

## Do God's Angels Kill People?

If you search the words *angel* and *smote* in the 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 70000 people smitten by the angel of the Lord.
3. 2 Kings 19:35 and Isa 37:36. Assyrian Army of 185000 men smitten by the angel of the Lord
4. Acts 12:24. Angel of the Lord smote Herod for his sin.

In the first story 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.

Num 22:23 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.

The threatening posture of the angel with a sword in hand does suggest that the angel was prepared to do Balaam harm and this thought is further strengthened by the other stories in our list.

In the next story, David seeks to number his forces in an act of pride to rank Israel among the nations and the result was the death of 70000 Israelites.

2 Sam 24:1 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 Sam 24:15,16 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.

A first reading of this story suggests something quite frightening. The king in pride numbers the people and then God sends an angel to kill 70000 people and then repents of the evil done and relents on killing more people. What is even more strange is that 2 Sam 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 live with 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.

2 Kings 19:35 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.

Inspiration adds this note to the story:

Under God the angels are all-powerful. On one occasion, in obedience to the command of Christ, they slew of the Assyrian army in one night one hundred and eighty-five thousand men. DA 702

A supposed plain reading of these statements strongly suggests that the angels of the Lord killed 185000 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.

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.

Act 12:21-23 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. (22) And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. (23) 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.

Herod had killed James the brother of John and then planned to kill Peter. Note what inspiration says of this story.

The same angel who had come from the royal courts to rescue Peter, had been the messenger of wrath and judgment to Herod. The angel smote Peter to arouse him from slumber; it was with a different stroke that he smote the wicked king, laying low his pride and bringing upon him the punishment of the Almighty. **Herod died in great agony of mind and body, under the retributive judgment of God.** AA 152.1

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 laid out for those who are preaching the Third Angels Message.

Those who are engaged in proclaiming the third angel's message are searching the Scriptures upon the same plan that Father Miller adopted. In the little book entitled "Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology," Father Miller gives the following simple but intelligent and important rules for Bible study and interpretation:--

"1. Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible; 2. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by diligent application and study; 3. Nothing revealed in Scripture can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering; 4. **To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence; and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in error;** 5. Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on a teacher to expound to me, and he should guess at its meaning, or desire to have it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his guessing, desire, creed, or wisdom is my rule, and not the Bible." {RH, November 25, 1884 par. 24}

If we form our conclusion *before* we have brought all points together and then use this conclusion to ignore points that appear to say something else then we are not following Miller's rules and therefore cease to be preaching the Third Angel's Message. This is a serious point for consideration.

How do we reconcile these stories with these statements?

Matt 5:44 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;

Luke 9:54-56 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? (55) But he turned, and rebuked

them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. (56) For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

Matt 26:52 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.

2 Pet 3:9 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.

## 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. Maybe it could be said that when His work here on earth was complete then there were other aspects of His ministry that must be fulfilled. As the Scripture indicates:

Ecc 3:3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

Deu 32:39 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.

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

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

Joshua 5:13,14 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?

Psalms 2:4-9 **He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.** (5) Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. (6) Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. (7) I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. (8) Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. (9) **Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces** like a potter's vessel.

Eze 9:1,2,5,6 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. (2) 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.... (5) 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:** (6) **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.

Rev 16:1-3 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. (2) 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. (3) 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.

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 but the supposed claim for a plain reading of Scripture would suggest that this indeed is how it should be understood even if it appears to be a very violent act.

## 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 enter the realm of thought 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 Scripture 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?

1 Peter 2:21-23 For even hereunto were ye called: because **Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:** (22) Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: (23) Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

Christ is our pattern, the perfect and holy example that has been given us to follow. Manuscript 65, 1894

**God has left nothing undone that He could do for us. He gave a perfect example of His character in the character of His Son;** and it is the work of Christ's followers, as they behold the incomparable excellency of His life and character, to grow in His likeness. As they look unto Jesus and respond to His love, they will reflect the image of Christ (Review and Herald, Feb. 15, 1898).

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:

Matt 5:39-44 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. (40) And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. (41) And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. (42) Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. (43) Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. (44) 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;

Isn't it fair then to ask the question, "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.

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

1 John 3:2 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.

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.

God's law is the transcript of His character. It embodies the principles of His kingdom. He who refuses to accept these principles is placing himself outside the channel where God's blessings flow. COL 305

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom. COL 315

The law of God is a transcript of his character; it portrays the nature of God. As in Christ we behold the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person, so also in the law the attributes of the Father are unfolded. ST Dec 30, 1889

God would have all men know, wherever His voice is heard, that the righteousness which Christ's obedience imparts to the believer is the righteousness that is described in the law spoken from Sinai. Not one letter can be altered. **It is an exact photograph of the character of God in Christ.** E.J Waggoner, Everlasting Covenant 343.1

Jesus tells us that He keeps His Father's commandments

John 15:10 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.

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 killed anyone.

"Herod and the wicked authorities killed the Just One, but **Christ never killed anyone**, and we may attribute the spirit of persecution—because men want liberty of conscience—to its origin—Satan." Ms62-1886.64

Did the earthly life of Jesus fully reveal the character of God?

Christ alone could represent the Father to humanity, and this representation the disciples had been privileged to behold for over three years. DA 664

**The whole character of God was revealed in his Son**, the whole range of the possibilities of heaven is displayed for the acceptance of man in the Son of the Infinite One. ST Dec 30, 1889

Such is the character of Christ as revealed in His life. This is the character of God. It is from the Father's heart that the streams of divine compassion, manifest in Christ, flow out to the children of men. Jesus, the tender, pitying Saviour, was God "manifest in the flesh." 1 Timothy 3:16. SC 12

## 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. Here is one explanation expressing this point:

There are two different Hebrew words (*ratsakh*, *mut*) and two Greek words (*phoneuo*, *apokteino*) for “murder” and “killing.” **One means “to put to death,” and the other 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.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/you-shall-not-murder.html>

A careful examination of the Scripture reveals that this argument is false. Firstly, within the very explanation the writer acknowledges that *ratsach* not only mean murder but accident death which we call manslaughter. This is not murder.

Num 35:22-25 **But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait,** (23) 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: (24) Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments: (25) **And the congregation shall deliver the slayer [H7523 *Ratsach*] 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.

Deu 4:42 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:

Secondly, God did command that people who commit *ratsach* should face the same thing.

Num 35:30 Whoso killeth any person, the murderer [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.

How could it be possible that God could command things that the Ten Commandments forbids? In short, God could command any form of death in the Scriptures because God seeks to secure the *sentence* of death in order to give mercy not to kill people. Please see the booklet called *Ministration of Death* for a full explanation of this.

Thirdly, the word *muth* [H4191] in Scripture is used to describe murder, and assassination. Saul desired to unlawfully murder David:

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

Saul ordered the unlawful murder of the priesthood:

1 Sam 22:17 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 [H4191] on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.**

### The assassination of Isbosheth:

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

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

2 Sam 13:28 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 [H4191] him**, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant.

### Athaliah murders all the king's sons except Joash:

2 Kings 11:2 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; [H4191] and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain.

### Notice the translation in the New King James:

2 Kings 11:2 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**; [H4191] and they hid him and his nurse in the bedroom, from Athaliah, so that he was not killed.

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

2 Kings 15:25 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 [H4191] him, and reigned in his room.

NIV 2 Kings 15:25 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** [H4191] Pekahiah and succeeded him as king.

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

Psa 37:32 The wicked watcheth the righteous, and **seeketh to slay [H4191] him**.

Psa 109:16,17 Because that he [the wicked] remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even **slay [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.

### Jeremiah warns against those seeking to murder him:

Jer 26:13-15 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. (14) As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. (15) But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, [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.

So the word *muth* can indeed be used to mean murder and assassination and thr word *ratsach* can be used for accidental death. This proofs 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?

The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. **The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government;** He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. DA 22.

Do we comprehend the significance of the above statement? God can't use lethal force as part of His kingdom. Do we accept this statement as inspired? The response comes that we must get our teaching from Scripture. I would suggest the most perfect example of the refusal to use lethal force is the earthly life of Jesus. Do we accept the words of Jesus?

Mat 5:39 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.

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.

What answer can be given to the person who says to the Lord, "I followed your example in the Old Testament when I put this evil doer to death." 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.

## **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?

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

If we compare this with the same story in another place, we read as follows:

1 Ch 21:1 And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.

If we *only* read 2 Samuel 24:1 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?

Those who make the effort to read further will discover 1 Chronicles 21:1 which reveals that Satan was allowed to tempt David to number Israel. 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. 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 and will 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.

Heb 2:14-15 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; (15) And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

The understanding of the people of God has been blinded, for Satan has misrepresented the character of God. Our good and gracious Lord has been presented before the people clothed in the attributes of Satan, and men and women who have been seeking for truth have so long regarded God in a false light it is difficult to dispel the cloud that obscures His glory from their view. 1SM 355

## Causing Sin to Abound

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

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

Our Father causes the offense to abound. How does He do this? He causes the law to enter. When the law comes to the natural man how will he read this law?

James 1:23-24 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: (24) For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

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 and the sinner is invited to come into the light of the Father through the revelation of the Son of God. 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 of God put to death – they die *by* that sword. 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. All of us will die by some sword. By which one will you die?

## So how did Satan tempt David?

David, in his prosperity, did not preserve that humility of character and trust in God which characterized the earlier part of his life. He looked upon the accession to the kingdom with pride, and contrasted their then prosperous condition with their few numbers and little strength when he ascended the throne, taking glory to himself. He gratified his ambitious feelings in yielding to the temptation of the devil to number Israel, that he might compare their former weakness with their then prosperous state under his rule. This was displeasing to God, and contrary to his express command. It would lead Israel to rely upon their strength of numbers, instead of the living God. {1SP 385.1}

## How was God moved against David?

God cannot, according to His own name's glory, protect those who are working contrary to His will. 8T 51

## David was not alone in this spirit of pride concerning the growing power of Israel.

Intercourse with heathen peoples led to a desire to follow their national customs and kindled ambition for worldly greatness. As the people of Jehovah, Israel was to be honored; but as pride and self-confidence increased, the Israelites were not content [747] with this pre-eminence. They cared rather for their standing among other nations. This spirit could not fail to invite temptation. PP 746, 747

Even though the Lord warned David through Joab, protection was removed from David by allowing Satan more access to tempt David. David resisted the promptings of the Spirit to follow his natural 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:

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

This is not an imperfect statement. It says *I was shown that the judgements of God would not come directly out from the Lord upon them*. The use of the definite article (the judgments) without qualification (some judgments) tells us this is a consistent principle and accords perfectly with how the Bible tells us that judgments come to men. The Ten Commandments tell you exactly how it works:

Exo 20:5-6 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; (6) And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Exo 34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

## **Pestilence is the Signature of the Enemy**

2 Sam 24:15 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.

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.

Lev 26:25 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.

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

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

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

Psa 91:1-3 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (2) I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. (3) **Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.**

...**Satan** is exercising his power. He sweeps away the ripening harvest, and famine and distress follow. He **imparts to the air a deadly taint, and thousands perish by the pestilence.** GC 590.

It is Satan who was allowed to destroy these people. The alternative is that God allowed Satan to tempt David and Israel and lead them into sin and then God turns around and smashes 70000 people. This position is not consistent. Satan stood up and was allowed to tempt David 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

2 Sam 24:16-17 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. (17) 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.

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

Rev 1:16-17 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. (17) 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:

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?

Heb 4:12 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 discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Do we have an example of how this sword was wielded by Christ?

As He beholds the scene, indignation, authority, and power are expressed in His countenance. The attention of the people is attracted to Him. The eyes of those engaged in their unholy traffic [158] are riveted upon His face. They cannot withdraw their gaze. They feel that this Man reads their inmost thoughts, and discovers their hidden motives. Some attempt to conceal their faces, as if their evil deeds were written upon their countenances, to be scanned by those searching eyes.

The confusion is hushed. The sound of traffic and bargaining has ceased. The silence becomes painful. A sense of awe overpowers the assembly. It is as if they were arraigned before the tribunal of God to answer for their deeds. Looking upon Christ, they behold divinity flash through the garb of humanity. The Majesty of heaven stands as the Judge will stand at the last day,—not now encircled with the glory that will then attend Him, but with the same power to read the soul. His eye sweeps over the multitude, taking in every individual. His form seems to rise above them in commanding dignity, and a divine light illuminates His countenance. He speaks, and His clear, ringing voice—the same that upon Mount Sinai proclaimed the law that priests and rulers are transgressing—is heard echoing through the arches of the temple: "Take these things hence; make not My Father's house an house of merchandise."

Slowly descending the steps, and raising the scourge of cords gathered up on entering the enclosure, He bids the bargaining company depart from the precincts of the temple. With a zeal and severity He has never before manifested, **He overthrows the tables of the money-changers.** [force used on inanimate objects] The coin falls, ringing sharply upon the marble pavement. None presume to question His authority. None dare stop to gather up their ill-gotten gain. **Jesus does not smite them with the whip of cords, but in His hand that simple scourge seems terrible as a flaming sword.** [No force used on people] Officers of the temple, speculating priests, brokers and cattle traders, with their sheep and oxen, **rush from the place, with the one thought of escaping from the condemnation of His presence.**

A panic sweeps over the multitude, who feel the overshadowing of His divinity. Cries of terror escape from hundreds of blanched lips. Even the disciples tremble. They are awestruck by the words and manner of Jesus, so unlike His usual demeanor. DA 157, 158

For those 70000 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 this deep conviction 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 rush from his presence. In the case of the 70000 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 asked God to forgive them 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

Exo 23:27-28 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. (28) And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.

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.

When they fled, the poor remained behind; and these were now looking to Jesus, whose countenance expressed His love and sympathy. With tears in His eyes, He said to the trembling ones around Him: Fear not; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. For this cause came I into the world. The people pressed into Christ's presence with urgent, pitiful appeals: Master, bless me. His ear heard every cry. With pity exceeding that of a tender mother He bent over the suffering little ones. All received attention. Everyone was healed of whatever disease he had. The dumb opened their lips in praise; the blind beheld the face of their Restorer. The hearts of the sufferers were made glad. DA 163

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, He was compelled to leave them to the hand of Satan because they refused him entrance.

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 and 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. Note carefully rule 11 of William Miller on this point.

How to know when a word is used figuratively. If it makes good sense as it stands, *and does no violence to the simple laws of nature*, then it must be understood literally, if not, figuratively.

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 the Word of God. 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:

In this age a more than common contempt is shown to God. Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. Many have well-nigh passed the boundary of mercy. Soon God will show that He is indeed the living God. He will say to the angels, "No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy. Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience; for the cup of their iniquity is full. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work. RH, September 17, 1901

Let us remember that it was a refusal to take the symbolic meaning of the words of Jesus when the literal meaning was understood to be extremely violent and unnatural.

John 6:53-55 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. (54) Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (55) For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

The response of many was as follows:

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

Will we have a 666 response to these stories in the Old Testament and fail to apply Miller's rules correctly and do violence to the laws of nature? With these principles in mind let us move to the next story where an Angel smote 185000 Assyrian soldiers.

## **The Destruction of the Assyrian Army.**

2 Kings 19:35 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.

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. The Spirit of Prophecy tells us what happened when these soldiers were smitten:

As the sound of the approaching force was heard, even before the Hussites were in sight, a panic again fell upon the crusaders. Princes, generals, and common soldiers, casting away their armor, fled in all directions. In vain the papal legate, who was the leader of the invasion, endeavored to rally his terrified and disorganized forces. Despite his utmost endeavors, he himself was swept along in the tide of fugitives. The rout was complete, and again an immense booty fell into the hands of the victors.

Thus the second time a vast army, sent forth by the most powerful nations of Europe, a host of brave, warlike men, trained and equipped for battle, fled without a blow before the defenders of a small and hitherto feeble nation. Here was a manifestation of divine power. **The invaders were smitten [smote] with a supernatural terror. He who overthrew the hosts of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, who put to flight the armies of Midian before Gideon and his three hundred, who in one night laid low the forces of the proud Assyrian,** had again stretched out His hand to wither the power of the oppressor. "There were they in great fear, where no fear was: for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them." Psalm 53:5. GC 117

The stories of the Egyptians, the Midianites and the Assyrians are put together as all facing a manifestation of Divine Power that caused a supernatural terror. This terror is the conviction of sin in the soul as the Spirit seeks to bring them to repentance and turn from their wicked deeds. When this sword falls it causes the soldiers to fall as dead men.

Matt 28:2-4 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. (3) His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: (4) **And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.**

Whom seek ye?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am He." As these words were spoken, the angel who had lately ministered to Jesus moved between Him and the mob. **A divine light illuminated the Saviour's face, and a dovelike form overshadowed Him. In the presence of this divine glory, the murderous throng could not stand for a moment.** They staggered back. Priests, elders, soldiers, and even Judas, fell as dead men to the ground. {DA 694.5}

Whether these soldiers died of the terror they experienced or whether Satan destroyed them we are not told. We know that Jesus died of a broken heart in agony of mind because of our sins, yet Satan had tried to kill him on the cross. There is no mention of pestilence or the soldiers killing each other. All that is recorded is that in the morning they were found dead.

We know that at the Second Coming the wicked are destroyed by the brightness of the coming of Christ. 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. A description of this process is recorded in the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Esdras from the Apocrypha. This book was quoted by a number of Adventist pioneers and Ellen White said the wise should understand this in the last days. See 15 MR 66.

2 Esdras 13:10-11 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. (11) 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 13:15 Shew me now yet the interpretation of this dream.

2 Esdras 13:34-38 And an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as thou sawest them, willing to come, and to overcome him by fighting. (35) But he shall stand upon the top of the mount Sion. (36) And Sion shall come, and shall be shewed to all men, being prepared and builded, like as thou sawest the hill graven without hands. (37) And this my Son shall rebuke the wicked inventions of those nations, which for their wicked life are fallen into the tempest; (38) And shall lay before them their evil thoughts, and the torments wherewith they shall begin to be tormented, which are like unto a flame: and he shall destroy them without labour by the law which is like unto me.

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.

Rev 16:9-11 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. (10) 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, (11) And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

They were destroyed “without labour by the law which is” the transcript of the Character of God. 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.

Lev 10:2-5 And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. (3) 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. (4) And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. (5) **So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp;** as Moses had said.

Again another way that we know that this smiting is the conviction of sin is by the way this word is used as follows:

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

2 Sam 24:10 **And David's heart smote** [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.

This is the same word as in 2 Kings 19:35

2 Kings 19:35 And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD **went out, and smote** [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.

So the word smite certainly can mean a conviction of sin.

## **The Death of Herod.**

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

Acts 12:23 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.

The same angel who had come from the royal courts to rescue Peter, had been the messenger of wrath and judgment to Herod. The angel smote Peter to arouse him from slumber; it was with a different stroke that he smote the wicked king, laying low his pride and bringing upon him the punishment of the Almighty. **Herod died in great agony of mind and body, under the retributive judgment of God.** {AA 152.1}

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. Satan was enabled to kill him with disease.

**Satan** is exercising his power. He sweeps away the ripening harvest, and famine and distress follow. He **imparts to the air a deadly taint, and thousands perish by the pestilence.** These visitations are to become more and more frequent and disastrous. Destruction will be upon both man and beast. "The earth mourneth and fadeth away," "the haughty people . . . do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; **because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.**" Isaiah 24:4, 5. {GC 589.3}

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

Lev 26:25 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.**

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? 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. For him it thundered.

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

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 and prove that the use of lethal force is consistent with the following statement:

The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. DA 22

The charge is made that this is spiritualising the Bible. The answer is that we seek 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 or he employs evil angels to work for Him as in the case of Ps 78:49 or sending lying spirits to cause the death of Ahab as in 1 Kings 22:22. We might add that such reading reveals that God hardens people's hearts and sends them strong delusions. 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. The angels of God are filled with the Spirit of Jesus. 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. Their holiness is their chief power yet they also have power to hold in check the forces of the wicked one.



I asked my accompanying angel the meaning of what I heard, and what the four angels were about to do. **He said to me that it was God that restrained the powers, and that He gave His angels charge over things on the earth; that the four angels had power from God to hold the four winds, and that they were about to let them go;** EW 38.

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.

## The Destructive Power of Good and Evil Angels

There is one final quote we need to consider.

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

A surface reading of this passage suggests that it was a holy angel that killed the firstborn of Egypt and caused a terrible destruction on Israel when David numbered the people. If we read more closely in context we shall see something very different.

We note first the structure of this paragraph. Two examples of destruction are provided.

1. The destruction of the first-born in Egypt
2. The destruction in Israel from David's sin.

Then a reference is made to destructive power. The same destructive power used by holy angels when God commands is used by evil angels when God permits. In order to connect the two examples of destruction to good angels the sequence of phrasing would need to be reversed. It would read as follows:

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

The fact that the power of holy angels is referenced by Ellen White first to then explain the destructive work of evil angels is significant.

## Reading in Context

Now when we read this passage in context of the previous paragraph it makes complete sense.

**When He leaves the sanctuary,** darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor. **The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent.** God's long-suffering has ended. The world has rejected His mercy, despised His love, and trampled upon His law. The wicked have passed the boundary of their probation; **the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last withdrawn.** **Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no protection from the wicked one.** Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. **As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce**

**winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose.** The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old. {GC 614.1}

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

The previous paragraph gives you the context of what Ellen White is talking about

1. When He [Christ] leaves the sanctuary
2. The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control
3. the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last withdrawn.
4. Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no protection from the wicked one
5. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose.

The whole paragraph speaks of God withdrawing His protection and allowing Satan to do his work of destruction. So the work of destruction mentioned in GC 614.1 is all about God allowing Satan to destroy those who refuse to listen and remain defiant. So when we read the next two examples in GC 614.2 it is evident that the work of destruction is done by Satan and His angels.

A single angel destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians and filled the land with mourning. When David offended against God by numbering the people, one angel caused that terrible destruction by which his sin was punished. GC 614.2

If we believe that it is good angels who killed the first born and killed some of the Israelites because David numbered Israel then the final sentence is out of place

There are forces now ready, and only waiting the divine permission, to spread desolation everywhere. GC 614.2

The use of the words *divine permission* corresponds to the phrase *will be exercised by evil angels when He permits* and that concludes the thought of the first and second paragraph about the work of evil angels and their destruction of people who refuse to listen to the appeals of God.

## **Satan the Destroyer of the First Born in Egypt**

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

Just before the firstborn were slain in Egypt, the Lord instructed the Israelites to gather their children into their houses with them, and to strike the lintel and the two side posts of their doors with blood, so that when the destroying angel went through the land, he would recognize the houses thus marked as the dwelling places of Christ's followers, and pass over them.

Today we must gather our children about us, if we desire to save them from the destructive power of **the Evil One**. The conflict between Christ and Satan will increase in intensity until the end of this earth's history. We are to have faith in the blood of Christ, in order that we may pass safely through the perilous times just before us" 2SAT 199

Jesus knocks; will you open the door unto Him? **Shall He be compelled to write upon the lintel of the doorway, in the place of His blood that cleanseth from all sin, the sentence that leaves you to the power of the destroying angels? "He is joined to his idols." Guardian angels, "let him alone."** [Hosea 4:17.] "How often I would have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and

ye would not.” [Matthew 23:37.] To all who will open the door, Jesus comes in and takes possession. Will you not say, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; come in; wherefore standest thou without?” [Genesis 24:31.] {Lt30a-1892.29}

So what destructive power do holy angels use? As we noticed earlier in the cleansing of the temple, Jesus did use force on inanimate objects.

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

When Jericho fell, no human hand touched the walls of the city, for the **angels of the Lord overthrew the fortifications**, and entered the fortress of the enemy. RH July 19, 1892

Notice how angels helped Jonathan and his armour bearer:

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

How did the holy angels fight with Jonathan? They shielded Jonathan and his attendant. How did holy angels use destructive force with the Egyptians?

Exo 14:25 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.

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. Let no man deceive when using this quote from Great Controversy page 614.2. It is taken 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 soldiers to turn back to avoid destruction?

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. What amazes me about the angels above many things is this.

The angels of glory find their joy in giving,—giving love and tireless watchcare to souls that are fallen and unholy. Heavenly beings woo the hearts of men; they bring to this dark world light from the courts above; **by gentle and patient ministry they move upon the human spirit**, to bring the lost into a fellowship with Christ which is even closer than they themselves can know. {DA 21.1}

The ministry of angels is patient and gentle not 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. 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 obey their master without flinching. How sorrowful must be their ministry and yet how faithful they are.

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

"The Lord opened the eyes of the young [257] man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Between the servant of God and the hosts of armed foemen was an encircling band of heavenly angels. **They had come down in mighty power, not to destroy, not to exact homage, but to encamp round about and minister to the Lord's weak and helpless ones.** {PK 256.4}

I am so much looking forward to speaking with my guardian angel in heaven and learn 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. May we ever be grateful.