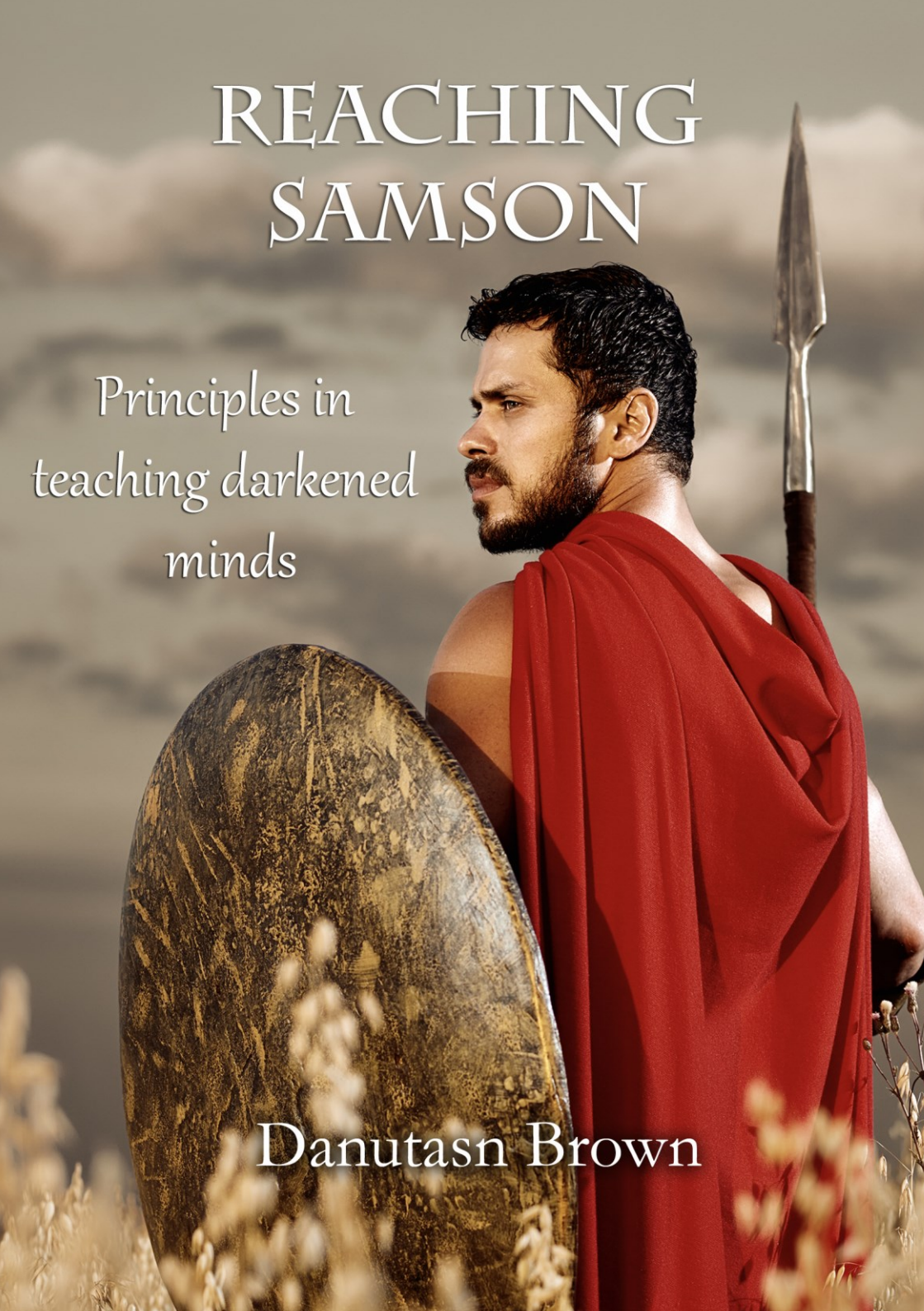


REACHING SAMSON

*Principles in
teaching darkened
minds*

Danutasn Brown



Reaching Samson

Principles in teaching darkened minds

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For Jodi Jones and Karen Prince

In memory of Andrew Agnew, troubled by PTSD due to his time in the
US Special Forces, who died March 1, 2021.



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The Question of War

The question comes up over and over – why all the violence in the Old Testament that seems to be done with the approval of God? How can we understand this when Jesus says to “love your enemies,” and loving them surely doesn’t mean killing them. It is an important question, and one that confounds Christianity just as Jesus confounded Peter when He told him: “Put away your sword. Those who use the sword will die by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52) Peter must have thought, but didn’t Israel defend itself with the sword against its enemies for hundreds of years?

This is a big subject. There is a whole range of wars that occurred in the history of Ancient Israel, from the more noble (Jericho for example) to the more heinous (Israel nearly exterminating the tribe of Benjamin in Judges 19-21). Regardless of whether the reason for the war and its prosecution was more or less justified, the fact remains that killing others is traumatic.

Many people seem to have a lofty ideal of war, especially when it seems as if God orders it or approves of it. It needs to be clearly understood that regardless of who the winner or the loser is, war causes serious trauma and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Here are some examples from the US Civil War (1861-1865):

Take the case of Confederate veteran William James, who first showed signs of derangement shortly after war’s end. Held captive in a northern POW camp, he had emerged physically ill, his mind “much disordered.” An Alabama farmer, he tried to restart his old life by putting in a crop in the fall of 1865. But within a year James had become uncontrollably violent. He threatened to kill his father and endangered his own life by jumping in a well in a failed attempt to kill himself.

Violence, including self-harm, are common indicators of PTSD. Post-war lunatic asylum records are filled with veterans whose uncontrollable rage jeopardized their lives and those of family members.

Like Neal Story. Story was just a teen when he enlisted in Georgia's 46th Infantry. He exhibited "peculiar" behavior during the war, and when he returned home he was "wanting in his former energy and activity." Still, he tried to reintegrate into civilian life as a farmer. But by 1872, he had grown exceedingly violent. He threatened to kill family members and to burn down the house. Desperate, his family built a small log cabin expressly to confine him. Finally, they resorted to institutionalizing him in the Georgia lunatic asylum in Milledgeville where caregivers noted he ate and slept erratically, and was listless and disinclined to move or talk.

Suicidal behavior, another indicator of PTSD, plagued Civil War veterans. While we lack the data to quantify suicide among Civil War veterans, we can draw on contemporary research of veterans of modern wars that provides context for nineteenth-century veterans. We know, for example, that 20% of Vietnam vets made suicidal attempts and another 20% were preoccupied at times with suicidal thoughts. Eric T. Dean Jr.'s path breaking study *Shook Over Hell* found that over half of the residents of an Indiana Civil War veterans' home either attempted or completed suicide or were suicidal.

The downward spiral of Albinus Snelson, a Georgia native who served in the Confederate Cavalry, exemplifies a recovery-and-relapse cycle peppered with multiple suicide attempts. Like Neal Story, Snelson was just a teen when he enlisted. He struggled while a soldier and in fact was discharged early and entered the Georgia asylum, where he attempted to burn himself and throw himself out of windows in efforts to kill himself. He finally succeeded in 1871 when he ingested strychnine.

Civil War soldiers also suffered from delusional paranoia, the kind associated with extreme cases of PTSD. Veteran John Williams was admitted to the Georgia asylum with what we would recognize as post-combat hypervigilance – he was "constantly frightened." He constantly complained that people were trying to kill him. In a state of extreme agitation, he cut his own throat. Forty-year-old Joseph Pearman, a harness maker from Petersburg, Virginia likewise took

his own life in 1875 after protesting that “someone was coming out from the city to kill him.” (<https://www.civilwarmed.org/ptsd/>)

This same sort of traumatized behaviour and thinking would have occurred among the Israelites. They came out of Egypt and warred with the Canaanites for many, many years. When they finally won, and received the Promised Land, did they have peace? No, in fact they entered into the darkest part of their entire history, which is laid out in the Book of Judges. Was it God’s will that a whole people would have PTSD, be suicidal, suffer from delusional paranoia, and become exceedingly violent?

Please keep this idea in mind as we go through this study. Many people think that I am attacking God or the Bible when I ask such questions. I am not. I see the loving, kind, gentle face of Jesus and I believe He wants to give us answers that will help end this spirit of war that resides deep in our flesh.

I wish to lay out a few principles before addressing the story of the Spirit of the Lord coming upon Samson and then he kills a thousand men. When we look at the history of the wars and Israel fighting with their enemies surrounding them, we need to get at the source of the problem: their estrangement and constant misunderstanding of God’s character and will. The Israelites constantly assumed that God was going to let them die. In fact, they even thought He wanted to kill them, even though they had much evidence that God was helping them. They lacked faith in His plan:

And they said unto Moses, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.”

And Moses said unto the people, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” (Exodus 14:11-14)

After this event, they sing a song of victory that includes the line “The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name.” Did the Israelites understand this properly? We know God’s ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), so when He wars it is not like how we war. Was it God’s plan to take Canaan by warfare? Is it His plan for us to claim God’s promises by the sword? Israel thought so:

They had distrusted the power of God to work with their efforts in gaining possession of Canaan; yet now they presumed upon their own strength to accomplish the work independent of divine aid. “We have sinned against the Lord,” they cried; “we will go up and fight, according to all that the Lord our God commanded us.” Deuteronomy 1:41. So terribly blinded had they become by transgression. The Lord had never commanded them to “go up and fight.” **It was not His purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict obedience to His commands.** (PP 392.3)

Obedience was the key. They were to understand the law as being crucial to their salvation and come to love it through knowing and loving God their Father. This would require an understanding of their own sinfulness, which we know is not easy for the human heart “because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” (Romans 8:7)

The Israelites didn’t really believe that God was merciful and good and going to take care of them. At the first sign of difficulty they assumed that God wanted to punish them. This distrust caused them to commit a series of errors that would trap their minds in a false paradigm for generations.

Where did the Israelites get the weapons?

When the Israelites left Egypt, they had no weapons. They were not trained soldiers; they were not an army. How did they come to start using the sword? Some people think they took weapons out with them from Egypt, and a verse that seems to support this is Exodus 13:18 – “But God led the people about, by the way of the wilderness by the Red Sea: and the children of Israel went up **armed** out of the land of Egypt.” (ASV)

But why would slaves have weapons, and why would the Egyptians give them weapons? The word “armed” here is translated “by fifties” in the YLT: “...and **by fifties** have the Sons of Israel gone up from the land of Egypt.” Many commentators believe this doesn’t mean they had weapons, and Ellen White agrees:

Instead of pursuing the direct route to Canaan, which lay through the country of the Philistines, the Lord directed their course southward, toward the shores of the Red Sea. “For God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.” Had they attempted to pass through Philistia, their progress would have been opposed; for the Philistines, regarding them as slaves escaping from their masters, would not have hesitated to make war upon them. The Israelites were poorly prepared for an encounter with that powerful and warlike people. They had little knowledge of God and little faith in Him, and they would have become terrified and disheartened. **They were unarmed and unaccustomed to war**, their spirits were depressed by long bondage, and they were encumbered with women and children, flocks and herds. (PP 282.1)

God knew that the hearts of the Israelites was inclined to war for the land of Canaan – because of their lack of faith and reliance on themselves – even though they were unarmed and unaccustomed to war. God hoped that by taking them through the Red Sea and miraculously winning a battle for them without them needing to fight, they would believe in His goodness and that

He would give them the land without their needing to war. This plan is told Israel in more detail in Exodus 23:27-28

I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy (*weaken/confuse* in other versions) 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. (Exodus 23:27-28)

But if they lacked faith, being influenced by the prevailing idea that gods blessed a nation by giving victory in war, then God would accommodate that idea too. In the great miracle of the Red Sea crossing, God gave the Israelites a choice.

While it is not stated explicitly in the Bible, there is only one place that they could have got weapons – from the bodies of the Egyptian soldiers who washed up onto the beach after drowning from following the Israelites on their miraculous Red Sea crossing.

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. (Exodus 14:30)

By the extraordinary agitation of the waters, no doubt multitudes of the dead Egyptians were cast on the shore, and by their spoils the Israelites were probably furnished with considerable riches, and especially clothing and arms; which latter were essentially necessary to them in their wars with the Amalekites, Basanites, and Amorites, etc., on their way to the promised land. **If they did not get their arms in this way, we know not how they got them, as there is not the slightest reason to believe that they brought any with them out of Egypt.** (Adam Clarke commentary on Exodus 14:30)

Josephus observes that the day following (that night the Egyptians were drowned) the arms of the Egyptians being cast on the shore where the Hebrews encamped, through the force of the sea and wind, Moses gathered them up and armed the Hebrews with them;

and this will account for it how they came to have arms... (Gill commentary)

The Israelites made a terrible decision that day when they decided to take the weapons from the bodies of the dead Egyptians. They should have thought, “we are not soldiers, we don’t know how to use weapons. The LORD has led us this far and saved us without our ever needing to fight. God has promised us Canaan, and He will give it to us, without our needing to kill with our own hands.”

But because of a distrust of God and the perception that He might leave them at any time to fend for themselves, the Israelites thought, “better safe, than sorry.” Let us take these swords just in case. For isn’t God “a man of war?” Maybe they thought God let the swords wash up on the beach for them to take, that it was His will they take them.

What we do know is they had distrust in their hearts even after God had saved them so supernaturally, and it only took 3 days without water from the Red Sea Crossing before they complained of water. God miraculously turned the bitter water at Marah sweet (Exodus 15:22-27), another circumstance designed to give the Israelites more faith. Very soon after this miracle, they once again complained that God wanted to kill them, forgetting all the things before and allowing their faith to shrivel.

On the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:

And the children of Israel said unto them, “Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Exodus 16:1-3)

Only two and half months had passed since the great plagues of Egypt, a time full of amazing signs and wonders, and still the Israelites thought God wouldn’t help them. No wonder they took the swords to defend themselves!

God gave them manna from heaven to eat, but still this wasn't enough. They reach the point where they wanted to stone Moses because there was no water. The Bible never states that they prayed for water. They didn't even ask Moses to pray for them. They just automatically assume that God wants to kill them. Moses strikes the rock, a symbol of Christ, and water is given to them.

And he [Moses] called the name of the place Massah (Temptation) and Meribah (Chiding/Strife), because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us or not? (Exodus 17:7)

It is right after this faithless occasion that Israel fights its first battle with human-made weapons. Amalek attacks Israel, and Israel doesn't think to leave it to God to save them nor consults with God, but goes to fight in their own strength. But Israel is not trained for war. What is God to do? Is He to leave His people because they don't understand His ways, the foolish children they are? Is that how God is?

No, God once again uses this as an opportunity to try to teach them their reliance on Him, to try to bring them back to Him. He connects their success in the battle with Moses lifting His arms and their failure in the battle with the dropping of Moses's arms. God would work through their false conception of Him to try to teach them obedience to Him. He would use something they could see to encourage their faith in things they couldn't see.

God knows that only through obedience will they have life and peace, and only by the experience of life and peace through following God's commands will they ever come to believe, trust, and have faith in Him and want to know His character. If God were to totally leave them because they chose to war, they would never understand. This comes to the hugely important point of God's accommodation to man, told beautifully through the Hunter Illustration.

How does a Father deal with children that don't trust or believe him?

There is a great illustration Fred Wright uses to illustrate this dilemma in his book *Behold Your God*. It really helped me to understand how God may have felt. It may be relevant to any situation where children are being influenced by the world against the wishes of Godly parents. Particularly for our study here, hunting can be seen as an analogy for warfare.

“Picture a smallish town located in an area where wild animals, such as bears, deer, mountain sheep, and various big cats abound. As is to be expected, the majority of men in the town are keen hunters never missing the opportunity to take their guns and track down some game.

But one man was different. He had the love of God in his heart and to kill the beautiful dwellers in the forests and mountains was contrary to his nature. Therefore, he was never seen in company of those who sought their adventures in the blood of others.

For their part, they were troubled by this odd man and never lost an occasion to try to persuade him to join them. At one time they even bought him a splendid hunting rifle for his birthday. With Christian graciousness he gently declined the gift.

This was naturally resented, causing those men to increase the pressure on him. But despite this, year after year there was no change in him. The only equipment with which he would hunt was a good camera.

This man had a fine son whom he was most anxious to protect from the influence of the hunters. He worked untiringly to instil into him the same love of the wildlife which he possessed, and was gratified to see that he was having good success in this direction. Thus the father was working to have the boy do things his way as distinct from the hunters' way.

But the father did not take away the boy's freedom of choice. When the boy eventually reached later youth, he became answerable for himself and was

no longer under the direct control and discipline of his father. Then he received an invitation to spend some weeks away from home and, eager to see new country, accepted the offer.

This was a clever plot by the huntsmen, who took their sons along. They hoped that their sons would have a greater influence over him once he was away from his father. The boys urged him to try hunting just once to see how he liked it. Feeling that no harm would be done by an on-the-spot personal assessment of the hunting business, he went along.

His first reaction was unfavourable but something about the challenge, thrill, and excitement drew him in, and soon he was an enthusiastic devotee. He went to the store, selected a beautifully engineered weapon, and in due time returned with it to his dismayed father.

He had exercised his choice, and now the father was confronted with a situation which required a response. How would he now relate himself to this turn of events? Clearly the young man had instituted in his life a course contrary to the ways of his father and of God.

For the boy's father, as for God, the choice lay between several alternatives.

1. Disown the son.

The first option was to disown the son, forbidding his entrance into the home and requiring he go his own separate way. The justification for this would have been the certainty that the principles of father and son could never harmonize.

2. Force him to surrender.

Another course would have called for the use of force to coerce the lad's surrender to his father's wishes and ways. This was not the answer for two reasons. Firstly, the youth had achieved the age of independence, so it would have been impossible for the father to achieve the desired result anyway. But secondly, it was not in this father's nature, any more than it is in the

character of God, to use force. To them the only acceptable service is that which springs from an educated heart of love.

3. Ignore the problem.

A third alternative was to quietly ignore the change, pretend that the rifle had never been brought into the home, and act as if all were well when, in fact, it was not. Again, this was no way out, for sin cannot be ignored. Neither love nor justice will permit it. Iniquity demands attention. A response to it will always be forthcoming whether it be the saving outreach of love or the vindictive reaction of destructive hate.

Having considered and rejected each of these possibilities, what would have been left for this godly man to do? What would God do in the same situation?

Firstly, the boy's father recognized that his son had placed himself, other people, domestic livestock, and wild animals, in a position of great danger. Being an inexperienced and untrained rifleman, he needed to learn:

- The necessity of looking beyond the target to ensure that there were no buildings, people, or farm animals in the line of fire;
- How to carry the weapon safely and how to climb through fences so that he did not, as so many have done, shoot himself or his friends;
- The awful potential of a ricochet which endangers life far to the right or left of the original target;
- To come close enough to the game to reduce the possibility of only wounding the animal which would then drag itself away to suffer a lingering death.

These and others things he could be taught in order to save himself and others from the worst effects of what he had chosen.

While the father could no longer save the youth from taking the gun, he could, if permitted, provide the instruction needed to save him from these serious consequences. Even the wild animals would benefit from this saving

ministry, for, while they could not be saved from death, they could be delivered from a painful and lingering one.

As the response of God and those who walk with Him will always be the outreach of saving love, there is only one course among those suggested above that the Lord or this father would follow. God is by nature a saviour. So too is the father pictured in this illustration. When God is blocked from saving people in one area, He will still exercise His saving power in whatever ways remain.

Thus, when the boy's father found that his long pursued objectives of saving the youth from taking up weapons had failed, he still recognized that there was much he could do to save the boy from the worst effects of what he had chosen. So, sadly but with tender dignity, the father drew his son aside and spoke with him. He expressed disappointment that the younger man had chosen to go the way he had, but assured him that he would respect his decision fully.

He gently suggested that there were dangers associated with the use of such a weapon, from which perils he could only be safeguarded by receiving and obeying a number of specific precautions. The father intimated that he was more than willing to carefully instruct the son in these things so that he would be saved from accidents.

This father seems to be instructing this young man to be a hunter. But in fact, he is advising the lad, who has elected to be a killer against his father's wishes, how to be safe and merciful in the use of a gun.



The son, relieved that his parent was not launching against him a fiery denunciation, no longer braced himself to resist such pressure. Instead he expressed his willingness to learn. **By so doing he exhibited the strange quirk of human behaviour which gives men an unwillingness to obey God where the higher levels of faith are concerned, but permits them to follow His counsel at lesser levels.**

Israel, for instance, was not prepared to trust God fully by leaving the sword alone, but they accepted and followed His counsels regarding the restrictions designed to minimize its evils. In like manner, the son who had abandoned his father's principles regarding the total rejection of firearms, was prepared to respect his counsels in the use of them.

So the father introduced the training session by emphasizing that nothing he was about to do or say indicated that he had changed in any way.

God, who has been placed in the same position by the determination of His children to take up weapons of destruction, has likewise solemnly warned that His effort to save them from the worst effects of what they have chosen does not indicate any change in Him, even though His actions could and have been interpreted otherwise.

“I am the Lord, I do not change.” (Malachi 3:6)

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

“...with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)

Despite the fact that men know that before sin entered God never destroyed, and despite these solemn declarations from God that no change has ever occurred in Him, men still look on His everlasting efforts to save and interpret them as being the actions of one who has become like man himself. [Psalm 50:21]

The father in our story did not have to change his ways in order to instruct the son how to be a kind killer. Neither did God have to change His ways to save Israel from being cruel users of the sword. Neither of them took life. They were only bent on saving it. And when that was no longer attainable, they tried to save it from as much as suffering as possible.

Now suppose that one of the villagers, the man who had most ardently sought to convert the father, had happened to come down the lane as this session was in progress. From a distance too great to hear all that was being said, he beheld the father instructing the son in the use of firearms.

What assumptions will this man make? What conclusions will he draw?

He never had the spirit of the father and therefore could never understand it. Accordingly, there was no possibility of his correctly assessing what the father was doing. Instead he would have interpreted what he saw as sure proof that the father had changed.

The onlooker would have lost no time in returning to his hunting companions to announce the father's conversion. He would have told them that he was now one of them—a gunman. He would have offered, as proof to his incredulous listeners, what he had seen of the father actually instructing the boy in gun-handling.

His report of the physical actions of the father was factually true, for this is exactly what he had seen the father doing, but the conclusions drawn from those evidences were the opposite from the truth.

Even as that father was misjudged, so God has likewise been.”

From Pages 328-333 of *Behold Your God* by F. T. Wright (1979)

Can you see the parallel between this story of the father dealing with his son and God having to deal with His people in light of the decisions they made? Man has fallen deep into sin, and he holds ideas that are not easily changed. The world we live in affects everything about how we think; our ideas of justice, law, success, wickedness, and righteousness are all contaminated. This includes how we perceive God.

Jesus articulates an idea similar to this when the Pharisees question him on why Moses allowed for divorce when Jesus is saying divorce is not God's plan. He responded like this:

They say unto Jesus, “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?”

Jesus saith unto them, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.”

(Matthew 19:7-8)

Warlike Worldview Becomes Locked-In

God worries intensely (or jealously, as Bible often states) for the people He has taken out of Egypt. He knows that their time in Egypt has deeply influenced their thinking, and that their wrong thinking is going to lead them into much hardship and difficulty. God has a plan. He knows the Israelites are scared of Him, yet He must come to them as they imagine Him to be or they will not fear and respect Him – not because God wants to scare people, but because for us to not fear and respect Him as creator and upholder of the world means we will fear and respect the idols of our imagination to our own detriment. It grieves Him to see our lack of consideration for Him and His law, because this lack of consideration will have the consequence of hurting us in the future.

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

And they said unto Moses, “Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

And Moses said unto the people, “Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.”

And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. (Exodus 20:18-21)

Imagine, God’s word that is life to us they perceive as bringing death! They will not love God, but will they at least fear Him? No they won’t, for very soon after they make a Golden Calf and the Ten Commandments are broken by Moses in front of them. At this point people unfamiliar with this story would assume that the Israelites will be disowned. But God has a plan to win back their love through Moses.

Through all the calamity, God is able to soften the heart of Moses. He draws out of Moses a plea for His people, and this allows Moses to see the mercy of God in more depth. He shows Moses His character (“merciful and gracious,

longsuffering..." Exodus 34:6) Moses sees the plan of salvation and comes to understand the goodness of God in giving His Son that we may have forgiveness of sin and have the law written in our hearts. God then sends Moses to share this beautiful good news with the Israelite people. But something heart-breaking happens.

And it came to pass, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses knew not that the skin of his face shone...And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him...And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face. (Exodus 34:29-30, 33)

While Moses was shut in the mount with God, the plan of salvation, dating from the fall of Adam, was revealed to him in a most forcible manner. He then knew that the very angel who was conducting the travels of the children of Israel was to be revealed in the flesh. God's dear Son, who was one with the Father, was to make all men one with God who would believe on, and trust in him. Moses saw the true significance of the sacrificial offerings. Christ taught the gospel plan to Moses, and the glory of the gospel, through Christ, illuminated the countenance of Moses so that the people could not look upon it.

Moses himself was unconscious of the beaming glory reflected upon his face, and knew not why the children of Israel fled from him when he approached them. **He called them to him, but they dared not look upon that glorified face. When Moses learned that the people could not look upon his face, because of its glory, he covered it with a vail.** (ST March 14, 1878)

The Israelites rejected the light. They couldn't stand the true character of God, and they asked Moses to put a vail over His face. They rejected God's glory, which is His character. They would not know the plan of salvation more deeply. They had locked-in their decision to not speak to God directly or to know Him as He truly was – a being of character just like His Son Jesus

showed in His life on earth. The Israelites have made up their minds; they would take Canaan according to their own works. They would follow the letter of the law, but not the spirit. Would God cut them off now? No, He would walk with them in their path and keep calling to them to recognize the error of their ways and to change. Thus begins the tragic history of the nation of Israel.

God Speaks to Israel through the Lens of War

The Israelites had chosen war, and now their history would revolve around it. They would struggle through all sorts of up and downs. When they obeyed God, they would be victorious in battle. Their victory would make them proud and they would become self-confident. They would then proceed to not consult the Lord and they would become lax in their obedience. They would then lose their next battle. Then they would repent and draw near to God again, constantly repeating this cycle.

Their history is defined by this up and down with the occasional realization of what was happening. This became their relationship with God, their experience of faith. We see this inability to break out of this cycle even among the greatest generation of Israelites – those under Joshua. They took Jericho through faith, and soon after this happened:

The great victory which God had gained for them had made the Israelites self-confident. Because the Lord had promised them the land of Canaan, they felt secure, and failed to realize the necessity of putting forth every effort in their power, and then humbly seeking for divine help, which alone could give them the victory. Even Joshua laid his plans for the conquest of Ai, without seeking by earnest prayer to obtain counsel from God.

The congregation of Israel had begun to exalt their own strength and skill, and to look with contempt upon the inhabitants of the land. Jericho had been marvellously overthrown, and an easy victory was expected at Ai. Hence three thousand men were considered sufficient to make the attack. The Israelites rushed into battle, without the assurance that God would be with them. They were unprepared for the determined resistance which they met, and, terrified by the numbers and thorough preparation of their enemies, they turned and fled. They were hotly pursued by the Canaanites, and thirty-six of their number slain.

The unexpected defeat brought grief and discouragement upon the whole congregation of Israel. Joshua looked upon their ill-success as

an expression of God's displeasure, and in deep humiliation he fell to the earth upon his face before the ark. The elders of Israel united with him in this act of self-abasement, and dumb with astonishment and dismay they remained in this position until the even. Then Joshua presented the matter before the Lord in earnest prayer:

“Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us around, and cut off our name from the earth; and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?”

Joshua manifested a true zeal for the honor of God, yet his petitions were mingled with doubt and unbelief. The thought that God had brought his people over the Jordan to deliver them up to the power of the heathen was a sinful one, unworthy of a leader of Israel. Joshua's feelings of despondency and distrust were inexcusable in view of the mighty miracles which God had wrought for the deliverance of his people, and the repeated promise that he would be with them in driving out the wicked inhabitants of the land.

But our merciful God did not visit his servant with wrath because of this error. He graciously accepted the humiliation and prayers of Joshua, and at the same time gently rebuked his unbelief, and then revealed to him the cause of their defeat.. (ST April 21, 1881, par. 2-7)

I share this not to look down upon Joshua and the Israelites, for we surely are the same – Ellen White has said we are repeating the history of that nation. What I want to notice is how there is no recognition of deeper underlying sinfulness, no asking of forgiveness in Joshua's prayer. There is instead the tenor of accusation against God: “Wherefore has thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?” This is the mindset that the Jews were locked into.

God does not leave His people. He has made a promise to Abraham and His seed. It was always possible for Israel to come out of its wrong understanding of God. Several successive generations of true worship with no idolatry, while diligently searching the law and repenting of sin, could have risen their experience of faith to a much greater level. But this isn't what happened. Ancient Israel was unwilling to change its view of God, instead stoning the prophets who were offering teachings that would have served as stepping stones eventually leading into a higher, holier perspective. That is why John the Baptist, who the Son of God said was the greatest of the prophets, fell into doubt and dismay when he didn't see God acting the way he was taught God would act.

Like the Saviour's disciples, John the Baptist did not understand the nature of Christ's kingdom. He expected Jesus to take the throne of David; and as time passed, and the Saviour made no claim to kingly authority, John became perplexed and troubled. He had declared to the people that in order for the way to be prepared before the Lord, the prophecy of Isaiah must be fulfilled; the mountains and hills must be brought low, the crooked made straight, and the rough places plain. He had looked for the high places of human pride and power to be cast down. He had pointed to the Messiah as the One whose fan was in His hand, and who would thoroughly purge His floor, who would gather the wheat into His garner, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Like the prophet Elijah, in whose spirit and power he had come to Israel, he looked for the Lord to reveal Himself as a God that answereth by fire. (DA 215.2)

John the Baptist had inherited this view of God from his forefathers. And if the greatest Israelites were unable to understand the nature of Christ's kingdom, how would those living in the darkest times of Ancient Israel? Let us now take a look at the Book of Judges.

As Ye Judge, Ye Shall Be Judged

The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen the great works of the Lord. Their sins were repented of and forgiven, but the seed of evil had been sown, and it sprang up to bear fruit. Joshua's life of steadfast integrity closed. His voice was no longer heard in reproof and warning. One by one the faithful sentinels who had crossed the Jordan laid off their armor. **A new generation came upon the scene of action. The people departed from God. Their worship was mingled with erroneous principles and ambitious pride...**

Man is prone to forget God, though claiming to serve him. The people of Nazareth thought they loved Christ, but when he showed them that they were no more the favorites of heaven than were the Gentiles, they dragged him from the synagogue, and tried to throw him from the crown of the hill. The multitudes who were fed by Christ thought they loved him, until he told them that they cared more for the bread that perishes than for the bread of eternal life. The rich young ruler thought he loved the Saviour. He had listened to the gracious words that fell from his lips, and had seen his wonderful works. But when the Saviour said, "Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me," he went away sorrowful, clinging to his idol. He loved his riches more than he loved Christ. Simon the Pharisee thought he loved Jesus, until he found that the Saviour did not esteem him as highly as he did a poor, sorrowful, repentant woman.

Many see much to admire in the life of Christ. But true love for him can never dwell in the heart of the self-righteous. **Not to see our own deformity is not to see the beauty of Christ's character. When we are fully awake to our own sinfulness, we shall appreciate Christ.** (RH September 25, 1900)

I quoted this extensive section because I hoped to show what the great problem is, for them as for us. As we enter the Book of Judges, the mistakes of their predecessors are expanded. Because they are already in the 'promised land,' they feel safe. They forget what God has done for them.

They refuse to understand their own sinfulness, the consequences of that sinfulness, and the workings of Christ's kingdom. Thus we get this type of cycle repeated over and over again:

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves. Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years. And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer [saviour] to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother... (Judges 3:7-10)

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel...So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera... (Judges 3:12, 14-15)

And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan...And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD... (Judges 4:1-3)

Because the Israelites perceived God as a God of war and punishment, they perceived all His laws as only necessary in times of crisis – when they perceived themselves being punished or under persecution. They didn't see that God would take care of them in the good times also, and they couldn't see how His laws would also bless them in their harvest and in their families, in their health and in their relationships with the neighbouring nations. They saw the law as a burden rather than a blessing, something to be done to win God's favor.

When the land did have peace, it was because they were in awe to a man through whom God had delivered them (a judge) – they didn't see that the

deliverer was just a channel for the Father, the source of all good things. God was trying to work with them, but they were limiting what He could do through their unbelief. God wouldn't force them to see Him differently. Their inability to love God meant that it was impossible for them to love their enemies.

Notwithstanding their apostasy and great wickedness, the Lord did not utterly forsake his people. From time to time he raised up faithful and valiant men to deliver them from the oppression of their enemies. But the hearts of the people had become so corrupted by an evil course that it was not an easy task to restore purity of faith or of worship. When the deliverer was dead, and the people were released from his authority, they would return to their idolatry...

The Lord sought to bring his people into a position where he could manifest his power in their behalf; but their hearts were set to depart from God, and they would not submit to his requirements. What blindness! what inexplicable folly! and equally incomprehensible is the course of those whom God has endowed with intellectual gifts and surrounded with temporal blessings, yet who will prefer worldly gain, and even the indulgence of debasing passions, to the favor of God and his infinite love. (ST June 9, 1881)

God would deliver them when they asked, but it was only in accordance to their judgment of His character. That's why we see that their judges came in the manner they did, all being generals of war. This would later cause them to think that the Messiah would be the same, not realizing that God had only been working in their framework and that God Himself was not actually like them.

This reliance on a man to judge them and keep them doing what was right showed that they didn't have the law in their hearts. They continuously walked by sight, rather than by faith (opposite of 2 Cor 5:7). This mentality of having a man lead them rather than God, or a man that would take responsibility for obeying God so as to lessen the people's own responsibility, would eventually manifest in their demand for a king.

Israel Demands a King

And the Lord said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.” (1 Samuel 8:7-9)

For the first 500 years of Israel’s existence, they had no King. They were split into different tribes and God was their king. But they tired of this system that was different than all the other nations, and demanded a king of the last judge of Israel, Samuel. Samuel feels hurt, but God assures him that it is God they are rejecting, not Samuel. Their demand also grieves God. God knows that their demand for a king is going to hurt them because He knows the future.

God gives them what they want, but not without warning them first about what a king will do – he will take their sons as soldiers, take their harvest, tax them, force their daughters to work for him, take their animals, etc. A king will oppress them. But notice the significant fact that even though they ignore the warning, God doesn’t leave them. He helps them pick a king, and He attempts to lead that king. He makes laws for such a scenario. But remember, it doesn’t mean that God wanted a king.

This is called His permissive will, His adjustment for a scenario He didn’t originally want, like the father who taught His Son how to hunt to ensure his and others’ safety. This is in contrast to God’s perfect will, which is what He would rather have. One example of God’s perfect will was for us to accept Christ, not kill him; but once we killed Him He had a plan in place to use it for our good. Ultimately His perfect will was for man never to eat the forbidden fruit, and everything since has been His permissive will.

Here is Ray Foucher's explanation from his excellent website, www.characterofgod.org

Since there was no established monarchy and line of succession from it, who would be king? God knew the sort of king they desired, He made the decision and chose a man who would please them. On the day the king was presented, they were reminded again that it was not a good idea:

“And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.” (1 Sam 10:19)

“And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, **he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?** And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.” (1 Sam 10:23-24)

Here we notice that it says the LORD chose Saul and that he was taller than everyone else. But this was God choosing someone after their own hearts; a man being taller is a visible characteristic of worthiness that means everything to humans and little to God. After Saul's first military victory as king, Samuel presented him again and confirmed that Saul was their choice:

“Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the LORD hath set a king over you.” (1 Sam 12:13)

Saul was their choice, not God's – this was a second accommodation on God's part. God picked Saul, but Saul was a man who matched the parameters of what they – the people – wanted. If God had felt free to pick a man to be king at that point it would have been someone like

David, but David would not have been accepted as he did not fit the image of what the Israelites felt was required of a king.

Again, the Israelite demanding of a king was as being sinful:

And all the people said unto Samuel, “Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.”

And Samuel said unto the people, “Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.” (1 Sam 12:19-20)

While they had done wickedly, they had not totally turned from following God, and He continued to work with them despite their choices – how gracious is God! Even when Saul didn’t work out, God continued allowing the monarchy but He personally chose the second king. The failure of the first king would humble the Israelites enough for them to accept a king closer God’s own heart:

“But now thy [Saul’s] kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man [David] after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.” (1 Sam 13:14)

God, while not approving, worked with them within the choices they had made. We know that God did not approve of Israel having a monarchy, but He continued to accommodate them. But where did it lead? To begin with God was their king:

“And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king.” (1 Sam 12:12)

Ultimately the Israelites would completely reject Christ their king:

“... Away with him, away with him, crucify him. ... We have no king but Caesar.” (John 19:15)

<https://characterofgod.org/gods-accommodation-for-man/>

This principle of working with man where he is at and through the choices he makes, though it's not God's ideal plan, is also called God's Accommodation. We see through all this how God works. The people wouldn't have accepted David if he was chosen from the beginning; they hardly even accepted Saul. If God had let them choose a king themselves, there would have been a massive civil war. So God did the best He could according to what their faith allowed. He didn't destine Saul for failure; He gave Saul His Spirit to fully equip him to do the task of being king. But when Saul failed, God used it to try to show the people how it reflected their own failure. He allowed sin to abound, so grace would much more abound (Rom 5:20), if they could just recognize it. God hopes all these lessons would be studied by those who live after, not to make us proud and think ourselves better, but to recognize ourselves in them and thereby learn from their mistakes.

Although the Israelites, as a nation, departed from God, yet there was ever a remnant who resolutely withstood the evil influences surrounding them, and maintained their allegiance to Jehovah. These were constantly growing in courage and true godliness. They clung to the Lord more firmly as they saw the apostasy of their brethren. Their faith grew stronger, with every conflict. (ST June 9, 1881, par. 4)

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

Shall we Continue in Sin, that Grace may Abound?

I want to stop here to make sure I am not misunderstood. We should never think to serve God by breaking the law. It is tempting to believe that God's will and grace can overcome all things, and therefore we can sin and repent later, like David, Solomon, and Samson. This idea is addressed by Paul:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? (Romans 6:1-2)

We deceive ourselves when we use the mistakes of Godly men to justify ourselves, and we forget the great suffering they went through as a consequence of those sins. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal 6:7) This is one of the most important lessons we should learn from the Bible.

Sin is deceptive, and we flirt with it at the risk of our soul. It is not everyone that can grab hold of repentance. We see this in the distinction between Peter and Judas, and we should not just assume that if we betray Christ that we can still be forgiven and have the experience of Peter, rather than of Judas.

Some teach that we can do things that are not lawful as long as the goal is good. In modern terms this is called 'the ends justifies the means.' This idea was propagated by the "Church Fathers" of the 4th Century, and it was one of the main causes of sinking Christianity deep into corruption and degeneracy.

"One scarcely knows in what terms of reprobation to speak of that license, which too many of the most eminent fathers of this century [4th century] allowed themselves, when they expressed their opinions in mystic terms for expediency sake; or when they outstepped the limits of truth in the warmth of argument; or when they indulged in exaggerated statements, rhetorical hyperbole, and bombastic flourishes, in conformity with the custom and taste of the times.

This unworthy practice has been rightly called ‘Falsitas Dispensativa,’ fraudulent management, or, license to conceal the truth, or to use falsehood as circumstances may require; and it has been vindicated and followed by the admirers of patristical antiquity in a manner which shews too plainly that there is a proneness in the human mind, under fanatical excitement, to ‘believe a lie.’

It was this ‘Falsitas Dispensativa,’ which enabled Jerome and his contemporaries to build up that structure called the church of the fourth century, so unlike ‘The holy temple of the Lord fitly framed together on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.’” (*Vigilantius and His Times*, W.S. Gilly, 1844)

This idea was also infamously inherited and put into practice by the Jesuits, the order at the forefront of the Counter-Reformation. They called it “mental reservation,” or a “lie of necessity.” It was also called equivocation. We must be careful about this. The continual practice of investing ourselves in things and ideas because they are expedient rather than being true can become second nature, and if so sin no longer seems like sin for us – a terrible state to be in.

We must be careful not to learn the wrong lessons from the Bible. By explaining the principle of accommodation, I hope the reader sees God’s mercy even in man’s sinfulness, not that man’s sinfulness is acceptable to God. Let us remember what is spoken of God’s final people:

And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God. (Rev 14:5)

Samson's Ungodly Marriage and the Moral State of Israel

In the life of Samson we see clearly the principle of God's accommodation. He was called of God, and it was the will of God that He be holy and "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." (Judges 13:5) God definitely didn't want him to marry a Philistine woman. So when Samson married a Philistine, did God cut off Samson and take back the promise? No, God would work through Samson's errors, continuing to teach him and trying to draw him back. But now we enter God's permissive will rather than His perfect will. We shouldn't think that we should also marry unbelievers because God worked through Samson in that way. God would have worked through Samson in a better way, with less suffering for him and for others, if he had married a believer. God's perfect will is always better than His permissive will.

Had Samson as faithfully obeyed the divine command as his parents had done, his would have been a nobler and happier destiny...

Thus at the time above all others when he should have maintained entire consecration to the will of God, just as he was entering upon the stage of manhood, the period when he must execute his divine mission,—at this critical point in his life history, Samson yielded to the tempter, and by an unwise marriage placed himself in alliance with the enemies of God. This important step was not carefully considered. Samson did not ask himself whether he could better glorify God when united with the object of his fancy, or whether he was placing himself in a position where he could not fulfill the purpose to be accomplished by his life. To all who seek first to honor Him, God has promised wisdom; but there is no promise to those who desire only to please themselves. (ST Oct 6, 1881)

We also must remember the context they were in, that of refusing to see the full character of God and choosing instead to perceive God as a harsh and demanding god of warfare. For them, being delivered meant victory in war. This was true also for the Gentiles, who worshipped gods based on their

power and ability to help them in war, not for the goodness of their character.

We see throughout the book of Judges and most of the Old Testament that it never occurs to the Israelites to share the goodness of Jehovah, or the plan of salvation. On the occasions when they do taste of the graciousness of God, they think it because of their birthright as sons of Abraham. Samson doesn't think to turn the Philistines to the one true God. This was the mindset they were in. But God understands the difficulty for us in rising above the environment, culture, and history we are in, and regardless of his failures, Samson is listed as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11.

Notice the suffering caused by Samson's decision, and the sorry state of the Israelite people at the time. At least Samson had the courage to stand up to the Philistines, in contrast to the majority of his countrymen.

The wife, to obtain whom Samson had transgressed the command of God, proved treacherous to her husband ere the close of the marriage feast, and at last was put to death by the very class whose threats had caused her perfidy. Samson had already given evidence of his prodigious strength, by slaying, single-handed, a young lion, and by killing thirty of the men of Askelon. Now, moved to anger at the barbarous murder of his wife, he attacked the Philistines, "and smote them with great slaughter." Then, wishing a safe retreat from the Philistines, **and fearing to trust his own countrymen**, he withdrew to a strong rock called Elam, in the tribe of Judah.

To this place he was pursued by a large body of Philistines, whose presence excited great alarm among the inhabitants of Judah. **When they learned that the sole object of the invasion was to take Samson captive, they basely agreed to deliver him up to his enemies. In so doing they hoped to secure the favor of the Philistines, and thus lighten their own oppression.** Accordingly three thousand men of Judah went up to take the mighty warrior. But even at such odds they dared to make the attempt only because they felt assured that he would not harm his own people. Samson consented to be bound and delivered to the Philistines, but first

exacted from the men of Judah a promise not to fall upon him themselves, and thus compel him to destroy them. He permitted them to bind with two new ropes, and to take him down to the Philistines...

Had the Israelites been prepared to unite with Samson, and follow up the victory gained, they might at this time have freed themselves from the power of the Philistines. But they had become weak and discouraged. They had basely neglected the work which God had commanded them to perform with diligence, thoroughness, and valor; not only failing to dispossess the heathen, but uniting with them in their degrading practices, tolerating their cruelty, and, so long as it was not directed against themselves, even countenancing their injustice. When at last the tyrant power was triumphant, Israel submitted to the degradation which they might have escaped, had they only obeyed God. Even when the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, they would frequently desert the one chosen to set things in order, and would unite with their bitterest oppressors. (ST October 6, 1881)

We see the terrible consequences of Samson's ungodly marriage – the death of many people and much suffering. We also see how fallen the Israelites had become. They had resigned themselves to being servants of the Philistines, and wished only to "lighten their own oppression." They had totally lost faith in God to deliver them, and even with this mighty warrior in their midst they didn't think to help him or fight with him. Even when God gave them a deliverer according to their desire, they still rejected him! If God had given a deliverer that was more Christlike, they would even more reject him. God condescends down to our level to raise us up, hoping to draw out even a little faith on our part that can be built upon – yet even this is rarely accepted.

Samson Slays a Thousand with a Jawbone

And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. (Judges 15:14-15)

The question is asked, how can it be according to the character of God for the Spirit of the LORD to come upon Samson and then he kill a thousand men? The words "came mightily upon" give the impression of the Spirit of Christ entering into Samson and doing the works... but can we imagine the "holy, harmless, and undefiled" (Hebrews 7:26) Son of God doing such a thing? God forbid.

So what does it mean when the Spirit of the LORD comes upon someone? Let us look at the Hebrew and follow William Miller's rules. The word is H6743 and is almost always translated "to prosper." This is how the Young's Literal Translation has it:

...and **the Spirit of Jehovah prospereth over him**...his bands are wasted from off his hands, and findeth a fresh jaw-bone of an ass, and putteth forth his hand and taketh it, and smiteth with it – a thousand men. (Judges 15:14-15)

A better understanding of the Spirit prospering Samson is God allowed him to win, or protected him in battle, rather than Jesus being in him while the works are done. Could it be said of Cyrus, a Gentile that God calls "His anointed," that "the Spirit of the Lord prospereth him" when he won a battle against incredible odds (taking Babylon), a battle that humanly he should have lost?

Another example of this use of "prosper" is here:

Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it...And he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, saith the Lord:

though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not **prosper**. (Jeremiah 32:3,5)

God wanted Israel to win over the nations by the righteousness of its government, the uprightness of its laws, and the moral integrity of its citizens. But Israel followed the other nations into warring, into having a king, into idolatry. Even though it is not God's original plan, still no king, army, or government can prosper without the Spirit of God. "The Spirit of the LORD" coming upon Samson can be understood in this sense – God gave Samson the confidence, the vigor, and the vitality to succeed, though it is not Christ's character.

Even still, let us look at the verse, Judges 15:14-15 more carefully. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him "and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands." That was the immediate result of the Spirit of the LORD, not the killing. God helped him to escape, but it was up to Samson to decide what he would do next.

And Samson said, "With the Jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men."

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi.

And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, "Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?"

But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereof; and he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived... (Judges 15:16-19)

Samson gave glory to himself rather than to God. A man with the spirit of Christ doesn't glory in himself, but always gives praise to the Father and the

Son – so when Samson said those words after the killing, it shows that God was not with him in the killing. Jesus said:

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. (John 5:30)

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. (John 16:13-14)

Samson glorying in himself would be a terrible influence on the Jews, who would be led to worship man rather than God, and the Philistines, who wouldn't see that Jehovah had given the victory. The people of those times were often turning men into gods, and the actions of Samson would lead to more idol hero-worship among the Israelites and the Gentiles. Remember, God is working in the paradigm they are in.

Thousands of Israelites witnessed Samson's defeat of the Philistines, yet no voice was raised in triumph, till the hero, elated at this marvelous success, celebrated his own victory. But he praised himself, instead of ascribing the glory to God. No sooner had he ceased than he was reminded of his weakness by a most intense and painful thirst. He had become exhausted by his prodigious labors, and no means of supplying his need was at hand. **He began to feel his utter dependence upon God, and to be convinced that he had not triumphed by his own power, but in the strength of the Omnipotent One.** (ST October 6, 1881, par. 13)

God gave Samson the power, which Samson received while rejecting God's character. This is part of how God recognizes our free will. It is the same with Satan, who has much power, which all comes from God, while rejecting God's character. But this power is given in probation, with the hope that finally the character of God will be accepted and therefore a man may enter into everlasting life.

All our deeds are done through the power of God, even those done by wicked men. The graceful pianist, the great football player, the ultra-marathon runner – all owe their vitality and growth to the power of God. The issue is whether we recognize that power is coming from God, repent of using it sinfully (selfishly), and turn back to Him and live according to His will (in His character); or we accept life/power from God in the Spirit of Satan, torturing Christ the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24) by using it for wickedness and sin, eventually leading to our everlasting death.

Samson used God's power for sinful purposes, but God didn't cut him off. Instead God caused him to realize his weakness through his thirst. God helped Samson recognize the error of his ways in proclaiming himself great, when everything he had, and everything we have, comes only from God.

God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.

Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work. (Psalm 62:11-12)

Samson, like many of us, was acting under competing principles of life: the desire of the Spirit of Christ in us to honor God and the desire of our own carnal flesh, encouraged by Satan, to honor ourselves. Because Samson had not fully hardened himself to the Spirit of God, He still had the capacity to come into repentance and fullness of faith. This must have happened, even if it took much calamity for him to get there, because Samson is one of the heroes of faith mentioned by Paul in Hebrews 11.

Assuming that God has done it

So did God kill a thousand men with a jawbone? No, God used man's sinfulness – in this case his warlike nature – to teach a lesson and draw him closer. Samson assumed that his killing was what God wanted because that was how he was taught. This is just like Elijah who thought that God was in the earthquake, in the wind, in the fire. This is just like the disciples, who assumed the God was the one who sent fire from heaven when Elijah called it down.

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

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

If the Son of man has come not to destroy, but to save, can we ever attribute destruction to him? The Bible states that Satan is the destroyer (1 Cor 10:10; the Greek word for destroyer there is “venomous serpent”). This is paralleled by Jesus's own words:

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

Yet we assume that Christ killed the firstborn of Egypt, burned up Nadab and Abihu, swallowed Korah in a pit (see booklet *The Rebellion of Korah*), killed the Assyrians with plague. Generally all calamities and natural disasters are thought to be caused by God and that is why they are called ‘Acts of God’ in insurance documents. But God is not like this and this is a lesson we all need to learn.

It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan. The disobedient and unthankful have great reason for gratitude for God's mercy and

long-suffering in holding in check the cruel, malignant power of the evil one. But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. **God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression;** but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown which yields its unfailing harvest. The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan. (GC 36)

When John was confused because Jesus wasn't doing what he expected (to become a worldly king and rule the nations), he sent messengers to Jesus to ask Him about His mission. John's disciples watched Jesus heal the sick, give the blind sight, the deaf hearing, and teach the people. They returned and told John what they saw:

The disciples bore the message, and it was enough [to satisfy John that Jesus was the Messiah]. John recalled the prophecy concerning the Messiah, "The Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." Isaiah 61:1, 2. The works of Christ not only declared Him to be the Messiah, but showed in what manner His kingdom was to be established. To John was opened the same truth that had come to Elijah in the desert, when "a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire:" and after the fire, God spoke to the prophet by "a still small voice." 1 Kings 19:11, 12. **So Jesus was to do His work, not with the clash of arms and the overturning of thrones and kingdoms, but through speaking to the hearts of men by a life of mercy and self-sacrifice.** (DA 217)

So what about the scenario Samson was in? Because of the culture of unbelief the Israelites were in during the time of the Judges, God couldn't work acts of "mercy and self-sacrifice" through them. God could only work with events as they happened in a manner to teach everyone the best He could while still respecting their free will. The Philistines also understood only the sword, and they had hardened their hearts to the extent that God could not protect them from Samson.

When parents or rulers neglect the duty of punishing iniquity, God Himself will take the case in hand. His restraining power will be in a measure removed from the agencies of evil, so that a train of circumstances will arise which will punish sin with sin. (PP 728.1)

Samson's killing was sin. But in the framework he was in, he couldn't recognize it. He thought that killing those he considered the enemies of God wasn't sin, instead it was righteous. There are Christians in the army right now that God is answering prayers for and helping, according to their knowledge of truth. But when they learn enough, God expects them to repent even if He has worked through their former framework to reach them.

At the same time, those who are running the war (and usually aren't fighting themselves, just overseeing it) know that it is absolutely necessary for the war effort to make the enemy seem evil and their own cause righteous; this is crucial for the soldier's ability to kill efficiently. That is why so much money and effort is spent on propaganda to demonize the enemy and justify our own side. This is true of every war in every time in history. To break this never-ending pattern of us-friends to protect, and them-enemies to kill or let die, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan.

³⁶ 'Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?'

³⁷ And he said, 'He that shewed mercy on him.' Then said Jesus unto him, 'Go, and do thou likewise.' (Luke 10:36-37)

If you had diabetes because you never heard the laws of health, God may heal miraculously; but those who know the laws of health and wilfully

disregard them should not expect miraculous healing. They should instead recognize their sin and ask for the gift of repentance and forgiveness. The same is true of those who have heard the pure gospel teaching of Jesus.

It will be according to the light they have had that they will be judged and punished. (YI June 8, 1893)

God holds us responsible for all that we might be if we would improve our talents. We shall be judged according to what we ought to have been, but were not; what we might have done, but did not accomplish because we did not use our powers to glorify God. For all knowledge that we might have gained but did not, there will be an eternal loss, even if we do not lose our souls. (TM 146.2)

Samson remains a hero of faith even though he killed many because he is judged according to the cultural mindset he inherited and the terribly sorry state of Israel he was in. The environment of Samson was cruel and harsh. Samson himself made many mistakes. But we learn from Samson also that, though mistakes have terrible consequences, we can be redeemed in the end through true repentance. But what terrible trial he had to go through! Such a trial is not required of us by God, and His commandments were given to us to protect us from such needless suffering.

What a change to him that had been the judge and champion of Israel!—now weak, blind, imprisoned, degraded to the most menial service! Little by little he had violated the conditions of his sacred calling. God had borne long with him, but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, that moment God departed from him. There was no virtue in the length of his hair, in itself, but it was a token of his loyalty to God, and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of lustful passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited. Had Samson's head been shaven without fault on his part, his strength would have remained. But his course had shown contempt for the favor and authority of God as much as if he had in disdain himself severed his locks from his head. Therefore God left him to endure the results of his own folly. (ST Oct 13, 1881)

He is left “to endure the results of his own folly.” The question is, if we reach such a point, how will we interpret it? What will be our relationship to God? Will we believe that God has condemned us and cut us off? That He hates us for our mistakes and for our misunderstanding His will? Do we let our guilt overwhelm us and lose heart because of the accusations of Satan? Remember, we shall be judged according to our own judgment (Matthew 7:2). Do we believe in repentance and forgiveness?

In his sufferings and humiliation, a sport for the Philistines, Samson had opportunity for reflection, and **he learned more of his own weakness than he had ever known before. As his afflictions led him to repentance**, his hair began gradually to grow, indicating the return of his extraordinary powers, but his enemies, regarding him only as a fettered and helpless prisoner, felt no apprehensions. (ST Oct 13, 1881)

Though Samson repented, and his powers came back, he also realized that there was not going to be any miracle to return his eyesight, or for him to live a life of peace. He accepted that the suffering he was now in was because of his own decisions, and did not cast his faith away. His faith grew as his understanding of his own weakness increased. He came to understand Romans 5:20-21

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

That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:20-21)

Thus God answered Samson’s final prayer, and he died glorifying to the world Jehovah over the fish god Dagon of the Philistines (a god that doesn’t exist, and therefore is unhealthy for us to believe in).

God’s promise that through Samson He would “begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” was fulfilled; but how dark and terrible the record of that life which might have been a praise to

God and a glory to the nation! Had Samson been true to his divine calling, the purpose of God could have been accomplished in his honor and exaltation. But he yielded to temptation and proved untrue to his trust, and his mission was fulfilled in defeat, bondage, and death. (PP 567.2)

Samson Compared to Joseph

God's ways were fulfilled, but in a terrible manner. Let this be a lesson to us at the end of time. Ellen White contrasts Samson with Joseph, who also fulfilled the purpose of God but in an honourable, noble way. When Joseph set himself to do according to God's law, he was risen to be honoured in Egypt and blessed his people mightily.

The future of Joseph's life was determined by the decisions made in that trying hour. He calmly looked up to Heaven, and exclaimed, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" The fires of unholy passion were not permitted to kindle. God's commands, God's promise were before Joseph. He felt that the all-seeing eye was upon him, extending to all his thoughts, penetrating to the secrets of the heart, to the motives underlying every action.

Samson in his peril had the same source of strength as had Joseph. He could choose the right or the wrong as he pleased. But instead of taking hold of the strength of God, he permitted the wild passions of his nature to have full sway. The reasoning powers were perverted, the morals corrupted. God had called Samson to a position of great responsibility, honor, and usefulness; but he must first learn to govern by first learning to obey the laws of God. Joseph was a free moral agent. Good and evil were before him. He could choose the path of purity, holiness, and honor, or the path of immorality and degradation. He chose the right way, and God approved. Samson, under similar temptations, which he had brought upon himself, gave loose rein to passion. The path which he entered upon he found to end in shame, disaster, and death. What a contrast to the history of Joseph! (ST October 13, 1881)

There are many things in the scriptures that are hard to understand, and which our sinful nature will read and misunderstand to gratify ourselves in our lusts and preconceptions. We all know examples of people doing this. For example, I see people commit adultery and say to themselves that David was forgiven, so will I be, and indeed, the wisest man in the world was even born to Bathsheba! But we forget all the terrible pain and suffering David went through as a consequence of that sin, and the context that He lived in. Thus we should not judge him or others, knowing we are all capable of similar sin. We should be quick to empathize and forgive, so that through forgiving others and judging them worthy of eternal life we may come to forgive ourselves and judge ourselves worthy of eternal life. At the same time let us remember that sin destroys our ability to do this; it deceives us and causes us to uplift self rather than God.

Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. (1 John 3:7-10)

In all of this we should never forget the sinfulness of sin, how destructive it is, and how it distorts and destroys everything around it. We should cling to our God and always be grateful for the gift of His Son to us to live in us His life. We must flee from sin or strive to overcome it, out of responsibility to ourselves and those around us. We need to know more clearly what is sinful to God. Finally, if we do fall into sin, and look back at our lives like Samson, let us remember that God's mercy is everlasting and ask God for the godly repentance of the sort Samson had, not the sorrow of the world that is all too common.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. (2 Cor 7:10)

We should never forget what sin has done to our saviour Christ, and forever remember that it is only through His life that He has given to us that any of us can overcome.

The history of Samson conveys a lesson for those whose characters are yet unformed, who have not yet entered upon the stage of active life. The youth who enter our schools and colleges will find there every class of mind. If they desire sport and folly, if they seek to shun the good and unite with the evil, they have the opportunity. Sin and righteousness are before them, and they are to choose for themselves. But let them remember that "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." ST October 13, 1881, par. 20

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

Before finishing this study, I want us to look at how the Jews misunderstood the will of God in the time of Jesus. The Jews thought that God would give them a Messiah who would lead them in war to overthrow the Romans, and when He said to "love your enemies" and to "resist not him who is evil," they had terrible difficulty understanding it.

This is especially the case when we are being oppressed and persecuted and evil men take over our governments. Are we not supposed to fight them? We is God allowing this to happen? Let us look closely at this next passage by Ellen White that will give us a clear insight into the relationship between Jesus and our sufferings.

Ellen White Explains “Resist not him that is evil”

Occasions of irritation to the Jews were constantly arising from their contact with the Roman soldiery...Collisions between the people and the soldiers were frequent, and these inflamed the popular hatred. Often as some Roman official with his guard of soldiers hastened from point to point, he would seize upon the Jewish peasants who were laboring in the field and compel them to carry burdens up the mountainside or render any other service that might be needed. This was in accordance with the Roman law and custom, and resistance to such demands only called forth taunts and cruelty. **Every day deepened in the hearts of the people the longing to cast off the Roman yoke... The people looked eagerly to Christ, hoping that He was the One who was to humble the pride of Rome.**

With sadness Jesus looks into the upturned faces before Him. **He notes the spirit of revenge that has stamped its evil imprint upon them, and knows how bitterly the people long for power to crush their oppressors.** Mournfully He bids them, “Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

These words were but a reiteration of the teaching of the Old Testament. It is true that the rule, “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (Leviticus 24:20), was a provision in the laws given through Moses; but it was a civil statute. None were justified in avenging themselves, for they had the words of the Lord: “Say not thou, I will recompense evil.” “Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me.” “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth.” “If he that hateth thee be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.” Proverbs 20:22; 24:29, 17; 25:21, 22, R.V., margin.

The whole earthly life of Jesus was a manifestation of this principle. It was to bring the bread of life to His enemies that our Saviour left His home in heaven. Though calumny and persecution were heaped upon Him from the cradle to the grave, they called forth from Him only the expression of forgiving love. Through the prophet Isaiah He

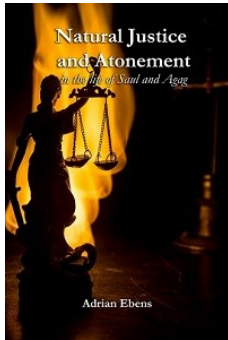
says, “I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting.” “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.” Isaiah 50:6; 53:7. And from the cross of Calvary there come through the ages His prayer for His murderers and the message of hope to the dying thief.

The Father’s presence encircled Christ, and nothing befell Him but that which infinite love permitted for the blessing of the world. Here was His source of comfort, and it is for us. He who is imbued with the Spirit of Christ abides in Christ. The blow that is aimed at him falls upon the Saviour, who surrounds him with His presence. Whatever comes to him comes from Christ. He has no need to resist evil, for Christ is his defense. Nothing can touch him except by our Lord’s permission, and “all things” that are permitted “work together for good to them that love God.” Romans 8:28 (MB 70-72)

This is a hard saying. For those of us who are Christians, God wants us to have total faith in Him. If someone comes to rob us, or hits us from behind because we are seen as an enemy, or snatches at our purse and drives away – all of these are to be seen like it “comes from Christ.” Christ has permitted it to come upon us, and we are not to strike back with knives or pepper spray or our martial arts training. I know this is difficult, but this is the difficulty of following in the footsteps of Christ. To fear these things and defend ourselves is to resist evil in a spirit of faithlessness.

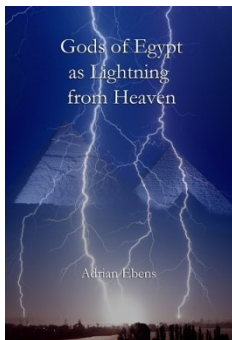
What are we to do when evil happens to us? Like Christ, we pray for our enemies, for thieves who steal from us and those who may want to kill us. We tell them that God sees what they are doing and that if they don’t turn from such a life, they will reap what they sow. (Galatians 6:7) We are not to have bitterness and anger of self-defence and retaliation, but like Christ we show only “the expression of forgiving love.” May God help us, for we cannot do this without Christ in us.

Natural Justice and Atonement



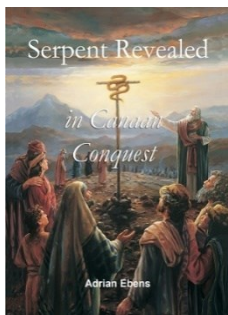
Why did God command Saul to slaughter the entire nation of the Amalekites including all the babies? How does this reconcile with the command of Jesus to love your enemies? God's thoughts are not our thoughts and God's justice is not our justice, even when we think it is. How does God reach people locked into a wrong idea of justice and atonement? This booklet is a perfect companion to the book in your hands.

Gods of Egypt as Li



The Bible contains several instances of sentencing people to be stoned to death for their transgressions. Where did this practice come from? Did God introduce this idea to Moses or did it come from some other source? Is it possible that the judgments that fell upon Israel related to their ideas of judgment rather than from God Himself? Did the sin of the golden calf change anything in the relationship between God and Israel? Is it important to know? To him that hath ears let him hear.

Serpent Revealed i



How do we reconcile the wholesale slaughter of nations by Israel with the sword against the words of Christ?

...for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

Not only men, women and children also:

Deut 2:34 And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain:

Reaching Samson

Principles in teaching darkened minds

If God is all-powerful, why didn't He just take Canaan for the Israelites without them needing to go to war?

If Canaan was the promised land, why was the history of that people once they had taken it so dark?

How does God continue to reach people who don't trust Him and don't listen to His advice? Does He just cut them off?

There are great lessons for us in studying how God dealt with our Egyptian-influenced forefathers. This book especially is for those who must deal with close friends and family who decide to take a path that we think is self-destructive. How do we reach them? What would our Father in Heaven do?