

A few days later, 'Big Tom' discovered that his lunch had been stolen. In time, the thief was located—a hungry little boy about ten years old. "Ok. We caught the thief," said the teacher. "He must be punished according to your rule—ten stripes across the back. Jim, come up here!" The little fellow, trembling, walked up slowly with a big coat fastened up to his neck. "Teacher," he pleaded, "you can lick me as hard as you like, but please, don't make me take my coat off!"

"You must take it off," the teacher replied. "That's the rule!" So, he did. To everyone's amazement, the little boy had no shirt underneath. Just a little, bony, crippled body. How can I whip this kid? the teacher thought. But I must maintain respect at this school. The classroom was as silent as a cemetery.

"How come you aren't wearing a shirt, Jim?" the teacher inquired. "My father died and my mother is poor," the boy replied. "I only own one shirt, and my mother is washing it today. I wore my brother's big coat to stay warm." The teacher, rod in hand, hesitated. *Oh, what should I do?* he thought. Just then Big Tom leaped to his feet and said, "Teacher, if you don't object, I'll take Jim's licking for him."

Thinking a moment, the teacher replied. "Very well. None of our rules say

that one person can't be punished for another's crime. Are you all agreed?" "Yes!" shouted the class. So off came Tom's coat. After five lashes the rod broke! The teacher bowed his head in his hands and thought, *How can I finish this awful task?* Then he heard some students sobbing. What did he see? Little Jim had reached up and grabbed Tom with both arms around his neck. "Tom, I'm sorry I stole your lunch, but I was so hungry. Tom, you'll be my friend until I die for taking my licking for me!"

Dear reader, this story parallels what our Best Friend did for each of us. Oh, what love! To save our souls, Jesus Himself came to earth and took upon Himself the exact punishment we deserve for breaking the Ten Commandments. In an ancient prophecy, the Bible predicted:

He was pierced because of our rebellions and crushed because of our crimes. He bore the punishment that made us whole; by his wounds we are healed.—Isaiah 53:5, C.E.V.

Just like Big Tom took skinny Jim's beating, Jesus "bore" our "punishment" when He died upon the cross. Now we have a chance to repent (turn from sin), be forgiven, and through *His power* to step onto the safe side of God's holy law as we await His soon return.

"Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12) is Heaven's description of God's loyal people who cheerfully obey the Ten Commandments during earth's last days because they love their Savior, who died for them.

Which group will you be in, that of commandment-keepers, or commandment-breakers? Will you join self-confident sinners destined for eternal death for rejecting God's law—just like that foolish man who perished in Arizona? Or will you be among the faithful who are prepared for Jesus Christ's soon return (read Revelation 14:12-14)? That choice—with its eternal consequences—is *up to you*. Remember, only eight people boarded Noah's ark.

Choose Jesus Christ today.



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It was a gorgeous, sunny day at the Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona. A crowd of happy sightseers had gathered near the edge of a mile-high cliff to absorb the pristine, rugged scenery. There was nothing to fear, for everyone stood behind a guardrail built to protect visitors.

As the sight-seers eyed the beautiful view, a young couple who were engaged to be married in three short weeks joined them. Suddenly, to everyone's shock, the young man, whose name was Jim, hopped over the guardrail near the edge of the cliff.

"Say, young fellow," a nearby tourist said in alarm, "Don't you know what guardrails are for?" "Yes sir," Jim replied with a hearty chuckle, "I helped build these rails. I work here. I know this canyon quite well." Calmly taking hold of his sweetheart's hand, he helped her over too.

Just beyond the rail was an outcropping of rock that precariously jugged out beyond the edge of the cliff. Carefully climbing onto the outcrop, the couple then sat down to enjoy an incredible view of the canyon. *That's dangerous*, thought watching tourists.

An eye-witness reported: "Presently Jim stood up and gave his hand to the girl. For better balance in helping to raise her weight, he naturally took a short step backward—just over the edge!" His girlfriend then beheld a look of sheer terror on her lover's face as he suddenly realized what he had just done, and that he was now hopelessly doomed.

With a piercing wail of awful agony, he plunged to his death far below. The girl was so hysterical, she nearly jumped off

too. She was finally pulled to safety, but had to be sedated.

The obvious lesson of this tragic, true story is that everyone—including you, me, families, societies, and nations—need boundary lines to protect us from ruin. *That rail is not for me*, Jim confidently concluded as he hopped over the guardrail.

And God spoke all these words, saying...

- I. You shall have no other gods before Me.
- II. You shall not make for yourself a carved image.
- III. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- IV. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day [Saturday] is the Sabbath of the Lord your God... For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth... Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.
- V. Honor your father and your mother.
- VI. You shall not kill.
- VII. You shall not commit adultery.
- VIII. You shall not steal.
- IX. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- X. You shall not covet.

—Exodus 20

But he was wrong. *Dead wrong*. He perished because of his vain self-confidence.

The Holy Bible informs us that our loving Creator who formed us "in His own image" (Genesis 1:27), is deeply concerned about our safety, too. To protect us from the fatal consequences of bad choices, He has mercifully given us a "guard-rail" for our protection. That guardrail is the Ten Commandments. To ancient Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive this law, Moses wrote:

...the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire... He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. —Deuteronomy 4:11-13 (NKJV*)

Believe it or not, God Almighty proclaimed His Ten Commandments amidst thunder, earthquake, and fiery flame not only to impress us with their holy sacredness, but to prevent us from destroying ourselves by breaking them. If you are a bit fuzzy about what the Ten Commandments teach, on the left is an abbreviated version as recorded in God's Holy Book.

Because "God is love" (1 John 4:8), His law is a law of love (Romans 13:10). This being so, to willingly violate this law is to purposefully oppose God's loving will and ways. In a nutshell, it means revolt and rebellion against the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. The Bible calls such wicked rebellion "sin."

“Sin is the transgression [violation] of the law” (1 John 3:4, KJV, emphasis added). “By the law is knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20), penned Paul. Because “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23), we are all sinners, subject to God’s judgment.

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy” (Psalm 103:8). Aren’t you glad? If He wasn’t, we’d all be dead. But here’s the catch. Mercy isn’t the only attribute of God’s character. He is also “a God of justice” (Isaiah 30:18) who “executes justice” (Psalm 146:7) when circumstances require such a response.

Bible history contains numerous instances when, after countless offers of mercy were stubbornly rejected by reckless, wayward sinners, that divine justice finally struck with holy vengeance. In the days of Noah, “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth...” (Genesis 6:5). Because human sin had become so horrific, God finally declared, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth” (verse 7).

Yet true to merciful nature, God first instructed Noah to build a massive boat to become a refuge in the coming storm. For 120 years Noah preached and urged sinners to repent. When that 120-year period closed, only eight people responded to God’s gracious offer of mercy by entering the boat.

Then torrents of rain fell, and a mighty flood destroyed the world. “And all flesh died that moved upon the earth...Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive” (Genesis 7:21,23).



In a sense, this judgment was a bit like what happened to Jim on that Grand Canyon cliff. In Noah’s day, the entire world stubbornly rejected God’s guardrail. As a result, everyone drowned. Notice also that in Noah’s day, God didn’t destroy a wicked world with His own hand directly. Instead, He used mighty

agencies of nature—rain and flooding—to implement His just wrath.

Something similar happened to the ancient city of Sodom. “But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord” (Genesis 13:13). So wicked in fact, that divine justice finally struck there too. But this time, instead of rain, burning fire descended in “the punishment of the city” (Genesis 19:15). “The Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens” (verse 24). Researchers have actually uncovered the ruins of those very cities—covered with ash and unique sulfur balls—just south of the Dead Sea.

Yes, God oversees the mighty forces of nature. He can use all natural elements to punish sin. “Fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind” can all become agents “fulfilling His word” (Psalm 148:8). As difficult as this may sound, in the midst of every major deadly natural disaster, God’s pleading voice may yet be heard warning sinners to turn from sin. Be assured of this: human wickedness won’t continue forever. An apocalyptic line will soon be crossed. “I will punish the world for its evil” (Isaiah 13:11), predicts God Almighty. Again, yes, He is exceedingly merciful; but He is also righteous, just, and holy. His plan is to utterly eradicate all sin, rebellion, and wickedness from His universe. The last book of the Bible reports:

Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”—Revelation 6:14-17

As we approach this cataclysmic “day of the Lord” that “shall come as destruction from the Almighty” (Joel 1:15), all major deadly natural disasters are actually merciful wake-up calls to wandering humans to return to their Maker—before

it’s forever too late.

Some scientists now consider “climate change” and “global warming” to be the cause of increasing calamities. Others dismiss such so-called “science” as politically motivated. Regardless, devastating convulsions of nature are occurring on all sides with terrifying frequency and loss of life. Simply scan today’s headlines. Check the Internet. Watch CNN or Fox News. Now don’t miss this point. The Bible reveals that the real reason for awful tornadoes, earthquakes, storms and flooding is that *God is sending judgments upon human rebellion against His Law*. Notice carefully the Lord’s words to ancient Israel:

Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people—the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words, nor My law, but rejected it.—Jeremiah 6:19

Thus “calamity” follows the rejection of God’s “law.” The prophet Hosea also listed specific violations of the Ten Commandments as the underlying reason for divine judgments:

...the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing [breaking the 3rd commandment] and lying [the 9th commandment], killing [the 6th] and stealing [the 8th] and committing adultery [the 7th], they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed.”—Hosea 4:1,2

Can’t you see this happening today?

Swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and sexual immorality are as common as houseflies. God’s prophet then describes the terrible consequences of reckless commandment-breaking:

Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away, with the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away... “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge... Because you have forgotten the law of your God... So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds.”—Hosea 4: 3,6,9

It is because humans have “forgotten the law” of God that untold suffering exists today. God warns, “So I will punish them for their ways.” Just like in the days of Noah, Sodom, and ancient Israel, even so is God punishing human wickedness today through the agencies of rain, fire, earthquakes, and storms. Unfortunately, it is part of the messy consequences of sin that innocent souls often suffer with the guilty. Now mark these words: much larger judgments are pending, far beyond what we can possibly imagine. Los Angeles, Las Vegas, San Francisco, New York, Paris, Rome, Moscow, London, Mexico City and countless other sprawling cities will soon reap terrible devastation for their great wickedness—just like in Bible days. *You are now being warned of pending judgments.*

Significantly, before God destroyed Sodom, He notified Abraham of what was about to occur. “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?” (Genesis 18:17), God asked. He didn’t. Similarly, it makes

sense that as we approach the time of His final judgments, that He would once again reveal His purposes to chosen individuals, just like He did to Abraham.

God has done exactly that. Prophecy predicts that “in the last days” the Lord will give “dreams” and “visions” (see Acts 2:17-21) to chosen persons. In our modern times, one such woman to receive heavenly illumination was Ellen White (1827-1915), whose books have now been translated into over 140 languages. In 1906, she wrote:

“In the night season I had a presentation...I saw the whole heavens lighted up. There were balls that looked like fire falling, and these balls looked as if full of arrows, and wherever they struck there were great calamities. Houses were set on fire, and no human effort could extinguish the flame. The earth quaked, and homes were falling with a crash. I heard distressing screeching and praying. There was confusion everywhere...*I was instructed that destruction hath gone forth upon cities. The Word of the Lord will be fulfilled*” (Manuscript 126, 1906).

Ellen White also wrote: “In quick succession the judgments of God will follow one another—fire and flood and earthquake, with war and bloodshed” (9T, 97). “The transgressor is about to meet the great Lawgiver over his broken law. The wrath of God has long slumbered, but soon, with terrible justice and crushing weight, will his wrath fall upon the transgressor” (Life Sketches, 341). “The time is near when large cities will be swept away, and all should be warned of these coming judgments” (Evangelism, 29).

For more information about Mrs. White’s revelations, read the booklet, *God Speaks Before the End of the World*, now available from White Horse Media, or visit www.whiteestate.org. Speaking of the final worldwide “seven last plagues” which will soon devastate Planet Earth, the book of Revelation reports:

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God upon the earth.”... “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments.”... there was a great earthquake...and the cities of the nations fell.—Revelation 16:1,7,18,19

If we take Revelation 16 at face value, Planet Earth is slated for total devastation (at least for a time). But it’s not all bad news. Not at all! Yes, God will eliminate all rebellion and evil, but He has a loving and eternal purpose in mind. He’s going to start all over again and He wants His universe free from sin. All who surrender their hearts to Him can enjoy eternal bliss. Take a look:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up...Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.—2 Peter 3:10,13

The biggest question is: how can we sinners who have violated the Ten Commandments find a place in God’s “new earth”? There’s only one answer. Through a merciful Savior, who took our just punishment on the cross. To illustrate, read this touching story:

Years ago a little one-room schoolhouse in the mountains of Virginia housed a group of boys so rough that no teacher could handle them. A new teacher applied for the job, willing to take the risk. On the first day of school, the new teacher appeared for duty. One big fellow named Tom whispered smugly to a friend: “I won’t need any help with this one. I can lick him myself.”

“Good morning, boys,” the teacher began. The boys shouted back, making fun of the wimpy-looking teacher. “Now, I want a good school, but I need your help. Let’s start with a few rules. You tell me what they should be, and I’ll write them on the blackboard.” “No stealing!” one student yelled. “Be on time!” shouted another. Finally, ten rules appeared on the blackboard.

“Now,” said the teacher, “all laws are worthless without a penalty. What shall we do to someone who breaks the rules?” “Beat him across the back ten times without his coat on!” was the class response. “That’s pretty severe, boys. Are you sure you’re ready to stand by that?” “I second the motion,” one kid screamed out. “All right,” said the teacher, “So be it. Class, come to order!”



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