

GOD'S STRANGE ACT

By Terry Hill

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Ezekiel 33:11

Amongst Seventh-day Adventists today, there are, in circulation, a number of false ideas about God. One such idea is portrayed by the trinity doctrine whilst another is the belief that God does not kill. Each view is as destructive as the other. This is because they both portray a wrong picture of God. Satan is continually striving to misrepresent God. If he fails in one way then he tries another.

Those who teach that 'God does not kill' are attempting to bring God down to a human level (see Psalm 50:21). They probably believe they are making Him 'look nice'. They maintain that because He says to us (in the 10 commandments) that we are not to kill (see Exodus 20:13) that He Himself does not kill. This reasoning is extremely superficial. It is usually built upon sentiment and emotion. These are feelings that do not stand the test of God's Word. Those who promote such an idea are taking the plainest of Scriptures and are twisting them to their own destruction (see 2 Peter 3:16).

God is love (1 John 4:8). Over and over again the Bible reveals Him as kind, merciful, compassionate and slow to anger (Exodus 34:5-7, Psalm 103:8-14, 145:8-9, Joel 2:12-13). The Scriptures are filled with such endearing manifestations of His character. None though are greater than the witness of Jesus. When Jesus came to earth He did not simply tell us what God is like. He showed us what God is like. He was God Himself manifest in the flesh – Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). His revelation of God, as He mingled with fallen humanity, showed a love and compassion for the 'other person' that remains equalled. As Ellen White once wrote of Christ

“Not for Himself, but for others, He lived and thought and prayed.” (Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons, page 139, 'Asking to give')

This sums up God's character to perfection. His love is self-less. Everything He does, or ever has done, is for the well being of others. There is no self-seeking with God.

God's love for each one of us is beyond question. If ever the day dawns when we are led to doubt His love then the only thing we need to do is to look to the cross of Calvary. In the sacrifice of His only begotten Son for the redemption of mankind from sin, God's love was poured out without measure. We shall return to this thought later.

Unfortunately, because of the wickedness of humanity, there have been times when God has deemed it necessary to visit the world with judgments (Genesis 7:4, Exodus 32:35, Deuteronomy 9:8, Jeremiah 1:16, Ezekiel 5:11-17). In fact even though God's ultimate purpose is to preserve and maintain life, there has been occasions when for the overall good of humanity, He has needed to go to extreme measures by doing what to Him is a very 'strange work'. This 'strange work' is the act of destroying life.

So let's take a look at some of the times when God did bring human life prematurely to an end. More importantly we shall also see WHY God has found it necessary to take such measures.

Crossing the Red Sea

An irrefutable example of God ending life prematurely is when the Hebrew people were fleeing from slavery in Egypt. This was when the waters of the Red Sea parted and they crossed to the other side in safety. This could only have been the result of a miracle (a supernatural happening). It was something that humanity alone could not achieve. Could this have been the work of Satan? That would not make sense. Satan wanted to destroy God's chosen people not save them.

It does not seem possible that anyone would dispute that it was God who held back the waters of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22). We need to ask therefore, who was it that let the waters go again that killed the ensuing Egyptians? It would be impossible to draw the conclusion that this was someone other than God. God therefore must have slain the Egyptians (Exodus 14:27-28). If we deny this then we will deny everything that can be deemed common sense. The Scriptures say

“And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.” Exodus 14:27

In himself, Moses did not possess the power to hold back the waters. He only did what God commanded him (see Exodus 14:16). The Bible tells us

“And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.” Exodus 14:21

The account of this happening ends by saying

“Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses. (Exodus 14:30-31)

There can be no question as to who destroyed the Egyptians. It was God who destroyed them. To say anything else would be to deny the Word of God. This is something we need to be very careful not to do. This is something else we shall return to later. Commenting on the aftermath of the event, Ellen White wrote

“As morning broke it revealed to the multitudes of Israel all that remained of their mighty foes--the mail-clad bodies cast upon the shore. From the most terrible peril, one night had brought complete deliverance. That vast, helpless throng--bondmen unused to battle, women, children, and cattle, with the sea before them, and the mighty armies of Egypt pressing behind--had seen their path opened through the waters and their enemies overwhelmed in the moment of expected triumph. Jehovah alone had brought them deliverance, and to Him their hearts were turned in gratitude and faith.” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 287, ‘The Exodus’)

Korah

Another example of God bringing life prematurely to an end is the rebellion of Korah.

Korah and his followers had disputed the authority of both Moses and Aaron. God would have regarded this as rebellion against Himself. This is because He had been the One who appointed these two men to their positions of authority. Korah and his followers claimed that both Moses and Aaron had taken ‘too much upon themselves’ (see Numbers 16:3). Moses responded by saying to Korah “Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy” (verse 5). Moses knew therefore that God was going to do something to vindicate his (and Aaron’s) appointment to leadership.

Moses was a humble person. He had not aspired to leadership. God had chosen him. Moses was also a type of Christ. He interceded for God’s people.

As the story unfolds we find Moses telling Korah and his followers to go to the door of the tabernacle. They were instructed to bring their censers with fire and with incense (verses 16-19). God then told Moses to separate himself from the rebels because He, God, was going to “consume them in a moment” (verse 21).

God then told Moses to tell the people to depart from the tents of the rebels. Moses then said to those around him

“... Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and

they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.” Numbers 16:28-30

Moses explained to the people that if the rebels died a natural death then God had not appointed him to his position of authority but if the Lord made a “new thing” (the earth opening up and swallowing the rebels) then this would be the evidence that Korah and his followers had rebelled against those whom God had appointed.

The Scriptures tell us that the earth did ‘open up’ and it did ‘swallow’ the rebels (see verse 31). We are also told that their houses and their goods perished with them (verses 32-33) but the question is, who was it that caused this to happen?

Moses said that it was God who would accomplish it (verse 30). Certainly it could not have been a natural happening. This is no more than the parting of the Red Sea was a natural happening. If it had been a natural happening it would have been an amazing coincidence (that the earth opened up and swallowed only the rebels but no one else). When reasoning these things through we really do need to use our common sense.

We are also told that “there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense” (verse 35). Could this have been a ‘freak of nature’? This I believe is not within the realms of possibility.

Could Satan have done it? Well, perhaps he had the power to do it but what sense would it make if he had been the cause of it. This is because the events served to confirm that Moses and Aaron were God’s appointed leaders. If Satan had been the cause of this happening then it would have been self-defeating for him. It could be said that he had ‘shot himself in the foot’. This would be the same as if he had destroyed the Egyptians in the Red Sea. What sense would it make?

This though was not the end of the rebellion. The next day there were those who accused Moses of killing God’s people (verse 41) (it is very strange how the human mind works). In response, God again instructed Moses to separate himself from those who continued to rebel. God then ‘plagued’ the rebels. Moses acted the part of Christ by interceding for the people. The plague eventually ceased but not until 14,700 people had died (verse 49).

Regarding the above, Ellen White was led to make some very interesting observations. They are well worth reading. In one place she wrote

“Korah would not have taken the course he did had he known that all the directions and reproofs communicated to Israel were from God. But he might have known this. God had given overwhelming evidence that He was leading Israel. But Korah and his companions rejected light until they became so blinded that the most striking manifestations of His power were not sufficient to

convince them; they attributed them all to human or satanic agency.” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 404, ‘The rebellion of Korah’)

Those who say that God does not kill tend to put across the idea that it is Satan who is responsible for such happenings. Thus they attempt to take away ‘the blame’ from God.

Ellen White then explained that those who accused Moses and Aaron of killing God’s people were doing exactly the same (attributing the work of God to Satan or humanity).

“Notwithstanding they had had the most convincing evidence of God's displeasure at their course, in the destruction of the men who had deceived them, they dared to attribute His judgments to Satan, declaring that through the power of the evil one, Moses and Aaron had caused the death of good and holy men. It was this act that sealed their doom. They had committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, a sin by which man's heart is effectually hardened against the influence of divine grace. "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man," said Christ, "it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him." Matthew 12:32. These words were spoken by our Saviour when the gracious works which He had performed through the power of God were attributed by the Jews to Beelzebub. It is through the agency of the Holy Spirit that God communicates with man; and those who deliberately reject this agency as satanic, have cut off the channel of communication between the soul and Heaven.” (Ibid)

As I am sure you will agree, these are very strong words. It is being said that to deny that God had done these things is the same as attributing the work to Satan. This is because it would have been impossible for humanity alone to achieve it. This therefore, according to Scripture and the spirit of prophecy, is to commit the unpardonable sin (attributing to Satan the work of God).

The flood

What about the flood? Who was the cause of this massive deluge of water killing multitudes of people and animals? Could it have been Satan or a ‘freak of nature’ (a natural happening)? The Scriptures are very clear that God said that He would destroy man and beast. They tell us

“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.” Genesis 6:5-7

Through the spirit of prophecy we are told

“As the violence of the storm increased, trees, buildings, rocks, and earth were hurled in every direction. The terror of man and beast was beyond description. Above the roar of the tempest was heard the wailing of a people that had despised the authority of God. Satan himself, who was compelled to remain in the midst of the warring elements, feared for his own existence. He had delighted to control so powerful a race, and desired them to live to practice their abominations and continue their rebellion against the Ruler of heaven. He now uttered imprecations against God, charging Him with injustice and cruelty.” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 99, ‘The Flood’)

Notice here three very important statements. The first is that Satan “feared for his own existence”. This means that he was not in control of the flood. Secondly we are told that it was Satan’s desire that the antediluvians should continue to live to “practice their abominations”. Satan therefore did not want the people to die -which would mean in turn that he did not cause the flood. The third thing is that Satan charges God with “injustice and cruelty”. Satan therefore was claiming that it was God who had caused the flood.

With regards to the flood, here is a statement from an article written by Ellen White. I have pasted a greater portion of it below as an addendum. When this article is read it will be seen that she irrefutably denies the belief that God does not kill. For the moment though read this snippet from it. She says

“Noah would have displeased God to have drowned one of the scoffers and mockers that harassed him, but God drowned the vast world. Lot would have had no right to inflict punishment on his sons-in-law, but God would do it in strict justice.” (Ellen G. White, *MS 5 1876*, ‘*The days of Noah*’, 1876)

This statement alone (if believed to have been written by the pen of inspiration) completely refutes the idea that God does not kill. Ellen White plainly wrote that God “drowned” those who mocked Noah’s message. It really is that plain and simple.

The seduction of God’s people

Another example of God destroying life is when He punished the Hebrews for worshipping the ‘gods’ of the Moabites (see Numbers 25:1-3). God’s people had been committing fornication and idolatry. God ordered Moses to kill those who had partaken of these heathen rituals (verse 4). Moses then ordered the judges to do what God had commanded (verse 5). When commenting on this Ellen White wrote

“And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor; and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the

people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor." Moses commanded the judges of the people to execute the punishment of God against those who had transgressed, and hang the heads of the transgressors up before the Lord, to cause Israel to fear to follow their example. The Lord commanded Moses to vex the Midianites, and smite them, because they had vexed Israel with their wives, wherewith they had beguiled them to transgress the commandments of God.

The Lord commanded Moses to avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites; and then he should be gathered to his people. Moses commanded the men of war to prepare for battle against the Midianites. And they warred against them, as the Lord commanded, and slew all the males, but they took the women and children captives." (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 1, pages 327-328, 'Balaam'*)

Many today would regard what we have just read as 'horrific'. Certainly it would not be referred to as 'Christian'. Yet as we can see, it was God who commanded that those who did the seducing, along with those of God's people who were seduced, should be put to death. Now notice what Ellen White followed on to say

"The Lord is regarded as cruel, by many, in requiring his people to make war with other nations. They say that it is contrary to his benevolent character. But he who made the world, and formed man to dwell upon the earth, has unlimited control over all the works of his hands; and it is his right to do as he pleases, and what he pleases, with the work of his hands. Man has no right to say to his Maker, Why doest thou thus? (*Ibid*)

God is the supreme (sovereign) ruler of the universe. Not only does He know the beginning from the end but He also knows what is best for those whom He has created and loves. God's servant went on to explain

"There is no injustice in his character. He is the ruler of the world, and a large portion of his subjects have rebelled against his authority, and have trampled upon his law. He has bestowed upon them liberal blessings, and surrounded them with everything needful; yet they have bowed to images of wood and stone, silver and gold, which their own hands have made. They teach their children that these are the gods that give them life and health, and make their lands fruitful, and give them riches and honor. They scorn the God of Israel. They despise his people because their works are righteous. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works." (*Ibid page 328*)

This is as true today as it ever was. In our educational system, our children are taught that there is no God. They are taught that we are here on earth not because a loving Creator gave us life but because of a freak of nature (evolution). Those who are teaching such things are greatly contributing to people being lost for an eternity. Ellen White continued

“God has borne with them until they filled up the measure of their iniquity, and then he has brought upon them swift destruction. He has used his people as instruments of his wrath, to punish wicked nations who have vexed them, and seduced them into idolatry.” (*Ibid*)

In 1910 the same author penned these words

“The forbearance that God has exercised toward the wicked has emboldened men in transgression; but their punishment will be none the less certain and terrible for being long delayed. “The Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act.” To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act. Yet He will “by no means clear the guilty.” By terrible things in righteousness He will vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law. The very fact of His reluctance to execute justice, testifies to the enormity of the sins that call forth His judgments, and to the severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, January 25th 1910, ‘Our message’*)

It is no wonder that by doing something drastic God ‘steps in’ at times to save His people. If it were not for His intervention then Satan would have complete sway over God’s creation. God’s destruction of those who commit abominations should serve as a timely warning that He will not always strive with mankind. It shows, as Ellen White says here, that there is a limit to His forbearance.

God’s ways not our ways

Through the prophet Isaiah, God gave to humanity this timely counsel and reminder

“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:6-9

Through the spirit of prophecy we are also told

“Men are naturally disposed to measure divine things by their perverted conceptions. They dwell upon infinite benevolence, but try to disbelieve in infinite justice. They grasp human assertions that the judgment executed against sin is contrary to right ideas of God’s benevolent character, and they put His word into the background and men’s opinions in the front.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms 4, 1882, ‘God in nature’, see also General Daily Conference Bulletin February 18th 1897*)

The counsel continues

“Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Those who have no vital connection with God are swayed this way and that, ever grasping the opinions of learned men who sit in judgment upon God and His works and ways. Weak, finite minds weigh God’s Word with men’s balances. The wisdom of these so-called great men is foolishness with God. They are blinded by the god of this world. Those only who are willing to be accounted fools in the eyes of these very worldly-wise men will have the wisdom which is divine. God will not dwell with those who reject His truth, for all who disregard truth, disregard its Author.” (*Ibid*)

The Scriptures are very clear. God at times does bring human life prematurely to an end. His motives though are above question. He does not kill because of hate. His ways and purposes are way above those of sinful humanity.

Some may say that this ‘killing’ by God was ‘Old Testament’ and that after Christ made the atonement at Calvary He (God) did things differently but what about Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)? Who was it that brought their life prematurely to an end?

It cannot be reasoned that they died a ‘natural death’. This again would be far too much of a coincidence. Some may say that Satan killed them but that would make no more sense than saying he killed the Egyptians, or Korah, or those who had drowned in the flood.

Why God destroys life

Now we have conclusively established that God DOES kill, it would be good to read a little more about WHY He does. In order to help us understand, Ellen White gives a very interesting parallel. See how she compares this with God’s seeming severity

“A family picture was presented before me: A part of the children seem anxious to learn and obey the requirements of the father, while the others trample upon his authority, and seem to exult in showing contempt of his family government. They share the benefits of their father’s house, and are constantly receiving of his bounty; they are wholly dependent upon him for all

they receive, yet are not grateful, but conduct themselves proudly, as though all the favors they received of their indulgent parent were supplied by themselves. The father notices all the disrespectful acts of his disobedient, ungrateful children, yet he bears with them.

At length, these rebellious children go still further, and seek to influence and lead to rebellion those members of their father's family who have hitherto been faithful. Then all the dignity and authority of the father is called into action; and he expels from his house the rebellious children, who have not only abused his love and blessings themselves, but tried to subvert the remaining few who had submitted to the wise and judicious laws of their father's household.

For the sake of the few who are loyal, whose happiness was exposed to the seditious influence of the rebellious members of his household, he separates his undutiful children from his family, while at the same time he labors to bring the remaining faithful and loyal ones closer to himself. All would honor the wise and just course of such a parent, in punishing most severely his undutiful, rebellious children.

God has dealt thus with his children. But man, in his blindness, will overlook the abominations of the ungodly, and pass by unnoticed the continual ingratitude and rebellion, and Heaven-daring sins of those who trample upon God's law and defy his authority. They do not stop here, but exult in subverting his people, and influencing them by their wives to transgress, and show open contempt for, the wise requirements of Jehovah." (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 1 page 329, Baalam'*)

God destroys the 'many' to save 'the few'. The following is how Ellen White concluded the chapter

"Some can see only the destruction of God's enemies, which looks to them unmerciful and severe. They do not look upon the other side. But let everlasting thanks be given, that impulsive, changeable man, with all his boasted benevolence, is not the disposer and controller of events. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." (Ibid)

When we read about God destroying life, we do need to "look upon the other side". We must see it from God's point of view. We must reason as to WHY He destroys. As He said through the prophet Ezekiel

"Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Ezekiel 33:11

God does not delight in death. Neither does He delight in vengeance. Very importantly note these words

“The Lord does not delight in vengeance, though he executes judgment upon the transgressors of his law. He is forced to do this, to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin. In order to save some, he must cut off those who have become hardened in sin. Says the prophet Isaiah: “The Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act.” The work of wrath and destruction is indeed a strange, unwelcome work for Him who is infinite in love.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, August 24th 1882, ‘A doomed people’*)

Notice that Ellen White says that in order to save some God is “forced” to destroy life.

In order to further understand WHY God at times does bring life to an end, there are two events of history that I believe are important to highlight. The first is when the Hebrews worshipped the golden calf at Mount Sinai whilst the other is the destruction of the Amalekites. In both of these happenings God did terminate life but as we shall now see, it was for specific reasons. We shall see also that God instructed others to do the work.

The Hebrew people had been the recipients of a miraculous deliverance from Egypt. They had witnessed the plagues that God had sent to the Egyptians (Exodus 8:1-10-29). They had also born witness of the slaying of the first-born (Exodus 11:1-6, 12:29-30). They had also experienced the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:13-31) as well as other tokens of God’s watch care and power. This was such as the cleansing of the water at Marah (Exodus 15:23-25), also the giving of the quails and manna etc (Exodus 16:11-15). God was not only leading His people but also protecting and providing for them.

Only a matter of weeks after leaving Egypt they were camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. God instructed Moses to go up into the mount (Exodus 24:12-13). This was to receive the two tablets of stone upon which God had written ten commandments (Exodus 31:18). Unfortunately, whilst he and Joshua were absent, the people became impatient. They told Aaron (the elder brother of Moses) to make them ‘gods’ which would go before them (Exodus 32:1). Aaron asked them for their golden earrings. After melting the ornaments and forming a calf (Exodus 32:2-4) he said to the people

“....These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” Exodus 32:4

The people had already entered into a solemn covenant with God. They had promised to do all that He would ask of them (Exodus 19:8, 24:3-7). In one of the Ten Commandments, which they had actually heard God speak, God had commanded them not to make or worship any likeness of Himself (Exodus 20:4-5, 23). The worship of the golden calf therefore was nothing less than idolatry.

Judgment quickly followed. God told Moses to have those who did not apostatise to slay with the sword those who had worshipped the graven image (Exodus 32:27). We are told that something like 3000 people died that day (verse 28). Commenting on this Ellen White observed

“Those who performed this terrible work of judgment were acting by divine authority, executing the sentence of the King of heaven. Men are to beware how they, in their human blindness, judge and condemn their fellow men; but when God commands them to execute His sentence upon iniquity, He is to be obeyed”... “The Israelites had been guilty of treason, and that against a King who had loaded them with benefits and whose authority they had voluntarily pledged themselves to obey. That the divine government might be maintained justice must be visited upon the traitors. Yet even here God's mercy was displayed. While He maintained His law, He granted freedom of choice and opportunity for repentance to all. Only those were cut off who persisted in rebellion.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 324, Idolatry at Sinai*)

She further explains why this judgment was necessary.

“It was necessary that this sin should be punished, as a testimony to surrounding nations of God's displeasure against idolatry. By executing justice upon the guilty, Moses, as God's instrument, must leave on record a solemn and public protest against their crime. As the Israelites should hereafter condemn the idolatry of the neighboring tribes, their enemies would throw back upon them the charge that the people who claimed Jehovah as their God had made a calf and worshiped it in Horeb. Then though compelled to acknowledge the disgraceful truth, Israel could point to the terrible fate of the transgressors, as evidence that their sin had not been sanctioned or excused.

Love no less than justice demanded that for this sin judgment should be inflicted. God is the guardian as well as the sovereign of His people. He cuts off those who are determined upon rebellion, that they may not lead others to ruin. In sparing the life of Cain, God had demonstrated to the universe what would be the result of permitting sin to go unpunished. The influence exerted upon his descendants by his life and teaching led to the state of corruption that demanded the destruction of the whole world by a flood. The history of the antediluvians testifies that long life is not a blessing to the sinner; God's great

forbearance did not repress their wickedness. The longer men lived, the more corrupt they became.

So with the apostasy at Sinai. Unless punishment had been speedily visited upon transgression, the same results would again have been seen. The earth would have become as corrupt as in the days of Noah. Had these transgressors been spared, evils would have followed, greater than resulted from sparing the life of Cain. It was the mercy of God that thousands should suffer, to prevent the necessity of visiting judgments upon millions. In order to save the many, He must punish the few.

Furthermore, as the people had cast off their allegiance to God, they had forfeited the divine protection, and, deprived of their defense, the whole nation was exposed to the power of their enemies. Had not the evil been promptly put away, they would soon have fallen a prey to their numerous and powerful foes. It was necessary for the good of Israel, and also as a lesson to all succeeding generations, that crime should be promptly punished. And it was no less a mercy to the sinners themselves that they should be cut short in their evil course. Had their life been spared, the same spirit that led them to rebel against God would have been manifested in hatred and strife among themselves, and they would eventually have destroyed one another. It was in love to the world, in love to Israel, and even to the transgressors, that crime was punished with swift and terrible severity." (*Ibid page 325*)

Again we see WHY it was necessary that some should die prematurely. It was for the good of themselves and of others.

Very similar to this was the explanation that Ellen White gave concerning God's instruction through Samuel to King Saul to destroy the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:1-8). This is what she wrote

"For four hundred years the execution of this sentence had been deferred; but the Amalekites had not turned from their sins. The Lord knew that this wicked people would, if it were possible, blot out His people and His worship from the earth. Now the time had come for the sentence, so long delayed, to be executed.

The forbearance that God has exercised toward the wicked, emboldens men in transgression; but their punishment will be none the less certain and terrible for being long delayed. "The Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act." Isaiah 28:21. To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Ezekiel 33:11. The Lord is "merciful and gracious, long-

suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Yet He will "by no means clear the guilty." Exodus 34:6, 7. While He does not delight in vengeance, He will execute judgment upon the transgressors of His law. He is forced to do this, to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin. In order to save some He must cut off those who have become hardened in sin. "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked." Nahum 1:3. By terrible things in righteousness He will vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law. And the very fact of His reluctance to execute justice testifies to the enormity of the sins that call forth His judgments and to the severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 628, 'Saul rejected'*)

God does not make mistakes. His actions will not prohibit someone from being saved who could have been saved. We must remember though, as is very plain from the Scriptures that we have studied

"Though God is strict to mark iniquity and to punish transgression, He takes no delight in vengeance. The work of destruction is a "strange work" to Him who is infinite in love." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 138, 'Abraham in Canaan'*)

There can be no doubt that God is love (1 John 4:8). Every action of His is born of love. Unlike humanity, nothing He does is born of self. God's love is not simply an emotion but a principle. God acts from principle. Divine justice is as much a part of God's character as is His grace. Contemplate what we have been told here

"God's love has been expressed in His justice no less than in His mercy. Justice is the foundation of His throne, and the fruit of His love. It had been Satan's purpose to divorce mercy from truth and justice. He sought to prove that the righteousness of God's law is an enemy to peace. But Christ shows that in God's plan they are indissolubly joined together; the one cannot exist without the other. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Psalm 85:10.

By His life and His death, Christ proved that God's justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed. Satan's charges were refuted. God had given man unmistakable evidence of His love." (*Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, page 762, 'It is finished'*)

The cross of Calvary reveals the ultimate expression of both the love and the justice of God. After seeing what sin has wrought, also understanding what was necessary for God to do to pay for our redemption from sin, how can we underestimate His love and the need for divine justice? It was at the cross that the two met and kissed.

God seeks to save. Everything He does is for the good of mankind. Our problem is that we cannot 'see' beyond our human understanding. God though, in His omniscience, sees the end from the beginning. Whilst His ways are past finding out, we can be sure He does nothing that will not be beneficial to mankind. Even His divine justice is a blessing.

The end result of the belief that God does not kill

The end result of believing that God does not kill is to believe that He did not really sacrifice His Son. This of course, as well as to paint a wrong picture of God, is to do great violation to the Scriptures – particularly to the words of Jesus. He very clearly said to Nicodemus

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

It was not by accident that Jesus died but by design. God predetermined it.

When Adam and Eve sinned there was nothing that humanity could do to resolve the sin problem. It was God alone who could provide the answer. If it were not for what God purposed (predetermined) to do through His one and only begotten Son then humanity would have perished without a hope. Through the prophet Isaiah we are told

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that he should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.” Isaiah 53:1-8

It was God's eternal purpose that Christ should taste death for every man (John 3:16, Romans 8:32, Hebrews 2:9). I can only repeat that it was no accident that He died. Commenting on the above passage of Scripture Ellen White wrote

“When man's redemption was to be worked out, God gave the commandment that the sword should awake against His only begotten Son, who had been one with Him from eternity. “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.” Think of the Father subjecting Himself to sorrow, sparing not His own Son, but freely delivering Him up for us all. God had to do a strange work; for He says, Fury is not in Me. O that we had a better understanding of His love.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms 76 1903, February 20th 1902, 'The burning of the sanitarium'*)

It certainly was a “strange work” that God carried out at Calvary but it was necessary for the salvation of the human race. Without this strange act there would be no salvation for any of us.

We read above how God used His people to carry out His purposes of divine justice. The death of Jesus was no different. God used His chosen people (the Jews) to bring about the death (sacrifice) of His own dear Son. The Jewish nation was the means (the instrument of God's wrath) by which God, in providing redemption for every person born on earth, sacrificed His only begotten Son. God's wrath was poured out upon His Son. Christ took the punishment of sin for every person who has been born or ever will be born on earth.

The angels who rebelled

It is reported by some that because a number of the angels who rebelled against God eventually repented of their actions they were re-instated to their original position in Heaven but in the Scriptures there is no record of this happening. This is no more than there is any evidence of this in the writings of Ellen White. Some though, very unfortunately, do ‘manipulate’ her words to make it look as though this happened but taken overall the evidence is to the contrary. The Bible tells us

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, Revelation 12:7

That is a concise summary of the great controversy between truth and error, or, as we can quite rightly say, the great controversy between Christ and Satan. When commenting on this in Volume 1 of the Spirit of Prophecy, Ellen White penned these very interesting remarks

“Many of Satan's sympathizers were inclined to heed the counsel of the loyal angels, and repent of their dissatisfaction, and be again received to the

confidence of the Father and his dear Son.” (*Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy Volume 1, page 20, 'Fall of Satan'*)

These words could easily be used to make it appear as though some of the fallen angels eventually repented and were reinstated to their former position but note these words found in the paragraph that followed

“The great God could at once have hurled this arch deceiver from Heaven; but this was not his purpose. He would give the rebellious an equal chance to measure strength and might with his own Son and his loyal angels. In this battle every angel would choose his own side, and be manifested to all. It would not have been safe to suffer any who united with Satan in his rebellion to continue to occupy Heaven. They had learned the lesson of genuine rebellion against the unchangeable law of God; and this is incurable.” (*Ibid*)

There was no way back for the fallen angels. In their rebellion they had gone too far. In keeping with the above in 'Spiritual Gifts Volume 1' we find these words

“After Satan was shut out of heaven, with those who fell with him, he realized that he had lost all the purity and glory of heaven forever. Then he repented and wished to be reinstated again in heaven. He was willing to take his proper place, or any place that might be assigned him. But no, heaven must not be placed in jeopardy. All heaven might be marred should he be taken back; for sin originated with him, and the seeds of rebellion were within him. Satan had obtained followers, those who sympathized with him in his rebellion. He and his followers repented, wept and implored to be taken back into the favor of God. But no, their sin, their hate, their envy and jealousy, had been so great that God could not blot it out. It must remain to receive its final punishment.” (*Ellen G. White, Spiritual Gifts Volume 1 page 18 'The fall of Satan'*)

This appears to be rather conclusive. According to the spirit of prophecy, none of the angels that rebelled against God were re-instated to their original position in Heaven. This does not mean though that their re-instatement had never been possible. In the 'Great Controversy' we find this precious insight

“God in His great mercy bore long with Lucifer. He was not immediately degraded from his exalted station when he first indulged the spirit of discontent, nor even when he began to present his false claims before the loyal angels. Long was he retained in heaven. Again and again he was offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission. Such efforts as only infinite love and wisdom could devise were made to convince him of his error. The spirit of discontent had never before been known in heaven. Lucifer himself did not at first see whither he was drifting; he did not understand the real nature of his feelings. But as his dissatisfaction was proved to be without cause, Lucifer was convinced that he was in the wrong, that the divine claims

were just, and that he ought to acknowledge them as such before all heaven. Had he done this, he might have saved himself and many angels. He had not at this time fully cast off his allegiance to God. Though he had forsaken his position as covering cherub, yet if he had been willing to return to God, acknowledging the Creator's wisdom, and satisfied to fill the place appointed him in God's great plan, he would have been reinstated in his office. But pride forbade him to submit. He persistently defended his own course, maintained that he had no need of repentance, and fully committed himself, in the great controversy, against his Maker." (*Ellen G. White, Great Controversy, page 495, 'The origin of evil'*)

Satan was not repentant of his rebellion against God. He was only repentant (after being cast out of Heaven) that he had lost his place in Heaven. Such will be the experience of many who finally realise what they have forfeited by their own rebellion against God. Whose fault will this be though? Can God be blamed?

The answer to that question is a resounding 'no'. God will never destroy those who are genuinely repentant. As Ellen White wrote of the idolatrous act of worshipping the golden calf at Mount Sinai

"Only those were cut off who persisted in rebellion." (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 324, Idolatry at Sinai*)

This is how it will be in the finality. Only those who are unrepentant will forfeit eternal life.

Angels that work divine wrath

Whilst we are on the topic of angels I would like to make this very important observation. We read above how God has used people and nations as instruments of His wrath. The angels are no different. God uses them for the same purpose. In the Signs of the Times of January 17th 1900, Ellen White made the following comment (see also Desire of Ages page 700)

"Under God the Angels Are All-Powerful.

They are mighty, and they excel in strength. On one occasion, in obedience to the command of Christ, they slew in one night one hundred and eighty-five thousand men of the Assyrian army. They can, and will, soon visit the earth with judgments. In quick succession one angel after another will pour out vials of wrath upon the inhabitants of the earth. How easily could the angels, beholding the shameful scene of the trial of Christ, have testified to their indignation by consuming the adversaries of God! But they were not commanded to do this." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 17th January 1900, 'Before Annas and Caiaphas'*)

The Biblical record of this is found in 2 Kings 19:35. These angels were under the command of God. As it says here, it was at “the command of Christ” that they destroyed the Assyrian army.

An angel too was involved in the death of the first born in Egypt. This when Pharaoh refused to allow God’s people to leave Egypt. God had done all that He could to persuade Pharaoh to submit to the request. He had visited Egypt with plague after plague but the ruling monarch still would not change his mind (see Exodus chapters 8 to 11). In the finality God visited him with one last plague. The Scriptures tell us

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether.” Exodus 11:1

This one final plague was the slaying of the first-born. This was when the angel of death ‘passed over’ (Exodus 11:4-6). After the decree was put into action, Pharaoh finally relented (Exodus 12:29-31). In the Great Controversy we read

“A single angel destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians and filled the land with mourning. When David offended against God by numbering the people, one angel caused that terrible destruction by which his sin was punished. The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He permits. There are forces now ready, and only waiting the divine permission, to spread desolation everywhere.” (*Ellen G. White, Great Controversy, page 614, ‘The Time of Trouble’*)

God will, in the future, just as He has done in the past, use holy angels as powers of destruction but as Ellen White says here of the destruction of the inhabitants of Sodom by the visitors of Abraham (Genesis 19:24-25)

“Abraham had seen in his guests only three tired wayfarers, little thinking that among them was One whom he might worship without sin. But the true character of the heavenly messengers was now revealed. Though they were on their way as ministers of wrath, yet to Abraham, the man of faith, they spoke first of blessings. Though God is strict to mark iniquity and to punish transgression, He takes no delight in vengeance. The work of destruction is a “strange work” to Him who is infinite in love.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 138, Abraham in Canaan’*)

Conclusion

With regards to this subject, much more from both Scripture and the spirit of prophecy could be quoted but it would all be tantamount to what we have already seen. This is that for the good of the human race, God does at times bring human life prematurely to an end.

So what will be the end of all these things? The answer is found in these words of Jesus

“What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:27-28

The One who can “destroy both soul and body in hell” is God.

Men are able to kill the body but God alone can destroy the soul. This is something that He does after the 1000 years in Heaven are ended. Along with the saved, Christ will descend to earth in the New Jerusalem. He will then resurrect to life the dead unrighteous who in turn will encompass and attack the royal city but fire comes down from God and destroys them (Revelation 20:1-15). So it will be that those who reject God’s offer of salvation will be as though they have never been (see Malachi 4:1). Both body and soul will be destroyed in the fire.

It is a very sad ending but what else can God do? He has given the unrighteous their lifetime to accept His offer but they rejected it. He will not force people to live forever and He cannot allow sin to continue forever. He will therefore bring life on earth, as we know it today, to an end. One day suffering and death will cease to exist (Revelation 24:1).

In the finality, people will either choose to be saved or choose to be lost (reject God’s offer of salvation through faith in Christ). It will always be one way or the other and it will always be a personal choice. God does not predestine some to be saved and some to be lost.

We have seen that the act of destroying life is indeed a ‘strange act’ to God (see Isaiah 28:21) but it is one that the situation demands. Allow me to explain.

Many years ago my mother’s cat gave birth to quite a large litter of kittens. Unfortunately, one of these kittens could not walk properly. It pulled itself along with its front legs and dragged its back legs behind it. My wife and myself took it to the vet who told us that it was evident that its spine was seriously damaged.

In our hearts we knew what the vet was going to suggest but that did not stop his words being painful. He told us that there was nothing that could be done for the kitten. He said that to stop it experiencing further pain and suffering, the kindest thing to do was to ‘put it to sleep’. We knew the vet was being kind. We knew too that normally he would seek to save life but this situation demanded something different.

This is how it is with God. Whilst He normally seeks to save life, His final act of destruction will be an act of kindness. Regarding this we are told through the spirit of prophecy

“In mercy to the world, God blotted out its wicked inhabitants in Noah’s time. In mercy He destroyed the corrupt dwellers in Sodom. Through the deceptive power of Satan the workers of iniquity obtain sympathy and admiration, and are thus constantly leading others to rebellion. It was so in Cain’s and in Noah’s day, and in the time of Abraham and Lot; it is so in our time. It is in mercy to the universe that God will finally destroy the rejecters of His grace.”
(*Ellen G. White, Great Controversy, page 543, ‘The first great deception’*)

Those who reject salvation would never be happy living eternally with God and His people. The prophet Nahum also tells us that affliction will not rise up a second time (Nahum 1:9). To achieve this God has to destroy sin root and branch. It is in mercy and sadness that God will carry out this work.

God bless you as you consider these things

Terry Hill

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Addendum

Ellen G. White - Extract from Ms 5 1876 *The Days of Noah*

Above I quoted a small portion of an article written by Ellen White that helps to explain God’s reasoning and purposes behind Him bringing life to a premature end. The following is a longer extract from it. It was written in 1876. Bear in mind, as we saw above, that God destroys the many to save the few.

“As they reasoned in Noah’s day, they reason today, when the warning message is proclaimed to fear God and keep His commandments, for the wrath of God is soon to fall on all the sinful and disobedient, and they will perish in the general conflagration. Professed servants of Christ who are unfaithful, who do not reverence God and with fear prepare for the terrible future event, will lull themselves to carnal security with their fallacious reasoning, as they did in Noah’s day. God is too good and too merciful to save just a few who keep the Sabbath and believe the message of warning. The

great men and the good men, the philosophers and men of wisdom would see the Sabbath and the shortness of time, if it were true. They did not believe a merciful God who made men would consume them with fire because they did not believe the warnings given. This, they reason, is not in accordance with God.

But the days before the flood steal silently on as a thief in the night. Noah is now making his last effort in warnings, entreaty, and appeal to the rejecters of God's message. With tearful eye, trembling lip, and quivering voice, he makes his last entreaty for them to believe and secure a refuge in the ark.

But they turn from him with impatience and contempt that he should be so egotistical as to suppose his family are the only ones right in the vast population of the earth. They have no patience with his warnings, with his strange work of building an immense boat on dry ground. Noah, they said, was insane. Reason, science, and philosophy assured them Noah was a fanatic. None of the wise men and honored of the earth believed the testimony of Noah. If these great men were at ease and had no fears, why should they be troubled?

God's love is represented in our day as being of such a character as would forbid His destroying the sinner. Men reason from their own low standard of right and justice. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Psalm 50:21. They measure God by themselves. They reason as to how they would act under the circumstances and decide God would do as they imagine they would do.

God's goodness and long forbearance, His patience and mercy exercised to His subjects, will not hinder Him from punishing the sinner who refused to be obedient to His requirements. It is not for man—a criminal against God's holy law, pardoned only through the great sacrifice He made in giving His Son to die for the guilty because His law was changeless—to dictate to God. After all this effort on the part of God to preserve the sacred and exalted character of His law, if men, through the sophistry of the devil, turn the mercy and condescension of God into a curse, they must suffer the penalty. Because Christ died they consider they have liberty to transgress God's holy law that condemns the transgressor and would complain of its strictness and its penalty as severe and unlike God. They are uttering the words Satan utters to millions, to quiet their conscience in rebellion against God.

In no kingdom or government is it left to the lawbreakers to say what punishment is to be executed against those who have broken the law. All we have, all the bounties of His grace which we possess, we owe to God. The aggravating character of sin against such a God cannot be estimated any more than the heavens can be measured with a span. God is a moral governor

as well as a Father. He is the Lawgiver. He makes and executes His laws. Law that has no penalty is of no force. The plea may be made that a loving Father would not see His children suffering the punishment of God by fire, while He had the power to relieve them. But God would, for the good of His subjects and for their safety, punish the transgressor. God does not work on the plan of man. He can do infinite justice that man has no right to do before his fellow man. Noah would have displeased God to have drowned one of the scoffers and mockers that harassed him, but God drowned the vast world. Lot would have had no right to inflict punishment on his sons-in-law, but God would do it in strict justice.

Who will say God will not do what He says He will do? Let God be true and every man a liar. The Lord is coming in flaming fire to take vengeance on those sinners who know not God and obey not His gospel. And because, in His infinite mercy, He delays His coming to give the world a larger span for repentance, sinners flatter themselves He will never come.

In the public press, in the haunts of sin, as well as in the schools of science so-called, there is one sentiment. They curl the lips with scorn and jest and ridicule at the warnings given them and look upon the thousands who will not believe. Jest is uttered, witty paragraphs published at the expense of those who wait and look for His appearing and with fear, like Noah, prepare for the event. This is not new, but as old as sin. It is as false as the father of lies.

When ministers, farmers, merchants, lawyers, great men, and professedly good men shall cry, Peace and safety, sudden destruction cometh. [1 Thessalonians 5:3.] Luke reports the words of Christ, that the day of God comes as a snare—the figure of an animal prowling in the woods for prey—and lo, suddenly he is entrapped in the concealed snare of the fowler.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms 5 1876, ‘The Days of Noah’*)

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