



Do Angels of God Kill?

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Preface

The question of whether angels of God kill is a difficult one, because angels are spiritual beings and therefore our knowledge of how they interact with our world is limited. But there is no doubt that there are stories in the Bible where it seems like angels are killing humans. But what is actually happening in these stories?

The Bible will say that an angel “smites” (strikes) people. That sounds like they are using swords to hit humans. But different things happen when people (and animals) are smote. Sometimes they die, sometimes they don’t. But when they do die, it tends to be of plague. How does that work? Did angels inject diseases in them?

It also begs the question: if angels kill, how many people around us right now are being killed by angels? When someone dies of a heart attack, is that an angel stopping their heart? What about all the diseases going around?

We also know that Satan has the “power of death” (Hebrews 2:14) and he wants to destroy humans. So, can fallen angels kill us? When is it a fallen angel causing a plague, and when is it a good angel?

I am not sure about the reader, but I think for many people the idea that we could be killed by an angel at any time for doing something wrong is a scary one. Also, if angels are given orders from Jesus to kill someone, can Jesus give us such orders? And when does Jesus shift from trying to save us to trying to kill us? It seems to go against the spirit of what Jesus was striving for us to understand while He was here as a man – for example, when He rebuked Peter for slicing off the priest’s ear and healed it (Luke 22:50-51) and such statements as these:

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

For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. (Luke 9:56, KJV)

The apostles understood this to mean not to use violence in preaching the gospel, and, like their master, they suffered patiently when attacked without using weapons and violence in self-defence. It would seem strange that if our duty as Christians is not to use violence and not to kill, that the angels would use violence and kill.

This booklet aims to analyze the Bible stories where angels “smite” to try to understand the principles of what is happening, that we may have a better understanding of how God governs and how the angels interact with our world. This should not only give us a more knowledgeable faith, but also help us know what is expected in our Christian walk. God is constantly trying to communicate with us through His angels, but the fallen angels are also trying to speak to us and oftentimes they will pretend to be good angels. Knowing more clearly how each operate, good and evil, should help us distinguish between the voice and will of God vs the voice and will of Satan.

Smiting Angels

If you search the words *angel* and *smote* in the KJV Scriptures, you will find four Bible stories mentioned.

1. Numbers 22. Balaam and the Donkey. Balaam smote the donkey who saw an angel.
2. 2 Samuel 24. David Numbering Israel and 70,000 people smitten by the angel of the Lord.
3. 2 Kings 19:35 and Isaiah 37:36. Assyrian Army of 185,000 men smitten by the angel of the Lord.
4. Acts 12:24. Angel of the Lord smote Herod for his sin.

Balaam and the Donkey

In the first story, Balaam is asked by Balak to curse the Israelites who have escaped Egypt. God tells Balaam, “... thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.” (Numbers 22:12). Balaam refuses to obey and heads out on his donkey with the princes of Moab to curse the Israelites. (Verse 21).

And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the **angel of the LORD** stood in the way for an **adversary** against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. (Numbers 22:22-23)

Balaam was unaware of the Angel in his path. When the donkey turned aside, Balaam becomes angry. The angel did not smite anyone but rather Balaam smote the donkey after it stopped for fear of the Angel. The Angel was standing before Balaam with a sword, and He stood as an adversary against Balaam.

And Balaam said unto the ass, "Because thou hast mocked me: **I would [wish] there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee.**" (Numbers 22:29)

It is after Balaam states he would kill the donkey with the sword that his eyes are opened, and he sees the Angel with His sword drawn (Verse 31). The term *Angel of the Lord* often refers to Christ (See Exodus 3:2; 3:14; 23:20; 32:34). The Hebrew word for "angel" is *mal'ak* which simply means "messenger." The Greek word *aggelos* means the same, so when referring to Christ, it does not imply one of God's created angels. Christ says to Balaam ...

"And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive." (Numbers 22:33)

Balaam knew he should not have gone to curse the Israelites. He made himself fully the agent of Satan. Through the encounter with the Angel, the character of Balaam is revealed as one who would kill with the sword. The Angel appears as "an adversary" which in the Hebrew is *Satan* and He appears with a sword drawn, thus Christ has the appearance of Balaam himself who is filled with the spirit of Satan and has the spirit of killing in his heart. It is evident that Christ was not seeking to kill Balaam because after this encounter He let Balaam go forward and do what he wished. Christ came to warn him and oppose his downward path to destruction.

Like Balaam, many people are blinded by covetousness and ambition that they cannot discern God's call to repentance. "The god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." (2 Corinthians 4:4). They despise the loving rebuke from friends, angels, and God who are reaching out to prevent their ruin as they rush down forbidden paths.

Christ appeared to Balaam as Balaam himself was. This was an effort to prevent Balaam from destroying himself. This is the process of the law causing sin to abound in order that through repentance grace might much more abound.

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

Sadly, Balaam did not repent through this process. Christ suffered in all the wicked things Balaam was doing and when Balaam rebelled, Christ was turned to be his enemy.

In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore **he was turned to be their enemy**, and he fought against them. (Isaiah 63:9-10)

The Hebrew word for *turned* is in the niphal form which in this case gives the sense of *being turned*, thus Christ appeared as an enemy because of the actions of Balaam. As Balaam was not a doer of the Word of God, he was beholding his natural face in a mirror.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror. (James 1:23)

As a comparison, we see that when Christ appeared to Joshua with a drawn sword, His appearance was not that of an enemy; but Christ still appeared as a soldier as Joshua was a soldier.

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, **there stood a man over against him with his**

sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, “Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?”

And he said, “Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.”

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, “What saith my lord unto his servant?”

And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, “Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.” And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13-15)

Christ appeared as an enemy to Balaam because Balaam was an enemy to Christ. Christ did not appear as an enemy to Joshua because Joshua was not an enemy to Christ.

With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself unsavoury. (2 Samuel 22:27)

With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward. (Psalm 18:26)

In *Young's Literal Translation* it says for this 2nd clause, “with the perverse thou wilt shew Thyself a wrestler.” If this translation is correct, it reveals why the Angel of the Lord appeared to Jacob as a wrestler – Jacob projected Him to be an enemy (Genesis 32:22-32; Hosea 12:4).

But what did Christ mean when He said He would have slain Balaam?

Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

And the angel of the LORD said unto him, “Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, **I went out to withstand [satan] thee, because thy way is perverse [rash] before me:** And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.” (Numbers 22:31-33)

The donkey sensed danger when it saw Christ standing in the way. Through the actions of Balaam, Christ was turned to be Balaam's enemy to save him

from ruin. This poor animal had a greater perception for what was happening than Balaam. This is the same as in the time of the flood. The animals could sense the impending doom more than the people. Even now, oftentimes animals can sense danger and natural disasters before we can.

How that poor donkey suffered under the satanic wrath of Balaam when she was seeking to save him from danger. The donkey was dumb in the sense of speech but not in the sense of feeling. She was more attuned than Balaam.

Christ said to Balaam, "I went out to withstand (or *satan*) you." How is Christ turned to be a Satan? Is it an accident that in the previous chapter of Numbers we read:

And the LORD said unto Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." (Numbers 21:8)

The people had rebelled and walked out from under God's protective hedge resulting in fiery serpents attacking them. This was a result of their decisions pushing God away, but God gave a way for them to choose to be reconciled and healed if they wanted and believed (for they had not realized that God was lovingly protecting them; they thought God didn't care about them making it difficult to believe they could be healed). They were cured by beholding the fiery serpent on a pole. A serpent is a symbol of Satan.

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Revelation 12:9)

Were they saved by a looking at a symbol of Satan? Notice what Christ says:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

Can you see the connection that, as they were murmuring against Christ, "He was turned to be their enemy"?

For he [the Father] hath made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (Romans 5:10)

Balaam might have looked upon Christ with a drawn sword and vexed countenance and realised his sin and confessed it and lived. But what did Balaam do?

And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, “I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, **if it displease thee**, I will get me back again.” (Numbers 22:34)

Balaam knew that what he was doing was displeasing, but still he said to Christ, “If it displease thee...” Balaam ignored the warning and did not repent, and thus Christ gives to Balaam the desire of his heart. He does not force him to change his course.

And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, “**Go with the men**: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak.” So Balaam went with the princes of Balak. (Numbers 22:35)

The fact that Christ allowed Balaam to continue his journey is proof that Christ had no motive to kill Balaam but rather He was confronting him with his sin. Once Balaam refused to acknowledge that sin, he was allowed to go on to his destruction. But how could Christ have caused the death of Balaam at that point? Balaam was full of the spirit of Satan and the guilt of his actions were written all over him. If Christ had have looked upon Balaam and caused him to remember all of his iniquities, the crushing weight of his guilt would have killed him. The sword of the Spirit would have divided the marrow from the bone and Balaam would have collapsed and died just as Ananias and Sapphira did when they were confronted with their sin. (Acts 5:1-11).

So we see that the appearance of Christ depends entirely on the state of the person standing before him. When a person is not filled with the Spirit of

Christ, the law acts as a mirror to the soul in order to reveal sin. The letter killeth for the purpose that the Spirit might give life. (2 Corinthians 3:6). The law given by Christ through Moses reveals sin in order that grace and truth might be given and abound through Christ. (Romans 7).

Do Angels of God Kill?

In our next three stories, we definitely see death as a result of something God's angels are doing. Before digging deep into these stories to see what's really going on, let's give a short summary of each.

In 2 Samuel chapter 24, David seeks to number his forces in an act of pride to rank Israel among the nations, and the result was the death of 70,000 Israelites.

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." (2 Samuel 24:1)

So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men. And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, "It is enough: stay now thine hand." And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite. (2 Samuel 24:15-16)

A first reading of this story suggests something quite frightening. King David, in pride, numbers the people, and then God sends an angel to kill 70,000 people and then repents of the evil done and relents on killing more people. What is even more strange is that 2 Samuel 24:1 actually says that God Himself moved David to number Israel, suggesting that God Himself was responsible for what happened next. For any person who believes that God is love, the question has to be asked: "What on earth is this story about?"

Although the next story involves the death of more people, it is apparently easier to accept because this nation wanted to kill God's people and were

some of the meanest characters on earth. The Assyrians skinned people alive and then impaled them on spikes. Such violent behaviour against the followers of God may subdue the question of the use of deadly violence by the angels of the Lord.

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. (2 Kings 19:35)

A supposed plain reading of these statements strongly suggests that the angels of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. It seems perfectly logical that when an evil menace is seeking to kill God's people then these soldiers should be put to death for their murderous designs. But even if we accept that an angel killed them, the question arises of why at other times in history this doesn't seem to happen, and God's people are killed by enemy soldiers?

The final story in our list relates to Herod. He seems like the most suitable candidate to be put to death considering all the deeds he had done.

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. (Acts 12:21-23)

Herod had killed James the brother of John and then planned to kill Peter. It is clear that it was a good angel who smote Herod. It is also clear that this was a punishment from the Almighty and that it was a retributive judgment of God. Retribution is repayment or compensation for deeds done. It would be extremely tempting to cease our search at this point and form a conclusion that indeed God sends His good angels to put wicked people to death. Although the first story has complications, the other two stories concerning the Assyrians and Herod appear unmistakable, and to suggest anything otherwise could invite the charge of spiritualising the Bible in order to make it fit the idea that God is so loving that He would never do anything like that.

How Do You Read?

If we did cease our search here, we would certainly be violating the rules of Bible interpretation. If we form our conclusion *before* we have brought all points together and use this conclusion to ignore points that appear to say something else, then we are not teaching the whole Bible. How do we reconcile these stories with these statements?

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. (Matthew 5:44)

And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias [Elijah] did?" But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village." (Luke 9:54-56)

Then said Jesus unto him, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." (Matthew 26:52)

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9). [Note that it says "perish," which means death comes from something else that the Lord is trying to save us from. It doesn't say "not willing to have to kill any of us..."]

A Natural Response

A natural answer to the command to love our enemies is that while we are commanded to love our enemies, God, as the rightful judge of the universe, has the right and responsibility to maintain order and discipline in His realm. As His subjects, we must love our enemies and trust that God will protect us, and, if necessary, kill those who threaten us.

Secondly, it might be stated that while Jesus *was here on earth* that His mission was indeed not to destroy but to save men... But after His work here on earth was complete then there were other aspects of His ministry that must be fulfilled. As the Scripture indicates:

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up. (Ecclesiastes 3:3)

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. (Deuteronomy 32:39)

If we do take this perspective, then it becomes possible to see Jesus as a mighty General who, when required, sends His loyal soldiers as messengers of death armed with lethal force. The following texts could easily give us this idea:

The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name. (Exodus 15:3)

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. **Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.**" (Psalm 2:4-9)

He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, "Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand." And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, **and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand;** and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar ... And to the others he said in mine hearing, "**Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women:** but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my

sanctuary.” Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. (Ezekiel 9:1-2, 5-6)

And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.” And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. (Revelation 16:1-3)

The image presented before us is the mighty Son of God with sword raised when required to do what needs to be done. It might be questioned why He sends men with slaughter weapons to slay maidens and little children. Such a terrible thought should push us to dig deeper, rather than just easily accept the thought that sometimes holy angels go around killing children – when, how and why doesn’t matter, we should just accept it.

Christ as our Perfect Example

If we accept this position, then we face a major issue. If the Son of God both commands and also Himself uses lethal force to deal with sinners, then we begin to run into problems with Jesus being our perfect example to follow – unless of course we entertain the idea that God calls men to defend His honour by slaughtering those who are His enemies. Is Jesus the same yesterday, today and forever as the Scriptures claims, or does He reveal parts of Himself as needed to meet any given situation? What is the example that Jesus gave us to follow?

For even hereunto were ye called: because **Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:** Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; **when he suffered, he threatened not;** but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. (1 Peter 2:21-23)

If we accept Jesus as the mighty general who uses lethal force against His enemies, then the mind really begins to struggle when we read things like this:

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you... (Matthew 5:39-44)

Isn't it fair then to ask the question of Jesus: "You ask us to love our enemies while you put your enemies to death when it suits you. Is that consistent?"

At a deeper level, those who believe in Jesus are breathed upon by His Spirit. This means that whatever characteristics Jesus possesses will be given to those who follow Him.

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father." (Galatians 4:6)

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, **we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

Will Jesus only give us part of Himself – the part that loves His enemies, and hold back the part that slays them and burns them alive? Is it even possible to do this? So here is the point in conflict:

Jesus has the right and responsibility to destroy those who persist in wickedness against Him and His Father.	Jesus is our perfect example and we are called to copy every aspect of His life revealed in Scripture.
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The Law a Transcript of the Character of God

Let us add to this another dimension. The Ten Commandments are a revelation of the character of God.

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, “Thou shalt **love** the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt **love** thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:35-40)

The whole of the law can be described in one word – love.

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for **he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law**. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore **love is the fulfilling of the law**. (Romans 13:8-10)

Love is the fulfilling of the law because God is love.

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for **God is love**. ... Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. **If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us**. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. (1 John 4:7-8, 10-13)

Through the Spirit of God, His law (character) of love is manifested (fulfilled) in and through us. Paul said that “love worketh no ill to his neighbour” or as the *International Standard Version* (ISV) says, “Love never does anything that is harmful to its neighbour.” Jesus tells us that He keeps His Father’s commandments:

“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as **I have kept my Father's commandments**, and abide in his love.” (John 15:10)

Does this include the commandment that says “thou shalt not kill”? When we examine the life of Jesus on earth, we see that He never did anything harmful to anyone. He never killed anyone. The earthly life of Jesus fully revealed the character of God; for He is “the image of the invisible God”, “the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person.” (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3).

Philip saith unto him, “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” Jesus saith unto him, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? **he that hath seen me hath seen the Father**; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, **he doeth the works.**” (John 14:8-10)

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I [Jesus] **have glorified thee on the earth**: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do ... I have **manifested thy name** [character] unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world. (John 17:3-4, 6)

Judicial Killing As Opposed to Murder?

It is argued that judicial killing is not murder and that the Ten Commandments teach, “thou shalt not murder” (rather than “kill”). Here is one explanation expressing this point from gotquestions.org/you-shall-not-murder:

There are two different Hebrew words (ratsakh, mut) and two Greek words (phoneuo, apokteino) for “murder” and “killing.” **One [mut] means “to put to death,” and the other [ratsakh] means “to murder.”** The latter one is the one prohibited by the Ten Commandments, not the former. In fact, ratsakh has a broader definition than the English word “murder.” Ratsakh also covers deaths due to carelessness or neglect but is never used when describing killing during wartime. That is why most modern translations render the sixth commandment “You shall not murder” rather than “You shall not kill.” However, a very large issue can arise depending on which translation one

studies. The ever-popular King James Version renders the verse as “Thou shalt not kill,” therefore opening the door to misinterpreting the verse altogether. **If the intended meaning of “Thou shalt not kill” was just that—no killing—it would render all of the God-endorsed bloodletting done by the nation of Israel a violation of God’s own commandment** (Deuteronomy 20). But God does not break His own commandments, so, clearly, the verse does not call for a complete moratorium on the taking of another human life.

A careful examination of the Scripture reveals that this argument is false. Firstly, within the very explanation the writer acknowledges that *ratsach* not only means murder but accidental death which we call manslaughter. Deaths “due to carelessness or neglect” is not murder.

But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait, Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm: Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments: **And the congregation shall deliver the slayer [Ratsach H7523] out of the hand of the revenger of blood**, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil.¹ (Numbers 35:22-25)

That the slayer [Ratsach H7523] might flee thither, which should **kill his neighbour unawares**, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live.” (Deuteronomy 4:42)

Secondly, God did command that people who commit *ratsach* should face *ratsach* – meaning killers should be killed.

Whoso killeth any person, the murderer [ratsach H7523] **shall be put to death** [ratsach H7523] by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die. (Numbers 35:30)

This cannot mean murderers should be murdered. But how could it be possible that God could command things that the Ten Commandments

¹ Numbers in brackets refer to Strong’s Concordance numbering system.

forbids? In short, God could command any form of death in the Scriptures because God seeks to secure the *sentence* of death (to magnify the sin) in order to give mercy and grace (Romans 5:20), not to kill people. Please see the booklet called, *The Conviction of Sin and Righteousness* for a full explanation of this.

Thirdly, the word *muth* [H4191], which the article says means judicial/executive killing, in Scripture is used to describe murder and assassination. Saul desired to unlawfully murder David:

And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, **that they should kill** [*muth* H4191] **David**. But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, "**Saul my father seeketh to kill thee:** [*muth* H4191] now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself." (1 Samuel 19:1-2)

Saul ordered the unlawful murder of the priesthood:

And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, "Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me." But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the LORD. **And the king said to Doeg, "Turn thou, and fall upon the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew** [*muth* H4191] **on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.** (1 Samuel 22:17)

The assassination of Isbosheth:

For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bedchamber, and they smote him, and **slew** [*muth* H4191] him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night. (2 Samuel 4:7)

Absalom orders the unlawful murder of his half-brother Amnon:

Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, "Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, **and when I say unto you, Smite**

Amnon; then kill [*muth* H4191] **him**, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant.” (2 Samuel 13:28)

Athaliah murders all the king’s sons except Joash:

But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were **slain**; [*muth* H4191] and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. (2 Kings 11:2)

Notice the translation in the New King James:

But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being **murdered**; [*muth* H4191] and they hid him and his nurse in the bedroom, from Athaliah, so that he was not killed. (2 Kings 11:2)

Another assassination using the word *muth* and the translation in the NIV:

But Pekah the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, conspired against him, and **smote** [H5221] him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house, with Argob and Arieah, and with him fifty men of the Gileadites: and he **killed** [*muth* H4191] him, and reigned in his room. (2 Kings 15:25)

New International Version:

One of his chief officers, Pekah son of Remaliah, conspired against him. Taking fifty men of Gilead with him, he **assassinated** [H5221] Pekahiah, along with Argob and Arieah, in the citadel of the royal palace at Samaria. So Pekah **killed** [*muth* H4191] Pekahiah and succeeded him as king. (2 Kings 15:25)

Is it possible for the wicked to so-called righteously slay a person?

The wicked watcheth the righteous, and **seeketh to slay** [*muth* H4191] **him**. (Psalm 37:32)

Because that he [the wicked] remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even **slay** [*muth* H4191] **the broken in heart**. As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. (Psalm 109:16-17)

Jeremiah warns against those seeking to murder him:

Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye **put me to death**, [*muth* H4191] **ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves**, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears. (Jeremiah 26:13-15)

So the word *muth* can indeed be used to mean murder and assassination and the word *ratsach* can be used for accidental death. This proves false the claim that *muth* is somehow only for righteous killing and *ratsach* for murder.

Lastly, regardless of how this is defined, both murder and judicial killing employ lethal force. Is the use of force part of God's kingdom?

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matthew 5:39)

Did Jesus demonstrate this as part of His character? Secondly, if judicial killing is part of God's character, then this must have been revealed in the earthly life of Jesus. Yet it is nowhere revealed that He carefully weighed the life of a person and then ordered them put to death. In fact, He said just the opposite: "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke 9:56). Jesus explains further about the kingdom of God:

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36)

Christ is not saying that if His kingdom came down to this world His servants would use force and fight. Jesus is making it clear that His kingdom is not governed by the worldly standards of force and coercion. He says "if my kingdom were of this world" then He would employ worldly standards, but since His kingdom is not of this world no force is to be used.

“If Christ's kingdom had been a worldly one, set up on worldly views, and governed with worldly policy, and was to answer some worldly ends, Christ would have had servants enough among the Jews, who would have declared for him, and took up arms in his favour against the Romans; his own disciples would not have suffered him to have been betrayed into the hands of the Jews by Judas; nor would he have hindered them from attempting his rescue ... [However] it [the kingdom of God] does not rise out of, nor proceed upon, nor is it supported by worldly principles, wherefore none of the above methods are made use of.” (*John Gill's Exposition of the Bible*)

What answer can be given to the person who says to the Lord, “I put this evil doer to death, following your example in the Old Testament.” Shall it be said to such a person, “You followed the wrong example, that part of Scripture is not for you to follow.” Can you see that it makes things very difficult?

I hope you have reached a point where you can see that major contradictions exist in Scripture when we allow ourselves to believe that God uses lethal force and exterminates people. If we do, then we are invited to go on our knees and ask our Father how to explain these apparent contradictions. The Bible appears to plainly teach that He uses lethal force on people, but then if we accept this, we have a terrible conflict in trying to harmonise the entire Bible together. I believe we are now ready to dig into our three final stories.

The Numbering of Israel

Let us begin with the story of where David numbered Israel. How do we understand the following verse? How did God move David to number Israel?

And again the anger of **the LORD** was kindled against Israel, and **he** moved David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” (2 Samuel 24:1)

If we only read this passage and demanded a plain reading of this text, then we must say that God Himself led David into doing this in order that 70,000 Israelites might be killed. Any thinking person would immediately question how this idea fits with a God who claims to be love. The wording of this passage invites us to question: did God really do this?

However, those who make the effort to study further will discover the *same story* recited in 1 Chronicles 21:1, which reveals that Satan was allowed to tempt David to number Israel

And **Satan** stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.
(1 Chronicles 21:1)

We are then invited to harmonise the two accounts. Do we conclude that God and Satan worked together to cause the destruction of these Israelites? Of course not:

... for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial [Satan]? ... (2 Corinthians 6:14-15)

Once again, we are invited to dig deeper to find the solution. This process tests the hearts of men to see if they really believe that God is a loving Father, a reluctant Judge, or a ruthless Tyrant. Those who see grace in the eyes of the Lord will hang on until they can harmonise the accounts; others simply believe the contradiction and state that God is loving even while doing these things. Finally, there are those who are seeking confirmation for themselves that God is a tyrant, abandon the search, and declare their verdict early into the investigation. When the sun rises high in the sky the shallowness of the seed inside them withers under pressure of the apparent contradiction.

As children of the first Adam, we have inherited a belief that God is harsh and tyrannical. Adam received this information from Satan. This is why Adam ran and hid in the garden. He feared that God would kill him for his sin, and this gave Satan the power over us through the fear of death.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; **And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.** (Hebrews 2:14-15)

How does our Father deal with these false accusations against Him written into our natural hearts?

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

Our Father causes the offense to abound. How does He do this? He causes the law to enter. How will man read and interpret this law when it comes to him?

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. (James 1:23-24)

The natural man reads the Word of God and, as he reads, his natural thoughts about God abound. His natural thoughts about God as a tyrant are magnified to the point where he must make a choice. If he becomes a doer of the Word, he will begin to see a different picture of God that conflicts with his natural thoughts. He then is offered the opportunity to allow grace to abound, or simply go his way and forget what manner of man he is.

The Bible is written in such a way as to allow the natural thoughts of man to grow. He will find for himself the confirmation he seeks to prove that God uses lethal force on people and exterminates them. This belief reinforces the thoughts of the natural man and expands them. This belief is then challenged by the revelation of the life of Jesus, which humbles us as we realize the very thoughts we had been holding and allowed to grow are incorrect – that it was our own judgment system that we had projected onto God, and we need to repent and be born again into God's righteousness, not our own righteousness.

This is the meaning of John 16:8. The Spirit convicts us of sin and then righteousness. The transfer from one position to the other requires a struggle because the flesh wars against the Spirit. But if the soul sees the love of God in the face of Jesus Christ, it will abandon the fleshly idea of the use of lethal force as part of the kingdom of God. Herein is a marvellous thing. Those who

take hold of the sword of the Word of God will have their “old man” view (their wrong way of viewing) of God put to death – they die *by* that sword. (Romans 6:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9). While those who retain the old man position and defend God’s use of the literal sword will die *with* that sword. For all those who take the sword will die with the sword. (Matthew 26:52). All of us will die by some sword. By which one will you die?

So how did Satan tempt David? David became prideful. The numbering of the people would lead Israel to rely upon their strength in numbers, instead of the living God.

How was God moved against David? David had walked out from under God’s protective hedge. God’s anger against David was not displayed by worldly standards of force and coercion, but instead by *not* forcing David to stay within the hedge. He permitted David to wander and reap the natural results of his own choice.

David was not alone in this spirit of pride concerning the growing power of Israel. God was visiting the iniquity of their forefathers who demanded “a king to judge us like all the other nations.” (1 Samuel 8:5). God had permitted their request and then later revealed, “I gave thee a king in mine anger.” (Hosea 13:11). He had given them a king according to their own heart’s desire and let the destructive course of this choice play out.

Even though the Lord warned David through Joab, protection was removed from David thus allowing Satan more access to tempt David. David resisted the promptings of the Spirit and chose instead to follow his own prideful path, and in doing this, Satan was able to break down the hedge of angels that surrounded Israel. Here is the process of how judgments come:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, **visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me**; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:5-6)

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.** (Exodus 34:7)

Pestilence is the Signature of the Enemy

So the LORD **sent** [H5414] a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men. (2 Samuel 24:15)

The word for *sent* is actually *nathan*, which means to *give* and sometimes *give up*. Notice carefully the following verse in relation to pestilence as related to the covenant of God.

And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be **delivered** [H5414] into the hand of the enemy. (Leviticus 26:25)

Here *nathan* is translated *delivered*. Note carefully the last part of the verse. The word *and* is supplied by the translators, thus it could easily read:

I will send the pestilence among you; ye shall be delivered [H5414] into the hand of the enemy.

This means that the pestilence comes because they have been handed over to the enemy.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my **refuge** and my **fortress**: my God; in him will I trust. **Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.** (Psalm 91:1-3)

It is Satan who was allowed to destroy these people. God is a “refuge” from the pestilences; He is not the bringer of the pestilence. Satan stood up and was allowed to tempt David *only because David was not working according to God’s will*. When David succumbed to this temptation, it gave Satan greater

access to Israel and he was allowed to bring pestilence among them. Yet this does not explain the part about the angel that smote the Israelites:

And when the angel stretched out [H7971 send away, loose] his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed [H7483 cast off, lose] the people, "It is enough: stay now thine hand." And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite. And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house." (2 Samuel 24:16-17)

1 Chronicles 21:16 describes the scene this way:

And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

Satan is the agent that brought the pestilence, but what is this sword that the Angel of the Lord stretched out over Jerusalem? What is the sword that the Son of God uses?

The Sword of the Son of God

And he had in his right hand seven stars: and **out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword**: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, "Fear not; I am the first and the last..." (Revelation 1:16-17)

We see the reaction of the apostle John when he saw the countenance of the Son of God and the sword that came out of His *mouth*. What was that sword?

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the **dividing** asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a **discerner** of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Do we have an example of how this sword was wielded by Christ? Notice these words that Jesus spoke:

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: **I came not to send peace, but a sword.** For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” (Matthew 10:34-36)

Luke describes this sword as “division” by “fire.”

“I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! **Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division:** For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. (Luke 12:49-53)

John Gill writes:

“ ‘I came, not to send peace, but a sword.’ By the ‘sword’ may be meant the Gospel, which is the means of dividing and separating the people of Christ from the men of the world, and from their principles and practices, and one relation from another; as also of divisions, discords, and persecutions arising from it: not that it was the intention and design of Christ, in coming into the world, to foment and encourage such things; but this, through the malice and wickedness of men, was eventually the effect and consequence of his coming; see Luke 12:51 where, instead of a ‘sword’, it is ‘division’; because the sword divides asunder, as does the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.” (*John Gill’s Exposition of the Bible*).

The fiery sword that comes from the mouth of Christ is the Gospel. How you react to that Gospel depends on how you perceive God. Will He appear to you as pure and merciful, or will He appear froward? Do you experience the Gospel hardening your heart, or is your heart hardening to the Gospel?

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

This fiery sword can be compared to the whip Jesus used to cleanse the temple of all the corrupt religious leaders and their conspiring money changers who were profaning God's true character by deceiving the people, making God to appear to be just like them (Psalm 50:16-21) – a tough negotiator who gives blessings in exchange for something of value.

Even here there was no display of violence on the part of Jesus; for “he had done no violence” declared the prophet of old (Isaiah 53:9). Jesus never struck anyone, and only those with a self-condemning conscience were afraid and ran away. They ran from fear, not because they were hit. However, the dear little children who had witnessed the event were not afraid and began to sing praises to God, while the blind and lame stayed by and were healed. (See, Matthew 21:12-16; John 2:13-17).

We know for a fact that Jesus despised the use of literal fire and the physical sword to burn, maim and smite offenders.

And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias [Elijah] did?” But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.” And they went to another village. (Luke 9:51-56)

When those who were around Jesus saw what was about to take place, they asked, ‘Lord, should we attack with our swords?’ Then one of them struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus said, ‘No

more of this!' So he touched the wounded man's ear and healed him.
(Luke 22:49-51, *International Standard Version*)

For those 70,000 people who faced the wrath of the destroyer, the Spirit of God came to them with deep conviction of sin in order that they might repent. The work of bringing to repentance is urgent because if they refuse to heed the work of the Spirit they will be completely unsheltered and face Satan the destroyer. Like the people at the cleansing of the temple, they flee from God's presence. In the case of the 70,000, they rush from the presence of Jesus straight into the waiting arms of Satan who cuts them down with the pestilence. They could have repented of their sins and received God's forgiveness, but they ran from His presence and death was the result.

This process is exactly the same as what God said He would do to the Canaanites:

I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. (Exodus 23:27-28)

The sending of the fear is the conviction of sin that causes terror to the wicked. The hornets are the pricks of the guilty conscience tormented with guilt. These pricks drive them out of the presence of God and into the hands of the enemy. But if they had repented and become as little children, they might have been saved. Not everyone left the temple, and yet all felt the sword.

So we see in the story of the numbering of Israel that, in a last effort to reach those falling into the hands of Satan, the Spirit of God came to them and desired to cleanse their hearts of sin that they might be saved. When they refused, Jesus uttered the sad words: "Your house is left unto you desolate." The word for *sword* in Hebrew actually means *drought*, and when the soul completely resisted Christ there was a drought of His Spirit. His Spirit is life, and when it is pushed away so there is a drought of the Spirit, then death soon follows.

Consider also that Satan controlled the hearts of these people. Christ was seeking one final time to reach them. Satan was determined not to lose his prey, so when the human heart refused Christ's entrance, Satan sought to secure these souls by taking their lives rather than run the risk of them repenting of their sins. We do not know the exact details of the case but the principles are not hard to follow.

The charge is raised, "you are spiritualising the texts of Scripture." The Bible uses the word *sword* and we should take it literally. Firstly, it was pestilence that killed the people. They did not die by a physical sword from the angel. Secondly, we are required to bring everything we can together and *then* form our conclusion.

As the people perished from pestilence, the sword mentioned as being in the hand of the angel must have had another purpose. The Bible tells us about the sword that Christ uses in several places, and that sword is seen coming out of His mouth, thus it is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:17).

We have described how the angel smote the people with the sword and yet died of pestilence. The sword was the Word of God convicting the people. This is how the angel of the Lord smote them. They refused to die to self through this sword and so the Spirit of God left them, and the destroyer took their lives. This is entirely consistent with what inspiration tells us concerning God's wrath and judgment. God's wrath and judgment does not lash out to inflict harm to coerce, but tearfully gives to man that which he selfishly desires. Notice how Paul describes God's wrath in his first letter to the Romans:

(16-18) For I am not ashamed of **the gospel** of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. **For therein is the righteousness of God revealed** from faith to faith: as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.' For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness ...

(24) Wherefore God also **gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts**, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves ...

(26) For this cause **God gave them up unto vile affections** ...

(28-32) And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, **God gave them over to a reprobate mind**, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

We should be careful not to force a literal interpretation onto scripture when symbolism is intended. That is what listeners to Jesus did when He said they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. The people listening refused to try to discover His deeper symbolic meaning, instead taking the literal meaning which was understood to be extremely violent and unnatural.

Then Jesus said unto them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.” (John 6:53-55)

The response of many was as follows:

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. (John 6:66)

With these principles in mind, let us move to the next story where an Angel smote 185,000 Assyrian soldiers.

The Destruction of the Assyrian Army.

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. (2 Kings 19:35)

Note carefully that it says the angel of the Lord smote them and *in the morning* they were found dead. It does not say that the angel of the Lord smote them causing them to die instantly. As we continue to compare scripture with scripture, we will see that these men were smitten with a supernatural terror. This terror is the conviction of sin in the soul as the Spirit seeks to bring them to repentance and turn them from their wicked deeds. When this sword falls, it causes the soldiers to fall as dead men. Compare this to the time of Christ's resurrection:

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. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: **And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.** (Matthew 28:2-4)

We know that the soldiers that kept the tomb of Jesus did not die of their terror for they were able to report to the Jewish leaders.

And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, "Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you." So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. (Matthew 28:12-15)

When the righteous Daniel saw the angel Gabriel, he fell at his feet as dead, and Gabriel strengthened him to stand in his presence.

Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: **for my comeliness [excellency, glory] was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.** Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, **then was I in a deep sleep**

on my face, and my face toward the ground. And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, “O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent.” **And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling.** (Daniel 10:8-11)

In the presence of the holy angel, the true reality of Daniel’s human sinful nature was exposed; his excellence or character was revealed as still corrupt in comparison to the angel. In Ezekiel 14:14 and 14:20 Daniel is, along with Noah and Job, used by God as an example of righteousness, meaning he was one of the most righteous men that ever lived. If such a holy man could not stand in the face of an angel, what shall we say for the wicked?

When the body receives a terrible fright, the immune system is put under great pressure, and if this is sustained for a length of time, the body begins to break down. Remember, these were no ordinary sinners; they were brutal and merciless soldiers who had killed many people in many campaigns, wiping out whole nations. When they were convicted of sin, their fear and guilt must have been extraordinary, especially when they didn’t believe in mercy, repentance, and forgiveness.

After the 185,000 soldiers saw the angel of the Lord, their bodies and minds were in such a weakened state of shock that they became susceptible to disease. The historian Josephus explains what happened next.

“Now when Sennacherib was returning from his Egyptian war to Jerusalem, **he found his army under Rabshakeh his general in danger [by a plague], for God had sent a pestilential distemper upon his army; and on the very first night of the siege, a hundred fourscore and five thousand, with their captains and generals, were destroyed.** So the king was in a great dread and in a terrible agony at this calamity; and being in great fear for his whole army, he fled with the rest of his forces to his own kingdom, and to his city Nineveh; and when he had abode there a little while, he was treacherously assaulted, and died by the hands of his elder sons, Adrammelech and Seraser, and was slain in his own temple, which was called Araske.” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* Book 10 Chapter 1, Section 5).

The supernatural terror experienced by the soldiers was simply because of the realisation of their wickedness when coming into the presence of a holy angel. The angel did not need to strike them, he only needed to appear before them. It was their own sins and the sense of guilt that immediately came upon them that caused them such a terrible fright. Their refusal to respond to the conviction of sin with repentance caused the spirit of God to leave them, leaving them defenceless – and a plague began to spread through the whole camp.

Some may argue, regardless of how it happened, the angel appeared and the result was they died. God answered the prayer of His people to defend the city. He can strike whom He wants with the sword of the Spirit. *It is up to us humans how we react to it.* Some repent (what God hopes will happen. He cannot force our will), some flee in terror, but for others it can cause death – depending on our own understanding of God, of guilt and justice, and the circumstances of the environment around us.

It would be if I told you some convicting truth about some evil you did. "Your sin is evil and will result in disastrous consequences." If you freak out, hyperventilate, and have a heart attack, did I kill you? Or was it your reaction that killed you, especially when you could have just repented and rested in God's everlasting forgiveness?

Take also into consideration that God is the source of life, and by attacking Him you are attacking your source of life – which is what the Assyrians were doing, directly wanting to destroy God – so the angel of the LORD was actually trying to convict them of their error so they wouldn't destroy themselves in their efforts, but they refused to find "grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8) and were consumed.

We know that at the Second Coming the wicked will be consumed by the spirit of Christ's mouth and destroyed by the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8). This means a revelation of the character of Christ that causes terrible torment in the sinner. The torment comes because the sinner

refuses to repent. Their hearts fail them for fear. (Luke 21:26). A description of this process is recorded in the book of 2nd Esdras from the Apocrypha.

But only I saw that he sent out of his mouth as it had been a blast of fire, and out of his lips a flaming breath, and out of his tongue he cast out sparks and tempests. And they were all mixed together; the blast of fire, the flaming breath, and the great tempest; and fell with violence upon the multitude which was prepared to fight, and burned them up every one, so that upon a sudden of an innumerable multitude nothing was to be perceived, but only dust and smell of smoke: when I saw this I was afraid. (2 Esdras 13:10-11)

Shew me now yet the interpretation of this dream. (2 Esdras 13:15)

And an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as thou sawest them, willing to come, and to overcome him by fighting. But he shall stand upon the top of the mount Sion. And Sion shall come, and shall be shewed to all men, being prepared and builded, like as thou sawest the hill graven without hands. And this my Son shall rebuke the wicked inventions of those nations, which for their wicked life are fallen into the tempest; **And shall lay before them their evil thoughts, and the torments wherewith they shall begin to be tormented, which are like unto a flame: and he shall destroy them without labour by the law which is like unto me.** (2 Esdras 13:34-38)

The smiting of the Assyrians by the angel of the LORD indicates that this is the Word of God convicting these men of their sins. It fell like a great tempest upon them and their refusal to repent caused them pain.

And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. (Revelation 16:9-11)

They were destroyed “without labour by the law which is like unto me” or, in other words, “the law which is the transcript of the Character of God.”

“Is not my word like as a fire?” saith the LORD; “and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29)

Is this not the same “fire” that consumed Nadab and Abihu that came from the Sanctuary? Even though fire consumed them, they were carried out in their clothes.

And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, “This is it that the LORD spake, saying, ‘I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace. 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.” **So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp;** as Moses had said. (Leviticus 10:2-5)

As they came closer to God in His physical temple, drunk and improperly following the statutes of how to do their task, their own anxiety and guilt began to manifest – because the law and glory of God was agitating them. Their own evil thoughts began to torment them “like unto a flame.” We don’t know exactly what happened to them, but we can assume following the principles that we have established: they refused repentance and grace, and so their sin manifested in the environment around them, due to man’s dominion of the earth, as lightning striking them.²

In this case, as their focus was on their guilt on entering the most holy place of the sanctuary, Nadab and Abihu inherently reaped what they had sown by offering “strange fire” upon the altar (Leviticus 10:1) according to their conception of deity, who negatively was known to them as “a consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24). In this false perspective, God became the cause of the fiery consumption of the sinner instead of the One who consumes the sin. Isaiah tells us that only those who do not fear but trust in God’s everlasting forgiveness and receive His righteousness will “dwell with the

² Other examples of this concept are found in the thorns from Adam’s sin in Genesis 3, the curses on the land from disobedience in Deuteronomy 28, and the wind, earthquake and fire from Elijah’s despair and shame in 1 Kings 19.

devouring fire” and the “everlasting burnings” of God’s love and protective presence (Isaiah 33:14-15).

What we want to get at here is that when the sword of the spirit smites a man, and he refuses to repent, then the spirit of God is withdrawn. Then all manner of problems can happen when the unrest that is in man’s heart is released, leading him susceptible to Satan, his own fears and weaknesses, release of latent mental and physical disorders, and the dangers of a sin-influenced environment around him (Isaiah 24:5-6).

Again, another way that we know that this smiting is the conviction of sin is by the way this word is used as follows. David reacts differently, thus allowing the spirit of God to come into/protect him and the people/environment around him. If David didn’t come to repentance, things would have gone much worse for David and the people with him:

And it came to pass afterward, that **David's heart smote** [*nakah* H5221] him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. (2 Samuel 24:5)

And David's heart smote [*nakah* H5221] him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. (2 Samuel 24:10)

This word *smote*, (*nakah* H5221), is the same word as in 2 Kings 19:35

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD **went out, and smote** [*nakah* H5221] in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. (2 Kings 19:35)

So, the word *smite* certainly can mean a conviction of sin. “David’s heart smote (convicted) him.” “The angel of the LORD went out, and smote (convicted) in the camp of the Assyrians.” Notice how the *New Living Translation* translates the two accounts:

That night the angel of the LORD went out to the Assyrian camp and **killed** 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere. (2 Kings 19:35)

But after he had taken the census, **David's conscience began to bother him**. And he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt, LORD, for doing this foolish thing." (2 Samuel 24:10)

By using this translation, it would never even come to mind that these two verses are using the same Hebrew word – *nakah*. Is it not reasonable that the angel of LORD was merely convicting the conscience of the Assyrian soldiers instead of killing them?

The Death of Herod

Our last story in the list is the death of Herod.

And immediately the angel of the Lord **smote** him [Herod], because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. (Acts 12:23)

From our previous examples, this story is simple to explain. Herod transgressed the law and broke the everlasting covenant. The Word of God deeply convicted him of his sinful behaviour in order to bring him to repentance. The conviction caused him agony of mind, but he refused repentance. Either Satan was enabled to kill him with disease, or his body broke down from the effect of terror on his immune system.

The way the verse describes the event, it seems to happen almost miraculously: an angel smites him, and immediately he dies and is covered in worms. But it doesn't necessarily have to be the case. Many commentators believe "eaten of worms" is an expression, used by Jews and Gentiles, referring to a painful death as a judgment of God. There may be literal worms such as intestinal roundworms, gangrene maggots (as infected Herod the Great), or it may have been a metaphor.

Here is Josephus's account:

"Agrippa... came to the city Cesarea... and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar... At which festival, a great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity through his province.

On the second day... he put on a garment made wholly of silver... and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and... his flatterers cried out... that he was a god; and they added, "Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature." Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery.

A severe pain... arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, "I whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept of what Providence allots as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner."

When he said this, his pain was become violent. Accordingly he was carried into the palace; and... when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign..." (Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.343–351)

Here's an expanded explanation by an online website: *livingfaith.org*

Josephus' record matches up with the account in Acts apart from one vital detail: Agrippa's being consumed by worms. Acts mentions it; Josephus does not. Why did Josephus omit such a gory and horrifying feature of the story?

As is often the case with the slightly bizarre, we're dealing with an artefact of genre. As Fitzmyer explains, "Luke describes the demise of Herod Agrippa I, using a genre well known in Greek literature". He continues, "The gruesome details are supposed to enhance the account of the death deserved by those

who despise God (or the gods)”. F. F. Bruce also explains that “such a term is used by several ancient writers in relating the deaths of people deemed worthy of so unpleasant an end”.

Let’s look at a few examples from history:

Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the man responsible for attempting to stamp out Jewish practice and for sacrificing on an altar to Zeus he’d placed in the Temple at Jerusalem, is recorded in the second book of Maccabees as dying like this:

2 Maccabees 9:5–9 But the all-seeing Lord, **the God of Israel, struck him with an incurable and invisible blow**. As soon as he stopped speaking he was seized with a pain in his bowels, for which there was no relief, and with sharp internal tortures— and that very justly, for he had tortured the bowels of others with many and strange inflictions. Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence, but was even more filled with arrogance, breathing fire in his rage against the Jews, and giving orders to drive even faster. And so it came about that he fell out of his chariot as it was rushing along, and the fall was so hard as to torture every limb of his body. Thus he who only a little while before had thought in his superhuman arrogance that he could command the waves of the sea, and had imagined that he could weigh the high mountains in a balance, was brought down to earth and carried in a litter, making the power of God manifest to all. And so the ungodly man’s body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of the stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay.

The final days of Herod the Great are described by Josephus:

But now Herod’s distemper greatly increased upon him after a severe manner, and **this by God’s judgment upon him** for his sins: for a fire glowed in him slowly, which did not so much appear to the touch outwardly as it augmented his pains inwardly; (169) for it brought upon him a vehement appetite to eating, which he could not avoid to supply with one sort of food or other. His entrails were also exulcerated, and the chief violence of his pain lay on his colon; an aqueous and transparent liquor also settled itself about his feet, and a like matter afflicted him at the bottom of his belly. Nay, farther, his privy member was putrified, and produced worms; and when he sat upright he had a difficulty of breathing,

which was very loathsome, on account of the stench of his breath, and the quickness of its returns; he had also convulsions in all parts of his body, which increased his strength to an insufferable degree. (Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.168–169)

Not pleasant. Herodotus describes the end of Pheretime like this:

But Pheretime did not end well, either. For as soon as she had revenged herself on the Barcaeans and returned to Egypt, she met an awful death. For while still alive she teemed with maggots: thus does over-brutal human revenge invite retribution from the gods.

In each instance, being eaten by worms is explained as being the punishment of a god. The passage in Acts is no different – it explains that Agrippa died, “because he had not given the glory to God”. It’s a classic example of the genre.

So, Agrippa died a miserable death – that’s certain. But his death probably didn’t involve worms. In fact, by understanding the term “eaten by worms” literally, we miss the point that would have been obvious to the original first-century audience of the book of Acts. It’s highly likely that the original audience of Acts wouldn’t have thought to imagine that Agrippa’s body was actually eaten by actual worms; they’d have understood the passage within the parameters of the genre it was written in and so would have seen in the phrase an illustration of the fact that Agrippa’s gruesome death was an act of divine retribution. (*livingfaith.org/on being eaten by worms*)

Thus we see that Josephus, who was a contemporary of Herod in Acts 12, said that he died five days later after the event, not instantaneously. Josephus even gives the remarkable words of Herod that show that he himself thought his disease a judgment of God. But though he said this, there is no evidence that he repented of killing James, the brother of John (Acts 12:2), vexed the church (Acts 12:1), and almost killed Peter too. Instead, Peter escaped, due to angelic help, and Herod killed the guards for failing their duty.

Herod was given over to the enemy because He broke the covenant.

And **I will bring a sword upon you**, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, **I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.** (Leviticus 26:5)

Christ brought upon Herod the sword of His Word. Herod refused to repent and so he was delivered to the enemy who brought pestilence upon him. What was the difference in the stroke that Herod experienced compared to Peter?

And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he **smote** Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, "Arise up quickly." And his chains fell off from his hands. (Acts 12:7)

The Greek word for *smote* is the same word used in Acts 12:23 referring to Herod. (*patassó*). Peter had a clear conscience, Herod did not. When Peter awoke, he was not full of fear at the presence of the angel. Herod experienced something far different. Notice the following example of how even God's voice can be experienced differently by different people:

[Jesus said] "Father, glorify thy name." Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." **The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, "An angel spake to him."** (John 12:28-29)

The smiting, which could have been as a still small voice, was like thunder to Herod and it terrified him to death. Those who continue to believe that the angel of the Lord used lethal force on Herod must harmonise all the other passages of inspiration and preserve the character of Jesus as our perfect example that we can copy. We have seen that Jesus clearly taught against the use of force. He is the express image of the Father who said, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit." (Zechariah 4:6). God's kingdom does not overcome evil by might or power, but by His Spirit – His everlasting affectionate self-sacrificing love. Jesus did not overcome evil by killing others, but by dying for them. As Christians, we overcome evil with good:

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay,' saith the Lord. **Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.** (Romans 12:14-21)

By feeding our enemy, we are not bringing literal "coals of fire on his head." This is, once again, referring to conviction of sin. By doing good to people when they expect us to return evil for their evil, we cause them to reflect on what they have done and feel guilty. Here is another translation of this verse:

Instead, as the scripture says: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; **for by doing this you will make them burn with shame.**" Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good. (Romans 12:20-21, *Good News Translation*)

That is how we conquer evil by good, by convicting enemies of sin. Depending on their reaction, consequences will follow, and if they push God's conviction of way and refuse to change, God's wrath will follow – which we have outlined – which is the removal of His Spirit. That is how God wants us to act, not avenging ourselves, but letting this process work itself out.

The charge is made that this is spiritualising the Bible. But would we dare argue that the Good News Translation is spiritualising the Bible when it translates the text this way? It is also the way it is translated in the standard version in Thai; they felt they had to translate it that way because a literal fire coming down due to feeding your enemies doesn't make sense. It isn't easy to know when to take this symbolically and literally, but we hope that we have given the reader some principles to follow.

We need to take all that inspiration speaks to us and form a conclusion consistent with the revelation of God's character revealed in Christ. To be consistent, those who wish to force a surface reading of scripture must believe that God sends evil spirits to torment people as in the case of Saul (1 Samuel 16:14), or He employs evil angels to work for Him (Psalm 78:49), or sends lying spirits such as to cause the death of Ahab (1 Kings 22:22). We might add that such reading reveals that God hardens people's hearts (Exodus 7:3) and sends them strong delusions (2 Thessalonians 2:11). Is this the best way to read Scripture?

We see that the angel that smites people resulting in death occurs when the Word of God convicts people of sin. The torment of one's own sinfulness causes agony of mind. The presence of pestilence indicates that the Spirit of God has been removed and the destroyer has done his work as God ceases to protect those who refuse to repent. It is sin that punishes sin. (Romans 6:23; James 1:14-15). Scripture says, "Evil shall slay the wicked" (Psalm 34:21).

God's holy angels are not evil angels. They are not sent to destroy man but are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister [serve] for them who shall be heirs of salvation." (Hebrews 1:14). The angels of God are filled with the Spirit of Jesus; "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister [serve], and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). They keep the Father's commandments and they do not wield a physical sword. They are mighty in the Word of God and filled with the righteousness of Jesus. Their purity, love and holiness are a terror to the wickedness of sinners and their holiness strikes terror into the hearts of the unrighteous. They carry the "flaming sword" of God's purifying Word (Genesis 3:24). Their holiness is their chief power, yet they also have power to hold in check the forces of the wicked one.

And after these things I **saw four angels** standing on the four corners of the earth, **holding the four winds of the earth**, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I **saw another angel** ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: **and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels**, to whom it was given to hurt

the earth and the sea, Saying, "**Hurt not the earth**, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads."
(Revelation 7:1-3)

These holy angels are not the ones who directly hurt the earth with these winds of strife, but once they let go there will be chaos and disaster due to the release of their protection and the end of their calming influence on the earth. Then the agencies of Satan, "the prince of the power of the air", are permitted to do their evil work, encouraging the evil hearts of men to war, steal, and lie; while the earth begins to act out due to the disorder of natural laws (Ephesians 2:2).

Therefore, the righteous angels have tremendous power. When they are commanded to loose their arms, they can release the full force of Satan's fury. Though they do not wish to do this, they will do it when they are commanded. This can only occur when a person refuses to heed the warning of God and persist in breaking His commandments. After years of long-suffering, finally the Spirit of God driven back relents and allows the sinner to have the master they have chosen.

And I sought for a man among them, **that should make up the hedge**, and stand in the gap before me for the land, **that I should not destroy it**: but I found none. **Therefore** have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: **their own way have I recompensed upon their heads**, saith the Lord God. (Ezekiel 22:30-31)

Satan the Destroyer of the First Born in Egypt

In reference to the first born of Egypt, we are told who did this work:

For **I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt**, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am **the LORD**. (Exodus 12:12)

For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass

over the door, and will not suffer **the destroyer** to come in unto your houses to smite you. (Exodus 12:23)

We clearly see Biblical language at work here. God says He will do it, and then He says another being named “the destroyer” will do it. God did it by allowing Satan to do it, based on the people’s choice of whether they would allow themselves to be protected or not, according to the blood on the door posts.

Do holy angels ever use destructive power? Actually, the answer is yes. As we noticed earlier in the cleansing of the temple, Jesus did use force on inanimate objects. Do holy angels follow this pattern?

And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And **took off their chariot wheels**, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.” (Exodus 14:25)

If holy angels used destructive force to kill people, why were they taking chariot wheels off Egyptian chariots? Why didn’t they just smash them to pieces? The evidence is there for those who have ears to hear and read these passages faithfully. Many read it out of context to make holy angels who keep God’s commandments into killers according to human perception and thinking. If the angels were taking off chariot wheels to slow them down, were they possibly trying to encourage the Egyptian soldiers to turn back to avoid destruction?

So, was Satan really “the destroyer” who killed the first born?

How he [God] had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan: And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them. He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. He cast upon them the

fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, **by sending [letting loose] evil angels among them.** He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; and smote all the firstborn in Egypt ... (Psalm 78:43-51)

It was “evil angels” causing the Egyptians all the trouble. God had been rejected by the Egyptians who had formerly honoured Him in the time of Jacob, and now Satan was claiming them as his own. God gave them multiple ways to stay connected to Him – for example, if Pharoah had let them go for a feast in the wilderness (Exodus 5:1) – but now it had come to the last terrible choice.

Terrible destruction was coming upon the land. God gave them a way to escape by spreading the blood of the lamb over their doorposts. Anyone refusing to do so was telling God to get lost and, since He will not employ force, He tearfully submitted to their free choice by allowing the destroying evil angel to go into their house and smite them. Like a lion, Satan is always roaming about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Paul makes it clear that Satan is “the destroyer” (1 Corinthians 10:9-10). And Jesus says, “he was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).

The Walls of Jericho

Jericho is a difficult story, because it seems like the angels pulled down walls that had people on it, thus killing them. The question is...why do this with this city, but never with any other city? Could it be because the circumstances regarding the walls of Jericho were special? Remember that the cup of iniquity of the Canaanites was full at this point, earlier it had not been:

But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full. (Genesis 15:16)

Here’s that verse again in the *New Living Translation*:

After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction.”(Genesis 15:16, *New Living Translation*)

This means that the Canaanites had fully rejected God, His Spirit was being removed, and all sorts of calamities would come on the land, including natural disasters. Archaeologists have discovered that the walls came down because of an earthquake. We know that before an earthquake happens, there is a build-up of pressure underground. Could it be that angels had been holding this earthquake back? What if they could hold it back longer, if they had come into some form of relationship with the Creator of Life? But they did not, only Rahab did, and the section of the wall where her house was did not fall; the rest of the wall did fall, having been released by the angels.

The first major excavation of the site of Jericho, located in the southern Jordan valley in Israel, was carried out by a German team between 1907 and 1909. They found piles of mud bricks at the base of the mound the city was built on.

It was not until a British archaeologist named Kathleen Kenyon [not a Bible believer] reexcavated the site with modern methods in the 1950s that it was understood what these piles of bricks were. She determined that they were from the city wall which had collapsed when the city was destroyed!

The Biblical record goes on to say that when the walls collapsed, the Israelites stormed the city and set it on fire. Archaeologists found evidence for a massive destruction by fire, just as the Bible relates. Kenyon wrote in her excavation report,

“The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire, and every room was filled with fallen bricks, timbers, and household utensils; in most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt.”

What caused the strong walls of Jericho to collapse? The most likely explanation is an earthquake. But the nature of the earthquake was unusual. It struck in such a way as to allow a portion of the city wall on the north side of the site to remain standing, while everywhere else the wall fell.

Rahab’s house was evidently located on the north side of the city. She was the Canaanite prostitute who hid the Israelite spies who came to reconnoiter the city. The Bible states that her house was built against the

city wall. Before returning to the Israelite camp, the spies told Rahab to bring her family into her house and they would be saved. According to the Bible, Rahab's house was miraculously spared while the rest of the city wall fell.

This is exactly what archaeologists found. The preserved city wall on the north side of the city had houses built against it.

The timing of the earthquake and the manner in which it selectively took down the city wall suggests something other than a natural calamity. A Divine Force was at work. (*ChristianAnswers.Net, Is the Bible accurate concerning the existence and destruction of the walls of Jericho?*)

A divine force was at work, but it was to let go in accordance with man's decisions and let the pent-up fury of nature be released, rather than arbitrarily acting. God did not sit in heaven and think, this time I will destroy with flood, this time with fire, this time with earthquake – all these things happened based on the existing circumstances of nature; God tried to warn those who lived in the disaster zone that it was coming, but finally it happened. Remember, the four angels in Revelation 7 released their hold on the earth and that is the sense of how God destroyed it.

In this case, God would use the inevitable disaster to encourage the faith of the Israelites and let them know that He knows the future and can bend it to help them according to their obedience. In this, God was working in the framework they were in, aiming to teach them so that they would mature in wisdom. The Israelites had decided to war, lacking faith, and it was they that thought that slaughter was the only way – so God allowed them to pour out their wrath on the Canaanites, whom He could not protect anymore.

So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. **And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old,** and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. (Joshua 6:20-21)

God allowed this into their history, letting the desires of their heart play out that one day they would reflect on it. Would they realize that it was not His will, that in all His commands He was merely mirroring their own desires in a way that was as merciful as their childish mind frame could bear? After 1,500 years of war, with its ups and downs, Jesus would tell them bluntly that those who “use the sword will die by the sword.” Israel would not give up the sword; they would rather kill Jesus than give up their belief that God approved and would bless their violence.

Thus what they did to Jericho, was done by the Romans to them in the destruction of Jerusalem. Will we learn from this history? There too, the angels let loose the winds of strife, and the fury of man was unleashed that the generals of the army could not even hold it back. Why was it that Titus was unheard, and his orders ignored? Because the angels had loosed the winds, and the destruction of Jerusalem was divinely ordained, Jerusalem having totally rejected God. That is why Jesus could say, “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” – because He knew what the consequence of their rejection of Him would be: a city desolate, having rejected conviction of sin; a total drought of the Holy Spirit that left it ripe to be destroyed according to the circumstances surrounding it.

Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul be alienated from thee; lest I make thee a desolation, a land not inhabited. (Jeremiah 6:8, *American Standard Version*)

In this case, it was not earthquake, nor flood, but the white-hot hatred of the Romans of the Jews.

That is what we see in the first-hand account of Josephus of the destruction of the temple – a Roman army that would tear every stone down, no matter what orders they received, and a fire that would blaze without being able to be quenched.

And now a certain person came running to Titus, and told him of this fire, as he was resting himself in his tent after the last battle; whereupon he

rose up in great haste, and as he was, ran to the holy house, in order to have a stop put to the fire; after him followed all his commanders, and after them followed the several legions, in great astonishment; so there was a great clamor and tumult raised, as was natural upon the disorderly motion of so great an army.

Then did Caesar, both by calling to the soldiers that were fighting, with a loud voice, and by giving a signal to them with his right hand, order them to quench the fire; **but they did not hear what he said, though he spake so loud, having their ears already dinned by a greater noise another way; nor did they attend to the signal he made with his right hand neither, as still some of them were distracted with fighting, and others with passion;** but as for the legions that came running thither, **neither any persuasions nor any threatenings could restrain their violence, but each one's own passion was his commander at this time;** and as they were crowding into the temple together, **many of them were trampled on by one another,** while a great number fell among the ruins of the cloisters, which were still hot and smoking, and were destroyed in the same miserable way with those whom they had conquered: and when they were come near the holy house, **they made as if they did not so much as hear Caesar's orders to the contrary; but they encouraged those that were before them to set it on fire.** (Josephus, *War on the Jews*, Book 6, ch. 4, par. 6)

Angels are protecting us at all times of a multitude of dangers, most of which we are not aware of. They constantly speak peace to humans so that we don't rape, rob, and kill each other. But rejecting God and His Spirit convicting us of sin has dramatic consequences, and God is just in giving us the fruit of our freedom of choice, though it pains Him greatly. The disaster that befalls us is not arbitrarily decided by Him, but is a result of our own ways of thinking, our own actions, and our environment which we have influenced around us.

It is my sincere prayer that you will give this subject careful attention. Your guardian angel is not one who transforms himself to be your personal executioner when your time is up. Like Jesus, they love us and will do everything they can to save us.

The ministry of holy angels is patient and gentle, non-violent and non-destructive. When commanded, they will use force to move non-living objects, but they do not use lethal force on human beings for whom Christ died because the Kingdom of God does not use force. Only by love is love awakened. It is true they will obey the command to cease to protect someone.

Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone. (Hosea 4:17)

How hard that must be for an angel. Imagine a person they have guarded for decades. They have gently tried to influence them towards the light and then finally they hear the words, *I have done all I can do and they will have nothing of Me. Let them have their own will and stand down from guarding them.* Faithful to their Master, after many years of watchful care they still will obey without flinching. How sorrowful must be their ministry and yet how faithful they are.

Yet how much joy they must get when someone they are guarding listens to their guidance, repents of their wrongdoing, and becomes a channel for the Spirit of God to flow into the world. This human becomes a priest, an intercessor for his fellow man, a “repairer of the breach” (Isaiah 58:12) that smoothens the way for good angels to work for us. How happy angels are to be able to do this work, when humans actually value and desire the blessings of their Master!

I am so look forward to speaking with my guardian angel in heaven and learning from them the experiences we walked through together and how they assisted me and pointed me to Jesus and the Word of God. Thank you Lord Jesus for my angel who watches over me and for the angels that care for my family. We owe you so much for your continual intercessions to the Father for our protection and the holding back of the four winds. We thank you that you bear with our misunderstandings and rejections, and that you suffer through all the difficulties of this world in order to bring us into the loving salvation of Your Father. May we ever be grateful.

Other books in this series – Available at fatheroflove.info

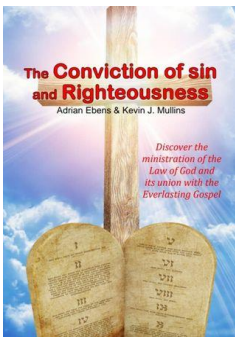


Canaan Conquest

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

Matthew 26:52 "...for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

Were the Israelites truly in tune with the character of God? Why were they regularly afraid that He had brought them out into the desert to kill them? Was the deep darkness that fell upon Abraham in any way related to his taking of the sword to save his nephew and family? Did the slaughter of the Shechemites by Levi and Simeon have any influence on the vow of Israel to utterly destroy their enemies? Do you need to know? If you didn't might Christ come to you as He did to Jacob in His trouble and be perceived as an enemy? Only trusting in the mercy of God did Jacob overcome as the true Israel of God.



The Conviction of Sin and Righteousness

"Nevertheless I [Jesus] tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." (John 16:7, 8)

What do you think of when you hear the word "conviction"? Do you think of condemnation? If so, from whom? The one doing the convicting, or yourself?

While you ponder your answer, think of this question: How does the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), convict of sin and righteousness? Does a Comforter bring condemnation, or comfort? Paul describes it this way:

"But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?" (2 Corinthians 3:7, 8)

How can a "ministry of death" be "glorious"? When the Comforter brings conviction of sin, the glorious "ministry of death" leads us to "the ministry of the Spirit, which is more glorious" because it leads us to a life of righteousness.

"And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." (Romans 8:10)

Do Angels of God Kill?

What do we make of statements like these?

And to the [other angels] he [God] said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. Ezekiel 9:5-6

Do God's holy angels really kill people – “old and young, both maids, and little children, and women”? Does Christ truly speak the words: “These people must die, go and execute them!” Does the Hebrew word *nakah* (to smite) always mean “to kill”? Jesus said He glorified His Father while here upon the earth, John 17:4. However, Jesus never killed anyone while here. Did Jesus hide this part of the character of God? If executing people is part of His character, then why did He not reveal this while here on earth?

For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Luke 9:56

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? John 14:9