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?' Says the Lord. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. **I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.** When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me ... When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. **Your hands are full of blood.** Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil." (Isaiah 1:11-13, 15-16)

However, knowing that the slain animal represents Christ, what do we do with Scripture that says, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7)? How does this work? How can blood defile and cleanse at the same time?

It all has to do with the cleansing of our minds (our reasoning, motives). When the blood was accumulating throughout the year, God was exposing the sins of His people who had an appeasement mentality. The more animals they killed, the more they believed God was satiated. Likewise, the more costly the animal was, the more they believed God would look down on them in favor. When we permit the blood of the appeasement mentality to accumulate, it defiles us.

When we truly understand what Christ did for us, in shedding His blood to appease *our* defiled understanding of justice/atonement and *our* enmity towards God, then His blood (His sacrificial life) cleanses us from the pagan concept of blood (i.e., appeasement theology/penal atonement).

“What can we bring to the LORD? Should we bring him burnt offerings? Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves? Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins? **No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.**” (Micah 6:6-8, *New Living Translation*)

This is why Daniel said the Messiah “shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (Daniel 9:27).³³ In other words, by teaching and demonstrating God’s true character, Jesus will end the pagan “sacrifice and offering” *mindset* and thus cleanse His temple (people).

“And **you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.** What’s more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, **you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.**” (1 Peter 2:5, *New Living Translation*)

Explaining the fact that Christ shedding His blood was not to change God’s mind toward us, but our mind towards God, E.J. Waggoner writes:

³³ Some commentators believe Daniel is referring to the antichrist who will do this after a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem sometime in the near future. I respectfully disagree. The book of Hebrews says it is Jesus who “takes away” the animal offerings (Hebrews 10:4; 8-10).

"From all that has preceded it is very evident that the only object that Christ could have in coming to earth and dying for men, was the reconciliation of man to God, so that he might have life. [John 10:1; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:21, 22; 1 Peter 3:18; Romans 5:10].

'But,' someone will say, 'You have made the reconciliation all on the part of men; I have always been taught that the death of Christ reconciled God to man; that Christ died to satisfy God's justice, and to appease Him.' **Well, we have left the matter of reconciliation just where the Scriptures have put it; and while they have much to say about the necessity for man to be reconciled to God, they never once hint of such a thing as the necessity for God to be reconciled to man. To intimate the necessity for such a thing is to bring a grave charge against the character of God. The idea has come into the Christian Church from the Papacy, which in turn brought it from Paganism, in which the only idea of God was of a being whose wrath must be appeased by a sacrifice.**

Stop a moment, and think what reconciliation means. The existence of enmity is the only necessity for reconciliation. Where there is no enmity, there is no necessity for reconciliation. Man is by nature alienated from God; he is a rebel, full of enmity. Therefore man needs to be reconciled to have his enmity taken away. But God has no enmity in His being. 'God is love.' Consequently there is no necessity for Him to be reconciled; there is no possibility of such a thing, for there can be no reconciliation where there has been no enmity.

... they who say that the death of Christ reconciled God to men ... separate the Father and the Son, making the former the enemy, and the latter the friend, of man. But God's heart was so overflowing with love to fallen man, that He 'spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all;' and in so doing He gave Himself, for 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.' The Apostle Paul speaks of 'the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.' Acts 10:28. **This effectually disposes of the idea that there was any enmity toward man on the part of God, so that He needed to be reconciled.** The death of Christ was the expression of God's wonderful love for sinners." (E.J. Waggoner, *Why Did Christ Have to Die?*, Present Truth UK, September 21, 1893)

Notice how Waggoner pulls together all the truths that we have discussed:

1. The idea that reconciliation (i.e., atonement) is wrongly defined by mainstream Christianity as a legal payment Christ made to God to appease (placate/pacify) Him.
2. This idea has come into the Christian Church from the Papacy, which in turn brought it from Paganism.
3. To intimate the necessity for such a thing is to bring a grave charge against the character of God.
4. Thus those that believe the death of Christ reconciled God to men, separate the Father and the Son, making the former (the Father) the enemy, and the latter (the Son) the friend, of man.

Does this not ring true? Remember what Richard Dawkins said in our last chapter and how he projected all of those horrible attributes onto “the God of the Old Testament”, insinuating that God is nothing like His Son. This is why we, as the temple of God, need to be cleansed from this false ideology that we have been ingrained with for thousands of years. Will we, who are journeying through the end-time wilderness, learn to simply speak to the Rock instead of smiting Him?

The great harlot in Revelation 17 is seen “arrayed in purple and scarlet” because she is “drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus” (Verses 4 and 6). Her robe is “scarlet” or “bright red” from the blood of her victims whom she has killed. Jesus’ blood does not defile our robes, but washes them, making them *white*— not red. Jesus’ blood is His selfless-cross-carrying-life of righteousness:

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, **He has covered me with the robe of righteousness** ...” (Isaiah 61:10)

“‘Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, **for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.**” (Revelation 19:7-8)

Please keep in mind that Christ's robe of righteousness is not to cover us from being seen by an angry Father. God sees the perfect righteousness of His Son because that righteousness is being reproduced within us. We have "become the righteousness of Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:21). Justification is not a legal adjustment of record books; it is the adjustment (a setting right) of *our* hearts and minds to be in harmony with God's.

Just as a husband and wife become "one flesh" (unified) when married, Jesus and His bride will be "at-one-ment" in character and purpose:

"Abide in Me [Jesus], and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5)

"I [Jesus] do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that **they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.** And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and **that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.**" (John 17:20-23)

Pay careful attention to that last sentence. Jesus assures us that the Father loves us as much as He loves Him. Isn't it a joy to know that the relationship between the Father and His only begotten Son is *not* metaphorical?

The 144,000

As we have noted from Revelation chapter 6, John sees a glimpse of the unrepentant as they run and hide from the face of Jesus at His second coming. The last verse of the chapter says, "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?" When we turn the page to Revelation chapter 7, we see those four angels who are holding back the final winds of strife until God's remnant people receive their own mark in

their foreheads— “the seal of the living God” (Verses 1-3), which empowers them to stand on that final day. As John witnesses the scene, he sees 12,000 people sealed from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, for a total of 144,000 (Verse 4-8).

When studying Bible prophecy, you will learn that when it comes to numbers, the number is always literal, but the thing numbered is symbolic. For example, when it comes to time-prophecy, the number is literal, but the “day” is symbolic for years. We find the same here as the number 144,000 is literal but what it’s numbering (Israel) is symbolic. Just as there were twelve literal tribes in the Old Testament and twelve disciples in the New Testament, there will be 12 x 12,000 spiritual Israelites/disciples (made up of both literal Jews and Gentiles) just before the second coming of Christ who, not only *proclaim*, but will also perfectly *demonstrate* the last message of mercy to a dying world.

As we jump over to Revelation chapter 14, we see exactly what “the seal of the living God” is that these 144,000 receive,

“Then I looked and saw the Lamb [Jesus] standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 who **had His name [character] and His Father’s name [character] written on their foreheads** ... These are the ones who have not been defiled with women [apostate churches/doctrines], for they are virgins [pure]. They follow the Lamb [Jesus] wherever He goes. They have been redeemed from among men as firstfruits [they have been sanctified and set apart for special service] to God and to the Lamb. And **no lie was found in their mouths**; they are blameless.” (Revelation 14:1, 4-5, *Berean Standard Bible*; words in brackets added)

It is this group of people who will carry, proclaim, and exercise the full everlasting gospel. They are the remnant of the remnant who, by faith, have measured up to “the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). They will be “redeemed from among men” in the sense of redeemed from Satan’s lies and from their own fear, selfishness, and enmity towards God and His Son, therefore “no lie” is found in their mouths.

It is interesting that the list of the tribes, and their order, is quite different in the book of Revelation from other parts of Scripture where they are also listed. For example, in Exodus 1:1-4, Reuben, the firstborn, is listed first, while in the book of Revelation, Judah is first. We can also see that the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are missing from the list in Revelation and replaced with Manasseh and Joseph. One explanation as to why this is can be seen in the definitions of each name.

1. Judah = "I will praise the Lord."
2. Reuben = "He has looked on me."
3. Gad = "Granted good fortune."
4. Asher = "Happy am I."
5. Naphtali = "My wrestling."
6. Manasseh = "Making me to forget."
7. Simeon = "God hears me."
8. Levi = "Joined to me."
9. Issachar = "Purchased Me."
10. Zebulun = "Dwelling."
11. Joseph = "God will add to me."
12. Benjamin = "Son of His right hand"

If we write out these definitions in the same order into a paragraph, or a "new song" if you will (Revelation 14:3), this is what we see:

"I will praise the Lord [for] He has looked on me [and] granted good fortune. Happy am I [because] my wrestling [with God is] making me to forget [all my troubles]. God hears me [and is] joined to me. [He has] purchased me [a] dwelling. God will add to me [the] Son of His right hand."

This is a song of victory founded upon complete love and trust in our heavenly Father, which we had lost, but is now restored by "the Son of His right hand." Because of the veil over our eyes, we have "wrestled" with God concerning His character and how He seems to be portrayed in the Old Testament Scriptures. But in Jesus— "the Son of His right hand"— the veil is

removed, and we are able to see God in His true glory. The act of Jesus restoring love and trust in us towards our heavenly Father is true reconciliation, which empowers us to stand in that great Day.

By accepting this cleansing (healing) Remedy, we permit God to write His law in our hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10), imparting to us His name (His character/righteousness)— “Listen to Me, you who know [correctly understand/experience] righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law ...” (Isaiah 51:7, words in brackets added).

A Greater Exodus

As the remnant people, made of both Jews and Gentiles, teach and display God’s true character traits (Ephesians 3:10), many of those who have persecuted, condemned, and crucified Christ in their hearts, will be drawn to Him. Just as Joseph’s brothers repented and embraced Joseph, whom they had sold into Egypt, those who realize what they, as humanity as a whole, have falsely taught and done to their Creator and Redeemer, will finally see Him as He is:

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then **they will look on Me (IY) whom they pierced**. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” (Zechariah 12:10)

One of the reasons why Jesus was condemned to death is because they believed He was a false prophet possessed by the devil and therefore they “needed” to honor the letter of the law (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Regardless of Jesus’ warning, “If God were your Father, you would love Me” (John 8:42), they went ahead and pierced Jesus, and by doing so, they also condemned and pierced the Father whom they presumed to be honoring; as Jesus also warned, “he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” (Luke 10:16). Instead of using the law to save, they instead used it to fulfill their own desire to kill.

With this revelation, men's hearts will be pricked, and "they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son." They will feel the heartache that the Father feels when humanity dishonors and rejects His beloved Son whom He gave to save us. Thus, the people will repent, not because they are afraid of Him, but will "grieve for Him", and be filled with His "Spirit of grace and supplication", knowing that it's "the goodness of God which leads them to repentance" (Romans 2:4). Joel prophesied of this time when he wrote:

"And it shall come to pass afterward that **I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh**; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days ...

... And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. **For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls.**" (Joel 2:28-29; 32)

Contrary to popular belief, this is not talking about literal "Mount Zion" and "Jerusalem." The author of the book of Hebrews writes about this, which once again reveals the dual application principle in Bible prophecy:

"For you have not come to what could be touched ... Instead, you have come to **Mount Zion**, to the city of the living God (**the heavenly Jerusalem**), to myriads of angels in festive gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to God who is the Judge of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, **to Jesus (mediator of a new covenant)**, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel." (Hebrews 12:18, 22-24, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, words in parenthesis in original)

Echoing this, Isaiah prophesied:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people

shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' **For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.**" (Isaiah 2:2-3)

This again confirms that God's last-day remnant people will "keep the commandments of God" (Revelation 12:17; 14:12), which must include His Statutes and Judgments. Through the prophet Malachi, God counsels His last-day people saying:

"Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:4)

Obviously, this does not mean that Elijah will literally be walking upon the earth. It means that, like John the Baptist, who proclaimed a message "in the spirit and power of Elijah" to prepare the way for the first coming of Jesus the Messiah (Luke 1:17), God's last-day remnant will proclaim a message in the same spirit and power, which will enlighten the earth with God's glory "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord [i.e., second coming of Jesus]."

This grand demonstration, of what God's grace can and will do in the submitted believer, results in "a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, tribes, and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb [Jesus], clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9).

John then hears a voice ask, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" (Verse 13). The answer is then given, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Verse 14)— "So the nations shall fear [reverence] **יהוה** the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth **יהוה** Your glory" (Psalm 102:15).

Referring to this time, in the book of Jeremiah we are told of an end-time exodus that will surpass the exodus from ancient Egypt:

“Therefore behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘that it shall no more be said, ‘The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.’ For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers.” (Jeremiah 16:14-15)

You may remember Jesus’ words to Peter and Andrew, who were both fishermen, saying He would make them “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:18-19). Likewise, in this prophecy concerning the greater exodus, God says, “Behold, I will send for many fishermen ... and they shall fish them” (Jeremiah 16:16). As this great multitude of people from all nations are lured by the call of God’s fishermen, God says:

“... the nations will come to you from the ends of the earth, and they will say, ‘**Our fathers inherited nothing but lies**, worthless idols of no benefit at all. Can man make gods for himself? Such are not gods!’” (Jeremiah 16:19-20)

Are we willing to admit that we have been lied to by the great Deceiver and have been “slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist” (Galatians 4:8)? Just as God called Abraham out of ancient Babylon, and the Israelites out of ancient Egypt to escape the plagues, so God is calling His people out of spiritual Babylon (confusion) today:

“... Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! ... Come out of her, **My people**, lest you share in her sins, and **lest you receive of her plagues**” (Revelation 18:2, 4, cf. Isaiah 21:9)

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

These “plagues” in Revelation 18 are referring to the seven last plagues spoken of in Revelation chapter 16. As you read through these plagues, you will notice that they have a direct effect upon the earth to the point that it goes into a reverse order from its original creation.

Creation	Plagues
<p>Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”</p>	<p>Revelation 16:2: “bowl upon the earth.”</p>
<p>Genesis 1:20-21: “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures ... So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded.”</p>	<p>Revelation 16:3: “bowl on the sea ... every living creature in the sea died.”</p> <p>Revelation 16:4: “bowl on the rivers and springs of water.”</p>
<p>Genesis 1:16: “God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day [the sun], and the lesser light to rule the night [the moon].”</p> <p>Genesis 1:3-4: “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.”</p>	<p>Revelation 16:8: “bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire.”</p> <p>Revelation 16:10: “bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness.”</p>
<p>Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.’”</p>	<p>Revelation 16:20-21: “every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men.”</p>

Like all the other major disasters throughout history, the seven last plagues wreak havoc because "the earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate ..." (Isaiah 24:5-6). Since transgressing God's design laws have a direct effect upon the earth, we have seen that the earth will in fact reflect man's violence and will "vomit out her inhabitants" (Leviticus 18:25). "Therefore", God warns, "you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God" (Verse 30).

In our last couple of chapters, we learned that spiritual Babylon will be run by "Christian Nationalists" who "cause [force/coerce] all to make an image to the beast/Papacy" (Revelation 13:11-18). By reflecting the Papacy's image, humanity will once and for all break (cause a breach in) "the everlasting covenant" by attempting to make their own laws and ordinances, proclaiming they are doing God service. This is why in the first plague we see a "loathsome sore" will come "upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image" (Revelation 16:2). They have accepted a government of fear and coercion, which reigns by arbitrary rules with imposed punishments, thinking it reflects the way God runs His kingdom.

Remember, the plagues of Egypt (which foreshadow the seven last plagues) were "against all the gods of Egypt" (Exodus 12:12). Could this be why "the fourth angel" will pour out his bowl "on the sun", resulting in men being scorched with fire? (Revelation 16:8). Is it possible that sun worship (i.e., Baal worship) as it exists today in the crucifixion of "the Lord of the Sabbath" be the cause of these plagues? Has not sun worship prevailed in mainstream Christianity by those who "have transgressed the laws [and] changed the ordinance"? Is it a coincidence that right after Isaiah says, "The curse has devoured the earth", he says, "Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned [scorched], and few men are left" (Isaiah 24:6)?

Is it also a coincidence that John contrasts those “who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” with “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:11-12)? Clearly, the mark and image of the beast must have something to do with *not* keeping God’s commandments nor having the faith of Jesus!

Remember, at the time of the plagues in Egypt, Moses said this to Pharaoh: “Let My people go, that they may hold *a feast* to Me in the wilderness” (Exodus 5:1), but Pharaoh refused. Then, because of that refusal, Moses again urges Pharaoh to comply “lest at any time death or slaughter happen to us” (Verse 3, *Brenton's Septuagint*). This again reveals a direct inherent consequence of grieving/suppressing/crucifying the Spirit of Christ that comes in greater measure during God’s festivals.

It is important to note here that, many times throughout Scripture, when God’s professed people began to worship the false gods of the nations, that the pagan feasts in honor of those gods is also adopted. When Aaron fashioned the golden calf, he said, “O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!” (Exodus 32:4). Then, after building an altar for it, he proclaimed, “Tomorrow will be a festival to the Lord” (Verse 5). Whether or not this was truly one of God’s feasts which also fell upon that day, we do know they celebrated on it like pagans— “The people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. After this, they celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry” (Verse 6, *New Living Translation*).

Another example of this is found when Jeroboam tried to put a stop to his people going south to Jerusalem to worship.

“So on the advice of his counselors, the king made **two gold calves**. He said to the people, ‘It is too much trouble for you to worship in Jerusalem. Look, Israel, **these are the gods who brought you out of Egypt!**’ He placed these calf idols in Bethel and in Dan—at either end of his kingdom. But this became a great sin, for **the people worshiped the idols**, traveling as far north as Dan to worship the one there.” (1 Kings 12:28-30, *New Living Translation*)

Adding to this sin, Jeroboam, not only built pagan shrines, but exalted himself to high priest, appointed his own priests, and made his own feast by changing the Feast of Tabernacles from the 15th day of the *seventh* Hebrew month (*Tishrei*) to the 15th day of the *eighth* month (*Cheshvan*):

“Jeroboam also erected buildings at the **pagan shrines** and ordained priests from the common people—those who were not from the priestly tribe of Levi. And Jeroboam instituted a **religious festival** in Bethel, held on the fifteenth day of the **eighth month** [instead of the seventh] in imitation of the annual Festival of Shelters [tabernacles] in Judah.

There at Bethel he himself offered sacrifices to the calves he had made, and he appointed priests for the **pagan shrines** he had made. So on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, **a day that he himself had designated**, Jeroboam offered sacrifices on the altar at Bethel. He instituted a **religious festival** for Israel, and he went up to the altar to burn incense.” (1 Kings 12:31-33, *New Living Translation*)

Where it says, “a day that he himself had designated”, other translations say, “in the month which he had devised in his own heart.” What have we learned happens when God gives man over to his own self-centered heart? Nothing but destruction, plagues, and death. We see the same in the case of King Jeroboam:

“At the LORD’s command, a man of God from Judah went to Bethel, arriving there just as Jeroboam was approaching the altar to burn incense ... When King Jeroboam heard the man of God speaking against the altar at Bethel, he pointed at him and shouted, ‘Seize that man!’ **But instantly the king’s hand became paralyzed in that position, and he couldn’t pull it back.** At the same time a wide crack appeared in the altar, and the ashes poured out, just as the man of God had predicted in his message from the LORD ...

The king cried out to the man of God, ‘Please ask the LORD your God to restore my hand again!’ So the man of God prayed to the LORD, and the king’s hand was restored and he could move it again ... But even after

this, Jeroboam did not turn from his evil ways. He continued to choose priests from the common people. He appointed anyone who wanted to become a priest for the pagan shrines. **This became a great sin and resulted in the utter destruction of Jeroboam's dynasty from the face of the earth.**" (1 Kings 13:1, 4-6, 33, *New Living Translation*)

Many do not see this as an inherent consequence, but a direct punishment from an angry God. However, Like Miriam becoming leprous, Jeroboam's hand became paralyzed when God exercised His anger by *departing*; leaving him to reap what he had sown (c.f. Numbers 12:9-10). But is this simply a vain attempt at comparing two completely different situations, or is this a continuation of a divine principle? Because of Jeroboam's sin, Scriptures says:

"For **the Lord will strike Israel**, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River, because they have made their wooden images, provoking the Lord to anger." (1 Kings 14:15)

Here, it clearly says, "the Lord will strike Israel." However, the very next verse tells us *how* He did this:

"And **He will give Israel up** because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin." (1 Kings 14:16)

Here's how it reads in the *New Century Version*:

"Jeroboam sinned, and then he made the people of Israel sin. **So the Lord will let the people of Israel be defeated.**" (1 Kings 14:16)

Likewise, as we learned from our study on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, angels are not sent from God to destroy, but they will be given permission to "let go." The seven angels who are commissioned to "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth" (Revelation 16:1), resulting in the seven last plagues, are no different. "The wrath of God" here

is once again exercised by the withdrawal of His Spirit (presence) from the earth. It is Christ crucified in the unbeliever as Christ is crushed under the weight of their sin (their hatred and rejection of Him) and thus He cries out, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

"If the seven last plagues contain the undiluted (or 'full strength' – English Standard Version) wrath of God unmixed with mercy [Revelation 14:10] there couldn't still be mediation, could there? Doesn't that sound like it is saying God is filled with wrath, that He couldn't be angrier? 'Had it up to here' as we might say? But the question is still *how* and *why* does that mediation end? If God's mercy is everlasting (Psa 100:5) wouldn't He always be offering it? As we saw above, the cutting off of the voice of the Holy Spirit by the willful action of the sinner effectively ends his probation. It marks his final choice. **It means that while mercy is even still being offered there is no awareness or appreciation of the offer and therefore no reception of it.** That was the situation in the state of people just before the flood:

'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)

God honored their freewill choice to have Him depart from them. Thus, He could do nothing for people who wanted nothing to do with Him." (Ray Foucher, *characterofgod.org*, words in brackets added)

It's interesting that in the letter we alluded to earlier, *Laudato si*, a major factor in the Pope's advancement of Sunday laws is the climate change agenda. The message is that no work on Sundays means less burning of fossil fuels and less pollution and less damaging climate change.

Linked to this idea, many of you remember the tsunami of Sunday December 26, 2005, which "caused one of the largest natural disasters in recorded history, killing at least 225,000 people across a dozen countries, with Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Maldives, and Thailand sustaining massive damage" (*Britanica.com*). What you may not know is that Reverend John

Macleod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland blamed the tsunami on “pleasure-seekers” on Sunday, which he refers to as “the Lord’s Day”:

“Some of the places most affected by the tsunami attracted pleasure-seekers from all over the world. It has to be noted that the wave arrived on the Lord’s day [meaning Sunday to him], the day God set apart to be observed the world over as a holy resting from all employments and recreations that are lawful on other days.” (*WorldNetDaily.com*, February 13, 2005, words in brackets added)

However, we have seen that this reasoning is backwards. The reason why the earth is in the shape it’s in is because mankind has broken *God’s law* and changed *His ordinances*— not man’s! Thus, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

In Matthew 24, Jesus said the increase of “natural disasters” such as “famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places” will be the direct cause of “wars and rumors of wars” as “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” for “*lawlessness* will abound, [and] the love of many will grow cold.”

A Sunday law does not bring us back into harmony with God’s design. God’s design is resting upon the seventh day of the week, not the first. This is why the very foundation of “the everlasting gospel” is to “Fear God [be awe inspired of Him] and give glory to Him ... and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:6-7). When we worship the true God, we worship Him as the Designer (Creator) upon which life operates. Also notice that the phrase, “made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” is an intentional allusion to the Sabbath instruction found in Exodus 20:11.

God has given us appointed times when the land is to rest based upon the Sabbath principle. God had instructed His people that every seventh year the land was to rest, during which time no crops were to be sown or harvested (Leviticus 25:2; Exodus 23:10-11). Then, after seven cycles of

sabbatical years (49 years), the fiftieth year was proclaimed a jubilee, when again the land was to rest from cultivation (Leviticus 25:8-12). This is God's creational design for true climate control. In fact, rejecting this protocol is one of the reasons why God's hands were tied, forcing Him not to protect His people from the invading armies of Babylon who ransacked and destroyed Jerusalem, leaving it desolate:

"Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon.

Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, **to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.**" (2 Chronicles 36:17-21)

A Sunday law would be a change in the law and ordinance of God, which is the problem. At the same time, a law enforcing rest on the seventh day would not solve the problem either. Why? Because God's kingdom is *against* forced obedience and coercion! He only desires obedience (submission) out of pure selfless love (*agap *) for who He is— "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments ... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word ... He who does not love Me does not keep My words" (John 14:15, 23, 24).

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness [fear/confusion of His character], we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light [trust/truth] as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:6-7, words in brackets added)

Concerning the unbelievers who receive the plagues, John says, "They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds" (Revelation 16:11). This again reveals the veil that sin has caused concerning the character of God and thus "We are ruined by our own stupidity, though we blame the LORD" (Proverbs 19:3, *Contemporary English Version*). On the other hand, professed believers who also accept man's satanic view of law and justice will only serve God out of fear, believing the Lawgiver will kill them if they do not comply. However, God, through the apostle John, says:

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment.³⁴ But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."
(1 John 4:18)

Just as the Israelites were still in Egypt, but did not experience seven of the ten plagues, God's people in the end of time (who have been healed from distrust and fear, and thus become settled into the truth of God's character as revealed in Jesus) will be on the earth and protected from the seven last plagues (Psalm 91:1-11).

³⁴*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* defines the word "torment" here as: "penal infliction, punishment, torment." Those who have not been healed from their fear, and thus continue to believe the pagan concept of an angry God who will seek to punish, torture, and kill those who disobey His rules unless He receives some sort of appeasement offering, will continue to possess this overwhelming influence of penal infliction.

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

In Revelation chapter 19, John describes the second coming of Jesus using symbolic language. In verses 11-16, he described Jesus returning with an army from heaven riding horses. In verse 19 he sees, “the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him [Jesus] who sat on the horse and against His army.” Satan’s heart is still determined to defeat Christ and His kingdom of love and freedom. As a result of this “war”, John sees the beast and the false prophet captured, and they and their followers are cast into a lake of fire.

Before we discuss this lake of fire, we read that Paul also describes destruction surrounding the second coming of Christ in the book of 2 Thessalonians. After writing about “the falling away” period in which “the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition”, he adds, “whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (Verse 8). So here again we are faced with the thought of Christ destroying the lost. But how is it that “the breath of His mouth” and the “brightness of His coming” are used as instruments of destruction?

Consumed By the Breath of His Mouth

The Greek word for “breath” here is πνεῦμα (*pnévma*), which the *King James Version* (and others) translates as “the *Spirit* of His mouth.” This same Greek word is used in the *Septuagint* in the book of Job:

“As long as my breath is in me, and **the breath** [*pnévma*] **of God** in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.”
(Job 27:3-4)

Again, the *King James Version* (and others) translates it as "the *Spirit* of God." The Greek term for "Holy Spirit" is *Ágios Pnévma*. Job's confession is that, while the breath (or Spirit) of God is in him, it will destroy any wickedness or deceit he has in him. The Spirit of Christ is "the Spirit [*Pnévma*] of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), which will "convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8).

Going back to Revelation 19, John mentions that Jesus' name is "the Word of God" (Revelation 19:13) and says, "in righteousness He judges and makes war" (Verse 11). Then, instead of saying Jesus consumes His enemies by "the breath [or Spirit] of His mouth", he says, "Now out of *His mouth* goes a *sharp sword*, that with it He should strike the nations ..." (Verse 15). Isn't that a strange place for a sword? This is obviously not a literal sword. Jesus was not being a hypocrite when He told Peter, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

As we can see, the "breath" (Spirit) of Christ is synonymous with this "sword." What does it mean that Jesus will strike the nations with a *sword* that comes out of His *mouth*, and how does Jesus judge and make war in righteousness? Have we not already learned that "the sword of the Spirit" is "the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17) and that this word (sword) is "sharper than any two-edged sword", which is used for "*piercing*" the "soul and spirit" of man while "judging [discerning] the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12)? This piercing of soul and spirit is to bring our attention to the pain and sorrow that Jesus has endured from the conception of sin. This is why John tells us:

"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, **even they who pierced Him**. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen." (Revelation 1:7)

Again, this does not only mean those who physically pierced Christ on the cross two thousand years ago, but it refers to all those who by evil-speaking and wrong-doing are piercing Him *today*. Men and women are daily piercing Him by dishonoring Him, distrusting Him, expressing violence

and hatred towards their fellow man, and by refusing to be conformed to His methods (Romans 8:29) and remain conformed to the methods of this world (Romans 12:2).

At His death, Christ physically felt and bore this piercing of soul and spirit carried out by hateful humanity. It wasn't the nails in His hands and feet that killed the Son of God; He died of a broken heart, which overwhelmed and consumed Him:

"Insults have broken my heart, and I am in despair. I waited for sympathy, but there was none; for comforters, but found no one. Instead, they gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink [Matthew 27:34]." (Psalm 69:20-21, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, reference in brackets added)

This truth of how much pain and suffering we have caused the Father and Son will, in the end, overwhelm and consume us to the point of death if we resist its healing power. Going back to 2 Thessalonians, Adam Clarke writes:

"Whom the Lord shall consume'— He shall blast him so, that he shall wither and die away; and **this shall be done by the spirit of his mouth - the words of eternal life, the true doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus; this shall be the instrument used to destroy this man of sin:** therefore it is evident his death will not be a sudden but a gradual one; because it is by the preaching of the truth that he is to be exposed, overthrown, and finally destroyed." (*Clarke's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2 Thessalonians 2:8)

Paul goes on to say that the "man of sin" or "son of perdition" is "according to the working of Satan" who has spread "unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). Thus, those who refuse to be led "by the Spirit of His [Jesus'] mouth]" will perish. Paul continues saying, "for this reason God will send them [i.e., give them over to] strong delusion, that they should believe the lie" (Verse 11). They will not receive the truth; therefore, they will be sealed into their delusions (i.e., lies about God).

I would like to write out this scene in 2 Thessalonians as it appears in *The Remedy Bible*, which is an expanded paraphrase emphasizing the healing model of salvation opposed to the penal legal model:

“And then, the one operating outside of God’s design template for life will be revealed. But he will be overthrown by the truth from the mouth of the Lord Jesus and destroyed by the brightness of his coming. The rise of the deviant one will be accompanied by manifestation of Satan’s methods and power, counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and anything else that deceives and darkens the minds of those who are dying—those who did not develop minds that love the truth, and thereby did not partake of the Remedy. Because they reject the truth, God leaves them to their delusional world built on lies. All who reject truth and love, and prefer lies and selfishness, will be diagnosed as terminal and die from their unhealed condition.” (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12)³⁵

Does this not show that Jesus’ type of warfare is different than fallen man’s? Jesus does not wage war using violence, but by the sword of His word which brings conviction of sin in order for us to acknowledge it, accept His everlasting mercy, and be brought into harmony with the law of life. Then, if anyone is still in resistance, he will reap the natural consequences of being emptied of the Spirit of Christ, which automatically leads to death.

Destroyed By the Brightness of His Coming

Although it is a different Greek word, we have seen that Christ is “the brightness” of the Father’s glory, or character (Hebrews 1:3). What is the Father’s character? “... merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). And yes, as we’ve already discussed, God is also “just,” but what have we learned about the way God executes justice? “The LORD is known by the justice He brings; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands” (Psalm 9:16, *Berean Standard Bible*).

³⁵ Although I do not endorse all interpretations and biases found in *The Remedy*, a paraphrase Bible can be useful to understand the meaning behind certain words and phrases better. There is no such thing as a word for word translation since the Hebrew Scriptures contain words that have multiple definitions and Hebrew idioms that may not be familiar to most of us.

The Greek word for “destroy” in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 is καταργέω (*katargeó*), which *Strong’s Concordance* defines as, “to make idle (inactive), make of no effect, annul, abolish, bring to naught, discharge, sever, separate from.” Further on, it says, “to render idle, unemployed, inactive, inoperative.” Is this not God’s justice— Giving the persistent sinner over to their free choice to sever himself from God’s protective Spirit, leaving him idle, unemployed, inoperative? Jesus said it this way, “Your house is left to you desolate”— i.e., void of His Spirit/presence (Matthew 23:38).

God’s justice will work no differently at the second coming of Christ than it always has. We again read from the Psalms:

“See the one who is pregnant with wickedness, who conceives destructive plans, and gives birth to harmful lies – he digs a pit and then falls into the hole he has made. **He becomes the victim of his own destructive plans and the violence he intended for others falls on his own head.** I will thank the Lord for **his justice**; I will sing praises to the sovereign Lord!” (Psalm 7:14-17, *New English Translation*)

Also remember, that both the saved and the lost experience this “brightness” of God’s fully unveiled character of love when Jesus returns. It affects the two groups differently because one group has accepted that love, while the other has despised and rejected it, and thus their hearts have become hard against it. As the saying goes, “The same sun which melts wax hardens clay. And the same Gospel which melts some persons to repentance hardens others in their sins” (see also, 2 Corinthians 2:14-16). In Proverbs chapter 4, we read:

“But the path of the righteous is like a shining light, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness. They do not know what they stumble over.” (Proverbs 4:18-19, *New Heart English Bible*)

As the righteous (God’s church/people) receive small glimpses of light (truth) throughout history, we are able to receive more and more. Thus, when Jesus comes in all His brightness, we will not perish because “when

He appears, we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2). This is what Daniel alludes to when he says that, during "the time of the end", "knowledge shall be increased" (Daniel 12:4) for "those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever" (Verse 3).

All the lies and methods of Satan, spread by the various beastly nations throughout history, will be completely consumed from our minds forever by the time of the second coming. This again is the meaning of the ten-horned beast and the false prophet being cast into the lake of fire. Those who are "in Christ" that are raised from their sleep of death at Christ's second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16), will include all those who (although may not have had all the light about God's character and methods) willingly lived up to all the light they had. Thus, they are raised in "the resurrection of life" (John 5:29^a).

This includes people who may not have ever heard of Jesus but unknowingly were living by His Spirit of truth and love. When they see Jesus they may ask, "'What are these wounds that are in Your hands?' And He shall say: 'These are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of My friends'" (Zechariah 13:6, *Aramaic Bible in Plain English*).³⁶ In addition, check out what Paul says in his letter to the Romans:

"Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through [or, by the standard of] Christ Jesus, will judge [diagnose/compare] everyone's secret life [to reveal if their life matches that of Jesus']." (Romans 2:14-16, *New Living Translation*, words in brackets added)

³⁶ Jesus being betrayed by "friends" is also in Psalm 41:9, which says, "Yes, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate bread with me, has lifted up his heel against me" (*Word English Bible*). This is clearly a foretelling of Judas, "the son of perdition" (John 13:18, 21-27).

Keep in mind that all the lost who are alive at Jesus' second coming will perish. All the followers of Satan will be gone, leaving his house empty— he will be in a state of destruction (i.e., unemployed).

This unemployment is described in Revelation chapter 20 as Satan being bound with a chain for 1,000 years (aka, the Millennium). This chain is obviously a metaphor, meaning a chain of circumstances— in this case, left alone with no one to deceive. It is not until the 1,000 years are finished when "Satan will be let out of his prison" due to the fact that "the rest of the dead [who were dead at the time of Jesus' second coming] did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (Verse 5). Jesus referred to this resurrection as "the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:29^b). The chain of circumstances is now broken because Satan has people to deceive once again; and this is exactly what we see happens:

"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out **to deceive the nations** which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea." (Revelation 20:7-8)

THE LAKE OF FIRE AND THE SECOND DEATH

After Satan deceives the nations and gathers them for battle, we read:

“They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And **fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them**. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”
(Revelation 20:9-10)

More Fire From God

Referring to this “fire” which “came down from God out of heaven”, the *Remedy Bible* says: “It is then that God unveils himself fully, and rivers of fire come out from him; and the fires of truth and love consume all evil and sin.” If this is true, then this is vastly different from what most of us have been brought up believing.

In the very popular and highly praised sermon entitled, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, Jonathan Edwards says:

“The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked. His wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire. He is of purer eyes than to bear you in his sight; you are ten thousand times as abominable in his eyes as the most hateful, venomous serpent is in ours ...

... O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder ... How dreadful is the state of those that are daily and hourly in the danger of this great wrath and infinite misery! But this is the dismal case of every soul in this congregation that has not been born again, however moral and strict, sober and religious, they may otherwise be ..."

So which is it? Is the fire from God "truth and love which consumes all sin", or is it the results of God's pent-up anger, abhorrence, and wrath towards sinners "worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire"?

After all, doesn't Scripture say, "God is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29) whose throne is a "fiery flame" which has wheels of "burning fire" with a continuous "fiery stream" coming from before Him (Daniel 7:9-10)? Yes it does, however it also says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), so could we substitute "love" for God— "Love is a consuming fire"?

"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for **love is as strong as death**, Jealousy as cruel as the grave; **Its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame.**" (Song of Solomon 8:6)

Here it is again in the *Berean Standard Bible*:

"Set me as a seal over your heart, as a seal upon your arm. **For love is as strong as death**, its jealousy as unrelenting as Sheol. **Its sparks are fiery flames, the fiercest blaze of all.**" (Song of Solomon 8:6)

Take note of the two underlined words used in the above translations— Grave and Sheol. Grave is a great translation of the Hebrew word *Sheol*, but did you know that the *King James Version* translates the word *Sheol* as "hell" 31 times? Please keep this in mind whenever you read the word "hell" in Scripture. It simply means the grave, not a place where God sends people to torture them.

The Greek equivalent to *Sheol* is *Hades*. In Revelation 20:14, The *New King James Version* says, "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." The *Aramaic Bible in Plain English* says, "And Death and Sheol were cast into The Lake of Fire- this which is the second death." However, The *King James Version* says, "Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." This not only tells us that *Sheol*, *Hades* and *Hell* simply mean "the Grave",³⁷ but also reveals that "hell" and "the lake of fire" are two different things since "death and hell [Hades/Grave]" cannot literally be cast into a "lake of fire." As the verse in Song of Solomon says, God's love is a vehement flame that eternally destroys death and the grave.

What caused death and the grave? Sin! God's love is a "consuming fire" to all sin. Who caused sin? Satan! God's love (as revealed by Jesus) will overcome the flood of lies that Satan (the serpent) has spewed out of his mouth which have infected our minds and actions to operate outside of God's design for life.— "Many waters cannot quench **Ἅγας** love, nor can the floods drown it ..." (Song of Solomon 8:7).

We must also remember that John saw the beast and false prophet are both thrown into the lake of fire. We have learned throughout this study that the beast is a representation of a kingdom of corrupt ideologies and lies against God, His Son, and Their character. The false prophet, mentioned in Revelation 16:13; 19:20; and 20:10, is also described as a beast, the lamb-like beast to be exact (13:11-18), which helps enforce the imposed methods of the ten-horned beast. Therefore, whatever these ideologies are thrown into, it cannot be a literal lake of combustible fire (or lava) as most imagine. As we will see throughout this chapter, it is therefore symbolic language referring to the experience of going into eternal nonexistence.

³⁷ Believing humanity naturally possesses an immortal soul, Hades became the personal name for "the god of the dead and the underworld" in Greek mythology. This tradition has also crept into Christianity.

Tormented

Since the lake of fire is not a place of literal burning, how is it that people experience “torment” in it? The Greek word for “tormented” in Revelation 20:10 is βασανίζω (*basanizó*) meaning, “To test the purity of metals such as gold and silver by rubbing them upon a touchstone.” The “torment” that the lost will experience is not merely physical pain, but intense *mental anguish* caused by a refusal to repent which magnifies self-condemnation and self-worthlessness as they realize what they have thrown away. Let’s review some other examples that help us understand the use of the word “tormented.”

“And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets **tormented** [*basanizó*] those who dwell on the earth.” (Revelation 11:10)

Although we will not be going into detail concerning these two prophets (or, “witnesses”, verse 3) we can be assured they are not tormenting people with physical torture, but instead it is more of a torment of the *conscience* because of the truth presented. Back in verse 5, God says:

“And if anyone wants to harm them [the two prophets], **fire** proceeds **from their mouth** and **devours** their enemies.”

Again, this is not literal fire that devours them but the conviction of sin coming from the truth of God’s word, just as we saw the Spirit/sword coming out of Christ’s *mouth* in our last chapter. God surely says, “Is not My word like a fire?” (Jeremiah 23:29). And again, He says:

“... Behold, **I will make My words in your mouth fire**, and this people wood, and it shall **devour them**.” (Jeremiah 5:14)

The “fire” coming from the two prophets’ *mouths* that “torments” and “devours” the unbeliever, is therefore the truth of God’s unveiled love as revealed by His Word.

Here is another example of the use of the word, *basanizó*, as Peter refers to Lot at the time of Sodom and Gomorrah:

“For that righteous man [Lot], dwelling among them, **tormented** [*basanizó*] his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds.” (2 Peter 2:8)

Here we read Lot’s soul (*psyché*/affections/thoughts of the whole being) was *tormented* by all the unlawful deeds done by the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. He was not tormented physically, but *mentally*. On page 8 of his book, *The Lake of Fire and the Second Death*, Ray Foucher writes:

“Think of ‘gold purified in the fire.’ This “torment” can be thought of as the application of the touchstone. It is the test, the evaluation of the character or fitness for heaven. It is especially the revelation to the lost themselves (God already knows their condition and destiny) of their condemnation as a result of their sins. Can you imagine being in that situation and coming to understand that you have thrown away eternal life because of choices you have made? The regret and mental anguish would be totally overwhelming.”³⁸

Notice how Isaiah describes the scene:

“Therefore all hands will be limp, **every man’s heart will melt**, and **they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them**; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; **their faces will be like flames.**” (Isaiah 13:7-8)

Unlike Lot, whose torment came by upmost sadness for the people of Sodom, the torment of the lost is caused by fear and regret. This overwhelming torment of soul will trigger in some a condition called “stress-induced cardiomyopathy” as it did to Ananias and Sapphira when their unrepented guilt and sin was exposed (Acts 5:1-11). Jesus echoes this by saying that “men’s hearts” will be “failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth” (Luke 21:26).

³⁸ I highly recommend reading Ray’s book. It is one of the best books I’ve read on this subject. You can access it at lastmessageofmercy.com or at Ray’s website, characterofgod.org.

Remember, it was the ingratitude and the reproach of humanity that Christ endured upon the cross, causing Him to die of a broken heart. This same ingratitude and reproach will come back upon the heads of those who, in the end, see what their selfishness has done— though with them it will be overwhelming *self-ingratitude* and *self-reproach*, causing them to die of a broken heart.

As can be seen in the example of Nadab and Abihu who were consumed with fire and yet were carried out of the sanctuary tent still in their clothes (Leviticus 10:1-5), the consuming fire that torments those who resist in the end is not the fire of combustion. Likewise, just as the fire was a mirror of the violence that was inside Elijah as it clashed with the gentle character of God, this fiery anguish comes from within the soul of the unbeliever. This we have also seen found in the example of the fate of Satan:

“In the abundance of your fraud and in the evil of your trafficking, you have defiled your holy place. I shall send out **fire from within you, and it shall devour you**, and I shall make you ashes in the Earth before the eyes of all who see you.” (Ezekiel 28:18, *Aramaic Bible in Plain English*)

Forever and Ever

Now that we know how the fire torments the lost, what does Scripture mean when it says the tormenting lasts “forever and ever”? Again, we turn to *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* by Jonathan Edwards:

“It is everlasting wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance ...”

In one of his other sermons, Edwards warns:

“... the wrath of God will be poured out upon the wicked without mixture. Imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven ... how would your hearts sink if you knew that you must bear it forever and ever! That there would be no end! That after millions and millions of ages your torment would be no nearer to an end, and that you never, never should be delivered. But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents.”

It is clear that Mr. Edwards had the wrong view of how God's law operates. In *The Eternity of Hell's Torments*, dated April 1739, He wrote:

“I am to show that it is not inconsistent with the mercy of God, to inflict an **eternal punishment** on wicked men. It is an unreasonable and unscriptural notion of the mercy of God, that he is merciful in such a sense that he cannot bear that **penal justice** should be executed ... It would be a great defect, and not a perfection, in the sovereign and supreme Judge of the world, to be merciful in such a sense that he could not bear to have **penal justice** executed.”

However, this notion that Mr. Edwards is advocating all depends on the pagan, but “Christianized”, belief that humanity naturally possesses an immortal soul. Remember, when God told Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit, He said, “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). This we have learned was a warning and not a threat. The sin itself would bring them death, not God. However, Satan lied to Eve when he said, “You shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Commenting on this, Ruben Olschewsky writes:

“With these words the Serpent has opposed the words of God by calling God a liar. God had explained to Adam and Eve that they were dependent upon Him for Life, therefore, to turn away from their source of life would naturally cause their life to end as they had no life in themselves (Genesis 2:9, 16, 17). Satan, by saying that they would not die,

perverted the words of God and made it appear that they wouldn't die of natural causes. **If they were to die, it would be because God Himself would remove the life which they had now been caused to believe was inherently in them.** Because Adam and Eve now believed that life came from somewhere other than God, for God's word to come true ('in the day that you eat, you shalt surely die') would mean **God would have to exterminate their life by active force, in other words, killing them.** This lie of the Serpent would cause mankind to mistrust the words of God and cause them to see Him as a tyrant." (*Faith Journey*, p. 9).

The lie of the serpent changed God's warning of inherent doom into "penal justice" from an offended God in the minds of Adam and Eve. They then exercised this warped thinking when they blamed and condemned the Son of God for their sin. This we have seen gave rise to the false notion that, for God's justice to be satisfied, someone had to die. This all started when man began to believe Satan's lie that we are inherently immortal.

So, if being tormented "forever and ever" does not mean we physically or mentally suffer for an endless amount of time (i.e., as long as God lives), what does it mean? What we must consider here is the fact that sometimes the word "forever" in Scripture means "until the end of the age." Did you know that the word "forever" is used 56 times in the Old Testament in connection with things that have already ended or that will come to an end?

"For this is God, our God **forever and ever**; He will be our guide **even to death.**" (Psalm 48:14)

Here, the phrase, "for ever and ever" means "even to death." The Hebrew word for "forever" here is **עֹלָם** (*olam*) which, when referring to humanity, means to remain for as long as *we* live. In referring to God, it means He remains for as long as *He* lives; for He alone is immortal (1 Timothy 1:17).

The book of Exodus reveals that if a servant chose to serve his master rather than be set free, "he shall serve his master forever" (Exodus 21:5-7).

Obviously, the servant could not serve his master for an endless amount of time. He could only serve him as long as he lives and yet the Scriptures declare he shall serve him "forever."

In 1 Samuel 1:22, we read that Hanna brought her son Samuel to the temple where he was to remain "forever." Here the word "forever" is accompanied by the word *ad* (*ad olam*). The word *ad* puts a condition on the word "forever." Samuel was not to remain in the temple for eternity (as long as God lives), but instead for "as long as he [Samuel] lives, he shall be lent to the Lord" (Verse 28).

Thus, we see, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, that Scripture explains itself. The truth is, those who reject their salvation will "burn" with overwhelming and self-destructive fear and guilt "forever", but this means until they die, and not some endless amount of time.

The Scriptures repeatedly reveal that the wicked will be "no more" (Proverbs 10:25; Psalm 37:10). They will "perish" and "consume away" (Psalm 37:20). They will be "cut off" and "destroyed" (Psalm 37:28, 34, 38). Here is how the *Remedy Bible* describes the scene in Revelation chapter 20:

"... The number of those who gather to war against God is beyond counting—like sand on the seashore. Once gathered, they march across the earth and surround the camp of God's people—the city he loves. It is then that God unveils himself fully, and rivers of fire come out from him; and the fires of truth and love consume all evil and sin.

And Satan— who deceived all those outside the city— along with the beastly power and false prophet, is drowned in the lake of consuming fire coming from the presence of God. **They will suffer torment of mind and agony of soul as the fires of truth and love burn through every lie, distortion and self-deception - consuming all deviations from God's design - and the painful reality of their corrupt condition sears through them day and night for the conclusion of their existence.**" (Revelation 20:8-10)

Jesus Himself speaks of “*everlasting fire* prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41), but again this does not mean they remain alive burning for an endless amount of time. Speaking of this “*everlasting fire*”, Jude tells us that Sodom and Gomorrah are “set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of *eternal fire*” (Jude 1:7), while Peter tells us that Sodom and Gomorrah were reduced “into ashes ... making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly” (2 Peter 2:6). It is not the pain and suffering from the mental anguish that is eternal, it is the *destruction* that is eternal.

In harmony with this truth, Jesus said the lost “will go away into *everlasting punishment*, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46). Pay careful attention here what Jesus does *not* say; He does *not* say *everlasting punishing*, He says, *everlasting punishment*. He then says this “*everlasting punishment*” is the opposite of “*eternal life*”, which is *eternal death*— also known as “the second death”, which is a death when there is no more hope of a resurrection. The one who experiences this death, symbolized by the lake of fire, will be eternally extinct.

Likewise, in John 3:16, Jesus says those who believe and accept Him will receive “*eternal life*” for He is that life, however all those who disbelieve and reject Him will “perish.” It’s that simple. No one has an inherent immortal soul— “the soul that sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4); “he who sins against Me [Jesus] wrongs his own soul; all who hate Me, love death” (Proverbs 8:36). No one is, or ever will be, burning in endless pain and agony.

Think about it, if God desired to torture anyone, He would force those who reject Him to live forever in paradise with Him, for this would be torture for those who choose to live in unrighteousness.

“So think of the sinner in the ‘Lake of Fire’ experience. Remember, the Lake of Fire is the Second Death. It is not a place but an experience and a process. The lost will have the record of their lives come before them; they will feel the guilt and the shame. But not the guilt and shame of one

sin at a time as committed over the years of their lives. No, it will be worse than that. It will be the guilt and shame of an awareness of all their sins at the same time.

Have you ever heard anyone tell you that when a person is facing certain death their whole life flashes before them? Apparently, it does happen. Even worse than that, they will experience all their guilt and shame in the presence of the Lamb [Revelation 14:10]—the Lamb who died for them.” (Ray Foucher, *The Lake of Fire and the Second Death*, pp. 26-27)

The greatest torment comes in the presence of the Lamb (Jesus) because being in His presence draws all their sinful thoughts against Him to the surface as they see His loving, tearful face. Their thoughts torment them as did Peter’s who, after denying three times he knew Jesus, “the Lord turned and looked at Peter ... and Peter left the courtyard, weeping bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62). However, Peter not only viewed this as a heart-piercing look (as does the unbeliever) but also as a heart-healing look and thus, unlike the unbeliever, he repented trusting in Jesus’ everlasting love and became a champion of the faith (Acts 2:14-38).

Then there was Judas who, although was remorseful after seeing that Jesus was condemned to death, he distrusted God’s everlasting mercy and so “he went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:3-5).

In the Apocryphal book of 2 Esdras (a book included in the original 1611 *King James Version*) we read this:

“And this my Son shall rebuke the wicked inventions of those nations, which for their wicked life are fallen into the tempest; And shall **lay before them their evil thoughts**, and the **torments** wherewith they shall begin to be **tormented**, which are **like unto a flame**: and he shall destroy them without labour by the law which is like unto me.” (2 Esdras 13:37-38)

The Son of God will “destroy them without labour”— i.e., without laying a finger upon them. Their destruction is “by the law”— i.e., the workings of

the law of design, which says man will *naturally* reap what they sow, and not by God imposing punishments upon them. God says this design law “is like unto me” because He is the master Designer (Creator) and His law (the design protocols upon which life operates) reflects His character of love and freedom, void of penal infliction and tyranny.

Those who have been taught the traditional view of the fate of the lost will find it surprising to learn that Scripture is clear that “he who walks righteously” will eternally dwell in the “consuming fire” and “everlasting burnings”— not the unrighteous:

“The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: **Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?**’ **He who walks righteously** and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking on evil.” (Isaiah 33:14-15)

Speaking of Jesus, John the Baptist said, “He will *baptize* [immerse] you with the Holy Spirit and *fire*” (Luke 3:16). God wants you to be fully immersed in His fiery presence. Only the “godless” (unbelievers) who are “afraid” and “tremble” in God’s presence, due to their perverted perception of Him, will be consumed along with their fear:

“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that **all the people in the camp trembled.**” (Exodus 19:16)

“The sight of the glory of the Lord was **like a consuming fire** on the top of the mountain **in the eyes** of the children of Israel” (Exodus 24:17)

The glory of the Lord was “like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain” yet the mountain did not consume. In fact, while the people at the base of the mountain were trembling, Moses hikes up the mountain into the presence of God. Then, when Moses returned after forty days in God’s presence, his face was shining so much that the people “were afraid

to come near him" (Exodus 34:29-30). As a result, Moses had to "put a veil on his face" every time he spoke with them (Verses 34-35).

This is why, in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul refers to this incident by saying, "their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (Verses 14-16). In other words, when we read the Old Testament and interpret all the violence as "acts of God" because we see Him as a furious judge waiting to consume His enemies with fire, we are reading it with a veil over our eyes. It is only Christ, by His faithful witness and demonstration that His Father is not like how we think we see Him, who can take away this veil of misapprehension.

God's "Strange Act"

Can you see how Satan has twisted the whole thing, proclaiming that the place you do *not* want to be is in the consuming fire—God's very presence! Instead, he has the world, including "Christians", thinking that God strikes people dead with fiery lightning bolts like the Greek god Zeus. To explain this, they say it is God's "strange work ... His strange act" as mentioned in Isaiah 28:21, as if God in the end works and acts *out of character* in order to destroy the unbeliever and solidify His justice.

However, God's "strange work" and "strange act" is strange to *us* because, instead of God's wrath operating like sinful humanity's wrath, He tearfully and reluctantly gives man over to his own self-destructive desire to sever themselves from Him.

"So I have poured out My indignation on them; **I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath;**

[how?]

I have brought their way upon their heads,' declares the Lord GOD."
(Ezekiel 22:31, *New American Standard Version*)

To further prove this, the first occurrence of the word "strange" in Isaiah 28:21 is the Hebrew word זָר (zûr), which is defined by *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* as: "To turn aside. To depart. To turn from the way. To be a stranger." Likewise, in *Strong's Concordance* we see the primitive root of the word zûr as "to turn aside."

The second occurrence of the word "strange" is the word, נֹכְרִי (nokrîy), which *Strong's Concordance* defines as: "Strange, in a variety of degrees and applications (foreign, non-relative, adulterous, different, wonderful): - alien, foreigner, outlandish, strange (-r, woman)."

In the minds of fallen humanity, God's wrath and justice of "turning aside" is a completely "foreign" (strange) concept. However, after years of reaching out to His people, only to be continuously rejected, He justly gives them over to their own desires and withdraws His Spirit. This action causes Him deep grief and sorrow as His heart breaks, just as we saw demonstrated in the life of Christ when He wept over Jerusalem, eagerly desiring to gather them as a hen gathers her chickens, but they refused.

It is not strange for us to express anger and justice by lashing out and causing harm to the one who's offending us. The "golden rule", built by design within God's law to always treat others as you want to be treated even when they are mistreating us, is strange to our self-centered minds, which are "not subject [submissive] to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7^b).

"I have written for him the great things of My law, but they were considered a strange thing." (Hosea 8:12)

The process of man's "penal justice" system, projected onto God, then comes crashing down upon the heads of the lost as they are self-judged and self-condemned by the justice system *they* demanded.

"Yet your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not just,' when it is their own way that is not just." (Ezekiel 33:17, *English Standard Version*)

Man Crucified in Christ = Sins Consumed by Fire

The reason why some will be able to stand at the end and “dwell with the consuming fire” while others perish is because those who have accepted Jesus are daily being strengthened in grace and the knowledge of the Lord as they go through the fiery trials now.

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because **it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.** If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but **he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**” (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)

Can you see how the one who trusts and accepts Jesus is the one who will be saved “through fire”? When we trust in Jesus, we will welcome the fiery test and, even though it may hurt our ego, everything that is not built upon the foundation of Christ will burn and consume away from our lives. Only those things (works, motives, ideas, trust etc.) that are built upon Christ will endure.

We will be like the two disciples who walked upon the road with Jesus as He rebuked them for their unbelief. After their eyes were opened, they confessed, “Did not *our heart burn within us* while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). Instead of being consumed in fear and guilt, their love and trust accepted the loving correction, and they became powerful witnesses for their Lord.

Believers are going through each trial trusting in Jesus. As He lovingly convicts of sin, caused by the friction that occurs when love and fear are rubbed together, we immediately give that fear and guilt over to Him to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Those who fear in the end are the ones who have held onto their guilt, not trusting in nor giving the guilt over to Jesus who overcame sin and fear. Instead, they have decided to become

their own sin-bearer, but when their sin is fully exposed to them, they are crushed by it due to its overwhelming self-destructiveness.

“Beloved, **do not think it strange** concerning the **fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but **rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” (1 Peter 4:12-13)

The “torment” of our “fiery trial” will bring out the dross and impurities buried deep in our heart and mind. Remember, Christ felt the anguish that the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race due to their adamant disbelief and resistance of it.

The difference is, Christ overcame that anguish by trusting in His Father, while the lost are overwhelmed by it. As in the days of Noah, the pleadings of Christ’s Spirit will not be able to penetrate the stony heart— “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever” (Genesis 6:3). At that point, there will be no use for mercy to plead, as God said of Ephraim, “Ephraim is joined to idols, *let him alone*” (Hosea 4:17). When that mercy stops, the unbeliever will *falsely sense* God is forsaking and willfully refusing to forgive them.

Many of you are aware that, upon the cross, Jesus said, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). When reading this, most people picture a despairing Jesus looking up into the sky questioning His Father’s whereabouts. However, what we must remember is that Jesus is quoting the very first verse of Psalm chapter 22, which says:

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?” (Psalm 22:1)

If you were to turn to that page in your Bible, depending upon what translation you have, you would read a heading to this Psalm saying something like this: “To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David” (*King James Version*).

The word *Aijeleth* means "Doe", while *Shahar* means "dawn." These words are the title of another Psalm (song) in which Psalm 22 is to be sung to the tune of. For example, the *Berean Standard Bible* says, "For the choirmaster. To the tune of 'The Doe of the Dawn.' A Psalm of David."

Although we do not have a copy of this tune today, the point is that, like other Psalms, Psalm 22 is a *song* that the Jews would *sing*. Therefore, one of the last things Jesus ever spoke before His dying breath was not something He cried out in frustration wondering where His Father was, but something He *sang* to those around Him.

Since at this time Scripture was not divided into chapters and verses, most Jews from early childhood memorized large portions. Instead of referring to a chapter and verse, they would recite a line or two directing the hearer to the whole portion. We do this today when someone sings (or even hums) the first line of a familiar song and almost everyone else can follow along by singing the rest.

The song title, "*Doe of the Dawn*" may sound like something peaceful, but it is a song about being hunted; as David Roseberry writes:

"It is hunting season in Psalm 22. The graceful, young female deer is in danger of being slain at dawn. The tune must have been haunting; it was about the peril of being hunted." (davidroseberry.medium.com)

As you will see, this Psalm is both a cry of despair and a song of praise. This is what David was experiencing at the time he wrote Psalm 22, and what Jesus was experiencing when He sang it.

Psalm 22:6: "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!'"

Luke 23:35: "And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.'"

Psalm 22:14-15: "I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death."

John 19:28: "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!'"

Psalm 22:16-18: "The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."

John 19:23-24: "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,' that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: 'They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.'

Intertwined within all this heartbreak, the Psalm repeatedly acknowledges God's ever-abiding presence and comfort:

Psalm 22:4-5: "Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed."

Psalm 22:9-11: "But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God. Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help."

Psalm 22:19-21: "But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me."

As this Psalm came rushing back to their memory, they were to understand just what Jesus was teaching as He sung that first line while being murdered:

Psalm 22:22-25: “I will declare Your [God’s] name [character] to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard. My praise shall be of You in the great assembly...”

Just as Jesus could not see His Father’s face through the darkness that surrounded the cross (Matthew 27:45), by referring His hearers back to Psalm 22, He reassures us that, even though we may not see His merciful face through the darkness that surrounds us, our heavenly Father is *always* by our side and will never forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus wants us to be confident that, as we are tempted to believe God is the one against us, and is therefore afflicting us, we can always trust Him to deliver us even from the grave—and the Messiah, the Son of the living God, would prove it!

The night before His death, Jesus told His disciples, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26:38). He felt this mental anguish so much so that He experienced *Hematohidrosis*, a condition caused by extreme stress in which someone sweats drops of blood (Luke 22:44). During this time, verse 43 tells us that “an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.” Jesus held on tightly in faith (trust), remembering from where His strength came— His Father!

While on the cross, Jesus sang to us “while we were still sinners” engaged in the heinous act of torturing and murdering Him (Romans 5:8) in the hopes of saving us who did not know what we were doing (Luke 23:34). Although fear and abandonment attacked His soul, Jesus remained faithful unto death, trusting in His Father’s abiding presence. And since Jesus “overcame” this fear (Revelation 3:21), He did not experience the second death; for “he that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death” (Revelation 2:11).

Hallelujah! By trusting in His Father, Jesus overcame this anguish, this “fiery trial”, therefore, “His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption” (Psalms 16:8-10; Acts 2:25-32).

This victory, where love and trust conquered fear and death, can be ours as we partake of “the faith of Jesus” as our only Remedy!

“And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. **The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.**” (Romans 8:10-11, *New Living Translation*).

Therefore, Paul tells us that, since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”, we mortals will put on immortality “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” when Jesus returns. “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (see, 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Although Jesus was the true “burnt offering” upon the bronze altar, He was not literally set on fire. It was His “fiery trial” which He overcame, thus John saw that “His feet [representing the way in which He walked] were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace” (Revelation 1:15, words in brackets added).

“[Christ] who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him [the Father] who was able to save Him from death, was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet **He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.**” (Hebrews 5:8-9)

Through Mary, Jesus partook of the terminal condition of the human species, and in that humanity, Jesus destroyed, or killed (at the cross) the infection of fear and selfishness. Thus, in Jesus Christ, a new Human was created that was sinless and perfect as God intentionally designed, and since we now have a sinless Human who never deviated from God’s law and perfectly lived out and eradicated fear and selfishness, the human species was saved in the person of Jesus. This is why believers will “count it all joy

when [we] fall into various trials, knowing that [like Jesus] the testing of [our] faith produces patience" (James 1:2, words in brackets added).

"Now since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity, so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and **free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.**" (Hebrews 2:14-15, *Berean Standard Bible*)

Christ Crucified in Man = Man Consumed by Fire

As we have seen, in that darkness that surrounded the cross, Christ could not sense the abiding presence of His Father, just as the lost in the end will not be able to sense the Father's presence due to their disbelief in His everlasting mercy. They, as did Christ, will sense they are forsaken by God. Thus, as we wrongly "assumed that He [Jesus] had been afflicted, struck down by God, and humiliated", the lost in the end will wrongly assume they are "afflicted, struck down by God, and humiliated" (Isaiah 53:4).

Just as Jesus said the events that surround His second coming will be like "the days of Noah", Peter said, "They [scorners] willfully ignore this: Long ago the heavens and the earth were brought about from water and through water by the word of God [Jesus]. Through these waters the world of that time perished when it was flooded" (2 Peter 3:5-6, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*). It was "the Word of God" (Jesus) upholding all things until they told Him to "Depart from us!" (Job 22:15-17). Likewise, Peter goes on to say that the fiery torment of mind and soul after the millennium will come as the lost realize they have crucified "the same word" (Jesus) from their midst as did the antediluvians:

"But the heavens and the earth which are now **preserved by the same word**, are reserved for **fire** until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (2 Peter 3:7)

On pages 34-36, in his book, *The Lake of Fire and the Second Death*, Ray Foucher gives a great visual of what happens when man rejects Christ and

cries out “Depart from us!” Ray points out that the Hebrew word for “man” (as distinct from “woman”, not “mankind” in general) is pronounced “*ish*” and appears in Hebrew letters like this: **איש**. The Hebrew letters, reading right to left, are *aleph, yod, shin*. To the Hebrew mind, the “yod” in the middle carries the meaning of “the right hand of God— the Messiah.” What is astonishing is, when you remove the *yod* from the midst of the word “man” (i.e., remove the Messiah from man), we are left with the Hebrew word for “fire”— **אש**.

Now, as Ray also points out in his book, a similar thing happens with the word for “woman”, which is: **אשה**. Reading from right to left, it is spelled: *aleph, shin, hey*. Although the Hebrew letter *yod* (representing the Messiah) is not present, when you remove the letter, *hey*, we again are left with the word, “fire”— **אש**. Here’s what Ray concludes:

“The letters ‘yod’ and ‘hey’ that have been removed from the words for man and woman respectively, when combined as yod-hey, make the word ‘Yah,’ (spelled ‘Jah’ in KJV; Psalm 68:4) which is **the poetic form of God’s name**. I already mentioned that the letter ‘yod’ refers to the Messiah. The letter ‘hey’ can mean ‘behold,’ thus, ‘behold the Messiah.’ It takes both man and woman together to properly represent God [Genesis 1:26-27]. **When God’s presence is removed from them what remains is fire.**

What we find, with a correct understanding of the role of God in the destruction of the wicked, is that men or women ‘burn’ (in a figurative sense) when God is totally removed from them. So it is not a direct act of God that destroys man but **the removal** of His life-sustaining presence when rejected.

This is consistent with the idea that God, throughout Biblical history, has not directly destroyed anyone. He removes His protective presence when it is not wanted and leaves unprotected people to the destroyer (Satan himself), to others who would do them harm, or to forces of nature. **In this case, what He is removing is His life-sustaining power and - disconnected from the source of life - people die.”** (Words in brackets added)

Another great example of this is found in Daniel chapter 3 when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the fiery furnace at the command of King Nebuchadnezzar because they refused to worship the golden idol. Verse 22 says, "And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, *the flames killed the soldiers* as they threw the three men in."

However, all three Hebrew boys were unharmed, and as they walked out of the fire, "the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn't even smell of smoke!" (Verse 27, *New Living Translation*).

What made the difference? While Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in the fire, "King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished ... 'Look!' he answered, 'I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and *the form of the fourth is like the Son of God*'" (Verses 24-25). Just as "the Angel of the Lord appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush ... and the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed (Exodus 3:2), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not consumed when the same Angel of the Lord (a title belonging to Jesus) appeared in the flame with them. Only that which bound them was consumed. Likewise, as the Spirit of Christ dwells within us, only that which binds us (sin, fear, selfishness etc.) will consume away.

We must listen and submit (*shema*) and allow our stony heart to be rolled away so Christ does not remain crucified (dead) within us, or we will be eternally lost; for "just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:4-5). But "if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The End of the Lost (Those Without Christ)

The prophet Hosea speaks of the overwhelming mental anguish the lost will experience building up into burning rage against others:

“For **they prepare their heart like an oven** while they lie in wait; all night **their anger smolders**; in the morning **it blazes like a flaming fire**. All of them are hot as an oven, and **they devour their rulers**. All their kings fall; not one of them calls upon Me.” (Hosea 7:6-7, *Berean Standard Bible*)

In their anger, they turn on their master ruler, the instigator of sin— Satan.

“Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you [king of Tyre/Satan] make your heart like the heart of a god, therefore, behold, **I will bring foreigners upon you, the most ruthless of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor. They shall thrust you down into the pit**, and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas [remember the Egyptians].

Will you still say, ‘I am a god,’ in the presence of those who kill you, though you are but a man, and no god, in the hands of those who slay you? You shall die the death of the uncircumcised **by the hand of foreigners** ... I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you ... **All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.**” (Ezekiel 28:6-10, 17, 19, words in brackets added)

As the life-giving Spirit of Jesus completely withdraws from the lost, their full character is revealed, and not only do they turn on Satan, but they also destroy one another.

“And when people burn with hatred and anger as they did when they rushed upon Stephen to stone him, they ‘gnash their teeth’ [Acts 7:54]. There will also be gnashing of teeth when they turn on each other with burning hatred and anger upon those who deceived them.

‘The horn of the Lord [His trophy of saints] shall be exalted with honor; the wicked shall see it and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and

melt away' [Psalm 112:9,10]; 'For they have made ready their heart like an oven' [Hosea 7:6]; '**Wickedness burneth as the fire ... no man shall spare his brother**' [Isaiah 9:18-19]; 'Every man's sword shall be against his brother' [Ezekiel 38:21].

'A great disturbance [panic/anguish] from the Lord shall be among them and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbor, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbor [Zechariah 14:13].'" (Gary Hullquist, *The Loving Wrath of God*, pp. 18-19, words in brackets added)

Scripture also speaks of a literal fire that burns up the elements of the earth (2 Peter 3:12) and turns the wicked into "ashes" (Malachi 4:1, 3). Since the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah burning to ashes is an example to those who live ungodly in the end, is it not unreasonable to conclude that the literal fire, kindled by the "burning lusts" of the Sodomites, appears again as a world-wide event because of the "burning anger" of all the lost?

Earlier in our study of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah we learned about the "slime pits" (bitumen/tar/sulfur) present in the land. Isaiah uses the image of these slime pits metaphorically when referring to the "day of Lord's vengeance":

"For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion. Its streams shall be turned into **pitch [tar/sulfur]**, and its dust into brimstone; its land shall become **burning pitch [tar/sulfur]**. It shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it forever and ever." (Isaiah 34:8-10, words in brackets added)

We have already discussed how God executes His vengeance on His enemies. Referring to "vengeance", Paul told us that the "torment" of mind in reaction to God's goodness, is compared to "coals of fire upon their heads" (Romans 12:19-21). Likewise, Isaiah tells us that "the day of vengeance of our God" is— "To preach good tidings to the poor ... heal the brokenhearted ... proclaim liberty to the captives ... to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord ... to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:1-2).

Let us also go back and quickly focus on Isaiah 34 where it said the burning pitch “shall not be quenched.” Jesus talks about this when he said, “It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’” (Mark 43-44).

First off, the "worm" referred to here is a literal worm that feeds off the corpses of *dead* bodies: “For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and *the worm will eat them* like wool; but My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation from generation to generation” (Isaiah 51:8). Referring to the fall of Satan, God says, “Your pomp is brought down to Sheol [grave], and the sound of your stringed instruments; the maggot is spread under you, and *worms cover you*” (Isaiah 14:11).

Now to the “shall not be quenched” part. Jeremiah also prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed by fire that would not be quenched: “I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it *shall not be quenched*” (Jeremiah 17:27). This is not referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, but to the time when ancient Babylon ransacked Jerusalem. Although Jerusalem was destroyed by a fire that “shall not be quenched”, the palaces were “devoured”, but only for 70 years (2 Chronicles 36:19-21). Like Sodom and Gomorrah, which were destroyed by “eternal fire” (Jude 1:7), Jerusalem is not still burning today. The fire is referred to as being that which cannot be quenched because no one was able to put the fire out (Isaiah 47:14). However, it did burn out on its own.

Now, let’s compare this to what happened in the time of the Exodus as they journeyed through the wilderness:

“And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and **the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.** And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, **the fire was quenched.**” (Numbers 11:1-2, *King James Version*)

Here we see the fire *was* quenched. This fire “consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.” These were the “mixed multitude” we spoke about earlier. Even though it says they were “consumed”, they are mentioned again right in verse 4 when they lusted for flesh food, despising the manna, which represented Christ. This is why most other translations say the fire consumed “*some* in the outskirts of the camp” (see, *New King James Version*). However, the word “some” is not in the Hebrew, so the “consuming” may mean something different from what your preconceived idea tells you.

Why was the fire quenched? Because the people cried out and Moses prayed to the Lord. Although it does not last long, we have a submitting, or a quieting down, from the mixed multitude. When their anger subsides, so does the “fire.” Isaiah tells us of the fate of those at the end of time:

“Through the wrath [departure] of the Lord of hosts the land is burned up, and **the people shall be as fuel for the fire**; no man shall spare his brother.” (Isaiah 9:19, words in brackets added)

Just as those in the end will act as “fuel for the fire” as their hatred and anger burns towards one another, the complaining of the mixed multitude acted as “fuel for the fire.” However, unlike those in the end, the mixed multitude, being quickly convicted (consumed/tormented) of this, cried out to God and the “fire” was quenched as their complaining was quenched. The “fire” at the end of time will not be quenched due to the people’s consciences being seared and thus they will not call out to God but continue in their fiery hate for one another.

Another way we can show that our actions, as well as our thoughts, are reflected by nature, is by looking at the story of when the disciples were out on the sea alone during a storm. Just after Jesus fed the five thousand, the atmosphere in the crowd changed which also affected the disciples. “Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world’” (John 6:14).

Because of this miracle, the thoughts of the people were drawn to God's promise He gave to Moses: "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him" (Deuteronomy 18:18). As the people remembered how God miraculously fed the people in the wilderness with the manna, they immediately made the connection to Jesus miraculously feeding them in an area of which the disciples declared, "This place is a wilderness" (Matthew 14:15, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*).

Discerning their demeanor, "Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king" so "He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone" (John 6:15). Since Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, His kingly reign is not established by force and coercion. The people, including the disciples, misunderstood this. They vainly thought if they began campaigning on His behalf, they would force Him as king of their revolt against the Romans—a position Jesus never desired.

In John's account above, it seems that Jesus simply "departed again to the mountain by Himself alone." However, Matthew gives us a little more detail saying, "Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray" (Matthew 14:22). The *King James Version* says Jesus "constrained his disciples to get into the ship." The Greek word here is ἀναγκάζω (*anagkazó*), which *Strong's Concordance* defines as "force, compel, constrain, urge." Because of the disciples getting mixed up in the thought of forcing Him to be king of their revolt, Jesus *strongly urges* them to get on the boat and leave. Jesus was doing this both as a loving rebuke and to protect them from this vain enthusiasm. In the *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary* it says, "The word 'constrained' implies reluctance on their part."

In John 6:16-17 we then read, "Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat, and went over the sea toward

Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them." Referring to the phrase "Jesus had not come to them", the *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary* says, "They probably lingered in hopes of His still joining them, and so let the darkness come on."

Now, why are we discussing all this? Because of Jesus' rebuke, the disciples' confusion of Jesus' true mission, mingled with His "lingering" and wanting to be alone at this time, clamored inside their heads. Could we not, in all fairness, conclude that the disciples' thoughts were "stormy", and that Jesus intended to teach them this by permitting nature to reflect their thoughts?

The Greek word used for the waves being "tossed" in Matthew 14:24 is βασανίζω (*basanizō*), which is the same word we have seen used for those being "tormented" in mind from the truth of God's word. In his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Adam Clarke notes that the mentioning of the ship being "tossed with waves" in Matthew 14:24, could also mean, "grievously agitated", which is equal to being "tormented", and is definitely a connection to the disciples' demeanor. Commenting on verse 27, after Jesus walks on the water and comforts His disciples, Clarke connects the grievous storm with the mindset of the disciples by saying: "those who are grievously tossed with difficulties and temptations require a similar manifestation of his power and goodness."

Also commenting on Matthew 14:24, in *Gill's Expositions*, John Gill connects the storm with "the tumultuousness of its [the world's] inhabitants; the wicked being like a troubled sea, which cannot rest, continually casting up the mire and dirt of sin, to the dishonour of God, and the grief of his people; and for its fickleness and inconstancy, changes and war being continually in it."

Echoing these thoughts, on page 380 in her book, *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White says, "They were in the midst of troubled waters. *Their thoughts were stormy* and unreasonable, and the Lord gave them something else to afflict their souls and occupy their minds. God often does this when men create burdens and troubles for themselves."

Jesus lingering to come to them would also teach them that His mission would be conducted in His own timing and in His own way, devoid of force. As the disciples were struggling to maneuver the boat during the storm, they received Jesus into the ship, and they immediately found themselves at their desired destination (John 6:19-21). This confirms the truth that attempting to do the works of God in our own strength, and forcing His hand to hasten His ministry, will only result in fear and frustration.

Instead of taking forty years, the ancient "church in the wilderness" would have immediately journeyed from Egypt to the promised land if they had trusted in the One who was leading them. Likewise, instead of taking two thousand years, the modern "church in the wilderness" would have immediately entered the heavenly Promised Land if we trusted in the One leading us. However, due to fear, selfishness, and an incorrect view of God and His methods (i.e., the "falling away" period), we perceive Jesus is "lingering" in His coming to us. The truth is, Jesus is not the One lingering to come to us, rather we are lingering to come to Him!

"Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.' ... But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. **The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**" (2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-9)

Prior to this encounter, the disciples experienced another stormy evening while Jesus was asleep in the boat. By comparing both incidences, we learn that, if we would allow Jesus to rid our fear and faithlessness, and welcome Him in, He, who "the winds and the sea obey", would stand and command, "Peace, be still!" (Mark 4:36-41). This not only applies to "natural disasters" today, but even to those disasters during the time of Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt etc. Jesus could have calmed it all!

“Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? **Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment?** Who has established all the ends of the earth? **What is His name, and what is His Son’s name,** if you know?” (Proverbs 30:4)

Sadly, instead of letting Him in, we have continuously cried out, “We will not have this man reign over us!” (Luke 19:14). It is this persistent mindset that will seal the lost in their sins, and as they are diagnosed as terminally ill, their stormy thoughts toward God and their fellow man are reflected in the seven last plagues before the second coming of Jesus and in the unquenchable fiery storm after the Millennium.

Also keep in mind that even the animal offerings were *not* burnt alive, but *after* they had died. Will not God treat humanity with the same respect? Are we not “of more value than many sparrows”? (Matthew 10:31). While the *spiritual fire* engulfs both the believer and the unbeliever while we are alive, resulting in impurities melting away or overwhelming mental anguish, the *physical fire* comes *after* the unbeliever has already died. The physical fire is not for torture, but only to cleanse (purify) the earth.

“Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. **Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left**” (Isaiah 24:6)

Going back to our illustration of the Hebrew words for “man” and “woman”, we see that when Christ IS present, there is no fire and man is NOT consumed, and when Christ is NOT present (crucified/“Depart from us!”), man is consumed (disappears) and only “fire” is present. However, in Numbers 11, it says when the fire was *present*, they were “consumed.” Therefore, could this be simply a matter of *how* the individual views (or, perceives) God? The scenario of, “the same sun which melts wax hardens clay” all depends on how the material responds to the sun.

Because of “fear” (i.e., believing God directly destroys the sinner), the unbeliever, as well as the professed Christian, IS consumed in the fire (the *outward presence* of Christ. The *yod*, representing Christ, on the *outside*).

Thus, they cry out, "Hide us from the wrath of the Lamb." And to the professed believer, He will respond: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:21-23).

On the other hand, because of "trust", man is *NOT* consumed in the fire (the *indwelling presence* of Christ. The *yod*, representing Christ, on the *inside*). Thus, they cry out, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us ... we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9). And God responds to them saying, "Well done good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:23).

This again goes back to the Hebrew letter *hey* in the word "woman", which means, "behold." As we "behold" (*hey*) "Jesus, the Son of His right hand" (*yod*), we will have a correct view of "Yah" (*yod-hey*).

"O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, '**Behold your God!**'"
(Isaiah 40:9)

Keep in mind, the Hebrew letters that make up the word "fire" (**אש**) are still present in the words "man" (**איש**) and "woman" (**אשה**). This shows us that, when we are crucified in Christ, we will "dwell with the devouring fire" and "with everlasting burnings" and we will not be consumed (see again, Isaiah 33:14-15). However, if we crucify Christ, the fire of will consume us.

Moreover, unlike Jesus who died having faith (complete trust) in His Father and was therefore raised back to life, those who are "fearful, and unbelieving ... have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

"For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head. Because just as you drank on My holy mountain, all the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow and **become as if they had never existed**." (Obadiah 1:15-16, *New American Standard Bible*, 1995)

THE NEW EARTH

“Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God’s righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:11-13, *New Living Translation*)

Throughout this study, we have shown how physical events reflect the spiritual controversy between good and evil (Christ and Satan). Just as natural disasters and physical chaos reflect the sinfulness of humanity, the “new earth” will reflect its new (born again) creatures thus it will be “a world filled with God’s righteousness.”

“In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all. The cow will graze near the bear. The cub and the calf will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm [because they won’t be deadly]. Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD.” (Isaiah 11:6-9, *New Living Translation*, words in brackets added)

Comparing this with what we just read in 2 Peter, a world “filled with God’s righteousness” is a world where “nothing will hurt or destroy.” The word “nothing” even includes creatures of the animal kingdom— “The cow will graze near the bear. The cub and the calf will lie down together.” Animals, including humans, will not hunt and kill for food, but will eat what God originally designed (Genesis 1:29-30)— “The lion will eat hay like a cow.”

This eternal lifestyle will not be accomplished by force. God's creatures will not be obeying out of fear of being punished by an angry God. Instead, "the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD." The *New King James Version* says, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD." We will not hurt or destroy because God does not hurt or destroy, and we, by the indwelling of God's Spirit through Christ, will be "filled with the knowledge of the glory [character] of the LORD" (Habakkuk 2:14).

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished. **Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law:** Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults. For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation from generation to generation." (Isaiah 51:6-8)

Having God's law (His design protocols upon which life operates) in our hearts, we, being new creatures, will think and walk in perfect harmony with His righteousness (His selfless character of love) as we continue to learn of Him and partake more and more of His Spirit upon His festivals:

"For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,' says the Lord, 'so shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that **from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,**' says the Lord." (Isaiah 66:22-23)

In addition to worshipping Him daily and weekly "from one Sabbath to another", we will be blessed monthly "from one New Moon to another." John describes this blessing saying: "On either side of the river was *the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month*; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:2, *New American Standard Bible*).

The daily, weekly, monthly and annual observances of God's feasts reflect major periods throughout history from the cross to the new earth.

- **Passover/Unleavened Bread:** Christ's death and burial.
- **Firstfruits:** Christ's resurrection.
- **Pentecost:** Receiving new life through the Spirit of Christ.
- **Trumpets:** Seven last warnings of coming judgment.
- **Day of Atonement:** The judgment/second coming/millennium.
- **Tabernacles:** Eternal harmony with God.

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ... And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, '**Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people.** God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'" (Revelation 21:1, 3-4)

THIS GOSPEL

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes ...” (Romans 1:16)

The “gospel of Christ” is “the power of God to salvation.” In verse 20 we read what that power is when Paul writes:

“For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.” (Romans 1:20, *New Living Translation*)

So, “the gospel of Christ” is “the power of God to salvation”, and “the power of God to salvation” is His creative power. God’s creative and redemptive power are one and the same and are both found in His only begotten Son “in whom we have *redemption* through His blood ... For by Him all things were *created* that are in heaven and that are on earth” (Colossians 1:14, 16).

“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person [born again]. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ ...” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18^a, *New Living Translation*, words in brackets added)

How was it that God brought us back to Himself through Christ? By demonstrating God’s “invisible qualities”; His attributes through His “divine nature” of self-sacrificing love (*agapé*). This love then changes us as we become “partakers of the divine nature” through the indwelling of the redemptive and creative Spirit of Christ (2 Peter 1:4).

Therefore, being “new persons” (creatures) born again in Christ, “God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.” And because “he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation, ... we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20, *New Living Translation*).

As you can see, we as believers, are given the *same* “wonderful message of reconciliation” to spread to the world. This “message of reconciliation” is not about a legal payment to an offended God to satisfy His justice, for, as we have seen, God does not need to be reconciled to us.³⁹ Instead, “His appeal through us” is all about revealing His true character, which Satan has hidden from us, and we do this by teaching that, in order to correctly understand God’s character and the way He saves/heals us, one must view Him through His only begotten Son.

“If the Good News we preach is hidden behind a veil, it is hidden only from people who are perishing. **Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe.** They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don’t understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God. You see, we don’t go around preaching about ourselves.

We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let there be light in the darkness,’ has made this light shine in our hearts **so we could know the glory [character] of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.**”

(2 Corinthians 3-6, *New Living Translation*, words in brackets added)

Remember, “Christ is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24) who is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3), and when that power is withdrawn (crucified), *self-destruction* is the sure result.

³⁹This does not mean, however, that the justice of God was not revealed at the cross. And how was it revealed? By God heart-wrenchingly giving the Satanic mind exactly what it selfishly desired while at the same time joyfully giving it what it needed to be healed—the death of His only begotten Son —“Mercy and truth met together; justice and peace kissed” (Psalm 85:10, *Smith’s Literal Translation*)

But also remember, “In His love and compassion He redeemed them [us]; He lifted them [us] up and carried them [us] all the days of old” (Isaiah 63:9, *Berean Standard Bible*). Oh, let us not say the Lord has forsaken us and has turned to be our enemy:

“But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me.’ ‘Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I [Jesus] will not forget you. See, **I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands**; Your walls [hedges of protection] are continually before Me.” (Isaiah 49:14-16, words in brackets added)

It is no wonder why Paul could say, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). As the lamb lay lifeless before Adam and Eve, God (non-condemningly) was not only saying, “Look what you have done to My Son!”, but also, “Look what My Son has done for you!” In the death of this lamb, Adam, in his anguish, saw down through the ages of time how Jesus has been daily “led like a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7) because He is daily “despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief” (Verse 3^a).

Many people desire the hastening of Jesus’ second coming because it would put an end to all *their* problems— *their* pain and suffering. Some ask, “When will Jesus Christ be coming back to save us who don’t want to live in this wretched, evil world any longer?” Others are conflicted on whether or not they want Christ to return soon. Some say, “I don’t want Jesus to come back again because I want to live my life, but at the same time, I want him to come.” While others might say, “I’m only 22 and I want to travel, meet people, marry, start a family ... I have dreams!”⁴⁰

However, few look at it as putting an end to Jesus’ pain and suffering. If we are filled with the Spirit of Christ, which changes our thinking from penal atonement to relational atonement, then we will hate sin, not only because

⁴⁰ Actual comments from *Quora.com*.

it hurts our fellow man and us, but that it also directly hurts God and His Son. Therefore, our motive to stop sinning will not be to receive an award (eternal life) or to escape a punishment (eternal death), but solely because we love the Lord our God and our neighbor as ourselves.

In the final judgment, which confirms to the lost their terminal diagnosis, the ever-present cross will be made known in such magnitude that every mind will see and understand the nature of his own rejection of truth. Yet "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7) for while daily crucified upon this ever-present cross, Jesus cries out on behalf of all humanity, to all generations past, present, and future, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing!" (Luke 23:34).

In our fallen condition, we all possess the same spirit of the Papacy to "cause deceit to prosper", to "exalt [ourselves] in our heart" and "even rise against the Prince of princes [Jesus]" (Daniel 8:25). Without God's law written in our hearts and minds, we display this beastly antagonistic spirit by our use of force, coercion, and retaliation upon others who simply sin differently than we do. Although Martin Luther proclaimed the Pope to be antichrist, he also said— "I am more afraid of my own heart than of the Pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great Pope, SELF."

Are we willing to admit that the rise of the little horn power is but a reflection of *our* natural hatred towards God and His only begotten Son and Their methods? Although we continue to spiritually crucify Him again and again (Hebrews 6:6), are we willing to admit that, on the cross, Jesus gave us a "once and for all" physical demonstration of this hatred by letting our sinful nature come to its "end" (i.e., its fullness, being "fully spent") through the horrific act of killing Him (Hebrews 10:10; Daniel 9:24)?

By His Stripes We Are Healed

Remembering Jesus referred us back to Psalm 22, we read an interesting statement in verse 6: "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people." Why does Jesus call Himself "a worm"?

The Hebrew word for “worm” here is תּוֹלַעַ (*tola*), which *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* defines as, “the crimson-grub, but used only (in this connection) of the color from it, and cloths dyed therewith — crimson, scarlet, worm.” This worm (*tola*) was crushed and placed in hot water to produce a crimson-colored dye. The colors of scarlet and crimson represent sin (remember the harlot?), thus by drawing our attention to this crushed worm, Jesus draws our attention to another prophecy found in Isaiah:

“Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘Though your **sins** are like **scarlet**, they shall be as white as snow; though they **are red like crimson [tola]**, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18)

The connection is clear— Because Jesus was always in “hot water” over His interpretation of the law, we crushed Him and He died covered in red-like crimson blood. This exposed our sin and leads us to conviction and repentance thus becoming cleansed by His indwelling/healing life (blood), setting us free from the imperial (Baal/pagan/Romanism) view of the gospel— for “by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24). “In that day— this is the LORD’s declaration— you will call Me, ‘My husband,’ and no longer call Me, ‘My Baal’” (Hosea 2:16, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*). Healed by this gospel, my good friend Gavin Devlin testifies:

“So, the God of love took the risk of making man a free moral agent by giving man freedom of choice. When man abused that privilege and rebelled against the God of love, He took another risk by sending His Son to show us what we had rebelled against and rejected - pure Love. He who has seen the Son’s love has seen the Father’s love.

What an immense price was paid for my sin. I cry out, Father forgive me for I know not what I do. Save me lest I perish. Sorry for the pain I have caused you and the price you had to pay to bring me to my senses. How great Thou art. Thank you for your precious Son.

Now I understand what it means, ‘there’s power in the blood’. It means there is power in the beautiful life of Jesus to convict, convert and empower me to turn from my selfish ways and turn to His glorious ways. May Christ’s blood, His life, be my inspiration now and always.”

As Gavin so eloquently said, Jesus bore ours sin (our, hatred of Him) and died upon the cross to open our eyes to see the fact that it is not He nor His Father who has turned away, but that “we turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care” (Isaiah 53:3^b, *New Living Translation*). “Oh let Israel say, ‘His lovingkindness endures forever!’” (Psalm 118:2).

“And **this gospel** of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14)

It is “this gospel of the kingdom” (the Good News of God’s methods of truth and love as revealed by Jesus) that will be preached to all the world (to provide evidence of God’s true character and methods)— “then the end will come.” “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). This includes His work! The last message of mercy, which enlightens the whole earth with the glory (character) of God (Revelation 18:1), will allow all humanity the opportunity to cast their verdict for or against God and His only begotten Son— “for the hour of His [God’s] judgment has come” (Revelation 14:7).

“Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: ‘That You [God] may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You [God] are judged.’” (Romans 3:4, words in brackets added)

Members of the jury, have you reached a decision? Will you free your Lord from His cross by believing His witness statement concerning His Father, and the Father’s witness concerning His only begotten Son? Will you confirm Him and His Father innocent of all charges? Then stand with me and proclaim: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!” (Revelation 15:3).

Or, do you proclaim Them guilty and declare: “Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have if we pray to Him?” (Job 21:14-15)

Oh, dear reader, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). “Choose for yourselves this day **יהוה** whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

“I Am the Beginning and the End”

In Revelation 1:8, Jesus not only says He is “the Alpha and Omega [the “Aleph-Tav”] but also says He is “the Beginning and the End.” In verse 11^b, He says He is “The First and the Last.” He is indeed “the Author and Finisher of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2).

Taking this concept one step further, let us remember “the law” (Torah) is the first five books of Scripture— from Genesis to Deuteronomy. We have already seen that, by “beginning at Moses” (Genesis), Jesus taught His disciples “all the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27).

It is fascinating that the very first Hebrew letter in the Torah is **ב** (*Bet*) from the Hebrew word *Beresheet* (**B**eginning/Genesis 1:1). The very last letter in the Torah is a **ל** (*Lamed*) from the word *Israel* in the book of Deuteronomy (34:12). If you put these two letters together, they become the Hebrew word **לב** (*lev*) which means, “heart”; showing us that the Torah (God’s law) is the expression of the Father’s very own heart (soul/mind/nature) of eternal righteousness (agapé/love/selflessness).

Therefore, when God says, “I will give you *a new heart* and put a new spirit within you” (Ezekiel 36:26), He is saying He will take away your self-centered heart and give you HIS heart full of all His selfless and sacrificial love towards others— “I will give them a heart to know **יהוה** Me, that I am the LORD” (Jeremiah 24:7)

In addition, it is most fascinating that the very last letter in all of Scripture is **ן** (*Nun*) from the word *Amen* in the book of Revelation (22:21). When we put the **First** letter of the Torah (**ב**) and the **Last** letter together in all of Scripture (**ן**), we can make the Hebrew word **בן**, which means, “Son.”

Thus, all of Scripture (from the **Beginning** to the **End**) reveals that, in order to save (heal) humanity and bring atonement (oneness) between God and man, Christ (the **First** and the **Last**) had to correctly teach and demonstrate the character (heart/love) of God and vindicate Him before the universe.

This great atonement process would justify the Father and His Son in Their dealing with the rebellion of Satan, who was a murderer and liar from the beginning, and establish the perpetuity of the law of God by revealing the nature and the inherent results of sin. "Stand up and bless **יהוה** the LORD your God [i.e., Father and Son] forever and ever!" (Nehemiah 9:5).

In conclusion, we turn once again to E.J. Waggoner who had such a profound insight into this most precious message:

"The arms of the cross that was erected on Calvary, reach from Paradise lost to Paradise restored, and cover the entire world ... The risen Saviour is the crucified Saviour. So as Christ risen is in the heart of the sinner, so also is Christ crucified there. If it were not so, there would be no hope for any.

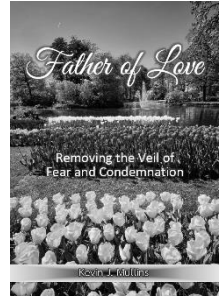
A man may believe that Jesus was crucified eighteen hundred years ago, and may die in his sins; but he who believes that Christ is crucified and risen in him, has salvation. What a glorious thought that wherever sin is, there is Christ, the Saviour from sin! He bears sin, all sin, the sin of the world. Sin is in all flesh, and so Christ is come in the flesh. Christ is crucified in every man that lives on earth. **This is the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation, which is to be proclaimed to all.**" (E.J. Waggoner, *Present Truth UK*, February 10, 1898, pp. 99-100)

The salvation (healing) of humanity depends upon this ever-present truth of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" which reveals the unmeasured risk God took to fix the broken condition of fallen man and bring us back into harmony with God (as revealed by Jesus) and His law (as interpreted by Jesus) and forever prove to the universe the validity of "the everlasting gospel" (Good News) that "God is love."

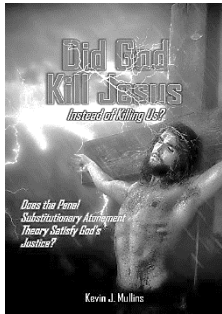
To see a condensed version of this book, see the following:

Father of Love (By Kevin J. Mullins)

In John 14:9 Jesus said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." Trace the evidence that God is a loving God who wants to do us as humans no harm. As the true character of our heavenly Father is revealed through the Spirit of His Son, we begin to see that God is not a blood-thirsty tyrant who is against sinners, but that God and man share a common enemy who seeks to destroy our faith in a non-condemning Father who loves us with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength.



For more info on what you've just read, see the following:



Did God Kill Jesus Instead of Killing Us?

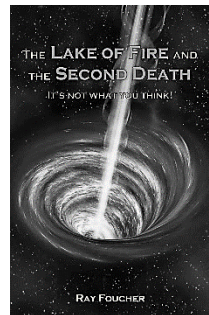
(By Kevin J. Mullins)

The Penal Substitutionary Theory is the most popular way of explaining the gospel in Christian circles. It wrongly teaches that "God is not willing or able to simply forgive sin without first requiring a satisfaction for it" (*Wikipedia*). According to this teaching, in order for His justice to be satisfied, God demands the death of the sinner and therefore, in order to save us, He killed His Son in our place. However, is this really the gospel of the kingdom Jesus came to demonstrate?

The Lake of Fire and the Second Death

(By Ray Foucher)

Contrary to popular belief, the final judgment scene is not about a physical fire burning forever. However, it will be a painful experience - mentally and emotionally. Billions of people will face their own wrong choices and the ultimate choice to not trust in God. With the realization of eternity lost, the degree of regret will be beyond measure. Along with guilt and shame as figurative coals of fire on their heads coming from within themselves, it will literally be enough to crush out their lives in the Second Death. (This is a great companion book to *Consuming Fire*, also available at the website below).



Want to learn more about God's true character?

Explore free e-books, booklets, tracts, and a colorful Q&A section at:

lastmessageofmercy.com



You will never read the Bible the same again!

What did the apostle Paul mean when he penned the following words?

"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2)

Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross daily**, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Is it possible that the meaning of the cross goes well beyond a one-day event and is instead a **daily** lifestyle?

In addition to seeing "**Jesus Christ and Him crucified**" during that violent Passover two thousand years ago, can we see Him carrying His cross during the events of the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt, the destruction of Jerusalem, the crusades during the Dark Ages, and that "**He bore them and carried them all the days of old**" (Isaiah 63:9)?

What about the current war between Israel and Hamas, the coming seven last plagues, and the fiery fate of the unbeliever? Are these events a result of God's justice and pent-up anger against sinners, or fallen humanity's continued desire to "**crucify the Son of God again and again**" (Hebrews 6:6)?

Come and see how the cross of Christ unlocks all the mysteries surrounding the violent events that have taken place throughout history, and how you and I have a role to play in relieving Jesus from His pain and suffering; for "**by His wounds we are healed**" (Isaiah 53:5).

