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TO KNOW THE ONLY TRUE GOD: RECONCILING THE GOD OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT WITH THE GOD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

by

Kelly D. Newman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts in Religious Education

Department of Religious Education

Brigham Young University

June 2006

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Kelly D. Newman in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

TO KNOW THE ONLY TRUE GOD: RECONCILING THE GOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WITH THE GOD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Masters of Arts in Religious Education

There is a popular misconception in the world that Jehovah is too severe on occasion while Jesus Christ is always kind and merciful. The Latter-day Saint belief that Jehovah and Jesus are the same person presents a supposed conflict. There has not been much written on this subject by either non-Latter-day Saints or Latter-day Saints, thus, this thesis represents a unique contribution to a common perception prevalent in many Christian circles.

The research of this thesis shows that the misconception is based on three problems: first, a misinterpretation of biblical stories in both the Old and New Testament; second, a lack of understanding biblical context and culture; and third, a lack of applying modern revelation to this subject. The research of this thesis focuses on these three areas in an effort to resolve this false perception.

This thesis takes a deeper look into the acts of Jehovah and Jesus Christ as found in the Old and New Testaments respectively. Next, it looks at several doctrines related to this subject that have been revealed through latter-day prophets and incorporates them into the Old Testament. This analysis paints a broader picture of the Lord and illustrates that He was, indeed, merciful in the Old Testament but, at times, severe in the New Testament. Lastly, this thesis takes four of the most difficult Old Testament stories that seem to represent Jehovah as harsh, capricious, and unyielding, and puts them in their cultural setting. Though not every act can be completely explained, there is a high degree of similarity between Jehovah and Jesus. The study concludes, therefore, that much of the problem lies with perception and not with reality.

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I acknowledge that the views expressed in this thesis are mine and do not necessarily represent the position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or of Brigham Young University.

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Chapter 1

THE JUSTICE OF JEHOVAH VERSUS THE MERCY OF THE MESSIAH

Introduction

A close relative once asked me, “How do you reconcile the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New Testament?” I did not know what to say nor did I completely understand his question. “What do you mean?” I thought. Shortly thereafter, I came across an article in the *Ensign* written in answer to a question from an adult Church member. Her question was, “In the Old Testament, God sounds harsh, so much so that it is hard for me to reconcile that impression with the personality of love and peace depicted in the New Testament and with the loving personal God I have discovered there. How can I reconcile these impressions?”¹

In pondering the depiction of Jehovah in the Old Testament in relation to Jesus in the New Testament, it is possible to perceive Jehovah as vindictive, capricious and cruel. “Is it not true that one of the greatest obstacles for most Christians’ appreciation of the Old Testament lies in the numerous moral difficulties that the Old Testament seems to present?”² Many of these seeming difficulties are in relation to Jehovah. Some have asked, “Could it really be true that the God of the Old Testament was fickle, hateful,

¹ H. Dean Garrett, “Questions and Answers,” *Ensign*, July 1979, 20.

² Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1983), 32.

deceptive, and revengeful? Certainly, if this were true, it could not be harmonized or integrated into the picture that the New Testament paints of God.”¹

For example, Jehovah decreed the death penalty for adultery. However, when the adulterous woman was brought to Jesus in the New Testament, He said, “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 7:10-11). Furthermore, the Savior taught to “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44) but Jehovah commanded the Israelites to “utterly destroy” all the inhabitants of Canaan (see Deuteronomy 20:17). One scholar asked concerning Jehovah, “Is God a loving father or a harsh, punitive deity who demands blood sacrifice of his followers and capital punishment for infractions of the law?”² In the view of some, Jesus Christ in His mortal and post-resurrection ministry does not seem to resemble the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Is their view, however, correct? Is there really a conflict between Jehovah and Jesus Christ?

It may seem that this perception would be more difficult for Latter-day Saints to resolve than some other Christian systems because of the unmistakable doctrine we hold that Jehovah and Jesus are literally the same individual. Succinctly stated, the Church holds that “He [Jesus] was the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New.”³ Since they are the same person, why the perceived contrast between testaments? Professor Richard O. Cowan explained, “Some students of the Bible erroneously view the God of the Old Testament as harsh and vindictive and so conclude that he cannot be the

³ Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 249.

⁴ Gerald N. Lund, *Selected Writings of Gerald N. Lund: Gospel Scholars Series* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 30.

⁵ “The Living Christ” document found in *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 43.

same person as Jesus Christ who taught the gospel of love . . . A comparison of the Old and the New Testament confirms that Jehovah is the same person as Jesus Christ. For example, Jehovah and Jesus Christ are identified as the Creator (Isaiah 45:11-12 and John 1:1-3, 14), as our only Savior (Isaiah 43:3, 11 and Acts 4:10-12), and as our Judge (Psalm 96:13 and John 5:22).”⁴ To the Book of Mormon peoples the Savior Himself testified, “Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel” (3 Nephi 15:5). Jesus is clearly Jehovah, yet many feel that their personalities are not harmonious. This is the problem.

As a religion teacher in the Church Educational System, I have come across many students who have questioned several stories in the Old Testament as to why God acted as He did. The conquest of Canaan and the smiting of Uzzah are two examples of stories that may be hard to harmonize with a loving, forgiving God.

Explanation of Thesis

This thesis will assert that there really is no conflict between Jehovah and Jesus Christ although there is a persistent perception that the actions and character of Jehovah shown in the Old Testament are incongruent with those found in other scripture. The title of this chapter “The Justice of Jehovah versus the Mercy of the Messiah” deliberately offers a false perception. Casual reading of the Bible may invite this misunderstanding, but a careful analysis will prove otherwise.

This thesis is researched and written from a Latter-day Saint perspective. To date, no known Latter-day Saint author has comprehensively written on this subject. The lack

⁶ Richard O. Cowan, *Answers to Your Questions About the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 50.

of a study the Saints could reference may have contributed to the misunderstanding that seems so prevalent.

In viewing the Old Testament, the question arises, “what should be considered out of character for God?” Professor Richard Draper, addressing one area that has caused people concern, suggests that:

Although some have maintained that God’s command to Hosea to marry a harlot was ‘inconsistent with His holy character,’ it could also be argued that such a command was indeed consistent with His character and practices as evidenced by other scriptural precedents. Abraham was commanded of God to sacrifice his own beloved son, even though as a child Abraham had been rescued by an angel of God when his own father sought to kill him as a religious sacrifice . . . Nephi recoiled from the command he received to slay Laban (see 1 Nephi 4:10-19). In each of these cases the commandments issued from Jehovah to His holy prophets appear repugnant or in some way contrary to gospel principles. Numerous other examples in the Old Testament attest that God used dramatic, sometimes even harsh means to warn, teach, and discipline Israel. Although these means may be troubling to some or even appear ‘inconsistent to His holy character,’ God's mercy and love are also consistently manifested. As we struggle to understand why God issues difficult commands or does certain things, we should remember, as the Prophet Joseph taught, ‘Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is.’⁵

⁷ Richard D. Draper, ed., *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 226.

This is an important concept. Whatever God does *is* right. Therefore, nothing is out of character for God whether in the Old Testament or the New. There are times, however, when an explanation of God's actions based on known truths and revealed doctrines help reconcile a perceived difficulty.

Thesis Overview

When one analyzes the Old Testament through a modern perspective, many events and actions by Jehovah may be considered capricious or undeserving. There are two recurrent situations which many modern readers of the Old Testament find repugnant, that is, mass destructions and the use of the death penalty. Both lend themselves to a negative perception of Jehovah. Some examples of mass destruction are the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the conquest of Canaan. Many consider the killing of innocent people, especially little children, in each of these instances, immoral and unethical by today's standards. Furthermore, the death of people for actions that do not seem to warrant a death sentence—like touching or looking at the ark of the covenant, breaking the Sabbath day, or looking back at Sodom—many find abhorrent. The moral conflict comes not as much because of the penalty itself, but because of the lack of perceived balance between the supposed crime and capital punishment.

I will discuss each of these conditions, mass destruction and God's use of capital punishment, because they are the popular for causing people concern. Resolving these two conditions will resolve many of the conflicts and show that Jehovah is not cruel, capricious, or revengeful. It will show, rather, that he is a perfectly just and merciful God who is in harmony with his moral self both the Old and New Testament.

This thesis will proceed in Chapter 2 with a review of literature, both ancient and modern, dealing with this subject. Chapter 3 will begin the resolution process by exploring a deeper examination into the Bible texts which will reveal the abundant mercy of Jehovah and the unfailing justice of Jesus Christ. Chapter 4 explores how the Restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith provides many answers to this problem. Furthermore, it will highlight many doctrines and principles exclusive to the Church that throw light on the biblical texts. The Bible may leave readers with several unanswered questions dealing with this topic, but the Restoration of the gospel brings additional insights that answer many of them. Chapter 5 will bring the material presented in the previous chapters to bear on four representative case studies. The four cases are:

1. The flood in Noah's day (Genesis 6-8)
2. The man stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36)
3. The conquest of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7)
4. The smiting of Uzzah for steadying the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6:6-8; 1 Chronicles 13:9-11)

Obviously there are many other examples that could be used; however, these four are sufficiently different from one another that they become representative of other stories in the Old Testament. Additionally, these four examples seem to be the hardest for modern readers to resolve. Two of them deal with mass destruction and two with the death sentence for someone who did not seem to deserve it. The final chapter will summarize the findings of the previous chapters and present the conclusions of the study.

The point is that understanding the nature of the God and his dealings with men anciently will augment our relationship, knowledge, and testimony of Deity. “In the Old Testament great richness is added to the understanding of God and how He deals with His children, blessing them according to their obedience and receptivity, or punishing them for rebellion and wickedness. If one would get to know Christ better, one must study the Old Testament, for in His role as Jehovah He permeates the whole record. Jesus Christ is the God of the Old Testament just as He is the God of the earth today. Keeping this important fact constantly in mind is one of the keys to understanding both the Old Testament and the nature of God.”⁶

In summary, casual reading of the Bible may yield a perception of a cruel Old Testament God especially when contrasted with the Jesus Christ of the New Testament. This thesis will prove that this is a false perception. This will be accomplished by a deeper examination of the biblical text and through the many principles and doctrines revealed in modern times. Four stories in the Old Testament will be scrutinized to demonstrate that a serious study of the Bible and using modern revelation reveals a more complete perspective of the character of God.

⁸ Church Educational System, *Old Testament: Genesis-2 Samuel Student Manual (Religion 301)* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 48.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will do four tasks. First, it will briefly summarize the background and history of this subject over the past 2000 years and illustrate that a number of people have felt there is a conflict between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. Second, it will review modern Christian literature on the subject pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of each source. Third, it will present a review of Latter-day Saint literature. Finally, it will show how this thesis is unique when compared to what is currently written on the subject.

Background and History

This problem of the perception of Jehovah began to receive much attention in the second century A.D., particularly with a man named Marcion. He was active in the orthodox community at first, but eventually he “found the Old Testament impossible to reconcile with the gospel of Christ . . . he concluded there must be two Gods, a lower Demiurge who created the universe . . . and the supreme God made known for the first time by Christ.”¹ He openly preached this doctrine of two gods, one that prevailed in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. He taught, “The Creator of the world is a

¹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: A. and C. Black Limited, 1977), 57.

just God, but severe and harsh; the God whom Christ revealed is a Father, a God of love.”¹ By A.D. 144 Marcion was branded a heretic and excommunicated. That did not stop his work or his attracting followers. He completely rejected the Old Testament as part of his canon as well as some of the New Testament that did not conform to his views. “Marcion was offended, as many Christians often are, by the way [Jehovah] appears to be depicted in the Old Testament.”²

The above quote shows that Marcion’s philosophy did not die with him but has survived the centuries. In the fourth century, Manichaeism, which incorporated elements of Christianity, held to the same dualism that Marcion promulgated. Mani, the founder, rejected the whole Old Testament for the same reasons Marcion did. “The Old Testament was ransacked for all the examples of offensive morality that could be found in order to justify their stance of regarding the Old Testament as an inferior and unchristian book.”³ Manichaeism was a form of Gnosticism which held the belief of a demiurge or lesser creator god.

Other groups accepted these same ideas, thus rejecting the God of the Old Testament. In the twelfth century another group known as Cartharists, or “puritans,” also held to these beliefs and are looked upon “as the lineal descendants of the Manicheans.”⁴ They also taught dualism, threatening the Catholic Church which labeled them heretics. The movement did not die, but has continued into the present. “One illustrious Marcionite of comparatively recent times was the great German church historian Adolf

² Walter Bauer, in Appendix II of John Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 172.

³ Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 249.

³ Ibid.

⁴ N. A. Webber, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03435a.htm>.

von Harnack.”⁵ Harnack believed that the fact that Christianity continues to use the Old Testament and “treasure it as a canonical document is the result of a paralysis which affects both religion and the Church.”⁶ He rejected much of the Old Testament as well.

Additionally, some converts to Christianity around the world have struggled with the Old Testament and its representation of God. For example, Christian converts in India have been known to say “that the Old Testament reflects a morality and a conception of God which is lower than that of the best Indian religion.”⁷ Furthermore, a sect of Christians in Germany under Hitler had a similar argument. They wondered if the Jewish-written Old Testament painted a picture of God different than He really was. Of course, their anti-Semitism may have contributed highly to their view. Even so, their attitude shows how this perception is a persistent problem. All of these examples illustrate how some people have struggled over the centuries with the perception of Jehovah in the Old Testament.

Literature Review

Current Christian Literature (non LDS)

This thesis will review a number of Christian commentaries that deal with the perceived contrast between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. This literature review will mostly deal with conventional Christian thought and recently published works. Only by reviewing the most recent published works will this review be able to demonstrate current Christian thought about this subject. Also, because there are so many theories and

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1950), 80.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

ideas available, analyzing all them would not be relevant. Those published works by mainstream Christian authors will serve the best purpose for this thesis.

One problem Latter-day Saints may have with this literature is the fact that it is written by non-Latter-day Saint authors. Many Latter-day Saints are hesitant to accept non-Latter-day Saint commentary, theories, or ideas about doctrine or scriptures because they are not based on modern revelation. However, for this study they are important because they show that the Saints are not alone in seeing this problem of the perceived conflict between Jehovah and Jesus Christ and that many of the solutions presented are agreeable to Latter-day Saints.

The New Testament scholar, F. F. Bruce, briefly addressed this issue in his book *The Books and the Parchments*. He stated: “We still find people drawing a contrast between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New, although they do not, like Marcion, regard the God of the Old Testament as having an independent existence, but regard Him as a developing idea in the minds of His worshippers.”⁸ The extreme nature of Marcion’s philosophy is not widely popular today (that is, the theory of two different Gods) but the conflict he saw definitely is. Bruce also points out that many draw a contrast “between the attributes of God—His righteousness and His mercy—as though the former were characteristic of the Old Testament revelation and the latter of the New Testament revelation, whereas in fact both coexist in harmony throughout the whole Bible.”⁹ Bruce discusses this issue, albeit briefly, but does not really give specific resolutions. He does say “Practical difficulties in the use of the Old Testament arise in various places and times, but these difficulties are to be surmounted by further teaching .

⁸ Bruce, *Parchments*, 79.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

. . . not burked by throwing the Old Testament overboard.”¹⁰ He believes that there is no real contrast, only a perceived one. He contends that this perception will go away with further study and proper teaching of the Old and New Testaments. He also points out that the Old Testament was the scripture of our Lord and His apostles. Though he makes a number of good points, they are definitely not comprehensive or exhaustively informative.

Since 1978, there have been at least 18 books written that deal with the subject of ethics in the Old Testament.¹¹ These types of books usually address this problem because of several passages in the Old Testament that seem unethical when compared to today’s society. I consulted several of these works and have outlined both the most recent and the best below.

One that was quite helpful to this thesis was *Toward Old Testament Ethics* by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. He deals with the issue directly in chapter 16 entitled “The Morally Offensive Character and Acts of God in the Old Testament.”¹² There he quotes two other contemporary scholars who cannot reconcile the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New Testament. Kaiser quotes Harry Fosdick’s biblical exposition in which he lists his objections to the Old Testament saying that: “Three offensive characteristics in the Old Testament ethics [are]: (1) its exclusivism, provincialism, and Jewish favoritism; (2) its inhumanity, class-consciousness (where women were treated as chattel along with the rest of a man’s possessions), slavery, and polygamy; and (3) its externality of rites, ritual, bans on census, and religious calendar. In contrast with each of these features, the New

¹⁰ Bruce, *Parchments*, 80.

¹¹ John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: approaches and explorations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 30-31.

¹² Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 247-269.

Testament was the exact opposite: (1) universal, (2) humane, and (3) inward.”¹³

Fosdick’s objections require a response. Like others he cannot easily resolve a perceived conflict between Testaments.

Kaiser also quotes William Brenton Greene, Jr., another modern scholar, who composed a list of seven objections to the Old Testament. Three that apply here are:

1. God is represented sometimes in the Old Testament as partial, fickle, hateful, revengeful, and otherwise morally unworthy
2. In addition to endorsing . . . expressions of individual feelings that offend our moral judgments, [the Old Testament] represents God as explicitly requiring in some instances acts condemned by our moral sense
3. The Old Testament . . . contains positive precepts and indirect requirements and sanctions that are in conflict with the teachings and implications of the New Testament and so with high morality.¹⁴

Greene also sees a conflict without resolution. He is proof that at least part of Marcion’s philosophy is still around today. Kaiser uses these two modern scholars to illustrate that this philosophy is still prevalent today and needs explanation.

Kaiser then takes some Old Testament examples and offers resolutions to them. He addresses issues such as “Yahweh is Fickle”¹⁵ and “Yahweh is Hateful.”¹⁶ Using Hebrew, he is able to effectively illustrate the original meaning of a number of passages. He also claims that part of the issue is that the Old Testament authors are just using

¹³ Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 248.

¹⁴ William Brenton Green, Jr., “The Ethics of the Old Testament: The Objections to Old Testament Ethics,” reprinted in *Classical Evangelical Essays in the Old Testament Interpretation*, compiled and edited by W. C. Kaiser, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 207.

¹⁵ Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 249.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 251.

“anthropopathisms (the description of God in human feelings)”¹⁷ to describe God. He explains the passage: “And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Exodus 9:12)¹⁸ which he says is “difficult to accept”¹⁹ for many scholars. He also explains the concept of the divine anger of God. He even delves into the extermination of the Canaanites, but only spends two pages on the subject. He concludes that God is just no matter what He does and that if we do not quite understand something it must be because there is “a deficiency in our view of things.”²⁰ Kaiser brings up some good points that help in resolving this perceived conflict. However, he does not deal with any of the other tough stories in the Old Testament. Despite its brevity and avoidance of several difficult Old Testament passages, this is a good source because it is fairly modern, mainstream and acceptable to many.

One of the most recently published books on Old Testament ethics is called *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics* by John Rogerson. He devotes about nine pages to the perception of Jehovah.²¹ He states that there are “Popular misconceptions about the Old Testament, such as that its God is a God of wrath.”²² He identifies several Old Testament conflicts, like the conquest of Canaan, to illustrate this misconception. He summarizes other works written on the subject, including Kaiser’s. He then concludes by saying that he has not tried to solve any of the problems. Rather, he points out that there are certain principles that a modern reader should apply to reading the Bible. He says that by applying these principles in the Old Testament the reader can “guard against simplistic

¹⁷ Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 250.

¹⁸ See also Exodus 7:13; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4; 14:8.

¹⁹ Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 253.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 269.

²¹ John William Rogerson, *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 30-39.

²² *Ibid.*, 30.

application” that God is capricious, cruel or vengeful.²³ In other words, an in-depth study of the Bible will dissolve these popular misconceptions. This book was not as comprehensive as *Toward Old Testament Ethics* and instead of offering possible solutions to the problem; it merely encourages the reader to focus on the positive aspects in the Old Testament.

Two other current books dealing with Old Testament ethics, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics* by John Barton and *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* by Christopher J. H. Wright have nothing to offer. Neither of them dealt directly with the problem discussed in this thesis but identified certain ethical problems within the Old Testament, especially when viewed from the perspective of modern society. They did not address the specific issue this thesis is resolving. One of the main focuses of many of these books on Old Testament ethics is that the Old Testament is filled with good principles that can help any modern reader follow the Savior better. However, focusing on these good principles in the Old Testament does not completely resolve the perceived conflict. These books on ethics are somewhat helpful, but they largely deal with a different topic than the one that is the focus of this thesis.

The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* is a good, mainstream Christian source recently published that contains several articles relevant to this thesis. Under the heading “Yahweh,” the character of Jehovah is described in the Old Testament as “a storm god who speaks in thunder, who hurls or shoots lightning . . . He is a god of the mountains . . . Fire is both a sign of [Jehovah’s] presence and a weapon.”²⁴ In the section “Wrath of God” another author acknowledges that, “At best, only a very few passages seem to

²³ Rogerson, *Theory and Practice*, 39.

²⁴ Henry O. Thompson, “Yahweh” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, editor-in-chief (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:1012.

suggest that, like other [Ancient Near Eastern] deities, [Jehovah] could behave in an irrational manner unrelated to any moral will. . . . The objects of such anger tend to be those who, unfortunately, are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Possibly underlying all these passages . . . is the fairly universal notion that the *mysterium tremendum* of deity is intrinsically life-threatening to mortals.”²⁵ This quote suggests that on occasion, what God does is unexplainable and for all intents and purposes may be irrational. People may just be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This is all just part of the tremendous mystery of godliness or *mysterium tremendum*. One of the more applicable sections of this work deals with “divine anger” as illustrated in the Old Testament. It shows that God was often justified in his anger because of wickedness, covenant breaking or idol worship. Under the heading “Vengeance,” the work explains that God’s vengeance is always appropriate. Although, the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* does not have all the answers, nor does it claim to, it is sufficiently thorough. Along with this six volume dictionary there is also a multi-volume commentary entitled *The Anchor Bible* arranged sequentially from Genesis to Revelation. The series gives valid explanation for many things in the Bible but admits that there are some things in the Old Testament where God appears capricious and there is no valid explanation for them.²⁶ This is a decent source for the Christian world, but gives little help to this thesis.

There are also several works recently published that are devoted to biblical law which throw light on the subject of this thesis. Two are *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times* by Ze’ev W. Falk with a Jewish point of view and *The Institutes of Biblical Law* by Rousas John Rushdoony with a Christian point of view. The latter work is over three and a half

²⁵ Stephen H. Travis, “Wrath of God,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, editor-in-chief (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:993.

²⁶ See footnote 24.

times larger than the smaller book by Falk, partly due to a certain amount of redundancy. They are both similar in analyzing Old Testament law. Rushdoony explains that “The time-honored distinction between the OT as a book of law and the NT as a book of divine grace is without grounds or justification.”²⁷ He disagrees with many who feel that there is a big contrast between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He criticizes a Lutheran Sunday School manual that read, “The New Testament is the presentation of life under grace as it differs from life under the law.”²⁸ Rushdoony fires back, “But the Old Testament also presents life under grace, and both Old and New Testaments present life under grace as life under law, never as lawlessness.”²⁹ He also refutes John Calvin who said, “[In the Old Testament] God manifested Himself more fully as a Father and Judge by temporal blessings and punishments than since the promulgation of the Gospel.”³⁰ A major point in Rushdoony’s book is that modern society has lost its understanding of the Bible and its law. As a result, many misunderstand important biblical passages. This definitely is a good point, but Rushdoony takes it a little too far in suggesting that modern society needs to return to Mosaic code. There is more to the misunderstanding of the Old Testament than not living the law of Moses. Even so, it is very helpful in understanding the God of the Old Testament and showing His ways are congruent with those of the God of the New Testament.

²⁷ John Rousas Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (S.I.: The Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1973), 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 653.

Latter-day Saint Literature

A reader asked the following question in the July 1989 issue of the *Ensign*: “In the Old Testament, God sounds harsh, so much so that it is hard for me to reconcile that impression with the personality of love and peace depicted in the New Testament and with the loving personal God I have discovered there. How can I reconcile these impressions?”³¹ In his short explanation, H. Dean Garrett focused on the fact that Israel was bound by covenant to Jehovah. With this covenant came certain responsibilities. “Therefore, some of [Jehovah’s] actions, viewed through our perspective, might seem harsh, but viewed through the eyes of eternity would not be.”³² He also suggests that “the Old Testament is not as unmitigatedly harsh as it might first appear, nor are the Book of Mormon and the New Testament endlessly patient.”³³ He concludes with the counsel from the Book of Mormon, “do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil” (Moroni 7:14). Although everything he wrote is true, he does not comprehensively cover the subject matter. What about the flood of Noah or Sodom and Gomorrah or the extermination of the Canaanites? In these stories, none of the victims were a part of covenant Israel. An understanding of the covenants that Israel made with Jehovah is one part of the answer but hardly resolves the problem entirely. This source is too brief and only answers one small aspect of the problem.

Latter-day Saint scholars have not written a great deal on the Old Testament. In contrast, there is much more written on the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, or even the New Testament. In fact, Latter-day Saint works that deal with the *entire* Old Testament are few. Below is a list of the most helpful sources in chronological order:

³¹ Garrett, “Questions and Answers,” 20.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

Companion to your study of the Old Testament by Dan Ludlow (1981)

Unlocking the Old Testament by Victor Ludlow (1981)

A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament by Ellis T. Rasmussen (1993)

Old Testament Student Manual Religion 301-302 (2 volumes, 2003)

Teachings and Commentaries on the Old Testament, 2nd ed. by Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen (2005)

Other books published on the Old Testament have a central focus. For example, *Isaiah, Plain and Simple* by Hoyt W. Brewster and *Words of Jeremiah* by Monte S. Nyman. There is no book in existence today written by a Latter-day Saint that deals solely with the perceived contrast between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. If mentioned at all in Latter-day Saint sources, it is only briefly discussed.

In Daniel H. Ludlow's *A Companion to your Study of the Old Testament* there is no specific section dedicated to the subject of this thesis. There is some brief commentary (less than half a page) on the conquest of Canaan. Ludlow quotes Joseph Smith "Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire."³⁴ Other than this, there seems to be no attempt to explain other Old Testament stories where God appears to be capricious. This book seems like a decent commentary on the Old Testament for Latter-day Saints but is of little help to the subject of this thesis.

In Victor L. Ludlow's *Unlocking the Old Testament* he writes in the preface, "The purpose of this book is not to answer every question or even most questions that an Old

³⁴ Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to your study of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 187.

Testament reader might have. It does, however, attempt to lead the reader into the work and through some of the more difficult passages.”³⁵ After reading this, one might become excited to see how this author resolved some of the more difficult passages in the Old Testament that lead to the perceived conflict between Jesus and Jehovah. He explains how the flood was an act of mercy³⁶ but there is no mention of the man stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath day (see Numbers 15) or of Uzzah being struck for touching the ark of the covenant (see 2 Samuel 6). He also comments on the conquest of Canaan in three short paragraphs but it only covers the geography.³⁷ The book is incredibly brief for an Old Testament commentary, only 233 pages, and does not mention of the perceived conflict between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. The introduction did not seem to accomplish what it had promised and the Old Testament was not unlocked as far as the subject of this thesis is concerned.

Another source on the Old Testament is *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament* by Ellis T. Rasmussen. It was printed in 1993 and is still in use today. It is 700 pages long and deals directly with the text of the Old Testament and added commentary where the author felt necessary. However, there is nothing written dedicated to answering the question of this thesis. Also, Rasmussen does not try to explain the tough stories of the Old Testament but frankly avoids their discussion. This book was not helpful in any way to this thesis.

The *Old Testament Student Manual* for Institute students contains a section addressing this issue entitled “Who is the God of the Old Testament?” This proved to be the best Latter-day Saint source on this issue. Much of the content of this section focuses

³⁵ Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), viii.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

on illustrating that Jehovah and Jesus Christ are the same person. In the concluding paragraph it reads, “There is no inconsistency in the nature of God.”³⁸ Though the point is well made, the main weakness with this section is that it is all too brief and does not tackle the hard issues. In the commentary passages it does mention the man stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath day and gives good reasoning for it. Further, it devotes three fourths of a page to answering the question “Why did the Lord command the Israelites to utterly destroy the Canaanites?”³⁹ This is a good summary and will be used later. In my estimation, this is by far the best source for Latter-day Saints, even though it is overly brief on this issue by not dealing with every case.

Teachings and Commentaries on the Old Testament by Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen is the most recently published Latter-day Saint book on the Old Testament. It is well organized and would be adequately helpful to any Latter-day Saint studying the Old Testament. The title of the book describes the contents well because it is full of lessons found in the Old Testament as well as commentary on various passages. One section is entitled “Portrait of the Savior in the Old Testament and Pearl of Great Price.” The opening paragraph states “The Old Testament . . . constitutes a grand and glorious exposition of the character, qualities, and mission of Jesus Christ . . . the thoughtful and prayerful reader cannot read these passages of scripture concerning the Savior without being touched spiritually with the profound significance of His love, the mercy of His longsuffering, and the majesty of His divine intercession on behalf of mankind.”⁴⁰

Although the authors make a good point, there is no mention of the difficult Old

³⁸ Church, *Old Testament: Genesis-2 Samuel*, 48.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁴⁰ Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen, *Teachings and Commentary on the Old Testament* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2005), 64.

Testament passages when Jehovah does not seem to be loving, merciful or patient. Furthermore, no commentary is written in this book about some of the tough Old Testament passages that may yield to a perception of a capricious and cruel Jehovah. There is no mention of Uzzah or the Conquest of Canaan and very little commentary on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. This is a decent book on the Old Testament but there is virtually nothing in it that contributes to the question of this thesis.

It is my opinion that Latter-day Saint authors have chosen not to deal in depth with this subject because of its difficulty. Many have simply focused on the gospel of Jesus Christ as found in the Old Testament instead of trying to explain the seemingly capricious actions of God in some Old Testament passages.

The Unique Contribution of This Thesis

In summary, I have not found any book that deals solely with the subject of the perceived contrast between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. In fact, there is no book that even devotes a whole chapter to it. The writings I have reviewed supply only brief and inadequate explanations. For Latter-day Saints, there is no published work that is comprehensive or analyzes all the aspects of this problem. That is where this thesis will make a contribution. This will be the first comprehensive work on the perceived contrast between Jehovah and Jesus Christ by a Latter-day Saint. It will also incorporate insights from the standard works, prophetic commentary and other Latter-day Saint scholars to increase the understanding of the Old Testament as a whole. Furthermore, this thesis will apply much of the research findings to several Old Testament passages to test their validity and success.

Chapter 3

THE MERCY OF JEHOVAH AND THE JUSTICE OF CHRIST

Most discerning readers ought to be able to find examples of justice and mercy throughout the Bible. It is true that many lay readers think of the Old Testament God as capricious and vengeful, while viewing the New Testament God as fair and benevolent. In this chapter I will demonstrate that the Old Testament teems with passages which give evidence of God's mercy and forgiveness. Similarly, I will cite scriptural passages from the New Testament, which on the surface may indicate that Jesus could err on the side of justice. My purpose in doing this is to bring about a more balanced view—one that demonstrates how Jehovah in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament applied appropriate amounts of mercy and justice as circumstances and overarching designs warranted. Furthermore, regardless of one's interpretation, the Book of Mormon prophesies that at the last day "we must come forth and stand before him . . . and acknowledge . . . that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men" (Alma 12:15).

The Mercy of Jehovah

The nature of Jehovah can be characterized by mercy, patience and tolerance. This section examines the aspect of mercy. By thoroughly reading the entire Old Testament, the conclusion can clearly be reached that the God of that scripture is a merciful being. Professor Richard O. Cowan explained, "A careful reading of the Old

Testament reveals God's tender mercies in the early dispensations. He was anxious to bless the obedient (see Deuteronomy 28), and he was likened to a loving shepherd (see Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:10-11). The commandment to love our neighbor is found not only in the New Testament but also in the record of Moses (see Leviticus 19:18).¹ Jehovah Himself proclaimed, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 3:12).

Many Old Testament prophets testified of Jehovah's mercy and kindness. One poignant verse in Micah reads, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18). This verse proclaims that the God of Israel delights in mercy and forgives the transgressor.

The prophet Isaiah described well the mercy of God in his first chapter. The Lord said to Israel, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isaiah 1:2-3). Israel had largely forgotten all that the Lord had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt and into the promised land. Therefore, the Lord condemned their wickedness and rejected their vain sacrifices and ritualistic offerings. However, He then pleaded with Israel, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). This passage truly describes a merciful God, willing to forgive even the most crimson of sins committed by His people.

¹ Cowan, *Answers*, 50.

Furthermore, the poignant verses of Isaiah's forty-ninth chapter are insightful. There the Lord declared, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me" (Isaiah 49:15-16). No matter the status of Israel's spirituality, the merciful, compassionate Jehovah could not forget His people nor turn His back on them. This verse also foreshadowed the Savior's merciful Atonement by the phrase "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

The mercy of God is portrayed explicitly in the following passages found in the book of Psalms:

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

"But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Psalms 86:15).

"For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalms 100:5).

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Psalms 103:8)

"O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalms 106:1).

"The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Psalms 145:8-9).

These are some examples of the many passages in the book of Psalms proclaiming the great mercy of God.

Psalm 136 is one of the most comprehensive declarations of God's mercy. In this chapter, the phrase "for his mercy endureth for ever" is repeated after each of the 26 verses. Each verse proclaims separate acts or characteristics of God for which the statement "for his mercy endureth for ever" is warranted. For example, the author mentions the creation of the earth and heavens; the victory over the Egyptians and the exodus of the children of Israel, including the parting of the Red sea; the successful conquest over many great kings and the leading of the children of Israel into the promised land. The author of Psalm 136 reviewed events from the beginning of time and emphasized how merciful Jehovah had been throughout the ages.

Many Old Testament stories portray the immense love, mercy and compassion that God has for His children. God promised the Israelites that if they would "hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God . . . [he would] set [them] on high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessing shall come on [them] . . ." (Deuteronomy 28:1-2). Jehovah was eager to bless the obedient and prosper the faithful. He preserved Jacobs's family through Joseph and led them into Egypt where food was plenteous. Joseph proclaimed: "God did send me before you to preserve life . . . and . . . to preserve you a posterity" (Genesis 45:5, 7). Later, Jehovah heard the pleas of the Israelites, "And their cry came up by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning" (Exodus 2:23-24). He miraculously led them out of Egypt and into the promised land. Even against His own will, He provided a king for them when they cried out, "make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 7:5). He responded to the pleading Hannah to

have a son, “and the Lord remembered her . . . that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel” (1 Samuel 1:19-20). He also healed the Syrian leper, Naaman, whose “flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (2 Kings 5:14). The story of Daniel shows how God graciously prospered, inspired and protected him and his three Hebrew comrades. These are but a few of the inspiring Old Testament stories that portray God’s love, mercy and kindness to His children.

In summary, the Old Testament prophets testified repeatedly that God was abundantly merciful. Beginning in the early stories of Genesis, Jehovah prospered, saved and protected His people. This fact is very obvious and must be taken into consideration when we look at the seemingly harsh acts also portrayed. Indeed, much of that perception may be a result of imposing modern standards on an ancient text. Certainly, as this section has shown, there are plenty of passages and stories that show the opposite. A thorough reading of the Old Testament characterizes a patient, merciful and loving Father—a perfect God, “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

The Justice of Christ

In contrast to the above, some insist that Jesus was never hard or biting. There are, however, several instances in the New Testament that portray the stern justice of Jesus. “The Christ depicted in the book of Revelation, who is shown with the great sickle ready to reap the grapes of the earth and tread them in the winepress (see Revelation 14:14, 20), is the same God of the Old Testament who said to Micah, ‘What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?’ (Micah

6:8).² This section will illustrate that the New Testament, as well as the Old, shows that the Savior exacts justice.

One example of Christ executing judgment in the New Testament is when He indignantly cleansed the temple during His mortal ministry. “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 2:15-16). He portrayed His justice and wrath as He overthrew the tables and drove them out. He did not ask them politely to leave or explain to them what was wrong with their actions. He also did this again later on in his ministry with the same passion (see Luke 19:45-46; Mark 11:15-17).

The Savior also portrayed His stern and just attributes in His relationship with the scribes and Pharisees. He rebuked them and called them hypocrites on several occasions.³ One passage may even shock modern readers, it reads: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matthew 23:13-15). He also reprimanded them and addressed them as: “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matthew 23:33; see also Matthew 12:34).

² Church, *Old Testament: Genesis-2 Samuel*, 48.

³ See Matthew 16:3; 22:18; 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:51.

His disgust of what they stood for and their actions is clear in the New Testament. They certainly did not see Jesus as a kind or merciful person.

On another occasion the Pharisees wanted to condemn Jesus for His healing a man's withered hand on the Sabbath day. He asked them, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts . . ." (Mark 3:4-5). This passage illustrates Christ's righteous indignation with the legalistic Pharisees.

In the book of Acts is the story of Ananias and Sapphira. The scriptures say that they "sold a possession, and kept back part of the price . . . and laid [the remainder] at the apostles' feet" (Acts 5:1-2). Peter discerned what had happened and inquired of them, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land . . . why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things" (Acts 5:3-5). Three hours later, Sapphira appeared before Peter and he demanded, "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost" (Acts 5:8-10). This story strongly resembles various Old Testament stories, for example: the man stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath or Uzzah struck dead for touching the ark. In all these cases the modern reader may feel like death was not the appropriate punishment but that was not

the way the people saw it in their day. The point is that the story of Ananias and Sapphira happened in the New Testament and, thus, it can be seen that the Old Testament is not the only place where one can clearly see the wrath and justice of God displayed.

The Book of Mormon also portrays the just side of God. The best illustration is the destruction in 3 Nephi. Many cities were destroyed, the whole face of the land was changed and numerous people were killed (see 3 Nephi 8:8-15; see also 3 Nephi 9). The Lord exclaimed by His own voice the reason for destroying so many people, declaring: “Many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations” (3 Nephi 9:12). President Joseph Fielding Smith commented, “Yes, it is true, the same meek and lowly Nazarene, who came into the world and offered himself a sacrifice for sin because of the great love his Father and he had for the human family—he ‘who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting the same unchangeable God,’ (Doctrine and Covenants 20:19) who loves little children and suffered them to come unto him—found himself under the necessity of meting out punishment to the inhabitants of this choice land and that too in a most drastic fashion.”⁴

There is a false assumption prevalent in some minds that God is always totally and completely loving and kind. This may be a better assumption than the idea that He is cruel, on occasion, however neither is true. God is perfect, and “He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world” (2 Nephi 26:24). There is a point though, where His loving grace is discontinued to mortal mankind due to their continual rejection of His teachings. Jesus declared, “For whosoever receiveth, to him shall be given, and he shall

⁴ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, edited by Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-1956), 3:42.

have more abundance; but whosoever continueth not to receive, from him shall be taken away even that he hath” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 13:10-11). When mankind continually rejects gospel principles, the Lord sees to their accountability and condemnation. The Lord explained early in Genesis, “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (Genesis 6:3).

Isaiah prophesied, “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” (Isaiah 6:9-12).⁵ This is suggesting that the Lord actually blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts from gospel learning. The Lord gives multiple opportunities and chances to accept the gospel, but there does come a time when He takes away those opportunities due to continual rejection. The rejection of the Savior’s many miracles during His mortal ministry is one example of the people seeing but not perceiving or understanding. John says, “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (John 12:37-41). Would God really blind eyes and harden hearts as Isaiah prophesied? The Lord is making them accountable for their rejection of spiritual things. He is closing the opportunity for them to repent. Similar to

⁵ The Book of Mormon’s quotation of verse 9 changes it to “they understood not; and . . . they perceived not” (2 Nephi 16:9).

the Nephites during Mormon's time, they were ripened in iniquity and Mormon said, "I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually" (Mormon 2:15). God loves all of His people but there comes a time when He must manifest "tough love" and issue appropriate consequences. The Book of Mormon teaches, "the Lord hath said, I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them" (Mosiah 7:29).

Another example of God's "tough love" is evidenced through Christ's teaching in parables. He taught parables to reveal truth to true believers and to conceal truth to the spiritually immature. Jesus explained to the Twelve, "And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them" (Mark 4:10-12). Some parables were clearly condemning the wicked and rebellious who were listening. The parable of the talents is one example of condemning those who saw but would not see. The last two verses in that parable state, "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:29-30). The Pharisees could see but would not accept it.

God's "tough love" might be best explained by these verses: "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they

which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth” (John 9:39-41). This idea manifests itself clearly in the Old Testament through the character of Jehovah and in the New Testament through the character of Jesus Christ.

In summary, from these examples it is apparent that the Old Testament is not the only place where Jehovah executed judgment. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained, “We should remember also that he is still a ‘God of wrath’ as well as a ‘God of love,’ and that he has promised to pour out his wrath upon the ungodly, and ‘take vengeance upon the wicked’ who will not repent. Not only did the ancient prophets predict that such should be the case in these latter days, but the Lord has spoken it in our own dispensation.”⁶ The Savior’s justice is throughout all scriptures if they are read and analyzed completely.

⁶ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:42.

Chapter 4

THE EFFECT OF MODERN REVELATION ON THE PERCEIVED CONTRAST BETWEEN JEHOVAH AND JESUS CHRIST

In addition to appealing to the Bible for help in resolving the perceived difference between Jehovah and Jesus Christ, there are several modern revelations and insights through prophets, scriptures, and Latter-day Saint scholars that are also helpful. In this chapter I will present five topics that directly relate to this misperception. Above all other possible resolutions, these five topics helped me to resolve this misperception the best. I will discuss these points briefly to illustrate how each topic sheds greater light on Jehovah's character in the Old Testament. The five points are:

1. The characteristics and attributes of Jehovah
2. Jehovah gives ample warning before meting out consequences
3. The Joseph Smith Translation: a different perspective of Jehovah
4. The Book of Mormon's insights on the descendants of Israelites and the law of Moses
5. Modern revelation concerning mankind's salvation

These five points are vital to understanding the God of the Old Testament and to be able to view ambiguous Old Testament passages from an eternal perspective. Each of these points are rooted in or clarified by modern revelation and apply directly to the way Jehovah is perceived in the Old Testament.

The Characteristics and Attributes of Jehovah

This first section deals with the character of Jehovah as viewed from the perspective of modern revelation as a means of uncovering His true nature. By understanding the characteristics and attributes of Jehovah one can better understand His actions, especially in the Old Testament. Joseph Smith taught, “It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God . . . I want you all to know Him and be familiar with Him”¹ and he also taught that we must have “a *correct* idea of His character, perfections, and attributes.”² Thus, Latter-day Saints will be better prepared to read the Old Testament when we have a correct understanding of His nature. This understanding will allow us to see Jehovah’s actions in context of the Old Testament. By understanding the Old Testament context and viewing it from an eternal perspective one can see that Jehovah was not arbitrarily vindictive or capricious.

Modern revelation affirms that God is and always will be absolutely perfect. Elder Neal A. Maxwell proclaimed, “God is perfect in His love, justice, empathy, kindness, goodness, longsuffering, and patience.”³ Jehovah is perfect in justice as well as kindness. It may seem it is impossible for God to be completely kind and loving and completely just at the same time. However, this is what adds to His greatness and glory; He is perfect in all these attributes at the same time. President Harold B. Lee also stated, “God is perfect in every way.”⁴ Understanding that Jehovah is absolutely perfect is a key to understanding the Old Testament because He does not act contrary to His perfection.

¹ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, introduction and notes by B.H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), 6:305.

² Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, comp. by N. B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 3:2-5.

³ Neal A. Maxwell, *That Ye May Believe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 62.

⁴ Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, edited by Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 3.

Zephaniah proclaimed, “The just Lord is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not” (Zephaniah 3:5). This section will describe several perfect attributes of Jehovah that will aid one’s understanding of His actions in the Old Testament.

The Justice of Jehovah

The Old Testament testifies concerning Jehovah that, “Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne” (Psalms 89:14). One must understand the divine attribute of justice to understand Jehovah and many of His Old Testament actions. Joseph Smith taught this when he said, “It is also necessary . . . that men should have the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in him; for without the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity men could not have confidence sufficient to place themselves under his guidance and direction; for they would be filled with fear and doubt lest the judge of all the earth would not do right.”⁵ Abraham asked the rhetorical question “Shall not the Judge of the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25). The Book of Mormon teaches, “Now it is better that a man should be judged of God than of man, for the judgments of God are always just, but the judgments of man are not always just” (Mosiah 29:12). The Book of Mormon makes it clear. No matter how callous it may seem or how undeserving it may appear, God’s justice is always correct and appropriate.

By its modern definition, the word justice denotes “the quality of being just, impartial, or fair.”⁶ In the Old Testament, the word translated “justice” (*tsedeq*) describes, among other things, conformity with the requirements of God’s law by which one can be

⁵ Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 4:13.

⁶ *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2004), s.v. “justice.”

said to be righteous. Being an attribute of Jehovah, the word tells us that God always acts in conformity to His law. Therefore, the word is also associated with retribution. One Jewish scholar elaborates, “Divine punishment is usually measured according to the ancient *ius talionis* of reciprocal justice: as a person does, so shall it be done to him (compare Exodus 22:21-24).”⁷ Elder Bruce R. McConkie further explained, “According to the terms and conditions of the great plan of redemption, justice demands that a penalty be paid for every violation of the Lord’s laws.”⁸ This means God cannot allow a broken law to go unpunished. He will not bend laws out of sympathy or love for His children. On the other hand, He will not exact punishments which are not deserved.

Considering these two points, that no law can go unpunished and that no punishments are exacted unfairly, the conclusion can be reached that Jehovah acted perfectly just in every seemingly capricious story in the Old Testament. His revealed character through modern revelation testifies of this fact. At the very least, it may not be known exactly *how* each instance is just, only that it has to be. In chapter five, I will analyze four difficult passages in the Old Testament and illustrate how God’s justice is present in these stories.

The Wrath of Jehovah

Another attribute the scriptures speak of is the wrath or anger of Jehovah. Though a number of Hebrew words are translated as “wrath” or “anger” in the King James Version, the most commonly used to describe God’s wrath is *qatsaph*. Since the word denotes the reaction of a superior to an inferior when the latter has transgressed the

⁷ Ze’ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 6.

⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 406.

formers desire, it fits well. This is appropriately called indignation or divine vengeance and “is always presented as appropriate and is often requested by a petitioner when the latter is afraid that justice may not be done on a human level, . . . these announcements of or calls for God’s vengeance generally are not to be construed as calls for vindictive action by God, but rather should be understood as appeals for justice. God’s vengeance will restore the balance which has been upset by wickedness.”⁹ It is also often associated with “a cup of wrath, or of wine of wrath . . . The suffering which man brings on himself is represented as a drink, a cup, or wine, which God hands to him.”¹⁰ Jehovah’s wrath is not emotional but rather the deserved consequences of wrongful actions. There is a difference between human passion and divine “pathos.” Human passion “can be understood as an emotional convulsion which makes it impossible to exercise free consideration of principles and the determination of conduct in accordance with them . . . a loss of self-control . . . Pathos, on the other hand, is an act formed with care and intention, the result of determination and decision. It is not a ‘fever of the mind.’”¹¹ This is an important point. In the Old Testament, Jehovah is not impetuously executing judgment upon His people.

Concerning God’s indignation, Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote, “It is customary, even understandable, when we read of God’s indignation and anger to think of it in terms of an angry mortal father and to not ponder it much more. Some even mutter about Old Testament ‘tribalism,’ mistakenly thinking of God as being personally piqued or offended at some human act of wickedness or stupidity because He has told us to behave

⁹ Wayne T. Pitard, “Vengeance,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, editor-in-chief (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:786-787. See also Moses 8:15-30.

¹⁰ Gerhard Kittel and others, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 3:168. Hereafter cited *TDNT*.

¹¹ Travis, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:991.

otherwise. This is erroneous, bumper-sticker theology. Simply because we are, so often, angry at a wrong done to us, we assume the same about God's anger."¹² Although similar wording is used, human anger and godly anger are vastly different. Modern revelation makes this point clear.

Elder Maxwell explained, "We should think of God in terms of His divine attributes, for He is perfect in His love, mercy, and compassion; as well as in His justice. Only then can we begin to understand why His anger is kindled and to appreciate the loving concern which underlies His wrath. God's love for us is perfect, and His desire for our happiness is so deep that when His anger is kindled this signals much more than we realize. Our God is not preoccupied with other concerns, nor is His ego offended, as are ours. Such narrow views of Him do an injustice to God who is perfect in His justice . . . God's anger is kindled not because we have harmed him but because we have harmed ourselves. We are His children and He is a perfect Father."¹³ Contrary to the emotional anger and offended ego felt by a parent of a disobedient child, God's wrath is kindled because of the missed opportunities and blessings He could extend if His people obey. God loves all His children. He is constantly and consistently seeking to bless them and provide opportunities for their happiness.

Jehovah's wrath is then, an expression of His love, mercy and concern for us rather than an expression of anger. Because of His wrath we are blessed. Similar to a loving parent who chides a young child for wandering into the street, God's wrath is for our eternal benefit. Even so, His anger is real and causes Him to act, even to punish severely when His children's actions require it. In 1831, the Lord told Joseph Smith,

¹² Neal A. Maxwell, *Sermons Not Spoken* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 83.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

“And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:21). Often, His wrath is expressed through afflictions or trials we suffer. Speaking of the Missouri Latter-day Saints in 1833, the Lord declared, “I, the Lord, have suffered the affliction to come upon them, wherewith they have been afflicted, in consequence of their transgression” (Doctrine and Covenants 101:2). Again, His wrath is not to punish us, so much as it is to teach us and to help us remember Him. The Book of Mormon teaches, “Except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him” (Helaman 12:3). In the next chapter, four difficult stories will be analyzed from the Old Testament that display the wrath of Jehovah, but these stories will actually illustrate His abundant mercy.¹⁴

The Jealousy of Jehovah

Another attribute of Jehovah that may cause some confusion to a modern reader is His jealousy. Similar to anger, this attribute is confused with human emotion. The Hebrew *qana* can be translated zeal or zealous in several instances. Jehovah declared, “Thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord . . . is a jealous God” (Exodus 34:14). In the Old Testament, this term “is almost always a question of His relations to His people Israel. Yahweh’s zeal is provoked when Israel worships idols and thus transgresses the commandment.”¹⁵ Jehovah’s jealousy makes His laws personal. Rushdoony explains, “God restrains His wrath in patience and grace, or He destroys His enemies with an over-running flood of judgment.” God’s jealousy gives eyes to His justice. Rushdoony also

¹⁴ For example, the flood of Noah and the conquest of Canaan (see chapter 5).

¹⁵ Kittel, *TDNT*, 2:879.

argues that, “The jealousy of God is therefore the certain assurance of the infallibility of God’s court of law . . . [it] is the guarantee of justice.”¹⁶ Because of God’s divine attribute of jealousy, He “judges the total man with total judgment.”¹⁷ Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that the purpose of God’s jealousy is “to keep ever before his people the exacting and exclusive devotion which he requires of them.”¹⁸ This perfect devotion required of God’s people causes some to falsely create a conflict between His jealousy and justice and His mercy. Elder Henry B. Eyring explained, “The exactness, the demand for perfect fidelity, combined with the willingness to reach out with mercy, apparently almost endlessly, are not in conflict. They do not create a paradox.”¹⁹

Concerning Israel in the Old Testament, Elder James E. Talmage said, “While Israel lived under the Law, bereft of the fullness [sic] of spiritual light such as the Gospel alone can give, Jehovah repeatedly manifested His righteous jealousy or zeal in behalf of His appointed servants and against all who pretended to arrogate authority unto themselves.”²⁰ On the other hand, when His people refused to obey, His jealousy pushed Him to judgment against them. This characteristic of God, as noted above, assures all that no one is going to get away with anything. In chapter five, we will explore examples showing this to be the case.

The Mercy of Jehovah

As cited in the previous chapter, the term mercy, Hebrew, *hesed*, appears in several passages in the Old Testament to describe Jehovah. The word denotes kindness,

¹⁶ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 391.

¹⁹ Henry B. Eyring, “Covenants and Sacrifice” (address delivered at CES symposium of the Old Testament, August 15, 1995), 2.

²⁰ James E. Talmage, *The Vitality of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, 1919), 101-102.

favor, and a good deed.²¹ In the Old Testament it is most often associated with a mutual relationship. “It is the attitude which the one expects of the other in this relationship, and to which he is pledged in relation to him. Thus the relationship of mutual mercy arises between relatives and friends, hosts and guests, masters and subjects, or others in covenant relation.”²² Thus, Israel’s covenant relationship with Jehovah played a large part in Israel’s ability to receive mercy from Him. Those in Israel who broke their covenants felt Jehovah’s wrath. Those outside the covenant of Israel experienced Jehovah’s justice.

The Book of Mormon clearly emphasizes Jehovah’s mercy and the conditions He requires before He extends it. Alma explained, “I would that ye should remember, that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name” (Alma 32:22). Mosiah also testified regarding the mercy of God and conditions that make it operative. He taught, “Thus doth the Lord work with his power in all cases among the children of men, extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him” (Mosiah 29:20). Modern revelation affirms that believing in and putting trust in God are important conditions for God’s mercy. Most important is the condition of repentance. Nephi recorded the Lord as saying, “I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me” (2 Nephi 28:32). When the people of the Old Testament met these simple conditions, they were blessed and received mercy. If they refused to agree to simple things like believing on His name and repenting of their sins, the justice of Jehovah prevailed. Modern revelation clearly teaches that the mercy of God can only be appealed to by the conditions laid out in the Gospel message taught by Jesus Christ. The examples I will use

²¹ James Strong, *The New Strong’s Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 46.

²² Kittel, *TDNT*, 2:479.

in chapter five will illustrate the conditions by which God's people bring upon themselves His mercy or His justice.

The Longsuffering of Jehovah

Understanding Jehovah's attribute of longsuffering is also essential to understanding the Old Testament. In Hebrew, the word *arek*, means "patient, slow [to anger]." ²³ Another dictionary explains, "The word takes on a distinctive depth in biblical usage. Quite literally [it is translated] 'to delay his wrath.'" ²⁴ Jehovah's wrath and His mercy can be seen as opposites with His longsuffering the divider between them. "The wrath and the grace of God are the two poles which constitute the span of His longsuffering." ²⁵

The Old Testament gives ample evidence that Jehovah is long suffering. He proclaimed to Moses, "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). Moses taught the children of Israel, "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression" (Numbers 14:18). And the Psalms declare, "Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Psalms 86:15). Realizing that the scriptures, especially the Old Testament, clearly proclaim Jehovah as truly patient with His people places a different perspective on many Old Testament passages.

While the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, Jehovah exercised his longsuffering as He patiently waited for them to repent and sanctify themselves so they could enter the promised land. They never reached this status until the next generation.

²³ Strong, *Dictionary*, 13.

²⁴ Kittel, *TDNT*, 4:376.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

The Israelites fell into great mischief and iniquity while in the wilderness, yet the Book of Mormon declares that Jehovah was patient with them. Alma reminded his people, “have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards [the children of Israel]?” (Alma 5:6). In spite of their murmurings and wickedness while in the wilderness, Jehovah was patient with them. Concerning his own life, Alma stated, “Yea, and if it had not been for his matchless power, and his mercy, and his long-suffering towards us, we should unavoidably have been cut off from the face of the earth long before this period of time . . .” (Alma 9:11-12). Alma was able to repent of his previous wickedness largely due to God’s patience with him. Thus, the Book of Mormon affirms that the God of the Old Testament was longsuffering.

In the New Testament, Peter affirmed the longsuffering of Jehovah stating that: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins . . . which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Peter 3:18-20). The Lord patiently waiting upon the wicked in Noah’s day and allowing them plenty of time to repent clearly illustrates this important attribute. The New Testament also proclaims, “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). God truly wants to exalt His children and is patient with them as they make mistakes and repent.

The Omniscience of Jehovah

Another divine attribute that helps the modern reader understand God's dealings with the Old Testament people is His omniscience. The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob explained, "O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it" (2 Nephi 9:17, 19-20). This point is vital to this thesis: God is all knowing. He sees with an eternal perspective what man cannot see. Modern revelation testifies that, "past, present, and future, are continually before the Lord" (D&C 130:7). Lehi taught, "But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things" (2 Nephi 2:24). Everything He does is a result of His infinite foreknowledge. What might appear capricious or cruel to modern readers could be viewed different from another perspective. God has a full, eternal perspective and acts accordingly. Joseph Smith also taught that, "Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire."²⁶ This point is crucial to this thesis, for if God could have simply made mistakes then many stories of the Old Testament could be written off as God learning from his mistakes.

The Lord told Isaiah, "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 55:8-9). People cannot pretend to understand with finite minds the designs of God who knows all things. Accurate judgments cannot be made when one does not see the full picture. "God's character and the acts he requires are fully consistent with everything that both testaments

²⁶ Joseph Smith, *Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. by Alma P. Burton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 70.

would lead us to expect in our God. The problem usually centers in a deficiency in our view of things and our ability to properly define terms or grasp the whole of the subject.”²⁷ Thus, in many Old Testament stories the reader may be left to wonder why things happened as they did. However, it must be understood and believed that God, in his omniscience, acted reasonably. He simply sees the whole picture. However, as modern readers collect as many facts and background information as possible, the difficult stories in the Old Testament begin to make more sense. As noted earlier, I will illustrate this point in the next chapter.

In summary, modern revelation affirms the fact that Jehovah is perfect in all His attributes. The Book of Mormon declares the invariable and unyielding nature of God throughout time. Lehi said, “For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever” (1 Nephi 10:18). Furthermore, the prophet Moroni wrote, “For do we not read that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in him there is no variableness neither shadow of changing?” (Mormon 9:9). God does not change, nor do His attributes. He has always been the same perfect God and always will be. By clearly understanding His attributes there is no reason to believe that Jehovah could have acted unjustly, impatiently or without considering the eternal consequences. From the testimony of both modern and ancient prophets, we can see that malice, capriciousness or vindictiveness are not a part of God’s character. Modern revelation has restored a better understanding of the attributes of Deity. By applying these attributes to many passages in the Old Testament, a greater understanding can be reached as will be illustrated in the next chapter.

²⁷ Kaiser, *Ethics*, 269.

Jehovah Gives Ample Warning Before Meting Out Consequences

The scriptures show that Jehovah gave clear and ample warning to the people that should have known the consequences of their actions. Modern revelation affirms this insight. As part of his divine justice *and* mercy, God always gives sufficient warnings before retribution, before He moves against a person or a people. Nephi, the son of Lehi, stated concerning the ancient Israelites that, “as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities; *and never hath any of them been destroyed save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord*” (2 Nephi 25:9, *emphasis added*). God executed His justice upon the Israelites and their posterity only after He first sent prophets to warn them.

For example, around 600 B.C., Nephi wrote, “there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed” (1 Nephi 1:4). Jerusalem was eventually destroyed but only after many years of warning by a number of God’s prophets. Among those prophets was Jeremiah, who decreed,

Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day *I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets*, daily rising up early and sending them:

Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is

perished, and is cut off from their mouth. For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord.

Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that . . . the carcasses of this people shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; and none shall fray them away . . . for the land shall be desolate. [Jeremiah 7:25-34, emphasis added]

Jeremiah explained that the people were wicked and needed to repent or else they would be destroyed. This kind of preaching was obviously not popular among the Jews and like Jeremiah and Lehi, several prophets were persecuted, imprisoned or killed. However, part of God's merciful plan includes giving sufficient warning before He metes out consequences.

The Book of Mormon provides an excellent example of this. Lehi saw, in vision, the destruction of Jerusalem and that "many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon" (1 Nephi 1:13). Immediately after seeing the destruction of his people and his beloved city he exclaimed, "Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!" (1 Nephi 1:14). At first glance it seems unusual that Lehi would praise God for His mercy and goodness when he just saw the ruin of his people and city. The answer comes, however, when we understand that the Lord had given abundant warnings to these people before issuing the decree of destruction. A capricious God might destroy hastily and impetuously, but a merciful and perfectly just God would warn the people in many ways

and give them ample time to prepare and repent. Only after this would He let the consequences fall. Nephi finished his commentary on the Israelites proclaiming, “And now, after all these things, the time has come that they have become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness; and I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed” (1 Nephi 17:43). Warnings have always come before the Lord sends punishment.

In summary, the scriptures show that God always gives sufficient warning and teaching so that His people, if they will obey, can escape sorrow and suffering. From the Fall of Adam and Eve, who were warned not to eat of the forbidden fruit, to the long preaching of Noah before the flood, to the many prophets through out time who prophesying of imminent destruction to the wicked, God has always given abundant warning.

The Joseph Smith Translation: A Different Perspective of Jehovah

Another source that greatly helps ones’ understanding of Jehovah in the Old Testament is the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Early in the history of the Church and after the Book of Mormon was translated, the Lord commanded Joseph Smith to make a translation of the Bible. On the basis of that direction, Joseph Smith proceeded to make inspired changes, corrections, and prophetic additions to the King James text. These changes have proved particularly useful in understanding the Old Testament and gaining a correct perception of Jehovah. The purpose of this section is to illustrate how some of those changes demonstrate a more loving, forgiving, and merciful God.

Joseph Smith taught, “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt

priests have committed many errors.”²⁸ There are several errors that have crept into the text over time which add to an incorrect perception of Jehovah. There are also several “plain and precious things taken away from the book” (1 Nephi 13:28) as the Book of Mormon teaches. Reading and understanding these changes made by the Prophet Joseph Smith will give one a better perspective of Jehovah than the King James Version affords.

There are several phrases that occur in the King James Version that are difficult for readers to understand or explain. According to the King James Version of the Bible, Genesis 6:6 reads, “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart,” which seems to denote God may have made a mistake and was regretting it. Obviously, this does not coincide with the understanding of a perfect, all-knowing being. In the Joseph Smith Translation this verse was changed to read “And it repented Noah, and his heart was pained that the Lord had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at the heart” (Joseph Smith Translation Genesis 8:13). Other similar verses about the Lord repenting were also changed throughout the Old Testament.²⁹ Because this translation consists of corrections and additions, the Joseph Smith Translation corrects a problem for the modern reader that would not have been needed by an ancient one. Because repentance has come to be associated with sin or, at best, wrong choice, Joseph Smith understood that it had to be removed as something God would do. For the Hebrew reader, however, repentance (Hebrew *nacham*) does not carry a moral component. It simply means to feel sorrow such that one turns to a different course of action. Therefore, Genesis states that God sorrowed that He had created man due to

²⁸ Smith, *Discourses*, 245.

²⁹ See Judges 2:18; 1 Samuel 15:35; 2 Samuel 24:16; Jeremiah 26:19 and 1 Chronicles 21:15.

man's unbridled wickedness. That sorrow, along with other attributes of God discussed above, may cause Him to destroy that particular people.

In Exodus 32:12-14 it seems that Moses called a furious Jehovah to repentance. According to the King James Version, Moses pleaded with the Lord, saying, "Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people . . . And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." This ambiguous passage reads better in the Joseph Smith Translation: "Turn from thy fierce wrath. Thy people will repent of this evil; therefore come thou not against them . . . And the Lord said unto Moses, If they will repent of the evil which they have done, I will spare them, and turn away my fierce wrath; but, behold, thou shalt execute judgment upon all that will not repent of this evil this day. Therefore, see thou do this thing that I have commanded thee, or I will execute all that which I had thought to do unto my people" (Joseph Smith Translation Exodus 32:12-14). This conforms better to the Old Testament and to all that has been revealed concerning the character of Jehovah.

Another example in the Old Testament comes from the interaction between Moses and the pharaoh of Egypt. The King James Version repeats several times the phrase, "the Lord hardened his heart" (or something similar). In each case the Joseph Smith Translation changed it to "and pharaoh hardened his heart" (or something similar).³⁰ Also, Exodus 14:17 says "And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians." The Prophet Joseph Smith changed this to say, "the hearts of the Egyptians shall be hardened" (Joseph Smith Translation Exodus 14:17). These changes better match the overall personality and nature of God. The issue here is really only problematic for the modern reader, not for the ancient one. Differing from the modern point of view, the

³⁰ See the Joseph Smith Translation of Exodus 7:13; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4; 14:8.

Hebrew's faith would have been shaken if God had not been a participant in hardening Pharaoh's heart. They viewed God as the center of all cause. For example, simply by sending Moses, God put in place something against which Pharaoh could react and, therefore, the very act worked to harden Pharaoh's heart. This is an instance in which the Joseph Smith Translation helps the modern reader understand the text from our point of view. The problem resolves itself, however, if we are willing to see it from the Hebrew point of view. Sometimes the perceived disparity between Jehovah and Jesus comes from a modern misunderstanding of the ancient cultures that captured and preserved the stories. We need to view the story in its ancient context.

Perhaps the best insight into the tender nature of God is found where the Joseph Smith Translation reports of a vision that Enoch had. Enoch saw the great Creator weeping "as the rain upon the mountains" (Joseph Smith Translation Genesis 7:35). He was appalled at this fact and asked God "How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?" (Joseph Smith Translation Genesis 7:35). The Lord sadly responded to Enoch with this heart wrenching reply, "Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency; And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood" (Joseph Smith Translation Genesis 7:39-41). Jehovah was weeping over His people whom He loved for they were choosing darkness and sin as opposed to choosing their Heavenly Father.

The vision of Enoch portrays the true nature of Jehovah—a patient, compassionate and loving God. He mourns for His beloved people who choose wrong and must pay just consequences for their actions. In this vision Jehovah told Enoch, “Wherefore, I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations which I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also, and among all the workmanship of mine hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren. But behold, their sins shall be upon the heads of their fathers; Satan shall be their father, and misery shall be their doom; and the whole heavens shall weep over them, even all the workmanship of mine hands; wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer?” (Joseph Smith Translation Genesis 7:42-44). He does not delight in the suffering of His people. He wants them to be exalted and be like Him.

In speaking of this glorious vision of Enoch, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “How we would thrill, for example, if all the world would receive and embrace the view of [Jehovah] so movingly described in the Pearl of Great Price.”³¹ Unfortunately, the world as a whole does not accept the scriptures of the restoration, which paint the complete picture of Deity and their involvement with people. Elder Holland continued, “That single, riveting scene [of Enoch’s vision of God weeping] does more to teach the true nature of God than any theological treatise could ever convey. It also helps us to understand much more emphatically that vivid moment in the Book of Mormon allegory of the olive tree, when after digging and dunging, watering and weeding, trimming, pruning, transplanting, and grafting, the great Lord of the vineyard throws down his spade and his pruning shears and weeps, crying out to any who would listen, ‘What could

³¹ Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Grandeur of God,” *Ensign*, November 2003, 71-72.

I have done more for my vineyard?”³² Enoch’s vision is truly an enthralling portrayal of Jehovah, the clarity of which is not portrayed in the King James Version. Even so, we must keep in mind that, Jehovah is always true to His character and His mercy is always subservient to His justice. When necessary, He will allow His children to experience the consequences of their evil acts even unto destruction.

In summary, the Joseph Smith Translation may not resolve every question pertaining to the perception of an unjustly harsh God in the Old Testament. However, this impressive alternate translation is a key ingredient in realizing that Jehovah is the same God portrayed in all scripture. The Prophet made numerous inspired changes, additions and clarifications to both the Old Testament and the New Testament that pertain to this thesis. Latter-day Saints “believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly” (Article of Faith 8). Of the thousands of changes made, several enhance the Old Testament perspective of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ and the plan of redemption. The Joseph Smith Translation revises the theology of verses in the Old Testament declaring that God repented or hardened people’s hearts. It also gives a proper perspective of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Furthermore, the vision of Enoch is extraordinary, portraying the mercy, compassion and personality of Jehovah. Integrating the Joseph Smith Translation into the Old Testament depicts a much better perception of Jehovah than the King James Version alone affords.

The Book of Mormon’s Insights on the Descendents of Israel and the Law of Moses

The Book of Mormon also depicts a more complete picture of Jehovah than the Old Testament. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught, “One of the remarkable contributions of

³² Holland, “The Grandeur of God,” 72.

the Book of Mormon is its seamless, perfectly consistent view of divinity throughout that majestic book. Here there is no Malachi-to-Matthew gap, no pause while we shift theological gears, no misreading the God who is urgently, lovingly, faithfully at work on every page of that record from its Old Testament beginning to its New Testament end.”³³

This section will illustrate, using two aspects, how the Book of Mormon aids us in resolving the perceived contrast between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. First, the Book of Mormon reinforces and clarifies the condition of the Israelites and their descendents throughout their existence—their hard heartedness, wickedness, and backsliding; hence the constant reprimands and punishments. Reading this commentary puts many Old Testament passages in a greater light. Second, the Book of Mormon contains interpretations and explanations of the law of Moses which largely contrasts with the view presented in the Old Testament. The Book of Mormon supplies vital pieces to the puzzle in answering this thesis’ question by bringing the ancient Israelites and their posterity into perspective through an outsider’s view—the prophets on the American continent.

The Descendents of Israel

In several places the Book of Mormon refers to the wickedness of ancient Israel and their progeny. During Lehi’s time he prophesied, “Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations!” (1 Nephi 1:13). After hearing his prophecies the Jews became angry, “yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away” (1 Nephi 1:20). Apparently, one of their abominations was rejecting and killing prophets of God.

³³ Holland, “The Grandeur of God,” 71.

Lehi's son Jacob taught that, "they are a stiffnecked and a gainsaying people" (Jacob 6:4), or, in other words, a stubborn, hardhearted and disobedient people.

Even though the Lord had earlier showed them His miraculous power as He led them out of Egypt and many miracles attended and protected them, they were still a rebellious people. Nephi taught, "and notwithstanding they being led, the Lord their God, their Redeemer, going before them, leading them by day and giving light unto them by night, and doing all things for them which were expedient for man to receive, they hardened their hearts and blinded their minds, and reviled against Moses and against the true and living God" (1 Nephi 17:30). It is not hard to see why the Lord used justice in several instances with these Israelites. They quickly forgot God, the miracles and the counsel of Moses their prophet. The Book of Mormon affirms this fact.

Many examples of their lack of faith and obedience illustrate this point. On one occasion, the Lord sent poisonous snakes into the camp of Israel. Nephi taught, "and he did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod; for they hardened their hearts . . . and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity. He sent fiery flying serpents among them; and after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished" (1 Nephi 17:41). The Lord had prepared a simple means to be healed—to merely look at the serpent held up by their prophet. Because of their hardened hearts many did not believe it would heal them and they refused to look. After teaching this story to the Zoramites, Alma asked "O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful,

that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish?” (Alma 33:21). It is a sad commentary given by Nephi when he said, “there were many who perished” (1 Nephi 17:41). The Book of Mormon emphasizes the degree to which Jehovah was dealing with spiritually immature people. This forced Him to use various drastic means to teach them.

Nephi continued, in a discourse to his brothers, saying, “and they did harden their hearts from time to time, and they did revile against Moses, and also against God; nevertheless, ye know that they were led forth by his matchless power into the land of promise. And now, after all these things, the time has come that they have become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness; and I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed; for I know that the day must surely come that they must be destroyed, save a few only, who shall be led away into captivity” (1 Nephi 17:42-43). His words show that the Jews continued to be a hardhearted people over the centuries. Eventually, these hardhearted people were scattered and destroyed. Jehovah gave them numerous chances to repent but, by refusing, they received just consequences to their actions.

During the time of Christ’s mortal ministry, some of the descendants of Israel were, perhaps, at their worst. According to the Book of Mormon, this group of people was the only group who would have crucified the Messiah. Jacob prophesied to his people, “Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ . . . should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him—for thus it behooveth our God, and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God. For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations they would repent, and know that he be their God” (2 Nephi 10:3-4). These same people were destroyed along with the Jerusalem temple by the Roman’s about A.D. 70,

perhaps as a punishment and expression of God's wrath for their wickedness. Wicked and rebellious people bring upon themselves dire consequences. The Book of Mormon clearly outlines the condition of the ancient Israelites which helps one understand better how Jehovah dealt with them.

The Law of Moses

The Book of Mormon also gives a different view of the law of Moses. It seems that the Nephites lived the law and maintained a fuller understanding of it than did the biblical Israelites and their posterity. King Benjamin commented on the Israelites and why the law of Moses had been given to them. He proclaimed, "Yet the Lord God saw that his people were a stiffnecked people, and he appointed unto them a law, even the law of Moses. And many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them, concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming; and yet they hardened their hearts, and understood not that the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood" (Mosiah 3:14-15). The majority of the Israelites did not understand that the law of Moses was not sufficient, by itself, for salvation. In short, the law could not save them, but many do not seem to have comprehended this.

In front of the wicked priests of Noah, Abinadi asked, "Doth salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye? And they answered and said that salvation did come by the law of Moses" (Mosiah 12:33). These priests were much like their distant cousins in Israel who did not understand this law. Abinadi taught them the law and then attested, "And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to

do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God; Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him. But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come. And now, did they understand the law? I say unto you, Nay, they did not all understand the law; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they understood not that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God” (Mosiah 13:29-32). These verses teach how the law of Moses was a day-to-day observance of performances and ordinances to help them remember Jehovah. But they did not understand it, or how it pointed forward to the Atonement of Christ.

The righteous Nephites had a much different perspective concerning this law of performances and ordinances. Nephi tells us why the law was given: “For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments. And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ . . . Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away” (2 Nephi 25:25-27). The Nephites lived the law of Moses because they were commanded to. However, they knew why the law was there, “it pointing our souls to him” (Jacob 4:5). The law was there to remind the people of the coming Messiah. With some exceptions, the Nephites generally understood it while many in Israel did not. The point is that, due to

the low spiritual condition of the people in the holy land, the Lord had to treat them differently than He did those in the Book of Mormon.

In summary, the Book of Mormon viewpoint is vital in resolving the perceived contrast between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. Comparing Jehovah's dealings with the Nephites and with the Israelites is helpful in understanding how He operates. On many occasions, He blessed and prospered the Nephites because of their righteousness. On the other hand, He cursed the Israelites in consequence of their wickedness. His actions conform to the promises Jehovah made with His people: "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them" (Deuteronomy 6:9-10). The wicked Israelites, who did not understand the law of Moses and were frequently forgetting their God, tended to see the more stern and just side of Jehovah, whereas the Nephites, because of their righteousness, saw a more balanced view of Him.

Modern Revelation Concerning Mankind's Salvation

Another topic which helps put God's dealings with the Old Testament people in perspective is the plan of salvation as elucidated in modern scripture. Understanding the revealed doctrines concerning mankind's salvation provides a vital key to unlocking many passages of the Old Testament. This section will take into account a few principles and doctrines unique to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that help resolve the perceived contrast between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. By incorporating these revealed truths into our understanding of the Old Testament, many of its stories can be viewed through a more eternal perspective. Though this perspective, it becomes much more

apparent why Jehovah acted as He did and how the Old Testament stories fit into God's eternal plan.

Modern revelation gives valuable insight concerning the nature of salvation for all people. Understanding these doctrines will ease the "sting of death" (Mosiah 16:8, see also 1 Corinthians 15:55) many feel arising from much of the Old Testament; for modern revelation has provided important insights into life after death. An essential doctrine involving the salvation of God's children is found in Doctrine and Covenants section 137, a vision given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1836. In it, the Lord declared, "all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven" (D&C 137:10). This doctrine revealed to Joseph Smith is a piece of the puzzle. Any child who dies before reaching the years of accountability (revealed as 8 year's old, see Doctrine and Covenants 68:27) will be exalted in the celestial kingdom. How many millions of little children have died and will be heirs of that kingdom?³⁴ Seen in this light, their deaths, though sorrowful, are not tragic. In fact, they can be seen as a blessing. I will explore this idea more in the next chapter.

In addition, Joseph Smith revealed, in 1842, the transcendent doctrine of work for the dead. Even as early as 1836, Joseph Smith knew of its possibility for, in vision, he

³⁴ Joseph Smith further taught concerning these little ones, "Children will be enthroned in the presence of God and the Lamb; . . . they will there enjoy the fulness [sic] of that light, glory, and intelligence, which is prepared in the celestial kingdom" [Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, selected and arranged by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1976), 200.] This means they will have every possible blessing a child of God is destined to receive. President Joseph Fielding Smith elaborated, "The Lord will grant unto these children the privilege of all the sealing blessings which pertain to the exaltation" (Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:54). He clarified and taught that they will become gods, exalted in the celestial kingdom of heaven. This doctrine does not exclude any child who dies before the years of accountability. Elder Bruce R. McConkie further added, "Little children shall be saved. They are alive in Christ and shall have eternal life. For them the family unit will continue, and the fulness [sic] of exaltation is theirs. No blessing shall be withheld. They shall rise in immortal glory, grow to full maturity, and live forever in the highest heaven of the celestial kingdom" (Bruce R. McConkie, "The Salvation of Little Children," *Ensign*, Apr. 1977, 3). Elder McConkie echoed President Joseph Fielding Smith in teaching about their eventual exaltation and also added that they will resurrect and grow to maturity, thus experiencing the growing process to adulthood.

saw his brother Alvin in the celestial kingdom although he had died before the gospel was restored (see Doctrine and Covenants section 137:5-6). The comforting doctrine of work for the dead essentially teaches that all of God's children will hear His word and have opportunity to accept the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. How many people have died who have not been baptized or who have never even heard of Jesus Christ? God's merciful plan includes a way for salvation for all His children, either in this life or in the spirit world.³⁵

President Joseph F. Smith's 1918 vision of the spirit world adds further to the doctrine of work for the dead. Among other things, he learned, "The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God, And after they have paid the penalty of their transgressions, and are washed clean, shall receive a reward according to their works, for they are heirs of salvation" (D&C 138:58-59). This verse reveals that there is repentance in the spirit world, although many questions remain on the terms and conditions of repentance there. However, many of the dead will repent and accept temple work done for them and eventually receive some degree of salvation.³⁶ This doctrine also provides insight into Jehovah's dealings with His people, the implications of which will be addressed in the next chapter.

³⁵ Peter also touched upon this doctrine of the redemption of the dead when he said, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison . . . For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18-19; 4:6).

³⁶ The Doctrine and Covenants does reveal that those who reject the gospel of Jesus Christ while on the earth may not be able to receive a celestial inheritance. In a vision of the three degrees of glory, Joseph Smith taught, "We saw the terrestrial world . . . these are they who . . . are the spirits of men kept in prison, whom the Son visited, and preached the gospel unto them, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh; Who received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh, but afterwards received it" (D&C 76:71, 73-74). In other words, whatever repentance is granted in some cases may not be able to take a person to exaltation depending on what their circumstances were in mortal life. God is the judge and will take everything into account.

In summary, Latter-day Saints can view the Old Testament with an eternal perspective because of their understanding of the plan of salvation. They understand that those who perished in the Old Testament could be learning the gospel in the spirit world and repenting, that little children who died will be exalted, and that death is not the end of mankind but a chance for something better.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated five crucial points to aid in resolving the perceived conflict between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. First, the scriptures, coupled with modern revelation, verify the fact that God is completely perfect in all His attributes. By understanding His attributes and applying them to the Old Testament, there is no reason to believe that Jehovah could have acted unreasonably, capriciously or without considering the eternal consequences. This section has expounded on God's justice, wrath, jealousy, mercy, longsuffering and omniscience and has illustrated how they work together for the benefit of His people.

Second, the scriptures show that God has always given sufficient warning to His people so they can escape possible, severe consequences. Many examples in the Old Testament illustrate this point. This idea demonstrates the patience and mercy of God as He has delayed His wrath until mankind either repents or is "ripened in iniquity" (Ether 2:9).

Third, the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible is helpful in seeing a correct perception of Jehovah. Joseph Smith made numerous inspired changes, additions and clarifications that enhance the Old Testament perspective of God. Incorporating this

translation depicts a more complete perception of Jehovah than the King James Version alone.

Fourth, the Book of Mormon perspective is essential in resolving the perceived contrast between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. Comparing Jehovah's dealings to the Nephites with the Israelites is helpful in understanding how He functions. Often He blessed the Nephites because of their righteousness and cursed the Israelites in consequence of their wickedness. The wicked Israelites, who did not understand the law of Moses and were frequently forgetting their God, tended to see the more stern and just side of Jehovah, whereas the Nephites, because of their righteousness, saw a more balanced view of Him.

Lastly, Latter-day Saints can view the Old Testament with an eternal perspective because of their understanding of the plan of salvation. They understand that death is not the end of man's progression and that gospel learning and repentance continues in the spirit world. Also, little children who have died will be exalted. Modern revelation concerning God's plan for His children, including life after death, helps to place Old Testament passages into an eternal perspective.

Understanding and applying these five topics greatly helped me to resolve this misperception between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. Each idea here adds greater insight to Jehovah's character in the Old Testament. These five points are vital to understanding the God of the Old Testament and to be able to view confusing, seemingly unjust Old Testament passages with an eternal perspective. Each of these points are rooted in or clarified by modern revelation and apply directly to the way Jehovah is perceived in the Old Testament.

Chapter 5

FOUR CASE STUDIES

This chapter will take a detailed look at four difficult Old Testament stories that many readers feel show Jehovah to be capricious and vindictive and, therefore, incompatible with a merciful Jesus. My objective with each story is to candidly evaluate it to see if the actions of Jehovah can be reconciled to those of Jesus provided the latter is properly understood. The principles identified in the previous chapters will be used to explain the actions of Jehovah in each story. Also, I will include specific quotes and explanations for each account from a variety of Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint sources to aid in resolving the popular misconception about Jehovah associated with these stories. The four cases are:

1. The flood in Noah's day (Genesis 6-8)
2. The man stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36)
3. The conquest of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7)
4. The smiting of Uzzah for steadying the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6:6-8; 1 Chronicles 13:9-11)

Each of these cases is different in nature. Some represent Jehovah's actions against a large group and some against individuals; some stories take place under the law of Moses while one does not; and each takes place in a different time period. Further, each case

deals with a decree of death pronounced by Jehovah, in essence, a sentence of capital punishment by God. According to Rushdoony there are: “two kinds of capital punishment. *First*, God directly executes judgment and death upon men and nations for certain offenses. This He does at His time and will and none can say Him nay. *Second*, God delegates to man the duty of inflicting death for certain offenses and that without undue delay and without hesitation.”¹ Both kinds are evident in these cases. Rushdoony argues further that capital punishment is basic and essential to biblical law. For, “If capital punishment is not basic to God’s law, then Christ died in vain, for some easier way of satisfying God’s justice could have been found.”² Because there is no other way, therefore, justice allows for and sometimes demands capital punishment. With only a mortal perspective of life, many people struggle with the idea that God could Himself kill and command others to do the same. From an eternal perspective, however, such acts are far easier to understand.

As noted above, because we live in a completely different time period and culture, many individuals find these Old Testament stories are difficult to accept. Resolving these representative cases will help readers realize that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are indeed compatible, a God who is completely just and merciful.

¹ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 230.

² *Ibid.*, 76.

The Flood in Noah's Day (Genesis 6-8)

Introduction

The global nature of the flood's destruction to both people and animals can give the impression that Jehovah is vindictive and unmerciful. The deaths of some innocent people, namely children, especially contributes to this impression. Because many find the perceived injustices of this story difficult to reconcile with mercy, it becomes an ideal place to begin our analysis. Further, the principles and resolutions discussed in connection with this story can also be applied to other divinely ordained destructions both within and without the Old Testament. By understanding these principles, we can perceive Jehovah in a much more understandable light, a light that is much more harmonious with His identity as Jesus Christ.

Discussion

The Bible is clear that Jehovah was displeased with His people because they had become extremely wicked. Genesis states that, "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" (Genesis 6:5-6). In one biblical translation of Genesis the Lord told Noah, "for you alone have I found to be truly righteous in this age."³ The Lord then proclaimed to Noah, "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 . . . the end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:5, 7, 13). The Lord specifically mentioned

³ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* in *The Anchor Bible* series (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), 8.

violence as one of major sins of the people. Undoubtedly, many years prior to the flood, the wicked were killing good and bad people alike. Regardless of who the wicked kill, in the eyes of God, murder is one of the most abominable sins man can commit.⁴ As a result of the great wickedness on the earth, God moved in judgment sending the flood, and “all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man . . . and every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground” (Genesis 7:21, 23).⁵ The only exceptions, of course, were the eight people, and the animals on the ark.

There happens to be some non-biblical accounts of a flood that are strikingly similar to the account in Genesis. However, many of these accounts are missing a strong moral motivation that is prevalent in the story of Noah. For example, the Gilgamesh Epic, “fails to suggest a plausible cause; one might ascribe the awesome interlude to mere whims of heaven.”⁶ In this story, man’s noise and commotion become so loud that the gods cannot sleep. Therefore, they send in a flood, which one man survives by building a boat. “It really should not surprise us that in a system of thought where the gods are not necessarily morally superior to human beings, and where the line between good and evil

⁴ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 520.

⁵ Scholarly opinion varies on the number of people destroyed in the flood. Several have theorized that the statements in Genesis of killing all flesh and covering the whole earth, “refers only to his own locality.” Also that, “the evidence of geology requires us to adopt the hypothesis of a partial deluge” [William Smith, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, revised and edited by Reverend F. N. and M. A. Peloubet, revised edition (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1948), 453]. Another Bible dictionary agrees, “That everything . . . was to be blotted out by the Flood is clearly stated, but it can be argued that these categories are qualified by the statements of locality . . . The statement that all high mountains (*har*) under the whole heaven were covered . . . and that near the end of the Flood they began to be seen . . . is interpreted in this scheme as a phenomenon due to a cloud and mist that must have accompanied the cataclysm. This interpretation favours [sic] a limited Flood” [J. D. Douglas, organizing editor, *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 1341]. Perhaps in an attempt to diminish the harshness of the flood, many have followed this interpretation. This surely portrays a less harsh God than a universal flood. However, many scholars including Latter-day Saint scholars and teachers disagree with the limited flood theory. Many others also believe in a universal flood.

⁶ Speiser, *Genesis*, 55.

is blurred, there is no recording of the fact that man is to be drowned because he is a rebel and a sinner.”⁷ Noah’s account, however, shows the strong moral motivation that caused God to punish the rebellious.

In the flood, Jehovah’s justice seems requisite, but was it necessary that He destroyed all life? Was every man, woman, child and beast wicked as well? Certainly there were some killed who had not heard Noah’s prophetic warning. How can one reconcile Jehovah’s justice in using the universal flood with His mercy?

Resolution

What might seem unfair and unclear in the Bible can be explained with clarity and conciseness by applying latter-day revelation and by analyzing this story from all aspects. Many of the difficulties of this story can be resolved by incorporating the attributes of Jehovah, specifically His mercy and His justice. By clearly understanding His attributes, there is no reason to believe that Jehovah could have acted unjustly, impatiently, or without considering the eternal consequences.

The Joseph Smith Translation portrays the flood of Noah more accurately and completely. One aspect not clear in the King James Version is that the people were warned and given a chance to repent prior to the flood. The Joseph Smith Translation adds to Genesis 6:3, “and if men do not repent, I will send in the floods upon them” (see also Moses 8:17). The Joseph Smith Translation clarifies that the Lord commissioned Noah to proclaim His word and be a warning voice to the inhabitants of the earth. The next verse states, “the Lord ordained Noah after his own order, and commanded him that he should go forth and declare his gospel unto the children of men” (JST Genesis 6:4;

⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17 in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* series (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 274.

compare Moses 8:19). Noah, however, was rejected: “And it came to pass that Noah called upon the children of men, that they should repent, but they hearkened not unto his words” (JST Genesis 6:4, compare Moses 8:20). The Joseph Smith Translation clarifies that Jehovah gave sufficient warning to the people of the earth before sending in the floods. This is a detail unclear in the King James Version. That He would give clear and prolonged warning is consistent with His perfect attributes of justice and mercy.

When His people rejected His warnings and teachings, the scriptures show that Jehovah felt deep disappointment and pain for their wickedness. Jehovah told Noah, “it repenteth me that I have made [man]” (Genesis 6:7). The Hebrew root of repenteth means “to be sorry, moved to pity or have compassion.”⁸ “It is easy, of course,” writes one scholar,⁹ to dismiss such allusions as anthropomorphisms, and to feel that they can tell us nothing about the essential nature of God. But verses like this remind us that the God of the OT is not beyond the capability of feeling pain, chagrin, and remorse.”⁹ In Enoch’s vision of the flood, Jehovah wept for the wickedness of these people (see Moses 7:28). After weeping He tells Enoch, “the fire of mine indignation is kindled against them; and in my hot displeasure will I send in the floods upon them, for my fierce anger is kindled against them” (Moses 7:34). This view presents an interesting portrayal of a “wrathful” God, because it shows Him to be much different than an angry mortal. He is, rather, one who feels deeply and acts, not out of pique or blind rage, but out of controlled and just anger.

The justice of Jehovah does not imply that His people never die by His decree; it just means they never die unjustly. In the Book of Mormon, for example, Nephi

⁸ See footnote *a* of Genesis 6:6 in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version.

⁹ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 274.

witnessed the future destruction of his people and exclaimed, “O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; *but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just*” (2 Nephi 26:7, emphasis added). Nephi understood that allowing his people to be annihilated was a just act of God. He understood this because he saw the full picture and history of his people and knew that their actions merited destruction.

Therefore, Nephi *had* to proclaim that God was just. Likewise with the flood, Jehovah justly destroyed those whose wickedness could not be denied. The flood illustrates the principle of man’s accountability to God. “The point is that God holds men and nations responsible for their deeds; and when they so pervert the ways of truth as to make mercy no longer a virtue, He destroys that which is corrupt.”¹⁰ God is perfectly just and “justice cannot be denied” (Jacob 6:10). An Old Testament scholar affirms, “The God of the OT never acts arbitrarily; he does not run his world amorally . . . Nobody will receive this divine judgment simply because he is human. God is moved to anger by man’s deliberate violations of the code by which God wills his world to live. The only innocuous bystanders are the animals.”¹¹

Following the destruction of many Nephites and Lamanites just prior to the Savior’s visit to the Americas, the Lord repeated five times the phrase, “The blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them” (3 Nephi 9:5, 7, 8, 9, 11). This phrase indicates at least two things. First, like Noah’s people, these people were thoroughly warned by the prophets of God concerning their wickedness and pending destruction. Secondly, they rejected and killed the prophets. This is true of

¹⁰ Hyrum L. Andrus, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 302-303.

¹¹ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 273.

Noah's people as well; the Lord said concerning them "for they have sought his [that is Noah's] life" (Moses 8:26). Likewise, Nephi, Lehi and Samuel the Lamanite all labored to preach repentance unto the Nephites and were largely rejected. After the people gave no heed to these many warnings and their wickedness continued, they deserved the full force of God's justice.

The covenant Jehovah made with Enoch and later with Noah (see Moses 7:51) clearly shows that He did not act capriciously. The Lord showed Enoch the flood long in advance and then at Enoch's request "sware unto him with an oath that he would stay the floods" (Moses 7:51) and give man a chance to repent. From this we see that the flood was a planned event only alterable if the people repented. "This announcement of the covenant, even before the Flood commences, is interesting. It shows us that God's covenant with Noah in ch. 9 is no ad hoc arrangement, hatched in God's mind once the floodwaters had disappeared. Even before he unleashes his anger God announces his intention to save at least one human being. This sequence of grace and indignation has already appeared two times in Genesis. Before God banished Adam and Eve from the garden he clothed them. Before he exiled Cain he placed a mark on him to protect him. And here God announces his covenant even before he sends his flood."¹² This truly illustrates a loving God who only issuing judgments against humankind for their benefit. This can be likened to a loving earthly father who must discipline a rebellious son. Too often we think of God as an angry father who yells at his son and proceeds to spank him out of anger. What about the father who lovingly holds his son's hand and takes him to his room to explain that he will have to stay in there for a while because he took a toy from his sister? The loving father may say sternly, "I love you son, but we don't do that. I

¹² Hamilton, *Genesis*, 284.

will come back and get you out in a few minutes.” This loving father may even need to spank his child depending on the severity of the offense, but it would be done for the child’s good rather than out of emotion. Good parenting has godlike attributes.

Although the Lord’s decree upon Noah’s people seems to tip the scales in favor of justice, it was actually more an act of mercy. Parley P. Pratt explained, “The people before the flood . . . had carried these corruptions and degeneracies so far that God, *in mercy*, destroyed them, and thus put an end to the procreation of races so degenerate and abominable.”¹³ The wicked that God destroyed were halted in their iniquity and sent to the post-mortal spirit world where circumstances and opportunities were much different. There, many of them had a chance to hear and accept the gospel under more favorable circumstances. Peter specifically mentioned those who were killed in the flood were taught the gospel in the spirit world where Christ had organized missionary work. According to Peter, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Peter 3:19-20). Because Christ organized and appointed messengers to preach the gospel in the spirit world, the dead who accept it there may be judged on the same terms as those who accept it on earth (see Doctrine and Covenants 138:32-34, 58-59). Death is not the end of spiritual progression; for some it is merely the beginning. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught

¹³ Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 166, italics added.

that, “The second estate continues until the resurrection.”¹⁴ In God’s merciful plan, man has until the resurrection to work out his salvation.

The Lord revealed this merciful plan for the wicked that would die in the flood in a vision to Enoch: “These which thine eyes are upon shall perish in the floods; and behold, I will shut them up; a prison have I prepared for them. And That which I have chosen hath pled before my face. Wherefore, he suffereth for their sins; inasmuch as they will repent in the day that my Chosen shall return unto me, and until that day they shall be in torment” (Moses 7:38-39). The Savior suffered for their sins so they could repent in the spirit world. If they repent they will inherit some degree of glory—some reward in eternity. Elder James E. Talmage taught, “To hell there is an exit as well as an entrance (See Doctrine and Covenants section 76:81-85; Matt. 5:25-26). Hell is no place to which a vindictive Judge sends prisoners to suffer and to be punished principally for his glory; but it is a place prepared for the teaching, the disciplining of those who failed to learn here upon the earth what they should have learned . . . [no] sinner is to be kept in hell longer than is necessary”¹⁵ This doctrine of a “temporary hell” and work for the dead illustrates the great justice *and* mercy of Jehovah concerning His people in the spirit world.

Jehovah was also just and merciful to the innocent or ignorant adults and children destroyed in the flood. They too, benefited from His action. These people had little or no chance to learn gospel principles and live them. The Lord removed them from their wicked society. They entered into the spirit world free from continued gross evil. There, they were able to live according to gospel principles, perhaps never encountered while in

¹⁴ Neal A. Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 54.

¹⁵ James E. Talmage, in Conference Report, April 1930, 97.

mortality, and work out their salvation. Thus, Jehovah was merciful in ending the lives of innocent people who lived in such a wicked and violent society. Little children, under the age of accountability, were granted a guaranteed entrance into the celestial kingdom (see Doctrine and Covenants 137:10).

From the above, it is easy to see that having an eternal perspective of death and temple work for the dead is a great help in resolving the seeming incongruity between Jehovah and Jesus. Herein one gains a full understanding of the balance between the justice and mercy of Jehovah.

More importantly, Jehovah was just and merciful to millions of unborn people. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught that with the flood, “Corruption had reached an agency-destroying point that spirits could not, in justice, be sent here.”¹⁶ Many of God’s children were being sent to these wicked societies with limited opportunity for righteousness, morality or integrity. Undoubtedly, their lives would have been filled with violence, wickedness and misery. Speaking of these same people, President John Taylor pointed out, “In forsaking God, they lose sight of their eternal existence, corrupt themselves, and entail misery on their posterity. Hence it was better to destroy a few individuals, than to entail misery on many. And hence the inhabitants of the old world . . . were destroyed, because it was better for them to die, and thus be deprived of their agency, which they abused, than entail so much misery on their posterity, and bring ruin upon millions of unborn persons.”¹⁷

Jehovah provided justice and mercy to the millions of unborn spirits when He destroyed the wicked to allow a new population to come to the earth. President George

¹⁶ Neal A. Maxwell, *We Will Prove Them Herewith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 58.

¹⁷ John Taylor, *The Government of God*, (Liverpool: S.W. Richards, 1852), 53.

Albert Smith further explained, “Why was it necessary for the flood to come? . . . It was because the people would not take advantage of their opportunities. They were not only wasting their lives here upon the earth but were also bringing into the world another generation which would follow their bad example . . . Heavenly Father in his wisdom and mercy cleansed the earth by the flood and cleared the way for a righteous people to dwell here if they would.”¹⁸ God could not justly send children down to the earth born in such wicked societies. He mercifully destroyed the wicked and paved the way for future righteous societies to exist. Resolutely, “The flood was an act of mercy, not an act of vengeance. The generation of Noah was so wicked that only an act of cleansing of immense magnitude could allow the next generations a chance to live by higher principles.”¹⁹

In summary, the flood may seem unjust, cruel, or vindictive at first glance, but after examining all the facts and considering modern revelation, it really was a wise, merciful, and just decision. The Joseph Smith Translation adds the detail that God gave sufficient warning through Noah before the destruction came. Thus, they stood warned and they, not God, were fully responsible for what followed.

The world was cleansed of wickedness, all the dead were sent to the spirit world to hear the gospel and hopefully repent, and unborn children were given an equal and fair chance of being born into a good world. God’s unique eternal perspective allows Him to create the best opportunities for His children to come to Him and obey His gospel. On occasion, death may not only be the best solution but the only solution. Whether by flood, fire, or famine, God’s omniscience provides a just, merciful and beneficial solution to

¹⁸ George Albert Smith, in Conference Report, October 1936, 71-72.

¹⁹ Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture, vol. 3: Genesis to 2 Samuel* (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 30-31.

everything in the long run. The flood accurately reflects Jehovah's mercy as well as His justice to all people involved. Through understanding these details and incorporating them into an approach to the flood account, Jehovah resembles better His mortal equivalent, Jesus Christ.

The Man Stoned for Picking Up Sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36)

Introduction

The decree of a death sentence for a seemingly small infraction cries injustice to almost all who learn of it. The feeling is compounded when one learns that the judgment was decreed by God. The first reaction is to see God as unmerciful and unforgiving. This is the case with the next story that deals with a man upon whom God imposed the death penalty for breaking the Sabbath by gathering firewood. I chose this story because it is often used as the supreme example of the injustice of Jehovah. For example, one author expressed his harsh feelings toward the law of Moses. He wrote, "Punishment should be fixed according to the gravity of the fault . . . Yet the Law fixed unequal punishments for certain faults . . . certain slight offenses [were] severely punished: thus (Num. 15:32) a man is stoned for gathering sticks on the sabbath day . . . Therefore the Law prescribed punishments in an unreasonable manner."²⁰ The unfairness of this story, as suggested by this author, is a perfect example of the perceived conflict between Jehovah and Jesus Christ.

The story, as we will see, actually illustrates the low spiritual condition of the ancient Israelites which demanded a strict enforcement of the Mosaic law. This story will

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, "Of the Reason for Judicial Precepts," *Summa Theologica, part 2, section 1* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999).

also help to explain the underpinnings of similar stories where the Lord had to decree the death penalty for breaking His law.

Many perceive this story as cruel and unjust by today's standards because, in modern times, we feel capital punishment for breaking the Sabbath day is unthinkable. Many people today would only condone capital punishment for an act of murder. By modern standards, picking up sticks on the Sabbath day is not even on the list of acts that may warrant any punishment at all. Therefore, the contrast between death penalty for Sabbath breaking in the Old Testament and the forgiveness of adultery in the New Testament seems to suggest two very different Gods. Thus, we see the need to reconcile this perceived contrast between Jehovah and Jesus Christ.

Discussion

In Numbers 15, some Israelites find a man picking up sticks on the Sabbath day. Jehovah commanded Moses, saying, "The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses" (Numbers 15:35-36). The text is silent as to the man's knowledge or attitude concerning God or the law of Moses. Though these important details could aid in the comprehension of this story, there is sufficient facts to resolve the problem. Jehovah clearly decreed that the death penalty was a consequence of breaking the Sabbath day. To Moses He avowed, "Whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 31:15, see also Exodus 35:2). Notwithstanding this direct commandment, many modern readers are appalled and frustrated by God imposing such a severe punishment.

There is a story in Leviticus, dealing with blasphemy, which has implications for this case. There, a man “blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed” (Leviticus 24:11) and Jehovah commanded that Israel stone him (see Leviticus 24:10-17). This is a similar situation as someone is given the death penalty for a seemingly small act. Engaging in the sin of idolatry was also punishable by death (see Exodus 22:20). In this case, as with the one we are studying, “The penalty . . . is death without mercy. To the modern mind, this seems drastic. Why death for idolatry?”²¹ Some scholars even think these stories of capital punishment are mythical, used only as a public deterrent.²² After all, “New England passed laws requiring the death penalty for incorrigible delinquents and for children who struck their parents, no executions were necessary; the law kept the children in line.”²³

We must not forget that this man was condemned for working on the Sabbath day in direct violation of the fourth commandment, the question must be raised “what is the definition of work?” An Old Testament scholar states: “What is clear is that the application of a great principle, such as abstention from work, is bound to raise questions as to what falls within its orbit, and as to what precisely constitutes ‘work’ . . . Is this action work? Is it evidence of a defiant and willful cast of mind?”²⁴ Very likely, in this case it was. Therefore, many scholars justify the act of stoning because of the clarity of the law. One commentary suggested that “the man despised the word of the Lord, and therefore broke his commandment.”²⁵ Although Numbers provides no statement about

²¹ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 38.

²² “O Eissfeldt . . . likens them to Islamic Hadiths, and thinks of them as late fictions.” Philip J. Budd, *Numbers* in *Word Biblical Commentary* series (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1984), 175.

²³ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 236.

²⁴ Budd, *Numbers*, 176.

²⁵ Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible: containing the Old and New Testaments*, commentary and critical notes by Adam Clarke (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 1:668.

the man's spiritual understanding, due to the fact that Moses had read the law to the people, it is probable that the man knew he was breaking God's law. If that is the case then he did despise the word of the Lord and had no regard for the consequences.

Others have suggested that, "he that gathered sticks (on the Sabbath-day) was put to death as a warning to others . . . and in no other instance did any suffer the same fate."²⁶ Is it possible Jehovah would make an example of one person for the benefit of others? We shall see.

Resolution

The brevity of the text contributes to the difficulty in resolving this story. Extenuating circumstances, background information, and other vital details are, unfortunately, not present. However, this story illustrates the vast differences between the Israelite time and culture and those of today. For instance, modern Saints no longer live the law of Moses, they are not wandering in the wilderness, nor are they afflicted with this high degree of hard heartedness. In addition, ecclesiastical and civil laws are separated in modern society; for Israel they were one and the same. It becomes more difficult to understand a story like this when today's culture is so different.

The attitude toward capital punishment is definitely much different today. Therefore, in order to properly judge an ancient culture, we must understand acts as they did. Otherwise the result is an irresolvable conflict. Understanding their laws and culture places a story like this into context. For example, "Capital punishment in cases other than murder was intended to purify the community and the country, and to safeguard the existence of the covenant between God and Israel. The death penalty, moreover, was used

²⁶ John Chrysostom, *The homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the acts of the Apostles*, translated by J. Walker and T. Sheppard (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1851-1852), homily 18.

as a public deterrent (Deuteronomy 17:12-13) as well as a means of atonement for the culprit.²⁷

The wanderings of Israel in the wilderness was a unique period of time for God's people. Due to the circumstances then existing, Jehovah had to use strict laws and severe punishments to help his people transition from a people infused with the Egyptian culture to God's covenant people. Bruce R. McConkie explained, "Under the law of Moses a penalty was added for dishonoring the Sabbath, and that penalty was death. Extreme? Severe? So it would seem to us, but the Lord was taking a nation of bondsmen and slaves and turning them into kings and priests. It required strict obedience to His laws, and the sooner the rebels were sloughed off the sooner the whole nation would walk in paths of righteousness."²⁸ Many of the immediate judgments were executed to quickly and efficiently sift out the rebellious of Israel while in the wilderness. Only the most faithful and prepared would receive the promised land.

Nephi commented on this same time period. He explained to his brothers that while Israel was in the wilderness the Lord "did straiten them . . . with his rod; for they hardened their hearts . . . and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity . . . And they did harden their hearts from time to time, and they did revile against Moses, and also against God" (1 Nephi 17:41-42). Therefore, the death of this man who clearly broke the law is one example of the Lord trying to "straiten" Israel with the firm "rod" of the Law of Moses. Surely the imposed consequences of breaking the law of Moses were an example and a reminder to all of Israel of the sacredness of the Sabbath day.

²⁷ Falk, *Biblical Law*, 73.

²⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979-1981), 1:79.

A basic comprehension of the law of Moses also aids in better understanding this story. The Israelites, God’s ancient covenant people, witnessed firsthand the judgments of Jehovah among themselves as they disobeyed this law. The Book of Mormon prophet Abinadi related, “that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God; Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him” (Mosiah 13:29-30). Because of their disobedience, Israel was required to live this law of daily performances and ordinances to help them remember Jehovah and keep their covenants with Him. “This passage is crucial to the understanding of what the sabbath ordinances demanded of God’s covenant people.”²⁹

The law of Moses contained many laws along with, in some cases, extremely serious consequences for breaking them. Several of the laws carried the death penalty if broken. These included acknowledgment of false gods (generally all idolatry), witchcraft and false prophecy, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, disobedience to or cursing of parents, murder, death by negligence, adultery, rape, unlawful marriages and kidnapping.³⁰ For example, the law specified, “He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, dying let him die: all the multitude shall stone him, whether he be a native or a stranger” (Leviticus 24:16). By having the multitude participate, all stood clearly warned.

However, the Old Testament suggests these people were so hard hearted that even such a severe lesson did not last long. Indeed, breaking the Sabbath day seemed

²⁹ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 829.

³⁰ Smith, *Dictionary*, 346-347.

somewhat common among the Israelites while in the wilderness. Many years later, the Lord told Ezekiel, “But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and *my sabbaths they greatly polluted*: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them” (Ezekiel 20:13, emphasis added). In other words, the Lord intended that all Sabbath breakers receive punishment somehow; the story in Numbers may be just an example of the Lord’s earliest attempt to get Israel to take seriously the importance of Sabbath observance.

We must not forget that this man was clearly gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. “One assumes that, in this instance, wood was being gathered in order to make a fire for cooking, which is expressly forbidden on the Sabbath, according to Exod 35:3.”³¹ However, this man was likely not just gathering sticks so that his family could cook or heat his home. Gathering firewood was typically the chore of children. It was usually women who actually used the wood for cooking. Men rarely had direct contact with the collection of firewood. “There could be a few exceptions, of course, but one exception seems to be far more likely, namely, that of the professional stick-gatherer.”³² “Earlier Sabbath laws” noted one scholar, “referred to occupation rather than domestic work.”³³ In short, there were Israelites who made a living gathering and selling wood. This man was likely working his profession upon the Sabbath, making this violation more severe than at first glance.

³¹ Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20* in *The Anchor Bible* series (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 399.

³² Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 831.

³³ Budd, *Numbers*, 176.

In summary, this man was in violation of a known law with its clear punishment and, therefore, deserved the consequences. His death was an example to all the Israelites, who themselves were greatly polluting the Sabbath day (see Ezekiel 20:13). Sometimes, “it is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief” (1 Nephi 4:13). Perhaps the death of this man helped many in Israel recognize their own sins and repent of them, at least for a time. If the man were a rebellious individual, his death may have served the greater good by saving many souls that he may have influenced otherwise. Given the fact that one’s probation continues in the spirit world where repentance can be exercised, the man’s death may also have persuaded him to come to Christ there. In short, the stoning of the man can be viewed not only as an act of justice but also an act of mercy for both him and Israel as a whole.

At the least, it must be kept in mind that society and culture were vastly different than they are today. Therefore, judgment should be deferred until the entire story is known. When taking all these things into account, this story actually portrays the justice and mercy of God and, thereby, shows the oneness of Jehovah and Jesus.

The Conquest of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7)

Introduction

In modern times, we rarely justify offensive warfare, especially for religious purposes. Many readers of the Old Testament are troubled about Jehovah’s command to engage in an offensive war against the nations in Canaan. Some use this story to show that Jehovah is unjust and cruel. For this reason, I have decided to analyze this story. In modern times it is a war crime to kill non-combatants, especially women and children,

which makes the story all the more repugnant. “This [story] has been repeatedly cited as ‘evidence’ that the Bible represents an immoral God and an ugly morality.”³⁴ This story is also interesting because Israel failed to carry out a complete destruction of the Canaanites as they were commanded and the results of this failure became very evident in later years as the Israelites suffered unnecessarily under the hands of these people. History shows the wisdom of Jehovah in issuing his decree and the sorrow Israel brought upon itself for refusing to obey.

Discussion

“Utterly destroy”³⁵ was the commandment that guided the conquest of certain areas of Canaan: The Lord decreed that every man, woman, and child were to be slain by the Israelites. The Lord specifically commanded His people, “thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them” (Deuteronomy 7:2). Jehovah named seven Canaanite nations to be destroyed: the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, “seven nations greater and mightier than thou” (Deuteronomy 7:1). Surely the conquest of Canaan is “one of the most frequently raised objections to seeing God as just and loving in the Old Testament.”³⁶

The conquest of Jericho is one example of this extermination order. As the armies entered the city, “they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword” (Joshua 6:21).

³⁴ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 93.

³⁵ See Deuteronomy 7:2 and Deuteronomy 20:17.

³⁶ Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 266.

Again, many modern readers are appalled at this commandment from Jehovah to slay innocent woman and children.

This wartime mandate, however, did not end with Moses and Joshua. Indeed over three hundred years later, during the reign of Saul, it was still in effect. As the king of Israel, he was commanded to “go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” (1 Samuel 15:3). Israelite soldiers obeyed this commandment and killed all the people, including the women and children. Saul, however, did not kill the king and saved some of the best animals. For his defiance, Saul was firmly rebuked by the prophet Samuel and rejected as king of Israel by the Lord (see 1 Samuel 15). These consequences demonstrate how strongly Jehovah felt about His directive; they were not words of wisdom for Israel’s consideration, but God’s decree directed against all the native inhabitants of Canaan.

Scholarly opinion is widespread on this topic even though most understand and accept the idea contained in the Hebrew word *herem*. The word means “‘devoted’ or set apart, ‘sanctified’ unto death by God’s order.”³⁷ Understanding what is behind this word assists one to understand why God ordained the total destruction of many Canaanites. “The root *hrm* in the Semitic languages has two connotations, forbidden and sacred . . . In the context of war and punitive anti-idolatrous action . . . [it describes] the consecration of the condemned to God.”³⁸ However, some scholars feel that *herem* was added to the biblical text later by Jews who wished to lessen the perceived cruelty of the story. “The rabbis indeed could not conceive the removal of the Canaanites in such a cruel, radical

³⁷ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 92.

³⁸ Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11* in *The Anchor Bible* series (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 364.

manner.”³⁹ The position of these scholars has, however, been discounted. “The *herem* of the Canaanites in Deuteronomy is conceived as an a priori decree . . . The implantation of the *herem* of the Canaanites in the deuteronomistic sources . . . is wishful thinking, an attempt to adjust reality to the ideal norm, which was never implemented.”⁴⁰

One of the reasons people are upset with this story is because they do not have all the information to make an informed judgment. “Nothing could justify such an exterminating decree but the absolute authority of God. This was given: all the reasons of it we do not know.”⁴¹ Using modern logic and finite minds, many questions remain. Some people are critical of God’s reasoning for destroying the Canaanites. One scholar points out, “The point of offense with respect to the Canaanite judgment is the *criterion* of judgment used by God. Had God declared the Canaanites to be cruel, capitalistic oppressors, and hence under judgment, His verdict would gain hearty praise from many intellectuals. But God is God, not the intellectuals, and, as a result, God’s criterion prevails, not man’s. The Canaanites as a whole were deserving of death; God’s patience allowed them a few centuries from Abraham’s day to Joshua’s and then His judgment was ordered executed.”⁴² The author’s point is a good one, but it still leaves needling questions. For example, why did the woman and children, especially the infants, have to die? Was it possible for the Israelites to inhabit the land peacefully? Walter Kaiser wrote, “I believe the Old Testament does uphold the justice and righteousness of God even in this command to eradicate the Canaanites.”⁴³

³⁹ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 384.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 365.

⁴¹ Clarke, *Holy Bible*, 255.

⁴² Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 93.

⁴³ Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 267.

Resolution

Bruce R. McConkie stated, “War is probably the most satanic and evil state of affairs that can or does exist on earth . . . Although all wars are in their nature evil, yet the fact is that they do exist and that the Lord uses them to further his purposes.”⁴⁴ To further the purposes of an all-knowing God, Israel needed to completely destroy the Canaanites. Even though the nations of Canaan were more numerous than the Israelites, “The God of the covenant would grant to his people the strength for victory.”⁴⁵ Again, God sees with an eternal perspective that requires the trust of His people.

Even so, the Old Testament gives some details as to why Jehovah commanded all to be destroyed and why no mercy was to be shown to the Canaanites. He proclaimed to the Israelites, “if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell” (Numbers 33:55) and “they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods” (Deuteronomy 7:4). This alone may be a good explanation for the offensive warfare. If by inhabiting the promised land many Israelites lose their salvation through the influence of the wicked Canaanites, the Lord then doubles his eternal casualties. But if the Israelites cleanse the land and preserve their religion and their children from the wicked influences, they have a better opportunity to grow up unto salvation.

The wickedness of the Canaanites had reached a “point of no return” aspect. In Jehovah’s eternal plan the best thing for them was ending their mortal existence. In Abraham’s day, the people’s wickedness was not yet full. In essence the Lord was still

⁴⁴ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 826.

⁴⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, series (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 178.

giving them time to repent. By Joshua's time their wickedness is undeniable, they had forfeited any privilege of living in this land. Many scholars attest to their filthy wickedness: "The iniquity of the Canaanites was 'full' or total in God's sight . . . Prostitution and homosexuality had become religious practices to the point where the people were entrenched in depravity and proud of it. Accordingly, God sentenced them to death and made Israel the executioner."⁴⁶ The Bible testifies that these nations sacrificed their children to idols, practiced homosexuality and bestiality, and committed many other abominations (see Leviticus 18:21-25, 20:3). Another scholar declares: "The Canaanites against whom Israel waged war were under judicial sentence of death by God. They were spiritually and morally degenerate. Virtually every kind of perversion was a religious act: and large classes of sacred male and female prostitutes were a routine part of the holy places. Thus, God ordered all Canaanites to be killed . . . both because they were under God's death sentence, and to avoid the contamination of Israel."⁴⁷

"Israel was called upon to cast out and destroy the inhabitants of the land, because now their iniquity was 'full' (Gen. 15:16). The whole point of the *ban* was that these Canaanite peoples were morally offensive to God (Deut. 20:16-18). This *ban* could be issued only by God, not by man. By the ban, God declared a people to be outside the law and under the sentence of death. The *ban* is the reverse of communion, and it declares the end of communion with God and man; the banned people are given over to death as their judgment."⁴⁸ This is similar to when the Lord told Nephi: "And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (1 Nephi 2:21).

⁴⁶ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 93.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 657.

God holds men and nations responsible for their deeds. When wickedness takes over, “the godly exercise of capital punishment cleanses the land of evil and protects the righteous.”⁴⁹ God has declared both by word and deed: “Either men and nations obey His laws, or God invokes the death penalty against them.”⁵⁰ This is also testified of in the Book of Mormon in Ether, “And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fullness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity” (Ether 2:9). Both the Jaredites and the Nephites are an example of this.

From one perspective, this war was not an offensive war. These nations had been warring against Jehovah and His teachings for many years. The psalmist makes this point citing several of these nations: “For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee” (Psalms 83:5, 7).⁵¹ It was time that Jehovah warred back and cleansed the land. Israel was chosen to carry out the mission.

The Book of Mormon gives added detail about the great wickedness of the Canaanites and especially their rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It teaches,

And after they had crossed the river Jordan he did make them mighty unto the driving out of the children of the land, yea, unto the scattering them to destruction.

And now, do ye suppose that the children of this land, who were in the land of promise, who were driven out by our fathers, *do ye suppose that they were righteous?* Behold, I say unto you, Nay. Do ye suppose that our fathers would

⁴⁹ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 77.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 313.

have been more choice than they if they had been righteous? I say unto you, Nay. Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. But behold, *this people had rejected every word of God, and they were ripe in iniquity*; and the fulness of the wrath of God was upon them; and the Lord did curse the land against them, and bless it unto our fathers; yea, he did curse it against them unto their destruction, and he did bless it unto our fathers unto their obtaining power over it. [1 Nephi 17:32–35, emphasis added]

There are at least two important contributions made by these verses. First, the Book of Mormon affirms the extreme wickedness of the Canaanites. Second, they had rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ and His prophets. If they rejected the word of God, logically, they must have first been taught it. If they were taught the word of God, it is reasonable to suppose that prophets warned them of their destruction if they did not repent. If they had repented and returned to the Lord He would have preserved them. Many of them were indeed destroyed as the Israelites inhabited the land. This is a great example of information not contained in the Bible which changes how the story is viewed by modern readers. The Book of Mormon teaches that the wicked Canaanites were sufficiently warned before being destroyed so that justice would be maintained.

In addition, Israel could not make any treaties with these nations because it would supplant the covenant they had made with Jehovah. The extermination of the Canaanites was to ensure a preservation of this covenant relationship. These covenants “set aside Israel as a distinctive nation among other nations. To make a treaty with other nations would indicate a lack of faithfulness on the part of the Israelites to their suzerain God.”⁵²

⁵² Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 178.

Furthermore, “Any kind of treaty would be a compromise and would lead to disaster; therefore the Israelites were to destroy systematically the physical religious ‘furniture’ of their enemies, indicating thereby their complete lack of recognition for the gods of their enemies.”⁵³ In short, Israel was to destroy both the nation and its possessions. All was contaminated. For example, “The association with false religions made the metals totally unsuitable for use within the Israelite community, which might again be tempted to misuse the materials to make a representation of God as had been done in the past (see Exod. 32).”⁵⁴ To utterly destroy the wickedness, it was necessary to have a complete destruction of everything: men, women, children, animals, houses, and so on. Only by a complete destruction could Israel be saved from the persuasions of that wicked society and obviously it was not God’s will that Israel inherit the numerous spoils of war from their conquest. These spoils, as we know, corrupted Israel. This decree illustrates how Jehovah was trying to protect His people from these spiritual hazards.

After all, the Bible notes that, generally, the Israelites were to be peaceful. Besides the conquest of Canaan, “the Hebrew wars with other nations . . . were designed to be only self-defense.”⁵⁵ Only the nations of Canaan were to be exterminated. The conquest of Canaan was a unique period of offensive warfare in Israel’s history. It was an exception to the rule. The Lord clearly instructed in Deuteronomy:

When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, *then proclaim peace unto it.*
And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee.

⁵³ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 177.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵⁵ Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 267.

And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: *But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself;* and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee.

Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations. [Deuteronomy 20:10-15, emphasis added]

These verses set the Canaanite nations apart as different from all other possible enemies of Israel. Jehovah, with an eternal perspective, commanded that the Canaanites were to be completely destroyed; other nations had not received the same decree.

The point is that only the Canaanites were under the ban (*herem*) from Jehovah. This subject deserves further explanation as it truly helps to understand Jehovah's command to exterminate them. This word has several synonym type words: "*Curse, ban* and *anathema* are basically the same concepts. That which is under a curse, ban, or anathema is *devoted* or *dedicated*, i.e., given over to destruction at the requirement of God . . . The Biblical purpose of the ban is always ethical, and its purpose was 'to preserve religion when gravely endangered.'"⁵⁶ The Canaanites were extremely wicked and deserved the justice of God, and Jehovah also issued their total destruction because His people were in spiritual danger.

Examples later in the Bible show that the Lord's concern about intermingling with the Canaanites was justified. "In reality, the Canaanites were neither expelled nor

⁵⁶ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 660.

exterminated, as may be learned from Judg. 1:21-33 and 1 Kgs 9:20-21.”⁵⁷ As a result, the text shows, many Israelites turned from the Lord, worshipped idol gods and committed all kinds of sin. They did all these things in companionship with the Canaanites whom they were commanded to destroy (see 1 Kings 12, for another example). “The failure of Israel to execute it fully became finally their own judgment.”⁵⁸ This extermination order was meant to be a great blessing given by the Lord to the Israelites, by both “driving out their enemies before them and giving them a great inheritance.”⁵⁹

President Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “Some people think it is not like God to take vengeance upon people, because he is a merciful God. *The fact is he takes vengeance upon the ungodly because he is merciful.* He is merciful to them in removing them and shows consideration for all others who keep his commandments. It was for this very reason that he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, and cleansed Palestine when Israel entered the land, and destroyed so many Nephite cities at the time of his crucifixion. It was the meek and lowly Nazarene who did all of these things, because in his mercy and justice he had to cleanse the earth for the benefit of the sinful as well as for the righteous who remained.”⁶⁰ God takes into account all things before acting—the past, the present, the future, the wicked, the righteous, the innocent and the unborn and in His mercy acts accordingly. Trusting in Jehovah’s justice and mercy, as well as His omniscience, is essential when reading the Old Testament. The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi wrote, “For behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you that the Lord God worketh not in

⁵⁷ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 384.

⁵⁸ Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 93.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁰ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:44, emphasis added.

darkness. He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world” (2 Nephi 26:23-24).

These are all helpful reasons to understanding the conquest of Canaan. However, some will still be troubled about the death of innocent people, especially women and children. An analogy may aid in answering this question, “A surgeon does not refrain from amputating a gangrenous limb even though in so doing he cannot help cutting off much healthy flesh.”⁶¹ As noted above in dealing with the flood, Jehovah acted mercifully by removing these children from their wicked societies. By ending their existence among the wicked, He placed them on the path to exaltation. It is not necessary to feel sorrow for the innocent children who were killed—they are saved. Moreover, it is not right to call Jehovah cruel for issuing the command to slay them, for in doing so He has exalted them.⁶²

In summary, Jehovah was perfectly just and merciful when He decreed the destruction of the Canaanites. They had rejected the word of God, continued in their extreme wickedness and, therefore, justly deserving of the punishment. Jehovah was, moreover, merciful to their children by removing them from their wicked societies and granting them salvation, because He is concerned with the saving of souls. Jehovah was also merciful to the Israelites by providing a way to remove all the wicked influences to help them stay on the path of righteousness. God knew if Israel did not exterminate the Canaanites, they would mix with them and spiritually fall. This was evident in later years. The Book of Mormon affirms the great wickedness of these people and their willful rejection of the word of God. Jehovah clearly gave them sufficient opportunity to change

⁶¹ Greene, *Classical Evangelical Essays*, 221.

⁶² See footnote 34 in chapter 4 for a full explanation of little children and their eternal destiny.

and repent. When all aspects are considered, it is obvious that Jehovah knows what He is doing and He always acts for the benefit of His people, the same as He did during His mortal ministry.

The Smiting of Uzzah for Steadying the Ark of the Covenant
(2 Samuel 6:6-8; 1 Chronicles 13:9-11)

Introduction

Many have explored the mysteriousness of the ark of the covenant in films and books alike. The ark has been the source of research, writing, and storytelling. “It seems sufficient to point out that the ark, being a very holy object, was also, therefore, a very dangerous one.”⁶³ The story of Uzzah certainly underscores its dangerous nature for by merely touching it, he was smitten. Modern readers perceive the death of an individual for apparent good intentions as cruel and unwarranted. These readers also perceive being smitten just for touching a sacred object as overly severe. Many have wondered, “What was his error of transgression?”⁶⁴ I chose this story because of how well it fits into the supposed dichotomy presented in this thesis. In my experience, this is the most often quoted story when addressing the differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament and between Jehovah and Jesus Christ. Therefore, resolving this story is crucial.

⁶³ P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *2 Samuel* in *The Anchor Bible* series (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984), 170.

⁶⁴ A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* in *Word Biblical Commentary* series, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1989), 103.

Discussion

The account of Uzzah is brief but the impression long lasting. The verses are clear as to what Uzzah did, how Jehovah felt about it, and the consequence Uzzah received.

“And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God” (2 Samuel 6:6-7).⁶⁵

John Wesley pointed out the obvious problem with the smiting of Uzzah, “This may seem very severe, considering his intention was pious, and his transgression not great.” He also called it “God’s heavy judgment.”⁶⁶ The problem, as viewed by many modern readers, is that the punishment does not seem to fit the crime. “The severity of Uzzah’s fate may seem to us too great for the nature and degree of the offense.”⁶⁷

Matthew Henry said, “His punishment for this offence seems very great,” and asked “Why was God thus severe with him?”⁶⁸

As with other biblical stories, some scholars feel that they have been fictionalized to teach moral principles. “The Ark Narrative has often been described as a festal or cult legend recounting the fortunes of the ark.”⁶⁹ This may be an attempt to lessen the perceived harshness of stories like this one. However, “It is difficult to believe that the

⁶⁵ 1 Chronicles 13:9 adds “. . . for the oxen stumbled . . .”

⁶⁶ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible* (online at <http://studylight.org/com/>, originally published in 1765).

⁶⁷ Robert Jameison, A. R. Faussett, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (online at <http://studylight.org/com/>, originally printed in 1871).

⁶⁸ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (online at <http://studylight.org/com/>, originally printed in 1706).

⁶⁹ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 100.

Uzzah story is a mere invention. For some reason or other, Uzzah must have died and his death was interpreted as Yahweh's punishment and/or warning."⁷⁰

There are many theories and ideas as to why Jehovah took Uzzah's life.

"According to the Chronicler (1 Chr 15:13) the Uzzah disaster occurred because the Levites did not participate in the transporting of the ark, while Josephus (*Ant.* 7.81) attributes Uzzah's death to the fact that not being a priest, he touched the holy ark."⁷¹

Many scholars have justified Jehovah's action of smiting him. One author said Uzzah was guilty of "profanation" which is blasphemous behavior or degrading something sacred. This same author also blames the "improper mode of transporting the ark which ought to have been borne on the shoulders of the Levites" as the main motive for Jehovah's anger.⁷² Perhaps "Uzzah had no idea of the unapproachable holiness of the ark of God,"⁷³ or as another source suggested, that "Uzzah sinned through ignorance and precipitancy [without forethought]."⁷⁴ All these theories may help to understand this story better, but they still leave Jehovah as being overly harsh and cruel.

Resolution

Understanding the nature and history of the ark of the covenant can help to place Uzzah and his deadly act in better perspective. "Uzzah's offence consisted in the fact that he had touched the ark with profane feelings, although with good intentions, namely to prevent its rolling over and falling from the cart." Whatever danger the ark *might* have been in, touching it was a violation of the law and strictly forbidden, "lest they die"

⁷⁰ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 104.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Smith, *Dictionary*, 724.

⁷³ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 333-334.

⁷⁴ Clarke, *Holy Bible*, 322.

(Numbers 4:15). If Uzzah was overseeing the transportation of the ark is it not probable to think that he must have been familiar with the rules and the sacredness of the ark? Since the beginning, “the ark was placed in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, and not even the priest was allowed to approach it. Only the high priest, a type of Christ, could approach it, and then only after going through an elaborate ritual of personal cleansing and propitiation for his sins.”⁷⁵ No one in Israel could mistake the special significance of the ark. Had Uzzah not heard of the incident in Beth-shemesh? Thousands were slain by the Lord, “because they had looked into the ark of the Lord . . . he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men” (1 Samuel 6:19). That incident must have emphasized to all of Israel the utmost sanctity of the ark. “However well-meaning his intentions, Uzzah approached casually what could only be approached under the strictest conditions. He had no faith in God’s power. He assumed the ark was in danger, forgetting that it was the physical symbol of God who has all power. What man can presume to save God and his kingdom through his own efforts?”⁷⁶ Uzzah was in violation of known laws and conditions surrounding the ark.

In addition to no one being allowed to touch the ark, the scriptures are clear that Levites, not oxen, were supposed to carry it. “None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever” (1 Chronicles 15:2). Indeed, the Lord made it clear that it be borne only upon the shoulders of the Levites (see also Numbers 7:9).

Furthermore, it is probable that the ark was not covered as the Lord instructed it to be. The Lord said, “Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the

⁷⁵ Church Educational System, *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* (Religion 324-325) (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 188.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it: And shall put thereon the covering of badgers' skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof' (Numbers 4:5-6).

Another scriptural passage infers that perhaps Uzzah was not even a Levite or was not sanctified to carry the ark (or both). King David counseled a group of Levites, “Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us” (1 Chronicles 15:12-13). “The breach” is very likely what David called the smiting of Uzzah. Therefore, this passage conveys the message that only sanctified Levites were to carry the ark—Uzzah apparently did not fit the profile. “The catastrophe that overtook Uzza was thus due to the violation of some kind of taboo to which the ark was subject. And however noble the motive of Uzza, the sanctity of the sacred symbol of Yahweh’s presence could not be taken lightly. The Chronicler wanted to show that Uzza and Ahio were not ‘legally’ qualified to handle it.”⁷⁷ Uzzah and perhaps many other people were guilty of treating the ark lightly instead of the sacred symbol it was meant to be. Definitely, the outcome of this story is a result of “The failure to deal with the ark in the prescribed way.”⁷⁸ Several things were not in compliance with what Jehovah had prescribed concerning the ark.

Additionally, Uzzah may have been rebelling against Jehovah Himself. One scholar suggests: “Since Uzzah acted on the spur of the moment to protect the ark, the

⁷⁷ Jacob M. Myers, *1 Chronicles* in *The Anchor Bible* series, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1981), 102.

⁷⁸ Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles* in *Word Biblical Commentary* series, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1986), 176.

punishment may appear rather harsh . . . he ought to have realized that the falling of the ark was really a *sign*, namely, Yahweh's way of stopping the procession . . . If so, not only the sacredness of the ark was an important factor but also the attempt . . . to frustrate or disregard the will of Yahweh."⁷⁹ Furthermore, "This incident could have been regarded also as a warning to David, especially if Yahweh was not consulted at the beginning of this undertaking."⁸⁰ Not only was this a warning and sign to Uzzah and David but to all of Jehovah's people.

Uzzah "had to expiate his offence with his life, as a warning to all the Israelites."⁸¹ The Lord used a severe measure to illustrate to Israel the sacredness of the ark and the responsibility of each Israelite to respect and honor it. After this incident, undoubtedly, many in David's kingdom evaluated their lives and the degree to which they respected and honored sacred things, particularly, how they respected and honored Jehovah of which the ark was a symbol. "The example of Uzzah must have filled them with fear and sacred reverence,"⁸² and encouraged change in their lives. It is possible that if Uzzah "touched the ark without punishment the ark may have lost its respect and sacredness to the Israelites."⁸³

Clearly, the ark was being taken for granted and being treated lightly. "The ancient Israelite understood that all sacred things were to be approached with great care and that the manipulation of sacred objects was an activity necessarily insulated by ritual precautions and taboos. The transference of the ark from one place to another, therefore, was not a task to be taken lightly; it amounted to a sacred rite. Any defect in preparation

⁷⁹ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 104.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Keil, *Commentary*, 333-334.

⁸² Clarke, *Holy Bible*, 322.

⁸³ Ibid.

for or error in the performance of such a rite might provoke a harmful response from a potentially beneficial power.”⁸⁴ As a symbol of Jehovah, this improper treatment of the ark of the covenant reflected on God’s people and their complete spiritual commitment.

The scriptures have several other stories concerning the ark of the covenant. Some of them also show consequences for treating the ark lightly. Other stories describe the great blessings that come from having the ark among God’s people and reverencing it. “The Ark Narrative as a whole shows quite clearly that a wrong attitude to Yahweh and his ark brings with it disaster. This was the fate of the sons of Eli and of the Israelite forces; likewise, calamity befell the Philistines and the citizens of Bethshemesh, as well as Uzzah. The reverse side of the coin is blessing, such as experienced by the house of Obed-edom and, later, by David.”⁸⁵

Jehovah is perfect and did not smite Uzzah out of impulsive anger. Jehovah Himself declared, “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God” (Ezekiel 18:32). Jehovah is not looking for opportunities to take revenge on rebellious humans. He is not a God of vindictive or impulsive anger. He is a God of justice, mercy, and longsuffering.

Furthermore, the smiting by Jehovah is not just an Old Testament act. For example, the death of Ananias and Sapphira struck dead for lying and breaking the law of consecration (see Acts 5:1-11) is a New Testament example of what could be perceived as cruel. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained,

Why did the Lord slay Ananias and Sapphira? Their crime was lying; they conspired together to deceive their church leaders; and the Lord made them an

⁸⁴ McCarter, *2 Samuel*, 170.

⁸⁵ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 107-108.

example of how serious the offense, how severe the penalty—for lying. In ancient Israel Achan was similarly punished for stealing (Joshua 7).

True, the death penalty is not imposed on all liars and all thieves, but these scriptural accounts of such penalties being justly imposed, stand as a warning of how such sins are viewed by the Lord. In effect the lesson to learn from Ananias is that unrepentant liars will be damned . . . “Thou shalt not lie,” the Lord says, for “he that lieth and will not repent shall be cast out” (D&C 42:21). “Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell” (2 Nephi 9:34). Liars suffer the second death (D&C 63:17; Rev. 21:8), and receive a final inheritance in the telestial kingdom (D&C 76:103). [Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 2:58]

This story has many parallels to Uzzah and yet they are hundreds of years apart. Jehovah exacts justice whenever He sees fit, whether in Old Testament, New Testament or modern times. He is consistent with His justice and His mercy. After all, is there another known story of someone who touched the ark and was not punished?

Not only did Uzzah serve to remind all of Israel of the sacredness of the ark, but his story has also served to teach a principle in the modern church. Modern prophets have explained that the phrase “steady the ark” refers to a person who thinks he has more wisdom, knowledge, and experience than God and His prophets and he must somehow correct the direction of God’s church or its leaders. The Doctrine and Covenants refers to these people noting: “While that man, who was called of God and appointed, that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning” (Doctrine and Covenants 85:8). Joseph Smith

also used it often in his letters and sermons, warning that, “Men should not attempt to steady the ark of God,”⁸⁶ “Many of the elders have come under great condemnation in endeavoring to steady the ark of God, in a place where they have not been sent”⁸⁷ and “Man cannot steady the ark. My arm cannot do it; God must steady it.”⁸⁸

President David O. McKay warned, “It is a little dangerous for us to go out of our own sphere and try unauthoritatively to direct the efforts of a brother. You remember the case of Uzza who stretched forth his hand to steady the ark. (See I Chron. 13:7-10.) He seemed justified, when the oxen stumbled, in putting forth his hand to steady that symbol of the covenant. We today think his punishment was very severe. Be that as it may, the incident conveys a lesson of life. Let us look around us and see how quickly men who attempt unauthoritatively to steady the ark die spiritually. Their souls become embittered, their minds distorted, their judgments faulty, and their spirits depressed. Such is the pitiable condition of men who, neglecting their own responsibilities, spend their time in finding fault with others.”⁸⁹ In the modern church, unfortunately, there are many like Uzzah; they try to steady the ark, but are instead dying spiritually. Perhaps the Lord needed to take Uzzah’s physical life to save many spiritually.

Sometimes people are troubled because one person is punished immediately for disobedience and another person never seems to receive what is deserved. Elder Neal A.

⁸⁶ Joseph Smith, Letter to Edward Partridge, W. W. Phelps, and others, from Kirtland, Ohio, March 30, 1834 found in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, compiled and edited by Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 317.

⁸⁷ Joseph Smith, Letter to Hezekiah Peck, from Kirtland, Ohio, August 31, 1835 found in *Personal Writings*, 346.

⁸⁸ Joseph Smith, Discourse of May 26, 1842, recorded by Eliza R. Snow found in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, compiled by Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, (Salt Lake City: Andrew F. Ehat, 1996), 121.

⁸⁹ David O. McKay in Conference Report, April 1936, 60.

Maxwell taught, “Unlike manna, divine justice is not meted out daily or visibly.”⁹⁰

Everyone will receive just consequences for their actions but it is not always immediate or public. Although the Old Testament has several examples of people who receive an immediate punishment, this is not always the case. God will execute judgment with wisdom in His own time.

As stated earlier, death is not the worst consequence that may be given by God; in fact, it is necessary for all to pass through. The probationary estate continues into the spirit world so there Uzzah could learn from his mistakes, repent of them and enjoy the blessings of salvation. “As to Uzzah, no man can doubt of his eternal safety.”⁹¹ It is likely that Uzzah worked out his salvation in the spirit world and will one day receive eternal life.

In summary, when viewed with an eternal perspective, the smiting of Uzzah was absolutely necessary. Jehovah used Uzzah’s death to save many Israelites who may have been waning in their commitment. Obviously, they had taken their God and their covenants to Him lightly through their treatment of the ark. Jehovah taught Israel to reverence, respect and honor Deity once more. Had Uzzah lived, the symbolism and sacredness of the ark amongst the Israelites may have diminished. The symbolism from Uzzah’s story has also been used in the modern church to bring souls to Christ. God’s “glory [is] to bring to pass the . . . eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39) and He does this in many different ways.

⁹⁰ Neal A. Maxwell, “*Whom the Lord Loveth: The Journey of Discipleship* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 92.

⁹¹ Clarke, *Holy Bible*, 322.

Conclusion

By analyzing these four stories, it should be clear that Jehovah is a God of mercy as well as justice. He sees all things with an eternal perspective. He loves His people and prospers those who keep His commandments. Those who rebel receive just consequences after sufficient warning. By considering many other important factors that were not in the original text, it is easier to see Jehovah's grace, love and wisdom. Even in these difficult cases of death and destruction, the nature of Jesus Christ is evident. Joseph Smith taught, "He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of His law and ordinances."⁹² The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are truly the same individual. With all things considered, no reconciliation is truly needed—perhaps just explanation and illustration.

⁹² Smith, *History of The Church*, 5:135

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

It is clear that many people today struggle with the perception that Jehovah of the Old Testament is very different than Jesus of the New. For centuries, people from scholars to layman have discussed the difference between the justice of Jehovah and the mercy of the Messiah. From Marcion's era in the first century to modern commentaries to confused readers of the Bible, the world of the Old Testament seems vastly different from contemporary society. Standards and cultures are different today such that modern western society does not tolerate the deaths of innocent people, or the death of those whose actions do not seem to warrant a death sentence. This thesis has illustrated that this perception may come from three things: first, a casual reading of the Bible; second, a lack of understanding of the context and background of the Bible; and third, not applying what modern prophets have taught to the Bible. This thesis has illustrated that the solution to this misperception is threefold: first, getting a deeper understanding of the Bible itself; second, incorporating pertinent background and culture information; and three, applying modern revelation to the Bible.

In thesis, I have shown that, although there is much written on this subject by non Latter-day Saint scholars, only some of this literature is helpful or solves the problem. It does, however, give pertinent background information. I have also reviewed several Old Testament works by Latter-day Saint scholars. These, too, have been helpful in some

ways but no current work has been written focusing solely on this subject and presented logical and clear solutions. This thesis has, therefore, made a unique contribution to the field.

Furthermore, I have illustrated that Jehovah showed great mercy throughout the Old Testament and that Jesus exacted justice in the New Testament. Examples such as Jehovah's mercy [give example here] as revealed through Isaiah or Jesus cleansing of the temple as recorded by John show that God is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (1 Nephi 10:11). The point is, God is perfectly just and merciful and both these attributes are manifested throughout all scripture. I have also illustrated that God's love does not always equal kindness. His "tough love" is perfect and is manifested in many different aspects, sometimes as severe consequences.

In this thesis, I have also expounded on and explained many of Jehovah's attributes. In doing so, the reader can reach a better perception of Him through understanding these attributes and using them to interpret many of Jehovah's acts in the Old Testament. The scriptures do refer to Jehovah's wrath or anger, but never as moved by impulsiveness or based on rage. His prophets have often testified of His great mercy and longsuffering for all His people.

Furthermore, God's omniscience plays a large role in how He acts. Modern readers cannot see the entire picture and thus are often left with only bits and piece of information. Understanding this attribute of God and applying it to Old Testament stories helps immensely in reconciling the actions of Jehovah and Jesus Christ.

In this thesis I have also illustrated that Jehovah has always sent abundant warnings to the wicked before He executes vengeance. A harsh God would destroy

hastily and impetuously. A merciful and just God, however, would warn far in advance before punishment was given or only after people had a chance to fully understand His law. This is the case in every instance in the Old Testament. The preaching of Noah long before the flood and the warnings to the Canaanites before Israel laid siege illustrate this pattern. That God allows people time to repent before He exacts justice is graciously just and merciful.

I have also shown that the Joseph Smith Translation is a key ingredient in realizing that the God of the Old Testament is the same God as that portrayed in all scripture. The Prophet Joseph Smith made numerous inspired changes, additions, and clarifications to both the Old Testament and the New Testament that pertain to this thesis. Of the thousands of changes made, several clarify the Old Testament perspective of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the plan of redemption. The Joseph Smith Translation of the Old Testament, therefore, gives a much more accurate picture of God than that found in the King James Version. It depicts the true God in accordance with all other scripture.

I have also shown that the Book of Mormon is an essential part of reconciling the Old and New Testaments. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland explained, “In an effort to give the world back its Bible and a correct view of Deity with it, what we have in the Book of Mormon is a uniform view of God in all His glory and goodness, all His richness and complexity—including and especially as again demonstrated through a personal appearance of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.”¹ Many passages in the Book of Mormon, as cited in this thesis, illustrate the principle that Jehovah is totally compatible with the New Testament portrayal of Jesus Christ. Not only does it teach the correct nature of God and His attributes of love, mercy, kindness and justice, but the Book of

¹ Holland, “The Grandeur of God,” 71.

Mormon also sheds light upon the condition of the biblical Israelites—their wickedness, rebellion, and apostasy. Knowing this helps the reader to understand more fully why God acted as He did. This record also reveals the true purpose of the law of Moses, a law which was largely understood by the righteous Nephites but misunderstood by the biblical Israelites.

I have also shown that modern prophets and apostles in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have taught many things that contribute to our understanding of the God of the Old Testament. The nature of salvation for little children and work for the dead, as they have taught, opens the door to a correct understanding of many Old Testament stories. The prophets have also shown that love and mercy lay behind many of the seemingly cruel acts done by God to both the wicked people, those who were destroyed, and the yet unborn children then living in pre-mortal existence. Modern revelation is vital in understanding the God of the Old Testament and that His work was congruent with that of Jesus Christ.

This thesis has illustrated how four difficult stories in the Old Testament can be understood better. I analyzed these four stories and placed them in their proper context and culture. I incorporated appropriate scholarly and prophetic commentary. Consequently, I have brought the perception of Jehovah in these stories into clearer focus and helped the reader see beyond what a first glances might bring.

Part of the Savior's earthly mission was to teach people His true character and the true character of His Father. One scholar pointed out that, "All through the Old Testament [Jehovah] points His people forward to a day when He will vindicate His character, establish His covenant, set up His kingdom, and bring near His salvation. We

turn the page into the New Testament, and find Him doing just this, in the person of Jesus Christ.”² Jeffrey R. Holland also explained, “Jesus did not come to improve God’s view of man nearly so much as He came to improve man’s view of God and to plead with them to love their Heavenly Father as He has always and will always love them. The plan of God, the power of God, the holiness of God, yes, even the anger and the judgment of God they had occasion to understand. But the love of God, the profound depth of His devotion to His children, they still did not fully know—until Christ came . . . In His life and especially in His death, Christ was declaring, ‘This is *God’s* compassion I am showing you, as well as that of my own.’”³ The combined view of God from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon testifies of the perfect consistency between Jehovah and Jesus.

How Jehovah is perceived may actually be different from person to person. For the righteous, He may be perceived to be merciful and anxious to bless and forgive. To the wicked, He may be perceived as harsh and vengeful. “What is left for us to decide” Victor Ludlow has said,” is the relationship we will establish with God's son. Whether we view the justice of God with fear and trembling or with hope and rejoicing depends upon where we personally stand in relation to eternal laws. If we are afraid of God's judgments, as Israel was in the wilderness, we reveal our own sinfulness and a need for the strict discipline of carnal laws. On the other hand, if we are glad that God is just as well as merciful, it is because we have hope of receiving rewards for our righteous acts . . . Those who live under carnal laws, then, receive a harsher judgment; those who have struggled

² Bruce, *Parchments*, 87.

³ Holland, “The Grandeur of God,” 70-72.

to live spiritual laws earn the benefits of mercy.”⁴ God’s justice and mercy, then, are consistent and depend largely upon the recipient, just as a loving parent may need to strictly discipline one child because of his actions but show mercy to another. Jehovah knows all of the details and background information that determines the actions He takes.

After all has been analyzed and considered, researched and written, re-written and edited concerning this subject, this powerful insight remains: the most profound doctrine related to the perception of a cruel God of the Old Testament is the fact that the very God who smote Uzzah for steadying the ark came to the earth and was Himself smitten. The One who justly punished Israel for wickedness, even by death, unjustly received punishment from Israel “more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” (Mosiah 3:7). The One who willingly slew in the Old Testament, Himself was willingly slain. The very God who took life under the old law gave His life for the new law. The very Being who destroyed hosts of wicked people would suffer infinitely for their sins if they would repent. The same God who demanded faithfulness and obedience of Israel was Himself perfectly faithful and obedient. The One who said, “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18) also said “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). And so He did.

Nephi poignantly taught of this paradox as he quoted from the Brass Plates: “And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men. And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out

⁴ Victor L. Ludlow, *Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 48.

of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos . . .” (1 Nephi 19:9-10). The great Jehovah “yielded himself” to suffer all things for the children of God. This simple fact that the God of the Old Testament, Jehovah, came down to the earth—“the condescension of God”—as the angel prophesied to Nephi (1 Nephi 11:16), and suffered, bled and died, as all scriptures testify, seriously undermines the incorrect view of some who think He is a cruel being.

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