

The Conviction of Sin and Righteousness

Dedicated to all our friends
in the *Father of Love* Facebook chat group.



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Introduction

The Old Testament is replete with stories of extreme violence appearing to be both conducted by God's followers as well as executed directly by God Himself. We would not read many of these stories to our children for fear of frightening them. The Old Testament appears to be quite an embarrassment for a Christianity seeking to preach the love and mercy of God through the story of Jesus.

One of the ways that Christians have tried to address the violence seeming to come from God in the Old Testament is through an understanding of the Old and New Covenant. Many Christians teach that the Old Covenant relates only to the Old Testament or the period before Christ came to this earth and died on the cross. It was the era of the law where you must "obey and live," or disobey and die. There is also a sense that people in the Old Testament were really primitive in their mentality and could only understand the language of violence in dealing with crisis situations.

In contrast the New Testament is perceived as an era of grace. The love of God is now revealed in Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit that came at that time allows men to experience the gospel. Those in the Old Testament could only dream of a future reality of a gospel beyond their reach. Some readers of Scripture have perceived this as God trying to do things in one way only to see it fail, and then try a more loving approach. Others present the situation as God simply doing the best He could under the circumstances until the Messiah would arrive. This only raises the question of why did it take so long for Christ to come into the world? Some reason that it would have been better to send Him earlier to introduce the loving approach sooner.



Wrong view of the Covenants

This approach to the Old and New Covenant present two opposing principles to the plan of salvation. The Old Covenant focuses on law enforcement while the New Covenant focuses on mercy. The placing of the two principles *in different eras of world history* ensures that the Covenants are understood as opposing each other. Whereas when these two principles are *placed together in a sequence within a person's personal experience* they reveal a beautifully divine process of restoration.

While this subject may seem a little tedious and irrelevant to the subject of God's character, when understood it will be seen that this issue plays a vital role in unlocking many passages that seem to indicate God as violent and cruel in His actions.

Let us take for example the situation of a person that has some level of abnormal bone growth. Upon visiting the doctor the patient is informed that the doctor must break the bone and reset it to grow in the right way. What if the doctor only did the first part of the healing process? What if he only broke the bone and then left it? The doctor would be considered a terribly incompetent physician. Consider another person visiting the dentist due to a growing sense of pain in his mouth. The dentist discovers a serious case of tooth decay. With the consent of the patient he begins to drill out the tooth to prepare it to be restored. Sometimes the patient can experience considerable pain in this process. What if the dentist only did the first part of the job? If he only drills out the decay and lets the patient go home, the unprotected tooth will only continue to cause pain. Thus the dentist will be considered negligent *because he only did the first half of the repair process.*

Let's see what is written in Scripture. Note carefully the use of the word *and* when underlined. This indicates both actions, the one before and after are done together in sequence, not one *or* the other.

"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)

*“The LORD killeth, **and** maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, **and** bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, **and** maketh rich: he bringeth low, **and** lifteth up.” (1 Samuel 2:6-7)*

*“A time to kill, **and** a time to heal; a time to break down, **and** a time to build up; A time to weep, **and** a time to laugh; a time to mourn, **and** a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, **and** a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, **and** a time to refrain from embracing.” (Ecclesiastes 3:3-5)*

*“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but [**and**] the spirit giveth life.” (2 Corinthians 3:6)*

In each of these cases the Bible reveals a two-step process. Firstly there is a diagnosis of the extent of the problem and a revelation of how painful it is. Secondly there is provided the remedy and restoration. This is how the covenants work in every person’s life. The verse in 2 Corinthians 3:6 links the process of the letter killing to the process of the Spirit giving life with the Greek word *de* [G1161] which can be translated as *and*. The Strong’s Concordance explains that it is a primary particle that can be “adversative or continuative.” The case of the two covenants is both adversative and continuative. The action of the first covenant is adversative to the second covenant because it exposes and breaks down, whereas the second covenant restores and builds up. It is continuative in the fact that the second covenant follows or continues on from the first.

- Adrian Ebens,

(Excerpted from, *Agape*, Chapter 21, pp. 225-227.

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The Ministration of Death

“But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away.” (2 Corinthians 3:7)

What is this ministration of death? It tells us that it is written and engraved in stone. What was written and engraved in stone?

“And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.” (Exodus 31:8)

This is the Ten Commandments. So the Bible tells us that the Ten Commandments are a ministration of death. How then do we understand these references to the Law?

“But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:2, 3)

“I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad. O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.” (Psalm 119:96-98)

“The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” (Proverbs 13:14)

“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” (James 2:12)

How can a Law that administers death be at the same time a fountain of life and liberty? It all depends on where you stand and what glasses you are

wearing when you look at the Law. In one sense the Law magnifies God's righteousness – His affectionate, selfless character of serving His creation:

“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.” (Isaiah 51:7)

“Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.” (Psalm 119:42)

“The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable.” (Isaiah 42:21)

In another sense the Law magnifies sin. Paul explains this carefully and in detail in the following verses:

*“For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, **that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.** What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. **For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.** Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. **Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.** For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.” (Romans 7:5-14)*

When we are not aware of the Law, we are not aware of sin; transgression does not appear.

“Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.” (Romans 4:15)

When the Law enters, then sin revives and we come under the condemnation of the Law.

“Moreover the law entered (privately into the heart), that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5:20, 21)

In Romans 7:9 Paul says that when the commandment came sin revived and I died. How did Paul die and yet be alive?

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3, 4)

Sin Working Death

Paul died in Christ and then was raised in Christ. For those who believe, they have already passed from death to life. We continue with this process of death:

“For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.” (Romans 7:11)

“Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.” (Romans 7:13)

How did sin work death in Paul? The Law, which is holy, just and good, made sin appear exceedingly sinful. And what does this achieve?

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

Paul was deeply convicted of his sinfulness. He felt guilty. He saw that he deserved to die. What was it that caused him to see that he deserved to die?

“...But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.” (Romans 7:13)

It is sin that worked death in him *by the commandment*. What does this mean? All the mysteries of the process of salvation are found in the cross of Christ. What was it that worked death in Christ?

“For he [God] 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)

Sin was working death in Christ because He was suffering in man’s stead as a transgressor of His Father’s Law. The horror that came upon Christ was the realisation of how horrible and destructive sin is. Where does the illumination of this horror come from? It comes from the Law:

*“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, **made under the law**, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” (Galatians 4:4, 5)*

But does this make the Law the active agent of death?

*“**For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.** Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.” (Romans 7:11, 12)*

Sin is doing the killing of the soul, yet it does it by deceiving the soul through the commandment, because the commandment magnifies the sin.

“‘The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.’ The law of God is the life of God. ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ Matthew 5:48. His life is the rule for all his creatures. Those in whom the life of God is made perfectly manifest, keep his law. It is very evident therefore that the design of the law is life, since it is life itself. But the opposite of life is death. Therefore when the law is transgressed, it is death to the transgressor. ‘For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.’ It is not the law that is the enemy, but the enemy is sin. Sin does the killing, for ‘the sting of death is sin.’ Sin has the poison of death in it. Sin deceived us so that for a time we thought that it was our friend, and we embraced it and delighted in the union. But when the law enlightened us, we found that sin’s embrace was the embrace of death. The law pointed out the fact that sin was killing us. ‘Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.’ We have no more reason to rail at the law than we have to hate the man who tells us that the substance which we are eating, thinking it to be food, is poison. He is our friend. He would not be our friend if he did not show us our danger. The fact that he is not able to heal the illness that the poison already eaten has caused does not make him any the less our friend. He has warned us of our danger, and we can now get help from the physician. And so, after all, the law itself was not death to us, but its office was ‘that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.’” (E.J. Waggoner, *Waggoner on Romans*, pp. 187, 188)

So, we see that the Law magnifies the sin (the disease) in order to lead us to Christ (the Physician). “For Christ is the end [goal, end-purpose] of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” (Romans 10:4). Anyone who allows sin to kill them is the one who does not believe in God’s forgiveness.

Because we are attached to sin, instead of realizing the Law is pointing out that sin is killing us, we get angry at the Law and think it is killing us

In the case of Paul, his faith in Christ allowed him to avoid physical death at that time; but in the case of Christ the physical death was not averted. Why was this? Simply because *He died as one who could not see His Father's face.*

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

Here Jesus is experiencing what every unrepentant person will experience as recorded in the book of Psalms:

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." (Psalm 22:1, 2)

Sin Hides the Father's Face

Did the Father really hide His face from Jesus? The Psalmist continues:

"For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard." (Psalm 22:24)

What hid the Father's face? Sin.

"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2)

How does sin hide the Father's face? It falsely portrays Him as one unwilling to forgive. It falsely portrays Him as requiring the death of every transgressor.

Where did this idea come from? Soon after the death and resurrection of Jesus these words were heard in heaven:

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


Satan is, and always has been, the accuser. He is the one who has urged that every sin must be punished with death. He is the one who has introduced a false justice system. Satan sat on the judgment seat and instituted a theory of justice that meant every sin must be punished without mercy.

This suggestion meant that, when justice is executed, then mercy is cut off. This view of justice means that mercy cannot exist at all, because every sin must be punished. There is no mercy. Whenever justice is poured out without mercy, it is an expression of Satan’s merciless justice system that he invented to smear the character of God and prevent anyone from returning to Him. This false system was abhorrent to God.

*“Next I saw Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, with **Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him**. The Lord said to Satan, “**May the Lord rebuke you, Satan!** May the Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Isn’t this man like a burning stick snatched from the fire?” Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood there before the angel. The angel spoke up to those standing all around, “Remove his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “**I have freely forgiven your iniquity** and will dress you in fine clothing.” (Zechariah 3:1-4, New English Translation).*

In the following verse notice the Hebraic Parallelism:

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



Here in this verse we see that God’s justice is mercy and His judgment is truth.

Now let's go to the book of Isaiah:

*“And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have **mercy** upon you: for the LORD is a God of **judgment**: blessed are all they that wait for him.” (Isaiah 30:18)*

Here we see that the LORD will have mercy upon us because He is a God of judgment, therefore His judgment is mercy.

Now let's go to the book of Zechariah:

*“Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute **true judgment**, and shew **mercy** and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and **let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.**” (Zechariah 7:9, 10)*

Here again we see God's “true judgment” is to show mercy and compassion upon everyone. And this would include those who hate and persecute you; for Jesus says:

“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. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:39-45)

Notice we practice this true system of justice because we are children of our Father which is in heaven. We are practicing His form of judgment.

What Did the Death of Christ Reveal?

#1. The Love of God:

“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do ...” (Luke 23:33, 34)

“But God commendeth [demonstrated] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

#2. The Hatred of Satan:

*“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled (disarmed) **principalities and powers**, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Colossians 2:13-15)*

Who are these “principalities and powers” Jesus disarmed?

*“Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and **the power of darkness.**” (Luke 22:52, 53)*

*“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against **principalities**, against **powers**, against the **rulers of the darkness of this world**, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12)*

Christ had said:

*“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)*

The serpent has always been symbolic of Satan (Genesis 3; Revelation 12:9). How did Christ both reveal the love of God *and* the hatred of Satan at the same time? How is the cross a revelation of infinite love while revealing the serpent on the pole?

Jesus died as a sinner will die. Why does the sinner die? When the Law convicts him of sin, he refuses to believe that God would forgive him and therefore dies. This is what Paul calls being “under the Law.” Jesus said that His Holy Spirit would “reprove [convict] the world of sin ... because they believe not on me.” (John 16:8-9). Sin by definition is “the transgression of the law.” (John 3:4).

By referring to the cross as the serpent on a pole, Jesus and the Father demonstrated Satan’s justice system to the Universe. His system didn’t allow for forgiveness; sin must have death as its consequence. This is in contrast to God, who says that through Christ we can be made righteous. Christ’s Spirit would “reprove [convict] the world ... of judgment, because the prince of this world [Satan] is judged.” (John 16:8, 11). Satan’s idea would be shown to be false, and Satan will be judged by his own justice system – Christ showed Satan his end on the cross. Matthew 7:1-2.

“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth [like the serpent on the pole], will draw all men unto me.” (John 12:31, 32)

Christ took our sinfulness upon Him. He felt the terrible condemnation of sin that the Father always intends to forgive in His mercy, but Christ could not reach out His hand and take the loving hand of His Father because the sinner will not do this and Christ had to die as sinners die – not believing that God can forgive them. After Cain killed his brother Abel most Bibles quote him as saying: “And Cain said unto the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear.’” (Genesis 4:13). However, the Hebrew more literally reads:

Marginal Reading: *“And Cain said unto the LORD, ‘My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven.’”*

Wycliffe’s Bible: *“And Cain said to the Lord, ‘My wickedness is more than that I deserve forgiveness (for).’”*

Brenton Septuagint Translation: *“And Cain said to the Lord God, ‘My crime is too great for me to be forgiven.’”*

Douay-Rheims: *“And Cain said to the Lord: ‘My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon.’”*

When Christ took upon Himself our sinfulness, it hid the Father’s face – sin hid the Father’s face, not the Father hiding His face. The difference is critical. He was eager to show mercy but sin covered His face so that Christ cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

This is the cry of the man carrying all our sins. Why did He speak these words? He spoke these words because He was made to be sin for us. Sin took occasion by the commandment and slew Christ.

Christ Pierces the Gloom

As Christ was about to expire, all that Christ knew of the Father pierced the darkness in that instant and He said:

“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” (Luke 23:46)

Though He felt utterly condemned and overwhelmed, at the very last moment He determined to believe that the Father would receive Him even though it felt impossible.

That cry that pierced the darkness and took hold of Father is our salvation. His victory is ours. His death revealed Satan’s justice system and His faith piercing the cloud of our sin accomplished our salvation.

“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the [condemnation of the] law, but under grace.” (Romans 6:14)

How was our salvation accomplished? Jesus trusted that the Father would still receive Him even though Satan and his justice system (which has become part of man’s fallen nature) told Christ that His being made sin meant the Father would not accept Him.

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

Here in the *King James Version* it says Jesus is the “author and finisher of our faith.” However, the word “our” is not in the Greek. It actually says that Jesus is simply “the author and finisher of faith.” He is the first being to ever exercise pure faith in the Father. Thus His Spirit will “reprove [convict] the world ... of righteousness” knowing He was accepted by the Father. John 16:8, 10.

*“There is therefore now **no condemnation** to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. **For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.** For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, **condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**” (Romans 8:1-4)*

It is the same faith that was manifested in Abraham when he was bowed down with terrible suffering at the thought of taking the life of his son. As he went into the darkness he determined to believe that God would make it work together for good and keep His promises; “accounting that God was able to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead.” (Hebrews 11:19).

It is the same faith as the Canaanite woman who was faced with the silence of Jesus and what appeared to be a statement that she was a dog – “It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.” (Matthew 15:26). Sin hid His face from her. What sin? It was the racial hatred of the Jews and Canaanites for each other. This sin hid the face of Jesus from the woman, yet the Spirit of Jesus in her, punctured through the hiding of His face, and she spoke the glorious words:

“And she said, ‘Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.’” (Matthew 15:27)

This same faith is offered to each and every one of us. We are to live by Jesus' faith working in and through us by His indwelling Spirit.

*“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live by the faith of the Son of God**, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)*

But does this mean the Law is made void?

“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” (Romans 3:31)

“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:12)

“What then? shall we sin [continue to break the Law], because we are not under the [condemnation of the] law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:15, 16)

Satan had declared that sin's effect on man was permanent and that man could never again be made righteous to the Law. This Jesus proved to be not true, showing that man can be redeemed through His Spirit.

Christ Frees Us from the Fear of Death

When Adam sinned, he absorbed the mind of Satan and was introduced to his merciless justice system that every penalty must be punished. As God had said that to eat of the tree meant death, Adam received the idea that God would surely put him to death. This put Adam in a cage of bondage.

The Son of God came to break the power of death by cutting through the gloom of Satan's merciless justice. On the cross He came down to where man stood. Man stood believing that his iniquity is greater than can be forgiven. In this very place the Son of God commended His Spirit into the hands of the Father. In taking this action He shattered Satan's kingdom. Jesus our Saviour exploded the lie that the Father would not receive us. And so we read:

*“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)*

In taking our nature, Christ placed Himself where man stands – taking on a mind that sees God as merciless, a mind sinful humanity inherited from Satan – and from this place He gave Himself to His Father believing He would be accepted despite all His feelings.

When the sinner has lost all confidence in himself, he accepts Christ as the only source of help, and at once becomes free. Thus the Law drives the sinner to Christ that Christ may free him from his past sins and enable him to keep the Law

Dear Lord Jesus how wonderful you are. You are the way, the truth, and the life. You have exposed the serpent on the cross and revealed his merciless justice system and revealed that the Father is willing to accept us.

The Cross Explains All the Judgments of God

Once we understand the cross, we can then understand many stories that appear severe and frightening.

The story of the cross teaches us that it was sin that works death through the Law. By this we mean that the sinner does not believe that God forgives sin. Jesus broke the dominion of death by standing in that domain and choosing to believe the Father accepted Him. This totally shattered the lie about the character of God as a merciless judge. It revealed that sin was the destroyer; sin caused the Father's face to be hidden; sin prevented the hand from reaching out and believing in forgiveness. It was sin that moved the Pharisees to condemn Jesus; it was sin that caused Pilate to compromise with the Jewish leaders; it was sin that caused Judas to betray Him; it was sin that hung Jesus on the cross, not our Father.

*"For **the wages of sin is death**; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)*

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:14, 15)

Why then does this lie of our Father being a merciless judge live on? It is because Satan turns the cross around to be the action of God.

*"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: **yet we did esteem [wrongly assume] him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.**" (Isaiah 53:4)*

Good News Translation: *"But he endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne. **All the while we thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God.**"*

God's Word Translation: *"He certainly has taken upon himself our suffering and carried our sorrows, **but we thought that God had wounded him, beat him, and punished him.**"*

The cross reveals to us the amazing love of the Father, but sin through the Law deceives us and causes us to believe that God demanded death to satisfy His wrath against sin. Not only that He demanded it but that God Himself killed His Son. Isaiah 53 tells us that we look upon the cross this way. When we read the judgments of God in the Old Testament as sinners being struck down by God Himself, we are revealing our false understanding of the cross. When we esteem (wrongly assume) those who died as smitten of God and afflicted, then we agree with Satan that God has merciless judgment by using lethal force on those who transgress Him. We lose sight of God as the source of life, who is forever offering mercy until they so harden themselves that He must respect their choice and let them go.

In every event in the Bible where people die through judgment, we are called to look upon the cross. Why is this? The suffering of Christ did not begin in the 1st century A.D. when He was physically nailed to a cross:

“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.” (Isaiah 63:9)

Nor did His sufferings end at Calvary:

*“If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they **crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.**” (Hebrews 6:6)*

Scripture tells us that Jesus was spiritually crucified during the plagues of Egypt and the destruction of Sodom:

*“And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called **Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.**” (Revelation 11:8)*

And just as the angry mob cried “crucify Him!” the book of Job tells us that the people before the Flood cried, “Depart from us!”

*“Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a **flood**: Which said unto God, **Depart from us**: and what can the Almighty do for them?” (Job 22:15-17)*

The cross not only reveals Jesus suffered for a few hours in one day, but that He has been suffering daily from the pain sin has brought to the heart of God since its very inception. He is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the word.” (Revelation 13:8). Jesus is asking us to take up our cross “daily”; He would never ask us to do anything He wouldn’t do. (Luke 9:23).

Our Father and His Son Jesus are not willing that any should die. It causes them immense pain to see sinners lost.

“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)

We are Judged as We Judge

Why don’t all come to repentance? It is because they don’t believe God can forgive (change) them and they don’t believe that God wants or knows what’s best for them. Note carefully that our judgment of those punished in the Old Testament and the final death of the wicked will be the system of judgment that we will use on ourselves.

“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (Matthew 7:2)

For all the stories in the Bible where judgments are falling on people, if we read these stories as God no longer offering them forgiveness but withdrawing His hand of mercy in order to destroy them, then this is how we will judge ourselves when the conviction of sin comes to us through the Law.

Please don’t miss this point. **God sends us conviction of sin to save us.** If we believe that God reaches a point where He withdraws that offer, then we

won't be able to endure the time of Jacob's trouble. (Jeremiah 30:7). Our sins will crush us as they are revealed to us. But those who have chosen to believe that the hand of mercy is always extended will allow self to die to find newness of life, attaining salvation through overcoming self-condemnation. (Luke 23:42-43). May we understand this precious insight!

The Bible tells us:

“For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.” (Psalm 86:5)

*“For the LORD is good; **his mercy is everlasting**; and his truth endureth to all generations.” (Psalm 100:5)*

God's mercy is everlasting. It does not end at any time. It only ends for those who don't believe in it because unbelief hides His merciful face.

“For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.” (Psalm 86:13)

What is the lowest hell? It is the place where you feel certain you can't be forgiven. God can deliver you from this if you believe it.

The righteousness of God endures for ever, yet it will not be found on everybody. Why not?—Because so many will not submit unto the righteousness of God. If men will not take what He freely gives, He (God) is clear. So His tender mercy is over all, and it endures for ever; and the fact that many utterly refuse His loving mercy, does not in the least diminish it.

Preliminary Summary

So let's summarize what we have considered thus far:

1. The Law ministers death to the man in sin and life to the man in righteousness. (Romans 7:5-13)
2. The carnal man accepts Satan's lie that transgression must be punished with death and that it is pointless asking for forgiveness. (Galatians 3:10)
3. The Law convicts of sin in order to give mercy, but the carnal man understands condemnation as a prelude to certain death. (John 16:8; Genesis 4:13 margin)
4. The mercy of God is everlasting. (Psalm 100:5). The sinner condemns himself to death and destruction. (Romans 1:32; Genesis 4:13 margin; Numbers 14:28)
5. Christ exposes Satan's lie through His death on the Cross. Through death He destroyed him who had the power of death. (Hebrews 2:14)
6. Christ took our sins upon Himself and died as the sinner dies to reveal that sin causes death. (2 Corinthians 5:21)
7. In the position of the lowest torturous hell Christ trusted Himself into the arms of the Father thus shattering the dominion of death. (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:46)
8. Humanity naturally looks upon the cross as a judgment directly from God and continues to believe Satan's lie of merciless justice. (Isaiah 53:3,4)
9. All stories of judgment in the Bible are revelations of the cross for Christ has been afflicted in all the affliction of humanity. (Isaiah 63:9). How we judge those stories is how we will be judged. (Matthew 7:2)

The Idolatry of the Golden Calf and its Punishment

Let us now apply these principles to one of the stories of the Old Testament.

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

To summarise some key points:

1. The people were offered repentance for their sins.
2. A large company refused to stand with Moses. They did not repent and accept forgiveness.
3. Moses commanded those who had not taken part in the idolatry to take up their swords and slay the rebellious.
4. This was a solemn punishment from God.
5. It defined genuine consecration and obedience to God.

The natural response to this story is to conclude that these people were smitten of God and afflicted like Isaiah 53. It is also natural to conclude that these people deserved to die because not only did they worship a false god, they stubbornly refused to repent. Human justice tells us that God had to kill them to preserve the nation because they would not submit under any circumstances.

It appears to be an open and shut case. It is at this point that it would be natural to draw the conclusion that God stood as an executioner towards these high-handed sinners and, even though it wasn't pleasant, it had to be done. It was best that these 3,000 die rather than the whole nation perish. (John 11:50).

How Do You Read?

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, ‘Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said unto him, ‘What is written in the law? how readest thou?’” (Luke 10:25, 26)

Jesus doesn’t answer the lawyer by asking, “*What do you read?*”; but instead asked, “*How do you read?*” The very question reveals that many, even during the days of Christ, were not reading the Scriptures, especially the Torah (Law), correctly. Most people, even at that time, read the Torah through their own preconceived ideas and not through the eyes of Jesus. They projected their worldly standards of justice onto God. This is why it’s crucial that when we read the Torah (Law), we read it with the correct sense.

*“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear **with understanding**, upon the first day of the seventh month ... Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, **caused the people to understand the law**: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and **gave the sense**, and **caused them to understand the reading**.” (Nehemiah 8:1, 2, 7, 8)*

Paul also brings this point out:

*“But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? ... Seeing then that we have such hope, **we use great plainness of speech**: And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to*

*the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: **for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament;** which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, **when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.** Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.” (2 Corinthians 3:7, 8, 12-16)*

When we read the Old Testament, we must allow Jesus to remove the veil of misunderstanding. When this takes place, we will begin to see God as a merciful Father instead of a vindictive judge. Paul is not saying that the Ten Commandments are to be “abolished,” but rather the veil of covering the Law that is the misunderstanding of God’s character and disbelieving that His mercy is everlasting to all.

Measuring by the Life and Death of Christ

We are not following the biblical rules of interpretation if we form our conclusion before we have brought all the pieces together.

“Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.” (Isaiah 28:9, 10)

Two very big pieces that must be included is the life and death of Jesus. What does the life of Jesus tell us about the judgments of God?

*“For such a High Priest [Jesus] was fitting for us, who is **holy, harmless, undefiled**, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens. (Hebrews 7:26, New King James Version).*

*“And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; **because he had done no violence**, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:9)*

And we have this assurance:

*“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”
(Hebrews 13:8)*

Jesus never harmed anyone; He was never violent and never killed anyone. We can also be certain that Christ is the same throughout Scripture. What was the mission of Christ in coming to this world? In the most beautiful prayer of Jesus we hear Him say:

*“I have glorified thee [Father] on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. ... I have **manifested thy name** unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.”
(John 17:4, 6)*

Jesus Manifests the Father’s Name/Character

The name of God is His glory, and His glory is His character:

*“I am the **LORD**: that is my **name**: and my **glory** will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” (Isaiah 42:8)*

*“And he [Moses] said, I beseech thee, **shew me thy glory**. And he [God] said, I will make all my **goodness** pass before thee, and I will proclaim **the name of the LORD** before thee; and will be **gracious** to whom I will be gracious, and will shew **mercy** on whom I will shew mercy.” (Exodus 33:18, 19)*

Jesus is the brightness of God’s glory/character:

*“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the **brightness of his glory**, and **the express image** of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (Hebrews 1:1-3)*

*“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God was manifest in the flesh**, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (2 Timothy 3:16)*

Jesus told Philip that his observation of the ministry of Christ qualified him to know exactly the character of the Father.

*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?’” (John 14:9)*

God gave us a perfect example of His character through the character of His Son. Nothing was left out. The whole character of God was revealed through Jesus. Christ made it known that God was not a stern judge but a warm and tender Father.

*“For **the Father judgeth no man**, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.” (John 5:22, 23)*

Jesus continues to reflect His Father’s glory by saying:

*“Ye judge after the flesh; **I judge no man.**” (John 8:15)*

The earthly mission of Christ was to reveal the Father and to remove the falsehood that God is a severe and unforgiving Judge. We are told that both the justice and mercy of God is revealed in the earthly mission of Christ. All of the Father’s character was revealed in those 33 years.

The book of Hebrews says that Jesus gave “the express image” of His Father’s character, and that this was the work that He came to do. In His prayer He said to the Father “I have finished the work you gave me to do,” and that was to reveal just what the Father was like.

Jesus manifested (glorified) the name, or character, of His Father completely. Therefore all the stories of the Bible must include an understanding of the life of Jesus on earth. He was harmless, non-violent and never killed anyone. That is the revelation that has been given to us of the Father through Christ.

What did Jesus say about the use of the sword as a means of protection?

*“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.** Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?’” (Matthew 26:52, 53)*

Jesus told Peter to put away the sword and that He would trust in His Father to protect Him with His angels.

Jesus as Judge

“And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me.” (John 8:16)

What about examples of judgment in the life of Jesus? What do we see?

*“Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. **Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?** Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered*

*thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! **Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.***" (Matthew 23:31-38)

The leaders of the Jewish nation refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. This rejection would lead to the entire nation being rejected as His chosen people. This means the whole nation of Israel was under threat because of these apostate leaders. Now would be the time to use the sword if Jesus would use one, because the nation needed to be saved! Wouldn't it be better for 3,000 or so leaders of the Jews to be slaughtered so that the whole nation would not perish? But how did Jesus respond?

"Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city." (Matthew 23:34)

Jesus would send them prophets and wise men to plead with them, and finally Jesus would leave them to their own devices – "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

*"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and **judge yourselves** unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.'" (Acts 13:46)*

The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. But note the words of the prophet: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;" "for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." (Hosea 13:9; 14:1). All their woes as a nation were but the reaping of that which their own hands had sown. They had rejected their Messiah, the One whom in which "all things consist"; and who is our very "life." (Colossians 1:17; 1 John 5:11-12). They had rejected God's divine love and mercy, and thus God's protection was withdrawn by their own self-judgment. They had succumbed to Satan's sophistries (John 8:44), and Satan was permitted to carry out the work of destruction.

Another example in the life of Jesus concerning Judgment is His cleansing of the temple.

“And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, ‘Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise.’” (John 2:13-16)

Jesus does not use any violence on the people (Isaiah 53:9). Through the Law they are convicted of sin. Rather than turn to Him in repentance, accepting His everlasting forgiveness, they run away because of the human perception of justice without mercy. Jesus wanted to cleanse their hearts, but they refused repentance and ran away, and so only the physical temple was cleansed. Sin deceived them by the Law. Yet, no one was killed by Jesus or violently attacked. Condemnation of sin and destructive force was used only on inanimate objects, revealing God’s displeasure. The cleansing of the temple shows how the Father judges, for Christ reveals His Father.

Another example is the cursing of the fig tree.

“And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, ‘Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.’ And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, ‘How soon is the fig tree withered away!’” (Matthew 21:19, 20)

The example of the fig tree is very important as a symbol of judgment. Jesus might have commanded His disciples to cut down the fig tree with axes and swords. He might have broken off all its branches and burned it with fire. He might have opened the earth and swallowed it. But He simply spoke to it and the water in the tree was removed causing the tree to wither. Water is a symbol of the Spirit (John 7:37-39), and the water was withdrawn from the

tree showing us how the Spirit of God is withdrawn from the sinner. In these two examples of the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree, we have demonstrated the judgment of God in His Son. Note carefully that this acted parable shows you how God destroys; He withdraws His Spirit due to our own choice of crucifying the Son of God from our lives by saying, "Depart from us!"

Let us come back to the story of the Golden Calf and now consider some more points. A critical question to ask is whether the Levites were filled with the Spirit of God when they slew the 3,000 men. Were the Levites in the New Covenant or the Old Covenant? What had all the Israelites said a few weeks earlier?

"And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, 'All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.'" (Exodus 24:7)

When God offered Israel the New Covenant in Egypt, what was the uniform response?

"And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD. And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage." (Exodus 6:8, 9)

None of the Israelites believed the promises of God. There is no record to indicate that the Levites were separate from the rest of Israel in the murmuring and complaining. There is no record to indicate that they were righteous. They were all in the Old Covenant, which is the ministration of death. Therefore the Levites were operating in that context.

Another important question we need to ask is why was Israel commanded to use swords? Jesus told Peter to put his sword away. Why would Jesus command the Levites to take up swords and kill their brethren? Where do we see the physical sword first mentioned in Scripture?

“And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.” (Genesis 27:40)

Isaac told Esau that he would live by the sword. Esau never accepted the New Covenant. He lived his entire life in the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant is a life living by the sword.

The Old and New Covenants are not two dispensations of time (before the cross/after the cross) but two conditions (mindsets/experiences) within the individual

So why did Jesus command the Levites to slay the idolaters? Again we come to the words of Christ:

“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (Matthew 7:2)

The work of the Law within the ministration of death is to cause sin to abound. This means that whatever man is thinking, the Law will magnify that thought and bring it to light. Notice again what the Scripture tells us on this matter:

“Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live.” (Ezekiel 20:25)

How does our Father in heaven who is good give us anything that is not good? The answer is that He allows us to be judged by our own judgment. When God’s people stray from His commandments, the merciless justice system of Satan is allowed to manifest itself. This justice system is not good, but God allows it to come in order that men’s sins are punished with their own sinfulness. Notice these alternate translations:

New King James: *“Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live.”*

Berean Study Bible: *“I also gave them over to statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live.”*

God never gives man bad statutes and judgments; but He does give man over to his own desires to practice statutes and judgments that are not good. Take the command to stone people to death for instance. This command was not to enforce God’s justice, but to cause both the sinful condemning mindset of the Israelites as well as the sin of the offender to abound. In an article on *theblaze.com* entitled, *fact-check: does the bible really condone stoning?*, they asked Rabbi Aryeh Spero concerning this statute:

“... When it comes to perceived Biblical mandates or issues like stoning, the rabbi noted **that it’s important to view the holy book through a specific lens.** ‘It is our duty to, with reverence and humility, demarcate between that which God intended as eternal and that which was a time-period-necessity later to be eased-out—animal sacrifices, for example ... Things regarding human nature and sexual discipline and limitations undoubtedly are eternal, as are the Sabbath and need for holiness. ... **Certain procedures were never meant to be permanent and were, instead, based on the habits and mindsets of the original society that God spoke to. The culture, thus, had a major impact on how these procedures were implemented and played out.**”

The mindset of the Israelites concerning stoning during the time of Moses did not come from God, but from Egypt:

*“And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land. And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and **will they not stone us?**” (Exodus 8:25, 26)*

Later, the Israelites themselves, being brainwashed into this form of justice for 100's of years while in slavery, desired to stone Moses:

*“Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? **they be almost ready to stone me.**” (Exodus 17:2-4)*

God then included this practice in the Law (Leviticus 20:27). Why? It is because they were judged as they judged – and the way they judged was the way they had learned in Egypt.

Many people view these types of judgments as reflecting the justice of God who seemingly demands the death of a sinner. But this not the biblical lens we are to be reading the Law through. Remember, Jesus asked, “What is written in the Law, *how* do you read?” (Luke 10:26), and Paul reminds us, “But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Covenant, but the veil is taken away in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 3:14).

With what type of lens are you reading the Law? Is it a list of arbitrary rules that demand arbitrary punishments for disobedience? Or is it a Law of design built into the very fabric of creation resulting in inherent consequences to the one who disregards it?

Just as Jesus spoke the minds of the disciples by calling the Canaanite woman a “gentile dog” in Matthew 15:26, God was speaking their minds by commanding stoning in hopes that their eyes will be opened to such a horrific

scene of punishment. Their sin of brutally condemning (sacrificing) others to excuse themselves would abound to the point of reaching out and taking hold upon God's grace, receiving His forgiveness and walk in His mercy. They were to remember, "the one who has shown no mercy will be judged without mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13).

God had told them, "as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you" (Numbers 14:28), which again shows the judgment that falls upon man will be the judgment that man decided for himself.

*"When anyone from the house of Israel erects his idols in his own heart ... **I the LORD will answer him according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.**" (Ezekiel 14:4, 5).*

When our first parents ate the fruit and accepted the principles of Satan's kingdom, they accepted the mind of Satan in regard to law and justice. The justice system of Satan did not provide for any mercy. In the case of Satan, sin means anything that disagrees with his own thoughts.

Therefore, as human beings we have inherited this notion that all those who disagree with us must be punished without mercy according to the crime. This is the reason why Israel so willingly embraced the Egyptian practice of stoning; it reflected the merciless mind of Satan.

*"They [the Pharisees] answered and said unto him [Jesus], Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. **But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father ... Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.**" (John 8:39-41, 44)*

In the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-19) we again see how the Lawgiver intended the sentence of stoning to death to be applied. It was to give mercy to the repentant. The commandment of stoning others was to reveal what was in our hearts. When Jesus gave the sentence from the Law saying, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7), Scripture says:

*"And they which heard it, **being convicted by their own conscience**, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: **and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst**. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? **Hath no man condemned thee?** She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, **Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.**" (John 8:9-11)*

Do you see how the command to stone others was meant to bring the conviction of sin and righteousness upon both parties? Jesus did not stone the woman in this manner because there is no condemnation in His heart. Instead, He gave her mercy (everlasting kindness) because that is what's in His heart.

That which was written in stone caused this woman to lose all hope of life. She accepted the sentence, yet Jesus knowing her heart and how she was used by these men knew that she had fallen upon the true Stone that the builders had rejected. Referring to Himself as this Stone, Jesus asked:

*"Did ye never read in the scriptures, **The stone which the builders rejected**, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? **And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken:** but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." (Matthew 21:42, 44)*

Paul spoke of Christ as being the Rock:

*"And [our forefathers] did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and **that Rock was Christ.**" (1 Corinthians 10:4)*

In falling upon the Rock Christ Jesus, the woman was indeed stoned as Christ intended. She gave up all hope that she could save herself and gave herself up to the mercy of Christ. Again, the stoning that Christ intended was that sinners should be convicted of their sins and seek for mercy (His kindness).

God does not seek to kill the sinner, but instead draws us to repentance with His everlasting loving kindness:

*“The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore **with lovingkindness (cheched) have I drawn thee.**” (Jeremiah 31:3)*

*“... do you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that **the kindness of God leads you to repentance?**” (Romans 2:4, Berean Literal Bible)*

When men refuse to come into the New Covenant and be judged in mercy, they remain in the Old Covenant to be judged by their own judgment and condemnation. Why then is it presented as God commanding it? The Law enters that sin may abound. As men in their carnal state hear the Word of God, they see their own face in the Law:

*“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. **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.**” (James 1:22, 23)*

A man in the Old Covenant deceives himself even as sin by the Law deceives us and slays us. Why does God allow this? He lets our own thinking to judge and condemn us, and then He offers us mercy by inviting us into the New Covenant. The ministration of death written in stone speaks condemnation and death to us. If we realize and accept our weakness and turn to God believing He will help us, then we can come into the New Covenant. If we don't believe He will help us, then we die according to our own judgment.

Abraham Commanded to Kill His Son

To illustrate that thought, come to the command to sacrifice Isaac:

“And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, ‘Abraham:’ and he said, ‘Behold, here I am.’ And he said, ‘Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” (Genesis 22:1, 2)

Why was Abraham tested on this point? Through the examples of Abraham lying about Sarah being his wife, and the incident with Hagar, we see that Abraham still had remnants of distrust in His heart that needed to be removed. Is it possible that Abraham had a fear that God might ask him to yield up his son? Was Abraham familiar with human sacrifice?

*“And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. **And the Canaanite was then in the land.**”* (Genesis 12:6)

The Canaanites were steeped in human sacrifice:

“...the Bible paints a picture of Canaanite society dominated by a religious system that was both licentious and cruel. **Canaanite gods demanded human sacrifice** and more specifically, the sacrifice of children. (Jeremiah 19:5) ... **The Bible is clear that child sacrifice was a regular feature of the religion of the Canaanites and the surrounding nations.** (Deuteronomy 12:31). ... According to the Bible, centers of worship for Canaanite gods such as Molech and the Baal’s were set up in Judah and Israel by apostate kings. Child sacrifice was even practiced in the Valley of Hinnom just outside of Jerusalem. Yet religious reformers such as King Josiah pulled down these places and rendered them unfit for use, ‘He also made unfit for worship Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, so that no one could make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech.” (2 Kings 23:10). (*biblereadingarchaeology.com*).

Maybe it was just that Abraham feared something would happen to his son. In either case a fear that something might happen to Isaac was a fear that God would not fulfil His promise to him. Was it something similar to the experience of Job?

“For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.” (Job 3:25)

The fact that Abraham was afraid to tell his wife about the command suggests that he was not sure if he would bring his son back. In the few days journey to the place of sacrifice Abraham wrestled with his doubts and then finally surrendered and trusted God completely.

Sometimes God commands things that we are thinking in order to reveal what is in OUR heart

Remember the work of the Old Covenant is to show us in a mirror our sinfulness. The promise given to Abraham depended on the life of Isaac, and Abraham would have faced fears of his son’s future, especially as he was struck every day with his neighbours sacrificing their children. God tested him on this fear as to whether He would trust God. If Abraham had trusted God from the start, then he never would have had to face this test. The Law can’t mirror what is not there. We see a similar test in the story of king Solomon and the two women claiming maternal ownership over one baby:

“Then the king said, ‘Bring me a sword.’ So they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, ‘Divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other.’ Then the woman whose son was living spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, ‘O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him!’ But the other said, ‘Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him.’ So the king answered and said, ‘Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she is his mother.’” (1 Kings 3:24-27)

The command to use the sword (or to stone others) reveals what is in the heart. As Solomon commanded the child to be slain with the sword that he might reveal what was in the heart of the two mothers, so God commanded Abraham to slay his son that He might reveal what was in his heart. Once Abraham realized it himself, God could heal it and Abraham could grow in grace and understanding.

Punishing Sin with Sin

At another level, this judgment came from God according to Abraham's own judgment. Abraham had taken the sword to defend his nephew Lot, and as he had lived by the sword, he was now called to die by the sword in offering up his son. Like Cain, Abraham knew the command "Thou shalt not kill" and that it was a sin (Genesis 4:5-7). Would God require Abraham what He has already forbidden?

This is a critical point to consider. When God tested Abraham in asking him to slay his son, did God ask him to do something arbitrary? No, it is directly related to the issues where he is afraid and where he does not trust God. In order to bring Abraham fully into the New Covenant, God must meet him in the Old Covenant in order to confront his sin.

How can God command something that He had once forbidden? The Law is our school master to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). The Law enters the heart that sin might abound (Romans 5:20). God gives us over to judgments that are not good which are according to our thinking in the Old Covenant mindset (Ezekiel 20:25) in order to bring us into the judgments that are good in the New Covenant mindset.

Another point to consider is that our doubts and fears cause us to misread the words of God. We note that Abraham obeyed God to the very letter. The Angel of the LORD said, "... for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not **withheld** thine only son from me." (Genesis 22:12). If Abraham obeyed the command to the very letter by not *withholding* his son, then God must have only required Abraham to *offer* his son but not kill him.

*“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, **offered up Isaac**: and he that had received the promises **offered up** his only begotten son.”
(Hebrews 11:17)*

Otherwise, God would not have stopped Abraham from going any further with his knife. Abraham did not kill his son. This distinction is important because God did not slay His Son, but He did offer Him up. This point is confirmed in Jeremiah.

*“And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to **burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded not, neither came it into my mind.**
(Jeremiah 7:31, Revised Version).*

It never came into the mind of God to offer children as a burnt offering on an altar. Remember, Jesus had finished the work His Father gave Him to do *before* He was killed on the cross (John 17:4).

As mentioned earlier, we see a parallel to this in the story of the Canaanite woman. Jesus said it is not right to take the children’s food and give it to dogs (Matthew 15:26). She thought He called her a dog, but Jesus was testing and magnifying the racial prejudice in her and the disciples. The Jews at this time looked upon the Canaanites as dogs. She might have answered that she was a child of God and still received the promise, but she understood that she was considered a dog in the disciples’ eyes and even then she still believed – claiming the promise that the Messiah came to save the whole world (John 3:16, 17; 12:47), and thus she received her request. In the book of John we see many examples of people misreading the words of Jesus. With Nicodemus, the woman at the well and the feeding of the 5,000 and other places, the people all misunderstood Jesus and made His words seem impossible. This is a human trait that the Law exposes when it enters.

Once we understand this magnifying sin principle, we can better appreciate what is taking place in the story of the slaying of the 3,000 with the Golden Calf. Let us look at the story of Elijah to further illustrate how God’s commands are misread and at the same time still fulfil His will.

Elijah and the Use of the Sword and Fire

This process of the use of the sword is also seen in the ministry of Elijah.

“And Elijah said unto them, ‘Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.’ And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.” (1 Kings 18:40)

“And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, ‘If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty.’ And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.” (2 Kings 1:10)

These judgments of God were executed on the false priests of Baal upon Mt Carmel. But did the actions of Elijah reflect the character of God’s kingdom? The key to answering this question is in the life of John the Baptist, who came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (cf. Malachi 4:5; Matthew 17:10-13).

John did not fully understand the kingdom of God:

“Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, ‘Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?’” (Matthew 11:2, 3)

Why did John, the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:28), have a crisis of faith? He expected Jesus to take the throne of David, but as time passed Jesus made no claim to kingly authority. Like Elijah before him, he looked for the Lord to reveal Himself as a God that answers by sword and fire.

Neither John the Baptist, the disciples of Christ or Elijah understood the nature of Christ’s kingdom. Before His death, Christ plainly told Pilate that His kingdom was not governed by the worldly standards of force and coercion:

“Jesus answered, ‘My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were [governed by worldly standards], my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders [because that’s how worldly standards operate]. But my Kingdom is not of this world.’” (John 18:36, New Living Translation).

Returning to Elijah we ask the question: when did Elijah first begin to comprehend the nature of God's kingdom? Right after the prophets of Baal are slain with the sword we read:

*“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, ‘So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.’ And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and **he requested for himself that he might die; and said, ‘It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers’** ... And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, ‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’” (1 Kings 19:1-4, 9)*

Elijah is now feeling self-condemnation and guilt for using the sword. His great victory rings hollow and he flees from Jezebel and wants to die. Here God intervenes and educates Elijah on His kingdom:

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

To both Elijah and John, the same truth was opened before them. Just as God was not in the wind, earthquake or fire, so Jesus was to do His work without the wielding of swords or the brute force of overtaking earthly thrones and kingdoms. His work was a life of mercy and self-sacrifice, always willing to lay down His own life instead of taking the life of another.

So, it was not until after the Mt Carmel incident that Elijah began to understand that God was not in the fire. Even so, after this event did Elijah fall back into his old understanding?

The event of calling down fire from heaven happened after Elijah ran away to Mt Sinai and was shown that God is not in the fire. Jesus Himself tells us that Elijah was not representing the kingdom of God when he called down this fire on those men:

*“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)*

God wrought through Elijah for the destruction of the prophets of Baal, but He punished the sin of the prophets of Baal with the sin of Elijah in the use of the sword. Elijah had confessed, “I am not better than my fathers.” God was “visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Exodus 20:5) by permitting the sins of the fathers to flourish until His Spirit was completely grieved and withdrawn. Ahab should not have allowed the prophets of Baal to prosper, so God allowed a series of circumstances to unfold that would punish sin with sin.

“Evil [not God] shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.” (Psalm 34:21)

Now remember that because John the Baptist misunderstood the kingdom of God, he had a crisis of faith. The same thing happened to Elijah. After the Mt Carmel experience he expected a reformation to immediately take place, and it did not because the actions of Elijah were not representative of the kingdom of heaven. Elijah had assumed responsibilities not given to him, and it caused him disappointment and failure. Elijah’s doubt and confusion came because he misunderstood the kingdom of God. Yet we remember that it was God who commanded Elijah to destroy the prophets of Baal. Why is this?

In the command of God, we find the ministration of death. God pronounces the sentence of death for the prophets of Baal. As we have learned, the intention of this sentence is to encourage those sentenced to seek for mercy. The refusal to seek for mercy only comes from a wrong conception of God by those sentenced, and therefore they bring judgment on themselves when the Lord withdraws from them.

We see in the story of Moses what happened when God pronounced sentence against Israel:

“Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.” (Exodus 32:10)

This command is a test for Moses and how does Moses respond?

“... ‘LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.” (Exodus 32:11, 12)

Moses pleads for the people when God indicates that He will consume them. Why didn't Moses simply accept the command? Why would he dare to appeal against the judgment of God, even going as far to tell Him to “repent of this evil”? Take notice that Moses was concerned for God's character by asking, “Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’” He knew God never does anything evil, and for Him to *permit* this evil to fall upon His people, Moses was not only concerned for them, but also concerned that the Egyptians would misrepresent God with false allegations.

What is interesting is that when God said *He* would consume Israel, Moses asks for mercy; but when Moses is given the sentence to destroy a little later, *he* moves ahead with the sentence:

*“... And all **the sons of Levi** gathered themselves together unto him [Moses]. And he said unto them, ‘Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, **Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.**’ **And there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.**” (Exodus 32:26-28)*

So, what does this say about Moses’ character? It shows that he was a “double minded man” and his inner feelings were revealed. He chose to be a hearer of the Word only, which reflected his own face, and not a doer of the Word which says: “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13).

When the Lord issued the command to slay the prophets of Baal, was He inviting Elijah to intercede for mercy for these men? Was He also seeking to bring forth from Elijah his inner feelings towards these men?

*“And he said, ‘I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and **slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.**”’ (1 Kings 19:10)*

Was it possible that Elijah felt deeply about the fact that his friends were killed by these prophets of Baal? Had he been afraid and discouraged because they tried to take his life? Did the fire coming down from heaven appear to justify the action of killing these men with the sword?

When the sentence of death was given by God, did Elijah take responsibilities upon himself that he was not given, and did he reveal his deeper feelings of negativity towards these prophets that were hidden inside him? Did the command to slay the prophets of Baal magnify the sin inside Elijah of a possible motive of revenge for the slaying of the prophets of God and destroying the nation with idolatry?

*“**Elias [Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.**” (James 5:17)*

If Elijah was subject to like passions as we are, could he have been tempted to seek revenge for the killings of God's people and possibly those who were his good friends? Would you be tempted with revenge if a close friend of yours was killed, especially if you didn't understand the nature of God's kingdom as revealed through Jesus?

"He [Jesus] did not retaliate when He was insulted, nor threaten revenge when He suffered. But continued entrusting Himself to Him [God] who always judges righteously [without retaliation and revenge]." (1 Peter 2:23)

Elijah was instructed to slay the prophets of Baal because this was the ministrations of death and a fulfillment of the Old Covenant process. Elijah was *not* however instructed to slay the prophets of Baal *with the sword*, but God *wrought* through these actions to punish Israel as well as to confront him with his own deeper feelings that were not in harmony with the Law of God.

Secondly there is no command in the Torah to use the sword to execute justice on the guilty. The sentence of death for those worshipping a false god was to be stoned to death.

*"If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. **And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.**" (Deuteronomy 13:6-10)*

What Elijah did was contrary to the Torah in regard to how to deal with idolatry. What Elijah appealed to was tradition, the tradition of Israel to use the sword.

When we refuse to do intercessory prayer for others, whether for family members or our enemies, we reveal the spirit of condemnation in our hearts, and it is likened to the wielding of the sword and casting the first stone

The Old Covenant sentence punished the sin of the prophets of Baal with the sin of Israel's use of the sword, and at the same time brought Elijah to realize his own deeper feelings of condemnation towards others.

How else do we explain the sudden fear of Elijah in the face of Jezebel? This failure on his part reveals that Satan had been allowed access to him in some way. How else is it possible to reconcile Elijah's use of the sword with the words of Jesus?

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

The character of Jesus reveals that He would not use the physical sword and when Peter used it, He healed the man who was struck and rebuked Peter (Luke 22:51). The place Jesus wanted Peter to put the sword was out of his hand. He wanted Peter to be like Himself who never used a physical sword at any time.

The Rashness of Moses

Did Moses have a similar experience to Elijah? Moses did not understand the nature of God's kingdom when he slew the Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-15). He acted too hastily, not understanding that God would accomplish His purposes for Israel, not by warfare, but by His own mighty power.

“Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, ‘This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.’” (Zechariah 4:6)

Commenting on this John Gill writes:

“[Through Christ] the church is built up in all generations through the conversion of sinners; and that is done, not by external force, by carnal weapons, or moral persuasion; but by the sword of the Spirit, the word of God; and not by the power of man's free will, but by the efficacious grace of the divine Spirit.”

The deliverance of Israel was not to be accomplished by warfare. Not one part of this mission from Egypt to Canaan was to be done in this way. Did Moses act rashly when he told Joshua to take up swords and fight the Amalekites?

“Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, ‘Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.’” (Exodus 17:8, 9)

Exodus 17:9 should read that Moses asked the Lord what to do, but it doesn't say this. Did the attribute of rashness manifest itself here again? It is true that Moses was put in a terrible position. The children of Israel did not trust him or God, and they complained about everything and even wanted to stone Moses. Yet having once taken the sword to defend Israel against Amalek, the sword would now come into Israel and many of them would die by the sword.

When we come to the story of the golden calf, do we not see this attribute of rashness once again as Moses threw down the stone tablets, smashing them to pieces?

God knew the heart of Moses even though he acted rashly. God wrought through Moses to awaken Israel to the wickedness of their sin. When Moses took the sword to deal with Amalek, he was standing in the sins of his fathers

and doing what any natural (unconverted) man would do – that is to defend his family by the use of force. Please see the booklet called *Canaan Conquest* for a full explanation of this.

The Prophecy of Jacob Concerning Levi

This action of Moses was not alone in him. Long before Moses was born, the following words were spoken concerning Levi, the original leader of his tribe.

“Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.” (Genesis 49:5-7)

When looking into the future, Jacob under inspiration gave a prediction of the future of the tribe of Levi as well as Simeon. The anger of Levi was a curse, and it was this anger that Moses had to wrestle with in his own experience to the very end of his earthly life. We see this anger manifested in Phineas (also of the tribe of Levi) who put a Javelin through the sinners who were causing a plague to descend on them (Numbers 25:7, 8). The Levites revealed their abhorrence of idolatry and the wrong actions of their brethren.

Why then would God choose the tribe of Levi to take the priesthood (Deuteronomy 17:9)? We need to go back to the stories of Shechem and Joseph to understand this.

When their sister had been seduced by a young man Shechem, the response of Simeon and Levi was treacherous cruelty manifested in the murder of the Shechemites. They took violent revenge against the whole city, tricking the men to circumcise themselves in an act of peace but then killing them with the sword when they were at their weakest (Genesis 34:1-29). Their father Jacob was not pleased at their violent behaviour:

*“And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ‘**Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.**’” (Genesis 34:30)*

Apocryphal books outside the Bible state that it was Simeon who was the mastermind in throwing Joseph into the pit.

“Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.” (Genesis 37:28)

But wherever Simeon is, we know Levi isn't far behind:

“The classical rabbinical sources argue that Simeon was very fearless, but also was particularly envious, and so had always been antagonistic and spiteful towards Joseph, owing to Joseph being Jacob's favourite son. The midrashic book of Jasher argues that Simeon was the one who proposed that the brothers should kill Joseph, and other classical sources argue that it was Simeon who threw Joseph into a pit, and became furious when he found out that Judah had sold Joseph rather than killed him ... In the biblical Joseph narrative, when Joseph, having settled in Egypt, asks his brothers to bring Benjamin to him, he takes Simeon hostage to ensure that they return. According to classical rabbinical sources, **Joseph chose Simeon to be the hostage because he was concerned that if Simeon wasn't separated from Levi, then Levi and Simeon might destroy Egypt together**, since they had already destroyed Shechem.”
(Wikipedia, Simeon Son of Jacob)

In selling their brother into slavery without mercy, they sowed the seed that would cause their children to be sold into slavery and ruled without mercy. As the Scripture says:

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

This willingness to kill for transgression would be visited upon Israel at Mt Sinai and in other places, because the prophecy of Jacob about them was for far into the future.

God wrought through the cruelty of Levi to punish the sins of Israel. The characteristics of the priesthood that Israel as a nation perceived and envisaged were just the characteristics found in the tribe of Levi and thus visited upon Israel.

In the story of the slaying of the 3,000 we read earlier (Exodus 32:26-28), the iniquities of the father (Levi) upon the children unto the third and fourth generation were now visited. God only commands in the Law that which the Levites were thinking in regard to how this should be dealt with. The Lord tests the faithfulness of the Levites because of their past faithlessness in not accepting the New Covenant. The blessing that came to Abraham in obeying the command to offer up His son was that it cured his lack of trust in God, and this blessed the world in showing an example of the Cross.

“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, ‘In thee shall all nations be blessed.’ So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham ... Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ... That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:8, 9, 13, 14)

When Israel sinned with the Golden Calf, the Law entered and caused their sin to abound. Their past sin in using the sword as a nation was now being visited upon them through the Old Covenant. The blessing that came to Israel was to realize how sinful sin really is, while at the same time learning to be obedient when it is difficult. Yet again we stress that at no time were any of

these Israelites in the New Covenant. At no time were they filled with the Spirit of Jesus as they slaughtered these people, because there is no violence in the Spirit of Christ. Please note again that it is our position that the Old and New covenants are not two dispensations of time but rather two inner conditions (mindsets/experiences) within the individual. Please see the booklet called *Faith Journey* for a full explanation of this.

The Lord was offering forgiveness through Moses when he asked them who is on the Lord's side (Exodus 32:26). When these people refused to repent, they had to face their own understanding of judgment. The sin of using the sword was magnified through the Law, and God punished sin with sin.

"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." (Exodus 20:5)

Israel bowed down to an idol and God visited their iniquity with the iniquity of the Levites, prophesied by Jacob centuries earlier, in the use of the sword. They had to live like Esau in order to survive (Genesis 27:40).

In Exodus 12:38 we read that "a mixed multitude went up also" with Israel from Egypt. In Numbers 11:4 the mixed multitude "fell a lusting" for flesh food, causing also the Israelites to lust and complain saying, "Who shall give us flesh to eat?" Due to this incident is it not fair to say that the mixed multitude were also the primary suspects in instigating the making of the golden calf and thus became the majority of the 3,000 souls who perished by the sword at the hand of the Levites? Likewise, the Shechemites had covenanted to join themselves to the family of Jacob and have their sons and daughters marry into each other:

"And Hamor communed with them, saying, 'The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife. And make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you. And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein.'" (Genesis 34:8-10)

The Levite slaughter at Mt Sinai of the mixed multitude that had joined themselves to Israel was a magnification of the slaughter of the Shechemites that had joined themselves to Israel centuries earlier. In manifesting the sin of their first father Levi, the Levites had the opportunity to seek the Lord for the cruelty of slaughtering people with the sword. As the Levite men went to sleep that night and saw the tortured faces of the dead and dying in their dreams and potentially awoke in horror at the scenes of death, they had an opening to turn from violence and seek a better way.

In the telling of the 3,000 men that perished we have a parallel to the experience of Christ on the cross. Jesus wanted to save these 3,000, but they refused to repent. They refused to reach out and believe that God could forgive them. Like Christ they died under the condemnation of sin. Unlike Christ they did not commend themselves into the hands of the Father because they did not trust Him (Luke 23:46).

Given for a Ransom

And so we see the cross in the death of these men because grace was freely available to them but they didn't take it. Their death caused Israel to tremble at the danger and severity of sin, and this humbled the people and invited them to come into the New Covenant. As Egypt was given for the ransom of Israel (Isaiah 43:3), so the 3,000 were given to awaken Israel to turn to God and seek forgiveness. As it was sin that crucified Christ, it was sin that destroyed the 3,000 at Sinai. As Christ felt the condemnation of sin through the Law, so did those who refused to come to Moses and be saved. Sadly, because they would not accept the cross of Christ they had to die on their own. Christ was rejected and crucified in their hearts (Hebrews 6:6).

If we assume that God inflicted death on His Son because of sin, then we will assume that God inflicted death on the 3,000 at Sinai. But if we see that *sin* killed Christ as He became sin for us and that this caused the Law to be presented as condemning without hope, then we can see that *sin* (not God) killed these 3,000 men at Sinai for the same reason. We urge you not to see these men smitten of God and afflicted but rather receiving condemnation

through the Law according to *their own false perceptions* of God and the Law. This process is clearly explained by Jesus:

“Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn’t plant and gathering crops you didn’t cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.’ But the master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn’t plant and gathered crops I didn’t cultivate, why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’ Then he ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matthew 25:24-30)

The outer darkness is where Jesus was on the cross. It is the condemnation of sin without hope of forgiveness. The man with one bag of silver could have been forgiven, but he believed the Lord to be a harsh man and so it was impossible.

“[The servant with one bag] calls him ‘Lord’, though he had not served him, and pretends he knew him; but if he had, he would have had a true affection for him, faith in him, and would have observed his commands; and he [the Lord] would also have appeared altogether lovely to him, and of an amiable character, and not in such a light as he represents him; which makes it a clear case, that he was ignorant of him, or he would never have said, that he was an hard [harsh], severe, or austere man; one very difficult of being pleased, cruel and uncompassionate to his servants, unjustly withholding from them what was due unto them, and rigorously exacting service that could not be performed by them: all which is the reverse of Christ's true

character; who accepts of the meanest services of his people: and takes what is done, though ever so little, as even a cup of cold water, given to the least of his disciples, as done to himself; is merciful and compassionate, both to the bodies and souls of men; and is not unrighteous to forget any labour of love, shown to him or his; and makes his strength perfect in the weakness of his servants, and his grace always to be sufficient for them.”
(John Gill's Exposition of the Whole Bible)

Through the combined stories of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist, within the framework of the character of God revealed in Christ, we can begin to understand what happened with the command to execute those who rebelled and refused repentance with the Golden Calf.

The ministration of death is glorious. It has power to bring people in the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, while at the same time bringing death and destruction upon those who refuse to accept their sentence, in a manner that is according to their own judgment.

*“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; **not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.** And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: **for the letter killeth, but [and] the spirit giveth life.**” (2 Corinthians 3:3-6)*

That this process is so terrible, shows how hard it is for man to have a change of heart. It requires much grief to Jesus to convict men of their misunderstanding and repent of it; it is a wisdom that walks with men to the depths of his soul.

We want to be brought fully to the New Covenant. Each day when we are convicted of sin, we thank Father for the Old Covenant that has power to show us our great need and cause us to see that we will die if we keep living

according to self. It is easy to say but hard to see all the ways that the sinful self impinges on our walk with God! May we pray like Job saying, “How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin.” (Job 13:23).

*“Nevertheless I [Jesus] tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, **the Comforter** will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, **he will reprove [convict] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”** (John 16:7-11)*

We need not feel any condemnation when we are convicted of sin and righteousness, for it is the Comforter who does the convicting. Jesus said:

*“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you **another Comforter**, that he may abide with you for ever; Even **the Spirit of truth**; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. **I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you ... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”** (John 14:15-18, 23)*

*The Comforter who convicts us of sin and righteousness
is the very Spirit (presence, attitude, and life) of our
loving Father and His Son*

Let us remind the reader that “the accuser of our brethren is cast down” (Revelation 12:10). Thus being convicted of sin and righteousness by the comforting Spirit of God and His Son is glorious and should bring us all joy knowing that with this conviction we will hear the words repeated unto us, “Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you? ... Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:10, 11).

By ever keeping in mind the love and mercy of the Father, as Jesus did, we believe that God will give us of His Spirit to overcome self-condemnation and our condemnation of others who simply sin differently than we do. We rejoice to enter into the New Covenant in Christ and know that we are fully forgiven and granted the righteousness of Christ as our inheritance.

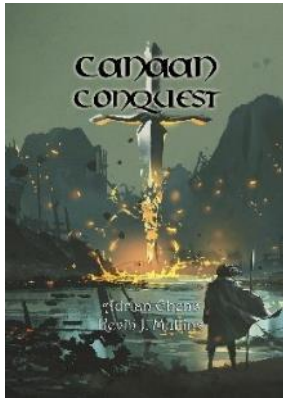
“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For God achieved what the law could not do because it was weakened through the flesh. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit. For the outlook of the flesh is death, but the outlook of the Spirit is life and peace, because the outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit [now able to submit to the law], if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is your life because of righteousness.” (Romans 8:1-10, New English Translation)

Both covenants are working for our salvation. One kills our “old man” (old sinful ways) and the other brings us forth in the resurrection of Christ our Lord. This process makes us “Awake to righteousness [that we] sin not” (1 Corinthians 15:34).

“See now that I [God], even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill [the old man of sin], and I make alive [unto a new life of righteousness]; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.” (Deuteronomy 32:39)

For more info on what you've just read visit us at: lastmessageofmercy.com

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."

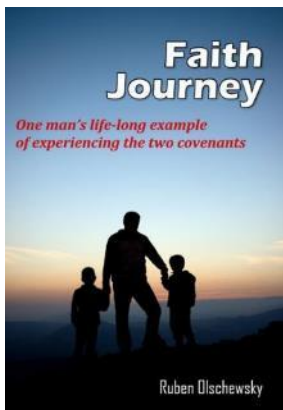
Were the Israelites truly in tune with the character of God? Why were they regularly afraid that He had brought them out into the desert to kill them? Was the deep darkness that fell upon Abraham in any way related to his taking of the sword to save his nephew and family?

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.

Faith Journey

One man's life-long example of experiencing the two covenants



Understanding the subject of the two covenants is an important part of understanding the gospel and reading the Scriptures in a correct framework. This booklet introduces this subject in a simple manner to provide the reader with essential elements to understand this subject. There is much confusion on the subject of the covenants because of misunderstandings which took place within Christianity many centuries ago.

The simplicity of the covenants is expressed in the life of Abraham and this is what Paul tells us in the book of Galatians:

"For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants..." (Galatians 4:22-24)

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)