

# Why Does the Bible Command Stoning?

## The Practise of Stoning

The Bible outlines some very harsh punishments in the book of the law:

Lev 20:2 "Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: 'Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. **The people of the land shall stone him with stones** (NKJV)

Lev 20:27 A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: **they shall stone them with stones**: their blood shall be upon them.

Lev 24:15-16 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. (16) And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, **and all the congregation shall certainly stone him**: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death.

Did God originate this punishment of stoning? Where does the Bible first tell us that this practice came from?

Exo 8:26 And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, **and will they not stone us?**

Stoning was an Egyptian practice. This is how Egyptians dealt with transgression against their gods. One of the reasons why Israel wished to go into the wilderness to sacrifice is because the animals they would sacrifice were worshipped by the Egyptians. It is very probable that Pharaoh was well aware that if the Israelites would sacrifice in the land that it would stir up the Egyptians to stone them.

The Israelites adopted this practice as is evident in what they wished to do to Moses.

Exo 17:4 And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.

When Caleb and Joshua pleaded with the people that they could go up and take the land of Canaan, the response from the people was to stone them.

Num 14:8-10 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. (9) Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not. (10) **But all the congregation bade stone them with stones**. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

If God had not intervened, they would have done it. So why would God allow this Egyptian practice of stoning into the laws for Israel?

Eze 20:23-26 I lifted up mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries; (24) Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. (25) **Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live**; (26) And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the LORD.

## Statutes and Judgments that were not Good

Since Israel despised the statutes and judgments of God and polluted His Sabbath He gave them statutes and judgments that were not good. What were these statutes and judgments that were not good?

The Lord said of the children of Israel, "Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols, wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live." Because of continual disobedience, **the Lord annexed penalties to the transgression of his law, which were not good for the transgressor**, or whereby he should not live in his rebellion. 1SP 265.2.

These statutes and judgments that were not good were the penalties that were annexed or added to the law that punished transgression. It is certainly not a good thing to be stoned to death! These punishments were in accordance with their own ideas of judgment for transgression. These punishments reflected their own thinking and their own ways that they had learned from the Egyptians. As Jesus explains:

Luke 19:21-22 **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. (22) **And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man,** taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow:

Remember that it was the Israelites themselves that took up the practice of stoning to deal with transgression. When they determined to stone Moses in Exodus 17:4, they revealed a spirit of judgment without mercy. The Bible says:

James 2:13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Since the Israelites showed no mercy in their judgment, this judgment process was reflected back to them. They chose to believe that God wanted to kill them in the desert and they wanted to kill Moses by stoning. God is not mocked for as the Israelites sowed this seed, they reaped the harvest. Again as Jesus stated:

Matt 7:1-2 Judge not, that ye be not judged. (2) For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Out of their own mouths Israel sentenced themselves to death in the wilderness according to their own beliefs about God.

Israel repeatedly expressed their fears that God would kill them in the wilderness:

Exo 14:11 And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, **hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?** wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?

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

Num 14:2-3 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, **Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt!** or would God we had died in this wilderness! (3) **And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey?** were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

So according to their own judgment they received judgment:

Num 14:26-29 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, (27) How long shall I bear

with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. (28) Say unto them, **As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:** (29) Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,

As we will see later, this sentence of death could have proved a blessing to them if they had chosen to believe that God would show them mercy, but they did not believe this and so perished.

Heb 3:17-19 But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? (19) **So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.**

In the time of Christ we see the Pharisees were cornered by their own system of judgment which their forefathers received from the Egyptians. It reveals the constant fear that the Israelites lived under and the bondage it created.

Luke 20:4-7 The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? (5) And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? (6) **But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us:** for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. (7) And they answered, that they could not tell whence *it was*.

The Pharisees lived in a world of condemnation, anger and revenge. The law provided a vehicle for them to try to destroy the law-giver. They used the law unlawfully.

They thirsted to be revenged upon Him for His pointed rebukes. They had tried to provoke Him to say or do something that would give them occasion to condemn Him. **Several times they had attempted to stone Him**, but He had quietly withdrawn, and they had lost sight of Him. DA 538.1.

Those principles by which Israel judged, God added to the law. He allowed them to co-author the laws of their nation. He reflected back to them the principles they chose to live by. This is because God is not one to force Himself upon them.

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. To know God is to love Him; DA 22.

God would not force His commandments upon them. He gave these wonderful precepts to them for their good. His commandments are full of promises and hope. Yet He allowed Israel to shape their own nation according to their perception of God. He could not force the truth about Himself upon them, instead they had to desire it and seek it out, but they didn't do this. They rejected Him and chose the gods of Egypt, the gods they already knew.

## **Consequences of the Golden Calf Apostasy**

It is important to note that these penalties about stoning were placed in the law after Israel danced around the golden calf. Through their actions Israel had stated emphatically that they rejected the true God of heaven and praised the golden calf which was one of the gods of the Egyptians. The sacrifice of a calf or bull in Egypt would have gotten an Israelite stoned to death. In choosing to worship the golden calf, the Israelites accepted the judgment system of this god. To transgress the golden calf meant that you should be stoned.

Rom 6:16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Israel had yielded themselves as servants to this false worship system which was a creation of Satan. Many had chosen Satan as their leader, and therefore his principles were allowed to be annexed to their national government. Aaron's complicity in this sin only gave Satan the greater advantage. If Moses had not especially prayed for Aaron, Satan would have been free to destroy the future High Priest and bring great sorrow to Moses and Israel.

Exo 32:34-35 Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit **I will visit their sin upon them.** (35) And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.

What is interesting about this verse is that it says that the Lord *plagued* the people because they made the calf. The word *plague* is the same word used in this verse:

Exo 21:35 And if one man's ox *hurt* another's, that he die; then they shall sell the live ox, and divide the money of it; and the dead ox also they shall divide.

The context of the word can be used of an ox hurting another ox that he die. Israel chose to worship the gods of Egypt, and God visited upon them the aggression of the ox or calf deity. God visited Israel according to their perceptions of deity. As golden calf worship was a creation of Satan, his principles were allowed to have greater control over their lives.

## Through the Fire

We notice another practice of the Egyptians connected with their worship system mentioned in Ezekiel:

Eze 20:25,26 Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live; (26) And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb

The Egyptians would cause their children to have to jump through a wall of fire. Notice the comments of the Spirit of Prophecy:

The Egyptians had received traditions in regard to sacrificing. They did not acknowledge the existence of the God of Heaven. They sacrificed to their idol gods. With great pomp and ceremony they performed their idol worship. They erected [268] altars to the honor of their gods, and they required even their own children to pass through the fire. After they had erected their altars, they required their children to leap over the altars through the fire. If they could do this without being burned, the idol priests and the people received it as an evidence that their god accepted their offerings, and favored especially the person who passed through the fiery ordeal. He was loaded with benefits, and was ever afterward greatly esteemed by all the people. He was never allowed to be punished, however aggravating might be his crimes. If another person who leaped through the fire was so unfortunate as to be burned, then his fate was fixed; for they thought that their gods were angry, and would be appeased with nothing short of the unhappy victim's life, and he was offered up as a sacrifice upon their idol altars.

Even some of the children of Israel had so far degraded themselves as to practice these abominations, and God caused the fire to kindle upon their children, whom they made to pass through the fire. They did not go to all the lengths of the heathen nations; but **God deprived them of their children by causing the fire to consume them in the act of passing through it.** 1SP 268.1.

So not only was stoning connected to the Egyptian worship system but also passing through the fire. We see that God in his mercy allowed the sons and daughters of the Israelites to be consumed in the fire. In mercy the Lord allowed these children to die instantly rather than pass through the flames and receive terrible burns and then face the terror of being executed to the Egyptian gods. So it is interesting to see the practice of stoning being connected to making children pass through the fire.

Lev 20:2 "Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: 'Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. **The people of the land shall stone him with stones** (NKJV)

## **Punishing Sin with Sin**

It is a point worthy of note that the combining of these two practices were from the Egyptian culture. One practice is used to destroy the other. God visits the iniquities of one aspect of this worship upon another aspect of the same worship system. He punishes sin with sin. Would this be something the Israelites would have understood? In these judgments that are not good, is the Lord showing Israel the self-destructive nature of sin while at the same time allowing them to embrace punishments that they themselves had chosen according to the mercy they saw in the gods they worshipped? Are judgments like these similar to the judgments on Egypt? God loosed plagues on Egypt characterised by the gods that they worshipped and therefore punished the sin of idolatry through the objects representing those idols.

In choosing the worship system of the golden calf did Israel not invite the judgment of burning which involved passing through the fire?

Num 11:1 And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, **and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.**

## **The Mixed Multitude**

The Spirit of Prophecy mentioned that God consumed the children of those who made them pass through the fire as an act of worship to pagan deities. In Numbers 11 we see this same process occurring. The people were being consumed by fire. This was a process they understood. It must be restated that Israel had chosen the Egyptian system. Numbers 11:1 speaks specifically of those on the periphery of the camp. Ellen White explains that it was the mixed multitude who followed in the wake or on the edges of Israel.

And a mixed multitude went up also with them." In this multitude were not only those who were actuated by faith in the God of Israel, but also a far greater number who desired only to escape from the plagues, or **who followed in the wake of the moving multitudes** merely from excitement and curiosity. PP 281

It was the mixed multitude that initiated the apostasy with the golden calf.

**The "mixed multitude" had been the first to indulge murmuring and impatience, and they were the leaders in the apostasy that followed.** Among the objects regarded by the Egyptians as symbols of deity was the ox or calf; and it was at the suggestion of those who had practiced this form of idolatry in Egypt that a calf was now made and worshiped. PP 316.

This group were camped on the edges of Israel and were not committed to the true God of heaven but were only seeking to escape punishment in Egypt. Satan often used them to lead Israel into sin.

Moses stood before them as the representative of Christ. Yet they wanted to stone him. In the same way the Jews resorted to the Roman process of crucifixion to kill Christ. They rejected Christ and chose Barabbas and suffered the consequences of their own choices forty years later in the destruction of Jerusalem when Satan was given complete control of the nation.

By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will. The horrible cruelties enacted in the [36] destruction of Jerusalem are a demonstration of Satan's vindictive power over those who yield to his control. GC 35, 36.

## Nadab and Abihu

We see the judgment of fire once again in relation to Nadab and Abihu:

Lev 10:1-2 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. (2) **And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them,** and they died before the LORD.

This was a judgment process that Israel had chosen themselves in their worship of the golden calf and in adopting the punishments of Egypt. Jesus plainly told us:

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

Israel had chosen this system and so they were judged according to their own desires and principles. Exactly how this fire went out from the Lord we cannot say for sure. This is what the Spirit of Prophecy tells us:

Nadab and Abihu were priests of the sanctuary, and although it was not lawful to use common fire, these priests, when they went in before God, presumed to kindle their incense with unconsecrated fire. The priests had been indulging in the use of wine, and their moral sensibilities were benumbed; they did not discern the character of their actions, or realize what would be the fearful consequences of their sin. **A fire blazed out from the holy of holies and consumed them.** Temperance 280.

## Lightning from Heaven

This fire came directly out of the Most Holy Place. Revelation tells us about other things coming from the Most Holy Place:

Rev 11:19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

Christ, depicted in Daniel 10, is described as having a face like lightning as is also the angel that came to call Christ from the grave:

Dan 10:5-6 Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: (6) His body also was like the beryl, **and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire,** and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.

Mat 28:2-3 And, behold, **there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended** from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. (3) **His countenance was like lightning,** and his raiment white as snow:

It is also significant that Satan is referred to as lightning that falls from heaven.

Luke 10:18 And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

It would appear that the lightning, thunder and earthquake are connected to the power of Christ and the angels either good or bad. Since all power belongs to God then all the power given to the activity of the angels must be determined by God the Father.

Psa 62:11 God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.

Rom 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

It is worthy of mention that references to violent wind or storm, earthquake and fire, that speak of angelic presence and power are related in the story of Elijah:

1 Kings 19:11-12 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: (12) And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

As the power of God is granted to both good and evil angels, does this experience with Elijah warn us against determining the character of God through the display of power? Some uses of His power come directly from Himself, but others do not but from the lightning that falls from heaven through Satan. As many situations are very hard to determine, let us listen for the still small voice to tell us of His mercy, love and grace.

We get a clear example of Satan being granted the use of the power of God in the story of Job and the fire of God that fell from heaven.

Job 1:8-16,19 And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? (9) Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? (10) Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. (11) But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. (12) **And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power;** only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. (13) And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: (14) And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: (15) And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. (16) While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, **The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them;** and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.... And, behold, **there came a great wind** from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

## Removal of Protection

As all power comes from God, we see that Satan is allowed to use this power to destroy with fire, wind, and sword. The power comes from God but allowed to be used by Satan in places where the protective hand of God is not operating. We notice something very significant after the incident of the golden calf that affected the protection of the Israelites.

Moses rebuked Aaron, and informed him that his conduct was highly censurable; for he had been blessed above the people, and had been admitted into close converse with God. That he should commit so great a sin, even to save his life, was a matter of astonishment to faithful Moses. He saw that the people were naked; that is, were stripped of their ornaments; for Aaron had made them naked to their shame, among their enemies. He had deprived them of their ornaments, and put them to a shameful use. **They had not merely lost their ornaments, but they were divested of their defense against Satan; for they had lost their piety and consecration to God, and had forfeited his protection. He had, in his displeasure, removed his sustaining hand, and they were left exposed to the contempt and power of their enemies.** Their enemies were well acquainted with the wonderful works performed by the hand of Moses in Egypt. And they knew that Moses had brought them from Egypt, in obedience to the command of the God of the Hebrews, to rid them of idolatry, and to secure to himself their undivided affections and their sacred worship. 1SP 250.

The story of Job had a special significance to the children of Israel for in both cases the hand of God's protection was removed and Satan was given access to attack and harass them. God prepared for their experience in the wilderness by having Moses write the book of Job before he went to Egypt.

The long years amid desert solitudes were not lost. Not only was Moses gaining a preparation for the great work before him, but during this time, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book of Genesis and also the book of Job, which would be read with the deepest interest by the people of God until the close of time. ST Feb. 19, 1880.

## **Destructive Work of Angels**

Knowing that both good and evil angels have access to the power of God and are like lightning that comes forth from the throne of God, how can we tell whether it is good or evil angels that are using the power of God? This quote from Great Controversy explains that both good and evil angels use destructive power.

When He leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor. The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. God's long-suffering has ended. The world has rejected His mercy, despised His love, and trampled upon His law. 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. Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old.

A single angel destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians and filled the land with mourning. When David offended against God by numbering the people, one angel caused that terrible destruction by which his sin was punished. **The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He permits.** There are forces now ready, and only waiting the divine permission, to spread desolation everywhere. GC 614.2.

We see evidence of the angels of God using destructive power in the destruction of Jerusalem:

Men will continue to erect expensive buildings, costing millions of money; special attention will be called to their architectural beauty, and the firmness and solidity with which they are constructed; but the Lord has instructed me that despite the unusual firmness and expensive display, these buildings will share the fate of the temple in Jerusalem. That magnificent structure fell. **Angels of God were sent to do the work of destruction, so that one stone was not left upon another that was not thrown down** (MS 35, 1906). 5BC 1098.

We know that the Roman soldiers were the ones that destroyed the temple but here we see angels of God helping them in this work. Again we see the combination of angel and human collaboration in the destruction of Jericho:

Christ is the ladder that Jacob saw, on which descended and ascended the angels of God, while the glory of God illuminated every round of the ladder from the highest heaven to the earth. Christ spanned the gulf that separated man from God, and earth from heaven, and he is working continually in our behalf, and individually we are to co-operate with him and with the heavenly intelligences. **But Christ can do nothing for us without our co-operation, and we can do nothing without him.** Satan and his angels are at war with us, and they will be at war with us to the end of the world, and Jesus has told us, "Without me ye can do nothing." This is the lesson that Christ has been teaching his children through all ages, and in every generation. When Joshua went forth in the morning before the taking of Jericho, there appeared before him a warrior fully equipped for battle. And Joshua asked, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" and he answered, "As Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." If the eyes of Joshua had been opened as were the eyes of the servant of Elisha at Dothan, and he could have endured the sight,



he would have seen the angels of the Lord encamped about the children of Israel; for the trained army of heaven had come to fight for the people of God, and the Captain of the Lord's hosts was there to command. **When Jericho fell, no human hand touched the walls of the city, for the angels of the Lord overthrew the fortifications, and entered the fortress of the enemy. It was not Israel, but the Captain of the Lord's host that took Jericho. But Israel had their part to act to show their faith in the Captain of their salvation.** RH July 19, 1892.

The angels of God require co-operation for without faith in God, He cannot command His angels to work on our behalf. We see angels of heaven assisting Jonathan in dealing with the Philistines.

**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. PP 625

Jonathan recognised the tokens of divine aid. This same aid was manifested for David who trusted God to help him.

2 Sam 5:24 And it shall be, **when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees,** then you shall advance quickly. For then the LORD will go out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines." (NKJV)

We see the angels of God assisting Jonathan and the armour bearer in defeating their enemies. We are told the angels shielded the two men. It also says they fought by their side. Is this fighting the work of shielding or is it actual fighting?

## **Acts of Satan Clothed in Mystery**

In reading the stories of the Bible it is very hard to determine exactly who is doing what. This situation is not by accident. Satan covers himself carefully and deceives wherever he can. In heaven the angels found it very hard to understand his movements.

His power to deceive was very great. By disguising himself in a cloak of falsehood, he had gained an advantage. All his acts were so clothed with mystery that it was difficult to disclose to the angels the true nature of his work. Until fully developed, it could not be made to appear the evil thing it was; his disaffection would not be seen to be rebellion. Even the loyal angels could not fully discern his character or see to what his work was leading. PP 41.2

We know that Satan seeks to place upon God with his own attributes:

Says the prophet: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;" "for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Hosea 13:9; 14:1. **Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God.** It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work. By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will. GC 35

The understanding of the people of God has been blinded, for Satan has misrepresented the character of God. Our good and gracious Lord has been presented before the people clothed in the attributes of Satan... 1 SM 235

This difficulty in knowing which angels are taking which actions requires us to base these decisions upon what we understand about the character of God. All power belongs to God and nothing can happen in this world without His being involved. Satan has no power in his hands that God does not allow him to exercise. Therefore all destruction and all deaths take place through the power of God.

## The Divine Pattern of Character and Power

This brings us to a very important question. What is the relationship between God's character and His power? Is God's character manifested through His power or is God's power manifested through His character? I hope you will catch the significance of this point. To get a better background on this topic see the presentation *Divine Pattern of Character and Power* on [maranathamedia.com](http://maranathamedia.com) or [youtube.com](http://youtube.com). If we worship God as power then acts of power written in the Bible will define what He is like. However, if we worship God as character abounding in goodness and truth then all acts of power will reflect His character and may be attributed directly to Him. Those which don't reflect His character will be attributed to the forces of darkness. Therefore God as a person cannot be judged according to power; He is not in the wind, earthquake and fire. He is the still small voice of character.

The question of how we understand all these stories in the Bible should be guided completely upon our perception of His character. Character is the source, and power is the channel. If we determine the character of God by His power then we made the agency or channel the source and we will misrepresent the character of God. Again check the presentation *Divine Pattern of Character and Power* to get this clear.

As we read through all the passages of the Old Testament, here are samples of the character guide lines to help us in that search:

Exo 34:5-7 And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. (6) And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, (7) Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Satan's representations against the government of God, and his defense of those who sided with him, were a constant accusation against God. His murmurings and complaints were groundless; and yet God allowed him to work out his theory. God could have destroyed Satan and all his sympathizers as easily as one can pick up a pebble and cast it to the earth. **But by so doing he would have given a precedent for the exercise of force. All the compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. He would not work on this line. He would not give the slightest encouragement for any human being to set himself up as God over another human being, feeling at liberty to cause him physical or mental suffering. This principle is wholly of Satan's creation.** RH, September 7, 1897

God keeps a reckoning with the nations. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice. Those who work evil toward their fellow men, saying, How doth God know? will one day be called upon to meet long-deferred vengeance. In this age a more than common contempt is shown to God. Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. Many have well-nigh passed the boundary of mercy. Soon God will show that He is indeed the living God. He will say to the angels, "No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy. Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience; for the cup of their iniquity is full. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work." RH Sep 17, 1901

Therefore when we know that Satan can act as lightning that falls from heaven, then is it possible to see that when he moves in his work of destruction, the power to do his work comes from the throne of God and is therefore written in Scripture as the judgment of God? Can we also see that as Satan is granted access to use power outside of the statutes and judgments of God that God as a person can't be judged by the use of that power?

## How Shall We Decide?

Returning to story Nadab and Abihu, inspiration tells us that fire came from the Most Holy Place and devoured these two men. Does this suggest that Nadab and Abihu were turned to ashes in the temple? No, because they were carried out in their coats.

Lev 10:4-5 And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. (5) So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said.

Were their clothes burnt? We are not told. Was their skin burnt? We are not told. Did power come out from the Lord and consume them? Yes it did. Did God make them pass through the fire like the gods of the Egyptians or did God allow the Israelites own principles of judgment come down on them in accordance with the judgment of the Egyptian gods which they had chosen? Were they judged according to their own judgment as Jesus said? Were they possibly electrocuted? Who did this? We are not told. Finally, should we use this display of power as evidence of how God directly operates? No, because God is not in the wind, earthquake and fire. Did God remove His hand of protection from them after the golden calf incident? Yes he did. Great care needs to be taken in how we judge these stories for in the measure we judge, we shall be judged. If we believe God judges without mercy then this will be the process that will judge us, for this sin of idolatry will be visited back upon us.

## Two Women Reveal the Ministration of Death

There are a number of passages in the Bible that once again test us as to how we view the character of God. Here is an example:

Lev 24:10-14 And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel: and this son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp; (11) And the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan:) (12) And they put him in ward, **that the mind of the LORD might be shewed them.** (13) **And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (14) Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him.**

The Lord told Moses to take a man who had blasphemed God outside of the camp and stone him. The story seems very straight forward. The man sinned and God said stone him. So this is what Moses and Israel did:

Lev 24:23 And Moses spake to the children of Israel, that they should bring forth him that had cursed out of the camp, and stone him with stones. And the children of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses.

## The Faith of the Canaanite Woman

This story tests us in a similar way to the Canaanite woman who came to Christ begging for her daughter to be healed.

Matt 15:22-28 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. (23) But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. (24) But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (25) Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. (26) But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. (27) And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. (28) Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

The woman came seeking mercy from Jesus. In reply Jesus allows the principles of the law to test her. She was a Canaanite and this is what the Jews would have read in the law about the Canaanites:

Deut 7:2-6 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: (3) Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. (4) For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. (5) But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. (6) For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

In reminding the woman that He was sent only to Israel, she is being reminded that she is outside of the favour of God. The woman might have stiffened her neck and yelled at him, "You bigoted self-righteous Jew!" She might have let His *ministry of condemnation* crush her in despair. Yet she clung to the belief that Jesus was merciful. She quickly accepts His sentence, agreed with him, and then held onto to His mercy.

Matt 15:27 "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

The woman accepted that she was unworthy but pressed her hand up to Christ to receive His mercy. She chose to believe that He is merciful despite the conviction of sin upon her and that she was considered outside the channel of blessing. This is the ministration of death and when we accept it still believing in the mercy of God, then we shall have it. We see the same process with the woman at the well.

John 4:15-18 The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. (16) Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. (17) The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: (18) For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.

Before Jesus revealed Himself as the Saviour of the world, He reminded her of her sinful condition. He did not do this to shame her but that she might accept the conviction of sin. Only when we accept the conviction of sin are we ready to receive mercy, but if we do not believe God is merciful we will not put out our hand to receive it.

## **How the Adulterous Woman was Stoned**

In the story of the woman caught in adultery we see how the law giver administers His law.

Moses of himself framed no law. Christ, the angel whom God had appointed to go before his chosen people, gave to Moses statutes and requirements necessary to a living religion and to govern the people of God. RH, May 6, 1875

The first thing Jesus says to them puts a very serious dent in their plans.

John 8:7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

Here we see the very law giver telling us the qualifications of those who are able to do the stoning. They must be without sin. How many of the punishments of the Old Testament could be carried out righteously if those executing the sentence had to be without sin? Is any man qualified of himself to perform such a deed as this? All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Apart from being hypocritical, why is it impossible for a sinner of himself to execute another sinner?

The condemning power of Satan would lead him to institute a theory of justice inconsistent with mercy. He claims to be officiating as the voice and power of God, claims that his decisions are justice, are pure and without fault. **Thus he takes his position on the judgment seat and declares that his counsels are infallible. Here his merciless justice comes in, a counterfeit of justice, abhorrent to God.** Letter 16a, 1892.

When our first parents ate the fruit and accepted the principles of Satan's kingdom they accepted the mind of Satan in regard to law and justice. The justice system of Satan did not provide for any mercy. Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan, (DA 761.4). In the case of Satan, sin means anything that disagrees with his own thoughts. Therefore as human beings we have inherited this notion that all those who disagree with us must be punished without mercy according to the crime. This is the reason why Israel so willingly embraced the Egyptian practice of stoning; it reflected the merciless mind of Satan.

This is why it is impossible for a sinner to put another man to death from his own interpretation of the law because men will use the law to destroy those who disagree with them, and this is exactly what the Pharisees were seeking to do to Jesus. They used the Law of Moses to try and destroy Christ. It is this very principle that Satan uses against God. He uses the Law of Moses in a manner to destroy our confidence in the loving character of our Father in heaven. How does he do this? Through his counterfeit system of justice that has no mercy.

When the woman was brought to the feet of Jesus for sentencing, Jesus did not excuse her sin. He said "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." The woman was certain of her death sentence. What takes place next is what Jesus always intended to do for sinners who feel the depth of their sinfulness.

John 8:10-11 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? (11) She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

The condemnation of the law is vital that mercy might be given. For without condemnation there is no need for grace; without the sentence of death there is no need for mercy. We must remember that heaven's condemnation is not the same as man's condemnation for God's thoughts are not our thoughts. And so we read:

Joh 1:17 (NIV) For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Rom 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

When Jesus gave the instruction to Moses that those who commit adultery should be put to death He desired to bring upon them the terrible results of engaging in such an act. For we read:

James 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

It is sin that brings forth death. Sin is self-destructive. The instruction given in the law was done to highlight the deadly nature of sin. Paul tells us that this ministration of death that causes men to see they are worthy of death is a glorious work.

2 Cor 3:7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious,...

Once we accept the sentence of death; once we mourn for our sins under the convicting work of the Spirit then we are ready to receive in its fullness, the pardoning grace and mercy of God.

When Jesus gave the sentence from the law that which was written in stone caused her to lose all hope of life. She accepted the sentence, yet Jesus knowing her heart and how she was used by these men knew that she had fallen upon the Rock.

1 Cor 10:4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

Mat 21:44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

In falling upon the rock Christ Jesus, the woman was indeed stoned as Christ intended. She gave up all hope that she could save herself and gave herself up to the mercy of Christ. The stoning that Christ intended was that sinners should be convicted of their sins and seek for mercy. The Ten Commandments were written in stone to reflect how the law stones us spiritually and condemns us to death.

Rom 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Rom 3:19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Those who refuse to accept this spiritual stoning of the inner man will eventually be crushed by the rock of their own conscience and they will judge themselves according to the mercy they have shown to others. When we don't allow the Law-giver to administer the law Himself, Satan then uses it to destroy us as we see in the case of Judas.

Matt 27:3-5 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, (4) Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. (5) And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

When once a person wrests the law from the hands of Christ, then he will face judgement through the merciless accusations of Satan and this will grind him to powder.

Jesus, the giver of the law to Moses, clearly reveals how He intended that law to be used. He intended to use it in such a way as to deliver mercy to the broken sinner. We can rejoice that through the mercy of Christ, the accuser who seeks to drive us to despair is cast down.

Rev 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

The poor woman dared not lift her eyes to the Saviour's face, but silently awaited her doom. She accepted the sentence against her. In astonishment she saw her accusers depart speechless and confounded; then those words of hope fell upon her ear, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." Her heart was melted, and she cast herself at the feet of Jesus, sobbing out her grateful love, and with bitter tears confessing her sins. Christ indeed stoned the conscience of this woman that she might receive newness of life.

This was to her the beginning of a new life, a life of purity and peace, devoted to the service of God. In the uplifting of this fallen soul, Jesus performed a greater miracle than in healing the most grievous physical disease; He cured the spiritual malady which is unto death everlasting. This penitent woman became one of His most steadfast followers. With self-sacrificing love and devotion she repaid His forgiving mercy. DA 462.2

How wonderful is the work of the Spirit through the law to bring conviction of sin in order that we might receive the pardoning mercy and love of God. How amazing is the miracle of God to turn our stony merciless hearts into Christlike hearts of flesh. The greater the biblical condemnation we feel, the greater the pardon and mercy that we receive.

Let us return to story of the young man who was stoned. In regard to the sin of blasphemy Jesus tells us plainly:

Matt 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

This sin of blasphemy would have been forgiven if the young man had asked for it. He could have confessed his faith in the sin bearer through the symbol of the slain lamb but he did not. When Moses asked the Lord what to do, the Lord did what He always does first, He brings conviction of sin. This conviction of sin came with the sentence of death. It was necessary in order that mercy could then be given. Here is the gospel process.

2 Cor 3:6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

If you read the Greek more closely in this verse you will see the sequence.

for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

The word *but* can be used either is an opposite or as a continuation. The text could read:

for the letter killeth, *and* the spirit giveth life.

This is exactly the process of the gospel. The written law secures the sentence of death in order that we might realise our lost condition. Then we can receive the Spirit that gives life through the mercy of God. Upon hearing the sentence of death, the young man might have accepted the condemnation and knelt before Moses, the representative of God, and asked him to pray for him and to ask God to forgive him. God surely would have answered this prayer. Yet because this young man evidently did not believe this then he could not receive it. He had already forfeited the protection of God. If God stepped back from him, then Satan would either kill him immediately or use him to draw others away from God to their deaths. The one hope for this young man to live was for the law to enter with the sentence of death.

The punishment of stoning was added to the law because of the hardness of the hearts of Israel. It was not God's desire to punish people in this way, yet He worked through their perceptions of justice in order to secure a conviction in the hope they would seek mercy. The man did not seek mercy, and so he died. If only he had the faith of the Canaanite woman to accept his sentence and then plead mercy. If he had believed that God was merciful then mercy would have rejoiced against judgment.

## **Who is on the Lord's Side?**

This process of justice and mercy is seen in the aftermath of the golden calf apostasy:

Exo 32:26-28 Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. (27) And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. (28) And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.

Moses invited everyone to choose mercy by coming to him. The Spirit of Prophecy explains in more detail:

Moses requested all who had been free from this great sin of idolatry, to come and stand by him at his right hand; also, those who had joined the rebellious in worshipping this idol, but who had repented of their sin in so quickly departing from God, to stand at his left hand. 1SP 251

All were offered pardon and forgiveness if they would accept it. Moses had already secured pardon for all of them before this time. In worshipping the golden calf Israel had corporately chosen Satan as their leader. This apostasy was so great that only the deepest repentance could save them. They must understand the terrible danger they were in and that the cause of the nation was truly lost beyond all hope without a decided change. It is at this point that we call to mind one of the strangest statements of Jesus in the Bible.

Matt 18:6-10 **But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me**, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. (7) Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! (8) **Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.** (9) **And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.** (10) **Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones;** for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

The context of Christ's statements relates to the protection of children. Jesus speaks about it being better to cut off your hand or foot than to have the whole body go to hell. The sin of Israel with the golden calf would doom almost all of the Israelites to slavery and death under Satan's control. The protection of God had already been removed from the camp. Israel had already expressed their views on justice in wanting to stone Moses, and they also had taken up the sword against the Amalekites without clear direction from the Lord. Working through their own perceptions of justice the Lord made an urgent effort to save the nation, protect the little ones and remove Satan's control over the body. The people who stubbornly refused to seek forgiveness from the Lord not only allowed Satan to rule them but through them allowed Satan to attack the whole congregation. Satan had penetrated the organisation to the highest level through Aaron, and the people who refused to repent would allow Satan to continue to destroy the organisation from the inside until no one was left.

## **A Corporate Responsibility**

A similar situation took place with the apostasy with the Moabites. When the Israelite princes brought the Moabite women into the camp, Satan gained access to the whole camp and began to kill them.

Num 25:6,9 And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.... And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.

Since many of the leaders as the *strong man* (Matt 12:29) of the house of Israel were involved Satan was able to get into the camp and destroy with the plague and spoil the goods. If these men had repented then the wicked one would lose access, and the plague would be stopped. If they did not repent then Satan could maintain access to the camp and keep killing men, women and children with the plague.

So what is the merciful thing to do? Let the leaders of the rebellion who refuse to repent continue to be a conduit for Satan so the little ones could be slaughtered by Satan? Can you imagine our Father in the position of not being able to save His children because of the sins of these leaders? The only path to follow



is to increase the conviction of sin by the sentence of judgment.

Num 25:4 And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel.

At any time before the sentence was carried out, these men might have realised their death sentence and asked for mercy. In taking this step, Satan's power would be stopped, but in refusing to repent they kept open the door for Satan to destroy the whole body. In maintaining their stubborn rebellion they invited this judgment upon themselves. As Christ is the light which lights every man that comes into the world, Christ was forced to cut lose his own hand or foot within the corporate body so that the whole of the body would not go to hell. Ellen White expresses it this way:

God is the guardian as well as the sovereign of His people. He cuts off those who are determined upon rebellion, that they may not lead others to ruin. In sparing the life of Cain, God had demonstrated to the universe what would be the result of permitting sin to go unpunished. The influence exerted upon his descendants by his life and teaching led to the state of corruption that demanded the destruction of the whole world by a flood. The history of the antediluvians testifies that long life is not a blessing to the sinner; God's great forbearance did not repress their wickedness. The longer men lived, the more corrupt they became.

So with the apostasy at Sinai. Unless punishment had been speedily visited upon transgression, the same results would again have been seen. The earth would have become as corrupt as in the days of Noah. Had these transgressors been spared, evils would have followed, greater than resulted from sparing the life of Cain. **It was the mercy of God that thousands should suffer, to prevent the necessity of visiting judgments upon millions. In order to save the many, He must punish the few.** Furthermore, as the people had cast off their allegiance to God, they had forfeited the divine protection, and, deprived of their defense, **the whole nation was exposed to the power of their enemies.** Had not the evil been promptly put away, they would soon have fallen a prey to their numerous and powerful foes. It was necessary [326] for the good of Israel, and also as a lesson to all succeeding generations, that crime should be promptly punished. PP 325, 326

Now if the majority of Israel had remained faithful to God and they had not adopted the practices of the Egyptians for punishment, this work of preventing greater calamity could have been done by other means. Yet to ignore this malignant cancer would eventually destroy the entire body. To fail to do anything was to do evil. We see again with the situation of the apostasy at the Jordan the complexity involved. Phineas, the priest, taking in the scene determined to stop it.

Num 25:7-12 And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; (8) And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. (9) And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand. (10) And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (11) 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:

The other leaders of the apostasy who were removed had ceased to provide a conduit for Satan to destroy the little ones of Israel. Yet Zimri the Israelite prince continued to keep the door open for the enemy. If Israel had been faithful to God, they would not be in this situation and He could have protected them, but they were far from God, and again the whole body was in jeopardy from these rebels.

What does our Father do when His children have chosen to step outside of His protection, and there are those who are determined to remain a doorway for the enemy to destroy them? This is no longer a case of someone simply being given the chance to reveal his principles. Mercy to the body requires justice for the

perpetrators.

When people think about judgments that befall people, they tend to think only of the impact on the transgressor. Most fail to realise that individual sin has an impact not only on themselves but on their community. When Israel went to fight against the city of Ai they lost thirty-six men in the battle because of the sin of Achan, (Josh 7:5). What is the connection? The sin of one person in the group affects all the others in that group.

Rom 14:7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

When we take in all the considerations we see the love and mercy of God always acting in the best interests of His children. To think of the terrible suffering Christ endures to actually cut off His own foot or hand to save the corporate body speaks of a heart-rending decision taken with great care and deliberation.

### **An Appeal to be Berean**

When I was in my mid-twenties, I travelled to work on the train from the northern suburbs to the centre of Sydney. I had the opportunity to witness to a lady on the train. Our discussions went well for a number of weeks until she discovered the Adventist teaching of the Sabbath and the Mark of the Beast from another source. When we met again she only had one question and the question was not for information but only to produce condemnation.

“Do you believe that if I keep Sunday that I have the Mark of the Beast?”

I said that Sunday Observance becomes the Mark of the Beast when it is enforced.

“So you believe it is the Mark of the Beast then,” she said as she glared at me. “I am happy to study this further with you,” I said hopefully.

“There is nothing further to study,” she said firmly. “You believe Sunday-keeping is the Mark of the Beast, so that is the end of the discussion,” she said in a determined voice.

I was very sad to say that was the end of the discussion and we never spoke again.

I have faced this process of interrogation a number of times.

“Do you believe that Jesus is a created being?”

“No, I believe Jesus is begotten of the Father.”

“Then, you believe Jesus is created.”

“Do you believe the Holy Spirit is a person? Yes or no!”

“I believe that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ.”

“Then you believe the Spirit is a mere influence.”

“I am willing to study further with you about my beliefs on this subject.”

“I have all the answers I need thank you.”

“Do you believe that we need to keep the feasts in order to be saved? Yes or No.”

“Well I enjoy the feasts and they are a blessing to me.”

“Answer the question, must we keep them or not!”

“Well, Jesus and the apostles kept them, and I can explain to you how I understand this if you wish to study with me?”

“I have studied the question and the issue is settled, feast-keeping is legalism and an insult to Jehovah, and therefore you are insulting Jehovah by having any connection to them!”

And so this spirit of inquisition continues into the subject of the character of God.

"Do you believe God kills or not? It is a simple question – just answer it."

"I can explain to you what I have learned and what I have discovered."

"You are evading the question; it is a simple, direct question. Does God kill or not?"

"Well, all power comes from God, and so God certainly takes responsibility for the actions that take place on earth."

"You are avoiding a simple yes and no answer. Therefore you must believe that God does not kill which the Bible utterly rejects."

Conversely I am asked "Do you believe God punishes people?"

"It is very clear that the Bible teaches this. I am simply not sure exactly how that always works."

"God is only love and would never act in this way."

When people ask questions like this and demand a black and white answer according to their own understanding then they feel certain they already have all they need to know. Such is the condition of Laodicea. Lord Jesus, help us ever to search out the truth and be quick to listen and slow to wrath and treat every person with kindness and respect as our Father would wish.

I know my Father in heaven is merciful, gracious and abounding in goodness and truth and will by no means clear; visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation. I know that He is not forceful, that He is tender hearted and that every man will reap what he sows. I know that those who love God and keep His commandments by the faith of Jesus will receive a hedge of protection from Satan and His angels and that the Sabbaths are a great blessing and protection for God's people. I know that God is our protector and that sometimes to protect His children He has to take some very tough decisions, but I trust He knows best. My Father is merciful, and therefore I know that He will always treat me with mercy. I do not cry with Cain "My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven!" I know that my redeemer liveth and that the darkness and misapprehension of God is disappearing in the light of His precious character.

In this message you are invited to respond to the last message of mercy to be given to the world. The world needs mercy and yet as we have discovered the world judges itself without mercy.

It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth.

This is the work outlined by the prophet Isaiah in the words, "O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him." Isaiah 40:9,10.

Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, "Behold your God." The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children [416] of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them. COL 415.

Within this context, consider the words of Jesus:

Matt 7:1-3 Judge not, [without mercy] that ye be not judged [without mercy]. (2) For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

(3) And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

I invite you to study this question carefully. What is our Father in heaven really like? What is His character really like? Did He decide to physically stone people as written into the Torah, or did He allow God's people to have a judgment system according to their Egyptian way of thinking but was not good? Did he allow judgment without mercy for those who showed no mercy?

You be the judge.