

Natural Justice and Atonement

1. The Slaughter of Infants.

For any person who has had the joy of being a parent passing through the test of labour and birth, you will appreciate the sacredness of the parent child bond. The scene of a child nursing at its mother's breast is one of the wonders of our creation. What could be more innocent or precious to our sense of humanity than this scene? Listen to how some mothers describe it.

The time I spent nursing my two children was such a special time in my life. I have wonderful memories of spending many cozy hours cuddling and bonding with them. Watching their little faces and feeling their warm bodies against mine made me feel proud and happy to know that I was giving them the best start in life that I could. I wouldn't give that time up for anything and sometimes I still miss it.

Breastfeeding is the most intimate act between a mother and child. I breastfed my first baby, who is now 22 months, and I am now breastfeeding my second baby. Not only is it the best for the baby, but I think it is the best for me too. It really helps me to love my baby more. All the late nights, crazy hours, and lack of sleep are worth it when you see that little tiny face looking up at you.

<http://sharethejoysofbreastfeeding.blogspot.com/>

It is with these thoughts in mind that we venture to consider the following verses of Scripture.

Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. (2) Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. (3) Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; **but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.** 1 Samuel 15:1-3

It appears that God has commanded not only the killing of men but women and infants. The word for infant also carries the meaning of suckling, a babe that is nursed at the breast.

It is passages like these that cause millions to turn away from the God of the Bible. Professor Richard Dawkins sums up the mood of many.

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

When Christians turn to their leaders to know how to respond they receive answers like this.

Repulsive as it sounds to us today, this ruthless brand of warfare was not technically "genocide." Not in the modern sense of the term. According to most biblical scholars, it was actually an expression of God's judgment upon the Canaanites.

To say this another way, it was neither Joshua nor Moses but the Lord Himself who put the idolatrous nations of the Promised Land to the sword. **This is perfectly legitimate from a strictly theological point of view. After all, God is the One who gives life. Accordingly, He also has the authority to take it away.** His sentence was simply carried out by the agency of His chosen people, Israel. To quote one commentator, "The Canaanite civilization was so totally corrupt that coexisting with them would have been a serious threat to the survival and spiritual welfare of the Hebrew nation. Israel here is God's instrument of judgment against those who refuse to honor Him."

Website:focusonthefamily.com/family-q-and-a/faith/christian-struggles-with-biblical-accounts-of-genocide-and-holy-war

I have often heard the cry, "Who are we to question God? God can do whatever He wishes." It makes me wonder if those who say these things have ever imagined a soldier tearing a nursing child from its

screaming mother and smashing its head against a wall. Have they never asked themselves if these actions truly represent the God of the Bible?

I have looked into the eyes of people when asking them if they believe God commands the hacking to death of little babies as representing His character in judgment. I have shuddered at the robot like yes response without any feeling or trembling that can only resemble the thoughts of those living under dictatorships like North Korea. To openly question what they understand is God's justice is to invite the same thing to happen to themselves. Therefore, you must express love for this sovereign and never question anything for fear of the same death.

The Bible says that perfect love casts out fear, but to worship a God who reveals His character as one who commands the brutal bashing and killing of breast feeding babies can never deliver this promise of living without fear.

So the question remains. How do we account for this and other stories that involve the death of women and especially small children?

2. Defining Justice

The Bible tells us that God is just.

Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face. Psalm 89:14

The natural question that follows is, "What is the Bible definition of justice?" Before answering this we need to consider the following.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. (9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9

This means that by nature our thoughts about justice are different from God's thoughts about justice. What makes things even harder is that we naturally think that God thinks like us.

Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. (21) These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; **thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself:** but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Psalm 50:20-21

So how did this happen? How did our thoughts become different from our Father's thoughts in heaven? The point of departure occurred in Eden.

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

God laid out in the beginning the penalty for disobeying Him. In order to have the power to choose mankind was made aware of a tree in the middle of the garden called the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

Without going into all the Hebrew meanings of the sentence – "thou shalt surely die," let's look at the Young's literal translation.

and of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou dost not eat of it, for in the day of thine eating of it--dying thou dost die. Genesis 2:17

3. The Introduction of Counterfeit Justice

Nothing was indicated as to the manner of death. The words simply stated that a process would begin that would lead to death if they ate from that tree. Satan inserted himself into the place between disobedience

and the final result of death. He developed an idea about how justice should work and then projected it onto God.

In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, **it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan**; and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice. *Desire of Ages* p. 761.4

It was most difficult to make the deceiving power of Satan apparent. His power to deceive increased with practice. If he could not defend himself, he must accuse, in order to appear just and righteous, **and to make God appear arbitrary and exacting. In secret he whispered his disaffection to the angels. There was at first no pronounced feeling against God; but the seed had been sown, and the love and confidence of the angels was marred. The sweet communion between them and their God was broken. Every move was watched; every action was viewed in the light in which Satan had made them see things.** That which Satan had instilled into the minds of the angels--a word here and a word there--opened the way for a long list of suppositions. In his artful way he drew expressions of doubt from them. Then, when he was interviewed, he accused those whom he had educated. He laid all the disaffection on the ones he had led. **As one in holy office, he manifested an overbearing desire for justice, but it was a counterfeit of justice, which was entirely contrary to God's love and compassion and mercy.** {*Review and Herald*, September 7, 1897 par. 3-4}

In the beginning Lucifer became jealous of the position of Christ. The only possible way he could become jealous was to forget that everything he possessed had come from Christ and the Father.

The high honors conferred upon Lucifer were not appreciated as God's special gift, and therefore, called forth no gratitude to his Creator. He gloried in his brightness and exaltation and aspired to be equal with God. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 37

Angels were expelled from heaven because they would not work in harmony with God. They fell from their high estate because they wanted to be exalted. They had come to exalt themselves, **and they forgot that their beauty of person and of character came from the Lord Jesus.** *This Day with God* p. 128.2

The lack of gratitude in Lucifer caused him to question the need for the angels being governed by the law of God.

He began to insinuate doubts concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings, intimating that though laws might be necessary for the inhabitants of the worlds, **angels, being more exalted, needed no such restraint,** for their own wisdom was a sufficient guide. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 37

Lucifer took the position that as a result of the law of God, wrong existed in heaven and on this earth. This brought against God's government the charge of being arbitrary. But this is a falsehood, framed by the author of all falsehoods. God's government is a government of free-will, and there is no act of rebellion or obedience which is not an act of free-will. {*Signs of the Times*, June 5, 1901, par. 4}

It was upon this point that Satan framed his mischief through the law. It was on this point that Satan established his throne.

Shall the **throne of iniquity** have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law? Psalm 94:20

The lie of Satan indicating that the angels had inherent life led them to view the law of God as arbitrary and restrictive. At the same time Satan desired to be like God and establish his own throne. His idea of justice was that sin against him could not be pardoned. The transgressor must be punished and if required be put to death by force. In Satan's universe each person possessed their own life and thus punishment required force to make it miserable or to end it.

The condemning power of Satan would lead him to institute a theory of justice inconsistent with mercy. He claims to be officiating as the voice and power of God, claims that his decisions are justice, are pure and without fault. Thus **he takes his position on the judgment seat** [throne] and declares that

his counsels are infallible. **Here his merciless justice comes in, a counterfeit of justice, abhorrent to God.** *Christ Triumphant* p. 11.4

Lucifer had reframed the way angels look at the universe. As we read previously

In secret he whispered his disaffection to the angels. There was at first no pronounced feeling against God; but the seed had been sown, and the love and confidence of the angels was marred. The sweet communion between them and their God was broken. Every move was watched; every action was viewed in the light in which Satan had made them see things. {*Review and Herald*, September 7, 1897 par. 3}

Nearly half of the angels were committed to Lucifer's view of the universe.

Satan unblushingly made known his dissatisfaction that Christ should be preferred before him. He stood up proudly and urged that he should be equal with God, and should be taken into conference with the Father and understand his purposes. God informed Satan that to his Son alone he would reveal his secret purposes, and he required all the family in Heaven, even Satan, to yield him implicit, unquestioned obedience; but that he (Satan) had proved himself unworthy a place in Heaven. **Then Satan exultingly pointed to his sympathizers, comprising nearly one half of all the angels, and exclaimed, These are with me!** Will you expel these also, and make such a void in Heaven? He then declared that he was prepared to resist the authority of Christ, and to defend his place in Heaven by force of might, strength against strength. *Spirit of Prophecy* Vol 1. p. 22.2

Yet even the rest of the angels were affected. It was not until the death of Christ that the principles of Satan were cast to the earth. The loyal angels remained with the Father and His Son, but Satan had planted seeds in their minds that they could not easily answer. Not until the cross could they fully discern Satan's deceptiveness.

Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. **By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings.** Henceforth his work was restricted. Whatever attitude he might assume, **he could no longer await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts,** and before them accuse Christ's brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken. *Desire of Ages* p. 761.2

The depth of the seeds planted by Satan in the minds of the angels can be reflected in the angelic reaction to the apostasy and ingratitude of man towards their creator.

Before Christ's first advent, the world seemed indeed to have become the grave for all piety. It was Satan's seat; man was in the power of the great apostate, helplessly receiving his lies in regard to God and to Christ, as truth. **The heavenly angels looked upon the world polluted by sin under the inhabitants thereof, and thought how much easier it would be to exterminate it than to reform it. But the Son of God Himself came to work a reformation.** *Bible Echo* March 8, 1897,

"Before Christ's first advent, the sin of refusing to conform to God's law had become widespread. Apparently Satan's power was growing; his warfare against heaven was becoming more and more determined. A crisis had been reached. With an intense interest God's movements were watched by the heavenly angels. Would He come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity? Would He send fire or **flood to destroy them? All heaven waited the bidding of their Commander to pour out the vials of wrath upon a rebellious world. One word from Him, one sign, and the world would have been destroyed.** The worlds unfallen would have said, "Amen. Thou art righteous, O God, because Thou hast exterminated rebellion." **But "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."** God might have sent His Son to condemn, but He sent Him to save. Christ came as a Redeemer. **No words can describe the effect of this movement on the heavenly angels:** With wonder and admiration they could only exclaim, "Herein is love!" {*Reflecting Christ* p. 58.4,5}

This does not suggest that the angels desired to directly kill the inhabitants of this world, but rather that man should immediately suffer the consequences of his own choices. If God had commanded the releasing

of the four winds before all of mankind had made their choice and the issues of the Great controversy were fully revealed it would be an act of arbitrary force, and the principle of force is not part of God's kingdom.

That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. **The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded;** it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. *Desire of Ages* p. 22

4. The Fall of Satan and His Angels

During the war in heaven, God offered to Lucifer and His angels pardon on condition of repentance and submission.

God in His great mercy bore long with Lucifer. He was not immediately degraded from his exalted station when he first indulged the spirit of discontent, not even when he began to present his false claims before the loyal angels. Long was he retained in heaven. **Again and again he was offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission.**—Great Controversy, p. 495, 496

Many of Lucifer's followers were inclined to accept this gracious offer, so Satan raised the stakes and took a giant leap into the darkness by telling the angels something he knew was absolutely false.

Many of Satan's sympathizers were inclined to heed the counsel of the loyal angels, and repent of their dissatisfaction, and be again received to the confidence of the Father and his dear Son. **The mighty revolter then declared that he was acquainted with God's law**, and if he should submit to servile obedience, his honor would be taken from him. No more would he be intrusted with his exalted mission. **He told them that himself and they also had now gone too far to go back, and he would brave the consequences; for to bow in servile worship to the Son of God he never would; that God would not forgive, and now they must assert their liberty and gain by force the position and authority which was not willingly accorded to them.** *Spirit of Prophecy* vol 1. p. 20,21

Sadly one third of the angels believed Satan. They believed they had gone too far because they believed that God would not forgive them. It is upon this point that Satan's throne was established, a throne built upon the principles of death. The other angels who had followed Satan chose to believe God would forgive them and they were eagerly welcomed back into the arms of Christ and the Father.

When Satan spoke the lie that God would not forgive, he said something that was false about the character of God. The law of God is a transcript of His character.

Christ came to our world to represent the character of God as it is represented in His holy law, for His law is a transcript of His character. Christ was both the law and the gospel. . . . *Christ Triumphant* p. 339.2

The law of God is as sacred as God Himself. It is a revelation of His will, a transcript of His character, the expression of divine love and wisdom. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 52.3

Therefore, when we believe something about God's character that is false then we are sinning. Sin is the transgression of the law, and the law is a transcript of God's character. Therefore, sin is the transgression of God's character. Satan sinned when he stated that God would not forgive. He sinned when he said that God's mercy and justice are in opposition. It is this sin that causes death, thus making Satan the author of death and the one who has the power of death.

Satan is the author of death. *Faith and Works* p. 73.4

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

If someone does not believe that the author of life will forgive them and they are dependent on the author for life, then of course they will die. "Dying thou dost die." The projected belief onto God that He does not forgive puts the person in a process towards certain death.

5. The Fall of Man

When man ate the fruit of the tree he accepted Satan's lies about God's character.

God told them not to touch the tree of knowledge. But here the tempter came in, and instead of obeying the words of God they listened to the tempter and obeyed his words. What was the result? They were excluded from their Eden home. When God made inquiry, they told Him about it. The voice said to them to eat and they obeyed it. Then was the first gospel sermon preached to Adam and Eve in Eden. Genesis 3:15. ...Christ looked upon our world before He came to it, and He saw that Satan's power was exercised upon the human family. And because of the transgression of Adam he claimed the whole human family. He pointed to their calamities and diseases and reflected [them] upon God. **He said God would have no mercy upon them and they might as well be under his control.** {Ms16-1893.2-3}

Satan told Adam and Eve the same lie that he told the angels. They were told that God would not have mercy on them, meaning that He would not forgive them. They were told they had gone too far so they might as well be under his control. When Adam fell his mind became one with the mind of Satan.

God declares: "I will put enmity." This enmity is not naturally entertained. **When man transgressed the divine law, his nature became evil, and he was in harmony, and not at variance, with Satan.** There exists naturally no enmity between sinful man and the originator of sin. Both became evil through apostasy. The apostate is never at rest, except as he obtains sympathy and support by inducing others to follow his example. **For this reason fallen angels and wicked men unite in desperate companionship.** *Great Controversy* p. 506

6. The Pivotal Issue

When man became evil he embraced the thinking of Satan in regard to justice and mercy. Satan's justice became man's justice. Ellen White summarises this for us in the following:

The warfare against God's law commenced in heaven. Satan was determined to bring God to his ideas, his way, to force Him to change the law of His government. This was the cause of the war in heaven. Satan worked upon the sympathies of the angelic host by his deceptive attitude, but he was expelled from heaven, **and now he is determined to carry out on this earth the plans [he] instituted in heaven.** If he can persuade man to be disloyal to the law of God, he will feel that he is revenged upon God. **He strives to instill into the minds of men his masterly deceptions, thus perverting judgment and justice, trampling down the law of God.** This work--the conflict between truth and error--lies at the foundation of the trials and tribulations that the children of God will experience. This is the "trial of their faith." 12 *Manuscript Release* p. 37.1

False views of justice and judgment trample down the law of God. When we sin, Satan tortures us into believing that God is displeased with us and presses us to give up in despair.

By pressing upon the soul the idea that God is displeased with us, Satan tries to torture us into unbelief. But we are to "rejoice in the Lord always" [1 Peter 1:6-9 quoted]. The Lord Jesus is our only hope. He is your hope, and I am commissioned in His name to ask you to put your entire trust in Him [Isaiah 57:15, quoted.] 12 *Manuscript Release* p. 37.2

When God came to Adam in the garden after he had sinned, Adam perceived the words of God through the lens of Satan's justice system. Adam did not believe that God would forgive him. He also believed that he possessed his own life by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. How would Adam understand God's intentions towards him with his new understanding of justice?

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

Why was Adam afraid?

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

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, **and death by sin**; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: Romans 5:12

Adam was afraid that God was going to kill him. The words God had spoken "that in the day you eat you will die" are understood by Adam to mean that God will kill him. As Adam views justice the same way as Satan does, he sees that his sin must be punished. He also sees that God will not give mercy. He reasons that God had stated that the punishment for his sin is death. Thus, Adam is afraid when God approaches him and he hides himself for fear of death.

In the light of this sequence of events we can begin to comprehend the significance of what happens next.

And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? (12) And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. Genesis 3:11-12

Adam fears he will die. When he is questioned, he implicates the woman as the agent, and he implicates the Son of God as the prime cause because He created her. In implicating his wife, he is actually placing her in the position of facing the death penalty as he understands it. In his mind he was willing to sacrifice her to save himself. This is the manifestation of appeasement based theology. It is the birth of penal substitutionary atonement.

It is highly significant that at the time that Adam fell there came a voice from the throne of God.

When Adam yielded to the temptation of the enemy, and fell from his high and holy estate, Satan and his angels exulted. But from the throne of God a voice was heard speaking words of mysterious import. "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." When man fell, **Christ announced His purpose of becoming man's substitute and surety.** {*Review and Herald*, September 3, 1901 par. 3}

We see that at the time that Adam fell the Lord made it clear that He did not desire sacrifice and offering for sin. It is certainly true that Christ gave Himself as man's substitute, taking man's woe upon himself, but he was not a substitute for God as though God demanded death in order to be satisfied.

Adam was willing to offer his wife as his substitute, as a sacrifice. God did not desire such offerings, He never required sacrifice. Yet in Adam's perception, now ruled by Satan's view of justice, there could be no atonement without punishment. His perception of God's requirement was that it must be death. Man then projects his ideas of justice onto God and now believes that divine justice demands death of the transgressor.

It is through this idea that Satan rules this world. It is this principle that caused justice to appear to be in opposition to God's mercy.

Justice and Mercy stood apart, in opposition to each other, separated by a wide gulf. The Lord our Redeemer clothed His divinity with humanity, and wrought out in behalf of man a character that was without spot or blemish. He planted His cross midway between heaven and earth, and made it the object of attraction which reached both ways, **drawing both Justice and Mercy across the gulf. Justice moved from its exalted throne, and with all the armies of heaven approached the cross. There it saw One equal with God bearing the penalty for all injustice and sin. With perfect satisfaction Justice bowed in reverence at the cross, saying, It is enough.**--General Conference Bulletin, Fourth Quarter, 1899, vol. 3, p. 102.

It is tempting to think from reading this last quote that when justice moved from the throne that this was the Father. It seems unassailable when it says all the armies of heaven approached the cross. We have previously established that Satan established his throne through means of a false justice system that was

abhorrent to God. Satan was the one who caused justice to be in opposition to mercy in the minds of angels and men. All the armies of heaven were affected by it. We note carefully that it was not until Christ died upon the cross that Satan was finally uprooted from the sympathies of the heavenly angels. As Paul states:

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

It was inconceivable to the selfish Satan that God would condescend to meet the demands of justice that Satan had established. In essence, the false theory of justice without mercy becomes the default ransom price to convince men and angels that atonement had been affected. At no stage was our dear Father alienated from us. He needed no ransom price. We were alienated from Him. We are the ones that need convincing. Therefore we read:

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. Hebrews 9:22

Thus God instituted the sacrificial system as an assurance to man, enveloped as he is in Satan's counterfeit justice, that he could be forgiven. The sacrificial system was not something God desired; it was a reflection of man's penal substitution mindset. Yet through these faulty ideas God was enabled to teach the Patriarchs about His tender mercies. The sacrificial system was a mirror reflected into the heart of man. It showed him his sinfulness and that he might come to know that after he had allowed his mind to be corrupted with Satan's idea of justice, it required the death of the Son of God to free him from his sense of guilt. If you can grasp this truth then the truth will set you free. He shall cause sacrifice and oblation to cease in your heart as a means of appeasing a wrathful God.

7. The Brass Altar

We have further evidence of this truth in that the sacrifice of the lamb was offered upon a brass altar.

And he made the altar of burnt offering of shittim wood: five cubits was the length thereof, and five cubits the breadth thereof; it was foursquare; and three cubits the height thereof. (2) And he made the horns thereof on the four corners of it; the horns thereof were of the same: **and he overlaid it with brass**. Exodus 38:1-2

Brass was a metal designed by one of the descendants of Cain.

And Zillah, she also bare Tubalcain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubalcain was Naamah. Genesis 4:22

The Bible sometimes presents brass as something undesirable.

Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: **all they are brass**, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; **they are even the dross of silver**. Ezekiel 22:18

Brass is an alloy made of copper and zinc. These two elements oppose each other in the human body. They have an antagonistic relationship. This appears to fit perfectly the situation that occurred in the minds of angels and men concerning the relationship between God's mercy and Satan's counterfeit justice that took hold of the universe. They were in opposition to each other. Thus through the symbolism of the brass the Scriptures are showing us that the Cross takes place upon antagonistic principles. Yet once the human mind reconnects with God's mercy through the cross, the pathway is opened for his mind to be purged of the brass and partake of the tree of life which contains only gold and silver.

Here we saw the tree of life and the throne of God. Out of the throne came a pure river of water, and on either side of the river was the tree of life. On one side of the river **was a trunk of a tree, and a trunk on the other side of the river, both of pure, transparent gold**. At first I thought I saw two trees. I looked again, and saw that they were united at the top in one tree. So it was the tree of life on either side of

the river of life. Its branches bowed to the place where we stood, **and the fruit was glorious; it looked like gold mixed with silver.** {*Christian Experience and Teaching* p. 60.1}

Within the heavenly sanctuary there is no brass. Only the metals of gold and silver are used. Therefore, when men are prepared for the judgment, that is when they are prepared to judge the character of God correctly as to His justice and mercy then they are free to leave out the courtyard that contains the conflicting principles of brass. The courtyard objects have served their purpose and are no longer required.

And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. (2) **But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles:** and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months. Revelation 11:1-2

Therefore, the gift of the Cross is a glorious burst of light that has the power to shatter Satan's idea of justice and remove the dross of brass from our hearts. God's mercy is revealed through our perverted notions of justice.

This same principle is used by Christ when speaking some of his parables. He would take their ideas and teach His truth through them.

"The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." **In this parable Christ was meeting the people on their own ground.** The doctrine of a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection was held by many of those who were listening to Christ's words. **The Saviour knew of their ideas, and He framed His parable so as to inculcate important truths through these preconceived opinions. He held up before His hearers a mirror wherein they might see themselves in their true relation to God. He used the prevailing opinion to convey the idea He wished to make prominent to all--that no man is valued for his possessions; for all he has belongs to him only as lent by the Lord.** *Christ's Object Lessons* 263.1-2

8. The Brass Serpent

We add another dimension to this subject through the story of the brass serpent that was lifted up upon the pole.

And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. (6) And the LORD sent [released] fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. (7) Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. (8) **And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.** (9) **And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.** Numbers 21:5-9

Does it not seem strange that Moses should be instructed to make an image of the very thing that is biting the people and raise this up for them to look at and be healed? We don't have time to explore all the details here because there are many. It is true that man has been bitten by the serpent Satan and imbibed his poisonous idea concerning justice. God meets this demand and so Christ is hung upon the cross to meet the demands of serpent justice. The serpent and all the armies of heaven bow in reverence before the cross. Those of humanity who choose to look upon the cross can now access the mercy of God because they now are free to believe it because their ideas of justice have been met.

The other point we note here is that according to the law the Israelites should have brought a sin offering before they could have confidence that God would hear them. In this case the uplifted serpent on the pole bypassed their sacrificial system and offered them mercy by faith alone in the provision given to them.

The Hebrews in their affliction could not save themselves from the effect of the fiery serpents. God alone could save sinful, rebellious Israel, by his infinite power; yet, in his wisdom, he did not see fit to pardon their transgressions without testing their repentance and faith. They were required, by an act of their own, to show their penitence, and faith in the provision that God had made for their recovery. They, on their part, must act. They must look, in order to live. **The act of looking showed their faith in the Son of God, whom the serpent represented.** The lifting up of the brazen serpent was to teach Israel a lesson. **They had presented their offerings to God, and felt that in thus doing they had made ample atonement for their sins. They did not, by faith, rely upon the merits of the Redeemer to come, of which their offerings were only the type. The serpent, made of brass to resemble the fiery serpent,** was to be placed in the midst of the camp, lifted upon a pole. **This was to show to Israel that their offerings, of themselves, had no more saving virtue or power than the serpent of brass, which was to revive in their minds the future sacrifice of the Son of God.** So, also, their offerings were to be brought with subdued wills and penitent hearts, they having faith in the meritorious offering of God's dear Son. None were compelled to look upon the brazen serpent. All could look and live, or disbelieve the simple provision God had made, refuse to look, and die. *{Spirit of Prophecy Vol. 1, 316-317}*

In the same way as the serpent was lifted upon the pole, Christ was lifted upon the cross

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: John 3:14

The serpent represented the Son of God only in the sense that Christ was meeting the demands of Satanic justice that enslaved the human mind. So great was the light of the cross that it not only penetrated the darkened mind of man, but it released the angels of heaven from any sympathy with Satan. Praise the Father for the gift of His Son upon the cross! Through the death of the cross Christ defeated him who had the power of death through his counterfeit justice. He brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

As a final witness to this understanding of the cross we add the following statement that will be vital for us to penetrate some of the stories of the Old Testament and their true meaning.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." **Here is language that expresses His mind toward a corrupt and idolatrous people:** "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together." Must He give up the people for whom such a provision has been made, even His only-begotten Son, the express image of Himself? **God permits His Son to be delivered up for our offenses. He Himself assumes toward the Sin Bearer the character of a judge, divesting Himself of the endearing qualities of a father.** *{Testimony to Ministers p. 245.2}*

This thought is impossible to decipher without understanding the demands of counterfeit justice. How is it that God assumes the character of a judge towards the sin bearer? From our darkened human perspective, in order for God to reach us where we are, He must satisfy our understanding of justice. It is utterly impossible that God should actually divest Himself of being a tender father. The key word is assumes. The assumption causes Him to appear as a judge as well as being divested of the endearing qualities of a father. This transformation that takes place in the darkness that surrounds the cross, where God apparently hides His face, is to meet the demands of our idolatry concerning Himself. Expressed another way, it is through our idolatry that our Father becomes a jealous God.

9. A Jealous God

Within the second commandment is contained the sequence by which God administers justice through our brass thinking.

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: **for** [H3588 causal relation. What comes next is caused by what has just been written. Most often translated as Because 466x When 245x If 166x] I the LORD thy God *am* ["am" is supplied, causal relation might allow translation becomes, or turns to.] a **jealous** [H7067] God, **visiting** [oversee, care for, call to remembrance] the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that **hate** me; Exodus 20:5

When Adam submitted himself to Satan, he committed idolatry. This idolatry caused him to view God as seeking to kill him for his transgression. Satan told Adam that God would not show him mercy. When Adam accepted this idea, God appeared jealous and wrathful.

Notice the parable that Jesus told of the men with the talents.

But his citizens **hated** him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. Luke 19:14

What did the man with the one pound or talent say of the master?

And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: (21) For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. Luke 19:20-21

The Bible tells us that those who hate God love death.

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

Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: (32) **Who knowing [perceive] the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death**, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. Romans 1:31-32

Those who hate God and/or are without knowledge perceive the judgment of God as seeing them as worthy of death. In order for those who are steeped in idolatry to believe that they can be forgiven punishment had to be inflicted upon the transgressors before they could believe they could expect forgiveness. In order to meet this expectation of man, God tells us how He executes judgment upon those who hate Him. He visits their iniquities upon them to the third and fourth generation.

Thus when men bring the consequences of their own choices upon themselves, God allows Himself to be seen to be inflicting punishment upon them. He assumes towards the sinner the character of a judge divesting himself of the endearing qualities of a Father.

In the destructive forces of nature both in the natural elements and the political strife of men, God is presented as a jealous God bringing calamity upon them. Why does He allow this? So that when evil does perish among the people, there is a sense that justice has taken place. Some form of atonement has been made so that men can be alleviated of their corporate guilt for a measure of time. There is deep wisdom in the Scriptures that states:

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. Proverbs 29:15

He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes. Proverbs 13:24

The mother may ask, "Shall I never punish my child?" Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail, yet she should not use the rod if it is possible to avoid doing so. But if milder measures prove insufficient, punishment that will bring the child to its senses should in love be administered. **Frequently one such correction will be enough for a lifetime**, to show the child that he does not hold the lines of control. *Child Guidance* p. 250.1-2

In some cases the child's own sense of justice will only allow its guilt to be removed through the use of the rod. But this must never be administered in violence, anger or with a raised voice.

The second commandment is vital to understand. The formula it contains reveals the character of God in regards to His mercy and justice. As we stated earlier, the law of God is a transcript of His character. Any understanding of God's justice that does not align with this commandment is not a true revelation of His character.

The principle of God's jealousy in Scripture is always connected to men falling into idolatry.

For thou shalt worship no other god: for [H3588 When] the LORD, **whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God**: Exodus 34:14

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. (14) Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (15) **(For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.** Deuteronomy 6:13-15

They provoked him to jealousy [H7065] with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. (17) **They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not**, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. (18) Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. (19) And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. (20) **And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be**: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. (21) **They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger** with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. Deuteronomy 32:16-21

Thus we see that God's jealousy occurs because of man's idolatry. Idolatry always means the loss of the belief in mercy for only the true God has mercy. Satan, the natural man, and their justice have none.

When you open the Bible, if you are transgressing the law [character] of God, **it will seem that all the threatenings of wrath are for your case**. When you rise in meeting to bear your testimony, it will be full of unbelief and darkness. Your testimony will misrepresent your Heavenly Father. **It will represent him as unwilling to forgive when you want to return to him**, and you will dishonor your Redeemer before the congregation. {*Review and Herald*, March 19, 1889 par. 7}

Where ever we see the jealousy of God manifested and His judgments falling, it is in response to man's ideas of justice. But it is always following the formula of Exodus 20:5.

We now wish to return to the story of Saul and see how God's justice follows the pattern of the second commandment. But before we do this we need to examine some statements that show how God visits or oversees iniquity upon evil doers.

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

It is evil that slays the wicked, not God. God assumes toward the wicked the character of a judge divesting Himself of the endearing qualities of a Father by hiding His face in the darkness as they face the consequences of their actions. This is agony for Father and Son to let this happen, but they must respect the choice of those who reject them. They can't force them to obey.

The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth: **the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands**. Psalm 9:16

Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: **their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD**. Ezekiel 22:31

And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, **but I will recompense their way upon their head**. Ezekiel 9:10

His mischief shall return upon his own head, **and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate**. [crown] Psalm 7:16

10. The Context for Command to Slay the Amalekites

Firstly, we note that the whole process of Israel asking for a king is the fruit of idolatry.

The Israelites adopted many of the customs of their heathen neighbors, and thus sacrificed to a great degree, their own peculiar, holy character. Their worship became less earnest and sincere. **Gradually they lost their reverence for God, and ceased to prize the high honor of being his chosen people.**

Dazzled by the pomp and display of heathen monarchs, they tired of their own simplicity, **and desired to be freed from the rule of their Divine Sovereign. As they departed from the Lord, the different tribes became envious and jealous of one another. Strife and dissensions increased, until it was vainly imagined that the installation of a king was the only means by which harmony could be restored.** {*Signs of the Times*, July 13, 1882 par. 3}

The entire career of Saul is in the context of Israel rejecting God and desiring to be like the world. It is this process of idolatry that invokes the jealousy clause of Exodus 20:5. It makes certain that the Lord will oversee events to bring their own ways upon them. This then will satisfy their idea of justice and provide an opportunity for repentance and mercy to be received.

Secondly, the request for a king was a great blow for Samuel.

The petitioners were careful to state that they could find no fault with Samuel's administration; but they urged that he would soon be too old to serve them, and his sons had given evidence that they could not be trusted. Despite these explanations and professions of regard, **Samuel was deeply wounded. He looked upon the request as a censure upon himself, and a direct effort to set him aside. But he did not reveal his feelings.** He uttered no reproaches because of the ingratitude of the people. Had he done this, one bitter recrimination might have wrought great harm. {*Signs of the Times*, July 13, 1882 par. 7}

Samuel had faithfully served the people his whole life. He had brought a great reformation to the nation. He was wounded by their ingratitude. He wisely restrained himself from expressing his feelings but a seed of pain now resided in Samuel.

And the Lord said unto Samuel: "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee." **The prophet was reproved for grieving at the conduct of the people toward himself as an individual. They had not manifested disrespect for him, but for the authority of God,** who had appointed the rulers of His people. Those who despise and reject the faithful servant of God show contempt, not merely for the man, but for the Master who sent him. It is God's words, His reproofs and counsel, that are set at naught; it is His authority that is rejected. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 605.1

After the disaster at Gilgal when Saul assumed the work of the priest and offered a sacrifice as means of boosting the morale of the people in the face of war things went downhill very fast for Saul.

Saul did not stand the test. God had promised to be with him, if he would be obedient. He should have trusted this promise, and waited patiently for divine instruction and guidance. But thinking that something must be done at once to inspire the people with courage, he commanded them to bring forward their victims for sacrifice, and then he presumptuously took the place of priest, and himself offered them upon the altar. This act was a flagrant violation of the divine command that only those should offer sacrifice who had been sacredly consecrated to the work. **Moreover, the public nature of the act, as well as the high position of the offender, added greatly to the pernicious influence of his example, and rendered prompt punishment indispensably necessary.** {*Signs of the Times*, August 3, 1882 par. 10}

Samuel rebukes the self-willed king.

In answer to his pointed inquiry, "What hast thou done?" Saul endeavored to excuse his own course, by depicting the terror of the people and the danger of an immediate attack from the Philistines. But the prophet returned the stern and solemn answer,-- "Thou hast done foolishly. Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee; for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue; the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou has not kept that which the Lord commanded thee." {*Signs of the Times*, August 3, 1882 par. 11-12}

Saul still refuses to repent and continues to justify himself.

The Holy Spirit had been granted to Saul to enlighten his understanding and soften his heart. He had received faithful instruction and reproof from the prophet of God. And yet how great was his perversity! **The history of Israel's first king presents a sad example of the power of early wrong habits. In his youth Saul did not love and fear God; and that impetuous spirit, not early trained to submission, was ever ready to rebel against divine authority.** *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 622

Saul did not love and fear God. He had never learned to trust and obey Him. Thus he did not have a correct appreciation of His character. The Lord did seek to enlighten Saul and draw him into the truth but sadly he remained self-willed and determined to the very end.

Shortly after this, God blesses Jonathan to open the way for a great victory from Israel.

Now it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison, that is on the other side. But he told not his father. 1 Samuel 14:1

And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armourbearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armourbearer slew after him. (14) And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armourbearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow. (15) And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling. (16) And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and, behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on beating down one another. 1 Samuel 14:13-16

Through what agency did the Lord bless Jonathan?

Angels of heaven shielded Jonathan and his attendant, angels fought by their side, and the Philistines fell before them. The earth trembled as though a great multitude with horsemen and chariots were approaching. Jonathan recognized the tokens of divine aid, and even the Philistines knew that God was working for the deliverance of Israel. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 625

The angels protected Jonathan and his armour bearer, but the angels did not kill any of enemy soldiers for we read:

Angels are sent from the heavenly courts, not to destroy, but to watch over and guard imperiled souls, to save the lost, to bring the straying ones back to the fold. {*Review and Herald* May 10, 1906.}

Angels do not come to the earth to denounce and to destroy, to rule and to exact homage, but are messengers of mercy to cooperate with the Captain of the Lord's host, to cooperate with the human agents who shall go forth to seek and to save the lost sheep. Angels are commanded to encamp round about those who fear and love God. {*Signs of the Times*, November 20, 1893, par. 3}

The angels watched over Jonathan and his armour bearer because their souls were imperilled. Now that Saul knows that his kingdom is under threat because Samuel has said it would be given to another, he is most alarmed that victory is occurring in Israel without his knowing anything about it! Saul is now very jealous for his own honour. God will oversee or visit his jealousy as a punishment on Israel. This is all part of the manifestation of God's jealousy when men choose an idolatrous path.

And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food. (25) And all they of the land came to a wood; and there was honey upon the ground. (26) And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped; but no man put his hand to his mouth: for the people feared the oath. 1 Samuel 14:24-26

Jonathan had not heard the oath and so took some honey to refresh himself. After this when Saul asked the Lord if they should continue the fight against the Philistines he received no answer. He now searched to see where the sin was in the camp. Within the justice system in which Saul is operating the Lord allows the lot to fall on Jonathan.

And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken. (43) Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and, lo, I must die. (44) And Saul answered, God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan. 1 Samuel 14:42-44

Like Adam who blamed his wife, Saul was willing to offer one of his own flesh and blood in order to bring an atonement for the sin problem in the camp. Rather than accept responsibility and repent he would rather offer up his own son as a sacrifice. The visitation of iniquity for Israel's desiring a king really began to manifest itself. Saul's insecurity in his position as king meant that any person that should advance the kingdom and cause the people to rejoice would be seen as a threat.

Had not the men of Israel interposed to save the life of Jonathan, their deliverer would have perished by the king's decree. **With what misgivings must that people afterward have followed Saul's guidance! How bitter the thought that he had been placed upon the throne by their own act!** The Lord bears long with the waywardness of men, and to all He grants opportunity to see and forsake their sins; but while He may seem to prosper those who disregard His will and despise His warnings, He will, in His own time, surely make manifest their folly. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 626.1

Saul could but feel that his son was preferred before him, both by the people and by the Lord. Jonathan's deliverance was a severe reproof to the king's rashness. He felt a presentiment that his curses would fall upon his own head. He did not longer continue the war with the Philistines, but returned to his home, moody and dissatisfied. {*Signs of the Times*, August 17, 1882 par. 11}

A man willing to sacrifice his own son for the sake of his own injured pride must be seen to be a man under the control of Satan. This is in perfect accord with God's promise to visit the iniquities of the people upon the people by overseeing events so that evil will slay the wicked.

Now that Saul knows the kingdom is to be taken from him, and his own son seems to be more favoured than he, himself, and the people resisted his authority in seeking to kill Jonathan, Saul seeks to regain his reputation by going to war with the neighbouring tribes.

So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them. (48) **And he gathered an host, and smote the Amalekites**, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them. 1 Samuel 14:47 -48

The sin of Saul's self-interest and jealousy for his crown will now be visited upon the neighbouring nations as punishment for their idolatry and rebellion. This is in strict accord with Exodus 20:5 of visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children of them that hate me.

11. The Lord's Prophecy and Command Regarding the Amalekites

Now we note with interest that Saul had already begun to wage war on the Amalekites before the command is given by God in 1 Samuel 15:1-3. We note with great interest how the Young's literal translation renders the command of God to Saul.

'Thus said Jehovah of Hosts, I have looked after that which Amalek did to Israel, that which he laid for him in the way in his going up out of Egypt. (3) Now, go, **and thou hast smitten Amalek, and devoted all that it hath, and thou hast no pity on it, and hast put to death from man unto woman, from infant unto suckling, from ox unto sheep, from camel unto ass.**' 1 Samuel 15:2-3 (YLT)

The text is rendered as Saul has already taken these actions. The events of 1 Samuel 14:48 reveal that Saul had already intended to destroy the Amalekites. This ambition already existed within him. The Lord now sends him a message via Samuel in the same manner as Noah prophesied the future of his sons.

The prophecy of Noah was no arbitrary denunciation of wrath or declaration of favor. It did not fix the character and destiny of his sons. But it showed what would be the result of the course of life they had severally chosen and the character they had developed. It was an expression of God's purpose

toward them and their posterity in view of their own character and conduct. *Patriarchs and Prophets*
p. 118.

Canaan was told he would be a servant of servants. In Satan's kingdom mindset this was a withering curse but if he had repented and humbled himself he might have become like Christ as a servant of all.

And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. Mark 9:35

The Lord was showing Saul what was inside of him. He knew how Saul would understand these words even though they were not a declaration of favour, and it did not fix the destiny of the future. It was indeed an expression of God's purpose towards Saul in view of his own character and conduct. If Saul had repented of his sin, this curse of slaughtering women and children could have been turned into a blessing as we see in the case of Levi.

Of the sons of Jacob, Levi was one of the most cruel and vindictive, one of the two most guilty in the treacherous murder of the Shechemites. Levi's characteristics, reflected in his descendants, incurred for them the decree from God, "I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." Genesis 49:7. **But repentance wrought reformation; and by their faithfulness to God amidst the apostasy of the other tribes, the curse was transformed into a token of highest honor.** *Education* p. 148.3

Just as the Lord never intended Abraham to sacrifice His own son but to consecrate him, so it was not the Lord's desire or character to slay women and children. But as both Saul and the Amalekites had refused to submit to Him and chose Satan as their guide, God assumed the character of a judge divested of the endearing qualities of a father. In sorrow He hid His face as the children's heads were dashed to pieces against the wall. Saul's desperation to hold onto his crown drove him to these extreme actions of killing children. Yet these actions were only the deeds of the Amalekites coming back upon them for they had done the same things to others in their history.

The Amalekites were a wandering people inhabiting the wilderness to the south of Palestine, between that country and Egypt. Like most of the neighboring tribes, they were idolaters, and bitter enemies of Israel. Soon after the exodus they attacked the Israelites in the desert of Rephidim, but were signally defeated by Joshua. The Amalekites were not among the nations whose lands were granted to Israel, nor had they received any injury from them. This assault was, therefore, wholly unprovoked. **It was also most cowardly and cruel; the foe, not daring to risk an open encounter with the Hebrews, had attacked and slain those who from feebleness and exhaustion had fallen behind the body of the host.** {*Signs of the Times*, August 24, 1882 par. 3}

The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Ellen White describes the process of God's judgement.

The Lord does not delight in vengeance, though he executes judgment upon the transgressors of his law. He is forced to do this, to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin. In order to save some, he must cut off those who have become hardened in sin. Says the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, **that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act.**" The work of wrath and destruction is indeed a strange, unwelcome work for Him who is infinite in love. {*Signs of the Times*, August 24, 1882 par. 15}

Here is further evidence to show the nature of the judgment. Ellen White quotes Isaiah 28:21 indicating that this work in regard to the Amalekites was a strange work. The two words for strange in this passage indicate to turn aside and become a stranger. See my book *God's Strange Act* for more details on this. The point here is that God had to give up the Amalekites. He turned aside and allowed Saul's wrath to be visited upon them.

Another clue to show that these actions are related to the visitation of sin with sin is found in 1 Samuel 15:2

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I **remember [H6485]** that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. 1 Samuel 15:2

The word *remember* is the same word as found in Exodus 20:5 for *visit*. So the Lord is *visiting* or *remembering* that which Amalek did. What does the second commandment tell us is the process for visitation?

...visiting [H6485] the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; Exodus 20:5

Thus we have a direct connection showing us that God punishing sin with sin. He is allowing the consequences of sin to bring punishment on them. Saul had already determined to do this himself. In this determination the Lord would test Saul to see if he would fully obey when the Lord added His command to what Saul had purposed.

When commanded to destroy the Amalekites, Saul did not for a moment hesitate. **To his own authority was added the command of the prophet**, and at the call to battle the men of Israel flocked to his standard. {*Signs of the Times*, August 31, 1882 par. 2}

Up till this point, Saul had always found a way to avoid fully doing what the Lord had commanded him to do. Knowing that Saul had purposed to take this action against the Amalekites, the Lord delivers him a message that gives to him the understanding that he has prophetic authority supporting him in what he was planning to do. As King Solomon said "bring me the sword and cut the child in half that I may know what is in your hearts" so the Lord brings forth the sword against the Amalekites that He might know what is in Saul's heart.

In Saul's selfish and darkened mind, if he could somehow manage to complete a task—even of his own design, there was hope that Saul could come to the place of repentance in the future. It was Saul's final test.

This victory was by far the most brilliant which Saul had ever gained, and it served to kindle anew that pride of heart which was his greatest danger. **The divine edict devoting the Amalekites to utter destruction was but partially executed.** Ambitious to heighten the honor of his triumphal return by the presence of a royal captive, **Saul ventured to spare Agag, the fierce and warlike king of Amalek.** **This act was not without influence upon the people. They too felt that they might safely venture to depart somewhat from the Lord's explicit directions. Hence they covetously reserved to themselves the finest of the flocks, herds, and beasts of burden,** destroying only that which was vile and refuse. Here Saul was subjected to the final test. His presumptuous disregard of the will of God, showing his determination to rule as an independent monarch, proved that he could not be intrusted with royal power as the Lord's vicegerent. {*Signs of the Times*, August 31, 1882 par. 3-5}

How God reaches down deep to save men. The Amalekites had filled up the cup of their iniquity and their doom was certain. Saul under the inspiration of Satan had determined to slaughter them in his raging insecurity and jealousy. If he could only take his actions with a sense of fulfilling a command from heaven then there was a chance he could find repentance and live. How Samuel prayed for Saul. He loved him dearly and he cried for Saul all night in prayer praying for him.

While pride and rejoicing reigned in the camp of Saul, there was deep anguish in the home of Samuel. His intense interest for the welfare of Israel had not abated. **He still loved the valiant warrior whom his own hands had anointed as king. It had been his earnest prayer that Saul might become a wise and prosperous ruler.** When it was revealed to him that Saul had been finally rejected, Samuel in his distress "cried unto the Lord all night," pleading for a reversal of the sentence. With an aching heart he set forth next morning to meet the erring king. {*Signs of the Times*, August 31, 1882 par. 6}

12. Confrontation with Samuel

And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. (14) And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? 1 Samuel 15:13-14

Saul seeks to justify his actions and blames the error on the people. The exchange intensifies.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. (24) And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. (25) Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. (26) And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.
1 Samuel 15:23-26

Ellen White makes the following comment.

As the king heard this fearful sentence, he cried out, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and thy words because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice." Saul was filled with terror by the denunciation of the prophet, **but he had, even now, no true sense of the enormity of his transgression. He still persisted in casting blame upon the people**, declaring that he had sinned through fear of them. {*Signs of the Times*, August 31, 1882 par. 12}

Samuel had intended to leave at this point but Saul begs him to stay and honour him. All he thinks about is his throne and protecting it.

Even now Saul fears only personal disgrace and the loss of his kingdom. He is far more disturbed by the alienation of Samuel than by the displeasure of God. He entreated Samuel to pardon his transgressions, as if the prophet had authority to reverse the divine sentence against him. He knew that the people had greater confidence in Samuel than in himself. **Should another king be immediately anointed by divine command, he felt that his own case was hopeless. Should Samuel denounce and forsake him, he feared an immediate revolt among the people.** As a last resort, Saul entreated the prophet to honor him before the elders and the people by publicly uniting with him in the worship of God. **Samuel remained, but only as a silent witness of the service.** Without humility or repentance, Saul's worship could not be accepted of the Lord. {*Signs of the Times*, August 31, 1882 par. 16-17}

By divine direction Samuel yielded to the king's request, that no occasion might be given for a revolt. But he remained only as a silent witness of the service. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 632.2

13. The Death of Agag

Now we come to the critical point of the death of Agag. All Israel knew that Saul had done the wrong thing and not obeyed the Lord completely. The people felt the guilt of taking some of the sheep and cattle.

An act of justice, stern and terrible, was yet to be performed. Samuel must publicly vindicate the honor of God, and rebuke the course of Saul. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 632

The human understanding of justice and atonement is death. If Agag had remained alive then the guilt of not following orders would hang over Israel. Samuel was not planning to stay at this event but he was directed by the Lord to remain there. How would God bring Israel back to a place where they could begin the path of repentance back toward God? They knew it was wrong for them to choose a king. Unless an atonement was made according to their sense of justice they would have no hope of finding true repentance. The previous night when Samuel was alone with God he prayed with tears for Saul and Israel. Now he was surrounded by apostasy. All the work he had invested in the school of the prophets and teaching them the truth seemed in the balance.

Like Moses, when he came down from the mountain and saw the idolatry of the people, he was spurred into action in zeal for God. Moses had pled for the people and in order for the honour of God to be vindicated the command had to go forth to slay the rebellious. It was the only way for the people to have a sense that justice had been served as they perceived it.

There is no direct command recorded for Samuel to take the life of Agag. Yet Samuel knows that this man represents an affront to Jehovah and the complete downfall of Saul as King. Samuel has been up all night and is it possible that the manner in which Agag was slain reflects those deep wounds that Israel had inflicted on him that now finally surface in frustration?

And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal. 1 Samuel 15:33

One Adventist Pioneer made the following comment on this event.

Samuel was a good prophet from a little child; but he hewed Agag to pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. **It seems that Samuel must have woefully fallen**, to become so hardened as to commit murder right before the Lord there in Gilgal! *Stephen Pierce, Review and Herald October 28, 1862*

While I think that assessment is harsh in the context, to cut this man into pieces suggests zeal and probable frustration. Saul wanted Samuel to honour him at his celebration of victory. Samuel destroyed the party atmosphere with pieces of Agag all over the party room floor. The death of Agag provided the sense of justice that Israel could understand. It brought atonement in their minds even as Phineas brought atonement in the slaying of Zimri and Cosbi.

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, **that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.** (12) Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: (13) And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because **he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.** Numbers 25:11-13

We see here that Phinehas was zealous for God. This is the same root word as found in Exodus 20:5. Phinehas acted in his understanding of justice. Even though his understanding of justice was the counterfeit justice of Satan, it was the only possible way for the people to have a sense of justice and atonement. The same was the case with the leaders who were executed in that rebellion.

Their iniquitous practices did that for Israel which all the enchantments of Balaam could not do--they separated them from God. **By swift-coming judgments the people were awakened to the enormity of their sin.** A terrible pestilence broke out in the camp, to which tens of thousands speedily fell a prey. God commanded that the leaders in this apostasy be put to death by the magistrates. This order was promptly obeyed. **The offenders were slain, then their bodies were hung up in sight of all Israel that the congregation, seeing the leaders so severely dealt with, might have a deep sense of God's abhorrence of their sin and the terror of His wrath against them. All felt that the punishment was just,** and the people hastened to the tabernacle, and with tears and deep humiliation confessed their sin. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 455.1-2

When the people saw the death of the leaders of the rebellion everyone felt that this punishment was just. This is justice as they understood it. Every sin must meet its punishment urged Satan. Again this was a case of Idolatry and the Lord followed the steps of Exodus 20:5. He visited their iniquities upon them.

In this light Agag had to be sacrificed to man's perceptions of justice. As Phinehas made atonement for Israel in the death of Zimri and Cosbi so Samuel made atonement for Israel in the death of Agag. This is atonement as humanity understands it so that we can see justice is served and then believe that God can accept us. All these sacrifices of people are offered on an altar of brass. It is a combination of God's mercy and Satan's justice. It is the only means of opening the door of our hearts that we might enter by faith into the Sanctuary only containing gold and silver.

14. Samuel's Wounds Revealed

How much easier would it be for Agag to simply die in his cell from a fear induced stroke or some disease. There were thousands of others ways for this man to die from natural causes due to lack of protection, but just as Jesus had to be preserved to face the death of the cross, so Agag had to be preserved to face execution by the sword. Justice had to be seen to be served by the people. Satisfaction had to be made that the door of mercy might then be opened. It was also necessary for Samuel to become aware of the seed that was sown in him when he was deeply wounded. This is a lesson for all of us to weigh carefully. Are there deep wounds we have received from others that we have not forgiven and asked the Lord to heal? They will surface again in the future. Let us pray now for hidden sins to be recognised and forsaken that we might not be used as a sinner to punish sin.

Another evidence that Samuel was acting in sin when he killed Agag is the fear of death that came upon him after he had killed.

And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. **And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me....**1 Samuel 16:1-2

This is exactly what happened to Elijah after he had killed the prophets of Baal.

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

Samuel had never shown any fear of Saul before he killed Agag. The fear of being killed only came after he had killed. If his act was a righteous act he would not have this fear. The effects did not stop here. When Samuel went to Jesse's home to anoint the next king, he did not perceive the right person.

And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed is before him. (7) But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; **because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.** 1 Samuel 16:6-7

There is a level of confusion in Samuel's discernment of who the right person is. Something has blinded his perception because God said to him that man looks on the outward appearance and it was Samuel that had chosen Eliab looking through man's eyes. It was not this way when Samuel was called to anoint Saul. God was able to communicate directly to him.

Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, (16) **To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin,** and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me. (17) **And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of!** this same shall reign over my people. 1 Samuel 9:15-17

It is true that the Lord told Samuel that David was the one when Samuel saw him, but the process introduced a spirit of confusion on the part of Samuel that had not happened previously. In this case the Spirit of Prophecy uses this story as an example we should not follow.

But who is capable of selecting from a family of children the ones upon whom will rest the most important responsibilities? How often human judgment has here proved to be at fault! **Remember the experience of Samuel** when sent to anoint from the sons of Jesse one to be king over Israel. Seven noble-looking youth passed before him. **As he looked upon the first, in features comely, in form well-developed, and in bearing princely, the prophet exclaimed, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him."** But God said, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." So of all the seven the testimony was, "The Lord hath not chosen these." *Education* p. 265-266

Eliab did not fear the Lord. Had he been called to the throne, he would have been a proud, exacting ruler. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 640

These two points indicate that Samuel was suffering from the effects of killing another person. The Lord instructed Samuel to stay at Saul's celebration in order that Samuel could discover the woundedness that still remained in him. The Lord was revealing Samuel's character to him while at the same time letting Agag receive the consequences of his choices and to allow Israel to have the belief that atonement and justice was served. How wise is our Father in heaven! How earnestly He seeks to reach the hearts of men and reveal to them the dross that remains in their souls.

How wonderful to know our Father in heaven does not condemn us for our weaknesses and faults. He arranges events to bring out our characters to cause sin to abound. Once Samuel had manifested his zeal he then had time to reflect upon what he had done and pray about any remaining woundedness in his heart.

Samuel was such a wonderful man of God that has served the Lord faithfully all his life. The Lord tested him to refine the remaining dross in his soul and prepare him for heaven.

15. Conclusion

There are several other points that could be made but I believe a clear series of points have been established to show that it is the satanically inspired justice system that man has engrained into his mind that led mankind to the need for sacrificial atonement. God never desired sacrifice.

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: Jeremiah 7:22

Let us remember that our Father is placed in a position where for us to believe that atonement can be made, a sacrifice has to occur. To think that God was willing to give up His Son to our concept of justice so that we could receive His mercy! It is a love beyond comprehension.

God does not kill little children. It has never been a desire of His. When men choose to reject Him and worship any other god of Satan's creation, then mercy eventually must fold her wings and the Lord must allow Satan's justice system to be satisfied in order for man to once again open the door to mercy. When men hate God then they love death and man's faulty perception of justice must then include death.

I was shown that the judgments of God would not come directly out from the Lord upon them, but in this way: They place themselves beyond His protection. He warns, corrects, reproveth, and points out the only path of safety; then if those who have been the objects of His special care will follow their own course independent of the Spirit of God, after repeated warnings, if they choose their own way, then He does not commission His angels to prevent Satan's decided attacks upon them. 14 *Manuscript Release* p. 3

The greatest attack Satan has ever made on us is his counterfeit system of justice. Jesus came to reveal the truth about God so that we could grasp the truth about God's justice.

In viewing the holiness and glory of the God of the universe, [from man's perspective] we are terrified; for we know that his justice will not permit him to clear the guilty. **But we need not remain in terror; for Christ came to the world to reveal the character of God, to make plain to us his paternal love toward his adopted children.** We are not to estimate the character of God by the stupendous works of nature alone, but by the simple, lovely life of Jesus, who presented Jehovah as more merciful, more compassionate, more tender, than our earthly parents. **Jesus presented the Father as one to whom we could give our confidence and present our wants. When we are in terror of God, and overwhelmed with the thought of his glory and majesty, the Father points us to Christ as his representative. What you see revealed in Jesus of tenderness, compassion, and love, is the reflection of the attributes of the Father.** The cross of Calvary reveals to man the love of God. Christ represents the Sovereign of the universe as a God of love. By the mouth of the prophet he said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." {VI September 22, 1892, par. 2}

Our Father shows mercy to those who approach Him in Christ. There is no condemnation to those who see the Father through the earthly life of Christ. Those who do not look through Christ will see God as jealous and punishing. They will see God is like them. God will oversee that the very choices Satan, and those who followed him have made and believed, will be the very things that judge them in the end. Through Satan's idolatry of his own idea, God will assume the character of a judge divesting Himself of the endearing qualities of a father, and Satan will meet the justice he demanded.

Satan will be judged by his own idea of justice. It was his plea that every sin should meet its punishment. If God remitted the punishment, he said, He was not a God of truth or justice. Satan will meet the judgment which he said God should exercise. 12 *Manuscript Release p. 413.1*