

Pattern of God's Judgment

Most Christians have firm ideas about the wrath and the judgments of God, about His visitations, His vengeance and His punishments. They believe, that they represent an active act of God who loses His patience at a certain point and punishes and eliminates the transgressors of His law by instructing His holy angels to hurt, torment and kill human beings and by using the forces of nature in a destructive manner so as to achieve His goal of destroying the apostate.

On the other hand Ellen G. White was shown another picture:

*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.** It is Satan's power that is at work at sea and on land, bringing calamity and distress and sweeping off multitudes to make sure of his prey.—Manuscript Releases 14:3 (1883). {LDE 242.2}*

Here are two more quotes which confirm this pattern:

*The wicked have passed the boundary of their probation; **the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last withdrawn. Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no protection from the wicked one.**—The Great Controversy, 614 (1911). {LDE 242.5}*

*Satan works through the elements also to garner his harvest of unprepared souls. He has studied the secrets of the laboratories of nature, and he uses all his power to control the elements as far as God allows. ... **It is God that shields His creatures and hedges them in from the power of the destroyer.** But the Christian world have shown contempt for the law of Jehovah; and the Lord will do just what He has declared that He would—**He will withdraw His blessings from the earth and remove His protecting care from those who are rebelling against His law** and teaching and forcing others to do the same. {GC 589.2}*

Here it is given to us a clear pattern of the judgments of God. This is the sequence of this pattern:

1. God warns, corrects, reproveth and points out the only path of safety
2. People follow their own course, independent of the Spirit of God
3. Even after repeated warnings they choose their own way
4. They place themselves beyond His protection
5. God withdraws His blessings and removes His protecting care
6. The Spirit of God is withdrawn
7. God does not commission His angels to prevent Satan's decided attacks upon them
8. Satan's power is at work at sea and on land, bringing calamity and distress and sweeping off multitudes to make sure of his prey

Through the way the Bible expresses it, with our human understanding of wrath, revenge, punishment and judgment we often have trouble recognizing this pattern in the judgments of God. We rather see an active, angry God who uses the elements and instructs His angels to destroy the transgressors. Therefore it is important that we learn to apply this pattern to the judgments of God otherwise we get a wrong picture of the character of God.

To study this pattern let us consider two real events, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the crucifixion of Christ on the Cross which are both related to the final destruction of the wicked.

*Tears were in many eyes as I directed their attention to the suffering and crucifixion of Christ, and the destruction of Jerusalem **which symbolized the final destruction of the wicked.** RH June 1, 1886, par. 18*

Can we find this pattern of God's judgement Ellen White was shown? Can we recognize the sequence? In the first chapter of the book *The Great Controversy* we have an inspired report about what happened at that time to explain the first of these two events.

Since we cannot quote the entire chapter here, it would be helpful if you read the chapter for yourself. We quote only a few sentences to see that it truly deals with a judgment of God and that all these terms are used which makes it difficult for us to immediately see what really happened.

*The hour of hope and pardon was fast passing; **the cup of God's long-deferred wrath** was almost full. p.20*

*He beheld **the destroying angel with sword uplifted against the city** which had so long been Jehovah's dwelling place. p.21*

*...He saw **but the first draft from that cup of wrath** which at the final judgment she must drain to its dregs. p.21*

*I have stayed **the angel of justice**, I have called thee to repentance. p.21*

*Christ saw .. Jerusalem .. hastening on **to meet the retributive judgments of God.** p.22*

*Jesus declared to the listening disciples **the judgments** that were to fall upon apostate Israel, and especially **the retributive vengeance that would come upon them for their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah.** p.25*

*Because of her sins, **wrath had been denounced against Jerusalem**, and her stubborn unbelief rendered her doom certain. p.26*

*For nearly forty years after the doom of Jerusalem had been pronounced by Christ Himself, the Lord delayed **His judgments** upon the city and the nation. p.27*

*The Jews had forged their own fetters; they had filled for themselves **the cup of vengeance.** p.35*

*Never was there given a more decisive testimony to **God's hatred of sin and to the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty.** p.35*

*The Saviour's prophecy concerning **the visitation of judgments upon Jerusalem** ... p.35*

In these sentences many well-known terms are mentioned like "retributive judgements", "cup of wrath", "the cup of vengeance" and more. With these terms we relate certain imaginations. Let us summarize them once more:

- the cup of God's long-deferred wrath
- the destroying angel with sword uplifted against the city
- the first draft from that cup of wrath
- the angel of justice
- the retributive judgments of God
- the judgments
- the retributive vengeance
- wrath had been denounced against Jerusalem
- the cup of vengeance
- God's hatred of sin and the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty
- the visitation of judgments

There is no doubt that the destruction of Jerusalem was a judgment of God. What we want to know is if the pattern that Ellen White was shown can be applied to this event. Here is again this pattern:

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. It is Satan's power that is at work at sea and on land, bringing calamity and distress and sweeping off multitudes to make sure of his prey.—Manuscript Releases 14:3 (1883). {LDE 242.2}

Out of this pattern we have already developed this sequence with eight characteristics:

1. God warns, corrects, reproveth and points out the only path of safety
2. People follow their own course, independent of the Spirit of God
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4. They place themselves beyond His protection
5. God withdraws His blessings and removes His protecting care
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Can we find this sequence and these characteristics in the events of the destruction of Jerusalem? The next paragraph from the first chapter in the Great Controversy answers this question and gives us a clear picture. The number of the respective characteristic of the above pattern is given in brackets to make it even clearer:

The Jews had forged their own fetters; they had filled for themselves the cup of vengeance. In the utter destruction that befell them as a nation, and in all the woes that followed them in their dispersion, they were but reaping the harvest which their own hands had sown. Says the prophet: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;" "for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." (1,2,3) Hosea 13:9; 14:1. Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work (8). By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them (4,5,6,7), and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will (8). The horrible cruelties enacted in the destruction of Jerusalem are a demonstration of Satan's vindictive power over those who yield to his control (7,8). {GC 35.3}

We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan (5,6,7,8). 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 (7,8). But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed (5,6,7). 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 (5,6,7), to reap that which they have sown (2,3,4). 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 (1,2,3,4). The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner (5,6), 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 (5,6,7,8). The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn

warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace and resisting the pleadings of divine mercy (1,2,3). Never was there given a more decisive testimony to God's hatred of sin and to the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty. (GC 36.1)

This description corresponds in all respects to the pattern of the judgments of God Ellen White was shown by Jesus. Thus, in the event of the destruction of Jerusalem the terms judgments, wrath, vengeance, punishment etc., mean that **God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner**, but He **withdraws** from the sinner and **no longer protects** him from the cruel power of the evil one.

That is also the meaning of what Jesus said in the parable of the king who made a marriage for his son: *But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.* Matthew 22:7

Thus the Jewish people sealed their rejection of God's mercy. The result was foretold by Christ in the parable. The king "sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." The judgment pronounced came upon the Jews in the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the nation. {COL 308.3}

It seems strange to us that the Bible expresses itself in this way. But the scripture is its own interpreter and clearly tells us what the wrath of God really is. It is the hiding of God's face.

In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. Isa 54:8

Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. Psalm 27:9

Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? Deuteronomy 31:17

Isn't this a wonderful accordance to the pattern we are studying about? The withdrawal of God's Spirit and protection corresponds to the hiding of His face. This is certainly a painful process for God who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Eze 18:23).

Finally I want to point to two things Ellen White mentions in this chapter about the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner (5,6), 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

This is what happens when God withdraws from us:

1. There is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul
2. No protection from the malice and enmity of Satan

This is mentioned again on page 36:

The records of the past,—the long procession of tumults, conflicts, and revolutions, the "battle of the warrior ... with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood" (Isaiah 9:5),—what are these,

in contrast with the terrors of that day when the restraining Spirit of God shall be wholly withdrawn from the wicked, no longer to hold in check the outburst of human passion and satanic wrath! GC 36

This is what we have to fear:

1. The outburst of human passion
2. The outburst of satanic wrath

The Spirit of God protects us from the first.

The Angels of God protect us from the second.

The destruction of Jerusalem is important because it addresses the process of the judgments of God throughout human history and the end of the world. Notice how the Spirit of Prophecy speaks to four major judgments within this same context.

Men cannot with impunity reject the warning which God in mercy sends them. **A message was sent from heaven to the world in Noah's day**, and their salvation depended upon the manner in which they treated that message. Because they rejected the warning, **the Spirit of God was withdrawn from the sinful race**, and they perished in the waters of the Flood. **In the time of Abraham, mercy ceased to plead with the guilty inhabitants of Sodom**, and all but Lot with his wife and two daughters were consumed by the fire sent down from heaven. **So in the days of Christ. The Son of God declared to the unbelieving Jews of that generation: "Your house is left unto you desolate."** Matthew 23:38. Looking down to the last days, the same Infinite Power declares, concerning those who "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved": "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. **As they reject the teachings of His word, God withdraws His Spirit and leaves them to the deceptions which they love.** GC 431

We see the judgments of the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world all follow this pattern. We must look to another example of this pattern to deal with the question of the final destruction of the wicked. Since the whole human race will be resurrected again at the end of the millennium, the wicked will finally experience the second death. All the judgments of the Bible up until the end place people in the state of Biblical sleep. As Jesus said of Lazarus he is not dead but sleeping. Jesus is the only one who has yet experienced the final judgment of the wicked. Therefore we must study the death of the cross to understand the final death of the wicked. Jesus took the cost of sin upon Himself and experienced the wages of sin for us.

Rom 5:8-9 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

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

Let us follow the sequence of the death of Christ to see what will happen to the wicked at the end of time.

Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. **The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart.** The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. **The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.** {DA 753.1}

When the Spirit of God withdraws from the sinner, there is no comforter to encourage them to trust in the mercy of God. The sinner is left to face the catalogue of their sins without any sense of hope. It was this sense of sinfulness that causes Christ to cry out:

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

Christ felt utterly forsaken and alone while carrying ours sins upon him.

Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. **He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race.** It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God. {DA 753.2}

It is the sense of sin the brings the Father's wrath upon the wicked. What is the Father's wrath?

How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire? Psa 89:46

The Father's wrath is the hiding of the face of God.

In that thick darkness God's presence was hidden. He makes darkness His pavilion, and conceals His glory from human eyes. **God and [754] His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed.** Had His glory flashed forth from the cloud, every human beholder would have been destroyed. **And in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father's presence.** He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him. {DA 753.4}

The Father was present with His Son in the darkness but the guilt of sin caused the comfort of the Father's to be withdrawn. The Father will be present with the sinner when they die but they will not discern Him for His Spirit will have been withdrawn. We notice in the text above that this hiding of the Father's face by the withdrawal of the Spirit is like a burning fire. This burning fire is described elsewhere in Scripture.

Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: Isa 30:27

Notice that it says the name of the LORD comes from far. The name of God is the character of God. When the selfish sinner looks upon the perfect and selfless love of God, it reveals the total wickedness of the sinner and it causes immense pain like looking into extremely bright light after being in deep darkness for many years.

Now Christ again appears to the view of His enemies. Far above the city, upon a foundation of burnished gold, is a throne, high and lifted up. Upon this throne sits the Son of God, and around Him are the subjects of His kingdom. The power and majesty of Christ no language can describe, no pen portray. The glory of the Eternal Father is enshrouding His Son. The brightness of His presence fills the City of God, and flows out beyond the gates, flooding the whole earth with its radiance. {GC 665.1}

The greatest glory of the Father and Son is the manifestation of the cross and at the end of the 1000 years the whole world will behold the glory of the cross. Let us read carefully the agony this creates for the wicked as they behold the cross:

Above the throne is revealed the cross; and like a panoramic view appear the scenes of Adam's temptation and fall, and the successive steps in the great plan of redemption. The Saviour's lowly birth; His early life of simplicity and obedience; His baptism in Jordan; the fast and temptation in the wilderness; His public ministry, unfolding to men heaven's most precious blessings; the days crowded with deeds of love and mercy, the nights of prayer and watching in the solitude of the mountains; the plottings of envy, hate, and malice which repaid His benefits; the awful, mysterious agony in Gethsemane beneath the crushing weight of the sins of the whole world; His betrayal into the hands of the murderous [667] mob; the fearful events of that night of horror--the unresisting prisoner, forsaken by His best-loved disciples, rudely hurried through the streets of Jerusalem; the Son of God exultingly displayed before Annas, arraigned in the high priest's palace, in the judgment hall of Pilate, before the cowardly and cruel Herod, mocked, insulted, tortured, and condemned to die--all are vividly portrayed.

And now before the swaying multitude are revealed the final scenes--the patient Sufferer treading the path to Calvary; the Prince of heaven hanging upon the cross; the haughty priests and the jeering rabble deriding His expiring agony; the supernatural darkness; the heaving earth, the rent rocks, the open graves, marking the moment when the world's Redeemer yielded up His life.

The awful spectacle appears just as it was. Satan, his angels, and his subjects have no power to turn from the picture of their own work. Each actor recalls the part which he performed. Herod, who slew the innocent children of Bethlehem that he might destroy the King of Israel; the base Herodias, upon whose guilty soul rests the blood of John the Baptist; the weak, timeserving Pilate; the mocking soldiers; the priests and rulers and the maddened throng who cried, "His blood be on us, and on our children!"--all behold the enormity of their guilt. They vainly seek to hide from the divine majesty of His countenance, outshining the glory of the sun, while the redeemed cast their crowns at the Saviour's feet, exclaiming: "He died for me!"

Amid the ransomed throng are the apostles of Christ, the heroic Paul, the ardent Peter, the loved and loving John, and their truehearted brethren, and with them the vast host of martyrs; **while outside the walls, with every vile and abominable thing, are those by whom they were persecuted, imprisoned, and slain. There is Nero, that monster of cruelty and vice, beholding the joy and exaltation of those whom he once tortured,** and in whose extremest anguish he found satanic delight. His mother is there to witness the result of [668] her own work; to see how the evil stamp of character transmitted to her son, the passions encouraged and developed by her influence and example, have borne fruit in crimes that caused the world to shudder.

There are papist priests and prelates, who claimed to be Christ's ambassadors, yet employed the rack, the dungeon, and the stake to control the consciences of His people. There are the proud pontiffs who exalted themselves above God and presumed to change the law of the Most High. Those pretended fathers of the church have an account to render to God from which they would fain be excused. Too late they are made to see that the Omniscient One is jealous of His law and that He will in no wise clear the guilty. They learn now that Christ identifies His interest with that of His suffering people; and they feel the force of His own words: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Matthew 25:40.

The whole wicked world stand arraigned at the bar of God on the charge of high treason against the government of heaven. They have none to plead their cause; they are without excuse; and the sentence of eternal death is pronounced against them.

It is now evident to all that the wages of sin is not noble independence and eternal life, but slavery, ruin, and death. The wicked see what they have forfeited by their life of rebellion. The far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory was despised when offered them; but how desirable it now appears. "All this," cries the lost soul, "I might have had; but I chose to put these things far from me. Oh, strange infatuation! I have exchanged peace, happiness, and honor for wretchedness, infamy, and despair." All see that their exclusion from heaven is just. By their lives they have declared: "We will not have this Man [Jesus] to reign over us." {GC 668.3}

This agony they experience is the hiding of the face of the Father with the revealing of the cross. As the cross was revealed on earth 2000 years ago at the end of the millennium once again it will be revealed to all the inhabitants of the world at once and once again the Father will hide His face and the wicked will experience what Christ experienced when the cross was revealed the first time. The agony of fire that ripped through the soul of Christ will engulf the wicked and overwhelm them. As the Scripture states

The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. (5) The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. (6) In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. (7) Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. (8) **There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.** (9) He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. Psa 18:4-9

This is the fire that comes down out of heaven and devours the wicked. As it states in the book of 2nd Esdras from the Apocrypha:

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

tormented, which are like unto a flame: and he shall destroy them without labour by the law which is like unto me. 2
Esdras 13:37-38

This same event is described in Revelation:

And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. Rev 20:9

Another evidence that this burning fire comes from the heart is revealed in the prophecy of Satan:

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

This is exactly what happened to Christ, a fire came forth from the midst of Him and broke His heart and He died. All those who reject Christ will be judged as they have judged him. A fire comes forth from within their hearts and the torture of their minds destroys them.

The pattern of the death of Christ on the Cross is the exact pattern of how the wicked will be finally destroyed. So in the light of the cross we discover the truth of God's judgments:

The mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries. In the light that streams from Calvary the attributes of God which had filled us with fear and awe appear beautiful and attractive. Mercy, tenderness, and parental love are seen to blend with holiness, justice, and power. While we behold the majesty of His throne, high and lifted up, we see His character in its gracious manifestations, and comprehend, as never before, the significance of that endearing title, "Our Father." {GC 652.1}

To the redeemed the cross brings joy everlasting but to the wicked it brings shame and destruction. God is not our enemy. God is our saviour and protector. Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from Him, from the Father of lights. How thankful we should be for His care and protection.

I want to close with this quote:

Fearful is the condition of those who resist the divine claims and yield to Satan's temptations, until God gives them up to the control of evil spirits. But those who follow Christ are ever safe under His watchcare. Angels that excel in strength are sent from heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard which God has stationed about His people. {GC 517.2}