

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!"

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, Jesus Christ, did for each of us. Indeed, God does say in His Word, "I will punish the world for its evil." But 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 our sins), be forgiven, and in His strength, step on the safe side of God's guardrail 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.

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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 jutted 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. 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 guard rail is the Ten Commandments. To ancient Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive this law, Moses wrote:

You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and 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. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice. So He [God] 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*)

To illustrate how the Ten Commandments are designed to protect us from harm, consider human laws. Are they not written for our protection too? Traffic laws, child pornography laws, laws against stealing, or murder, are all meant to protect life and property.

It's the same with the Ten Commandments. God Almighty proclaimed them amidst thunder, earthquake, and fiery flame from the summit of Mount Sinai, not only to impress us with their holy sacredness, but to prevent us from destroying ourselves by breaking them. "That it may go well with you and your children" (Deuteronomy 12:28)—this is the reason He gave us His law. Our Creator loves us, and wants what's best for us.

If you are a bit fuzzy about what the Ten Commandments teach, here they are as recorded in God's Book. Read each commandment carefully.

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.

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- 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 20:1-17.

This “law is truth” (Psalm 119:142), because its eternal Author is “the God of truth” (Isaiah 65:16). “The commandment is holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12) because God is holy, just and good. Because “God is love” (1 John 4:8), His law is a transcript of His character of love. This being so, to willingly violate the supreme law of our Creator is to purposefully oppose God Himself. In a nutshell, it means revolt and rebellion against the government of the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. The Bible calls such wicked opposition “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), wrote Paul. Because “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23), this makes us all sinners, subject to divine 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 the time is right.

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 told 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 finally 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 guard-rail. As a result, everyone drowned. In fact, the Grand Canyon itself was formed by the swirling action of water from Noah’s flood. Biblical geologists recognize this clearly.

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. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground” (verses 24,25). Archeologists have uncovered the ruins of those cities—covered with layers of ash—just south of the Dead Sea.

In still another instance, God used an earthquake to punish Korah, Dathan and Abiram for persistently revolting against His just authority manifested through the leadership of Moses.

After a period of mercy extended to these rebels, “...the ground split apart

under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up...” (Numbers 16:31,32). God also uses tornados and hurricane-like forces to punish sin, as it is written: “The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and storm...” (Nahum 1:3).



Yes, God oversees the mighty forces of nature, including floods, fires, earthquakes, storms and hail. As difficult as this may sound, in the midst of every 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), reports God Almighty. Again, yes, He is exceedingly merciful; but He is also righteous and just, and holy His plan is to utterly eradicate all sin, rebellion, and wickedness from His universe. The living God declares,

I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land, says the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land, says the Lord.
—Zephaniah 1:3

In a parallel prophecy, the last book of the Bible predicts:

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 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 tornados, flooding, fires, and storms 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 “for lack of knowledge” that humanity suffers today. “Because you have forgotten the law of your God”—here is the root issue. God warns, “So I will punish them for their ways.” Just like in the days of Noah and Sodom, even so is God punishing human wickedness today through the agency of rain, fire, earthquakes, and storms. Unfortunately, it is part of the terrible 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, San Francisco, New York, Paris (France), Rome (Italy), Moscow (Russia), London (England), Mexico City (Mexico) and countless other sprawling cities will soon reap terrible devastation for their great wickedness—just like in Bible days. God still keeps accurate records of every violation of His law. “Every transgression,” wrote Paul, will “receive a just reward” (Hebrews 2:2). *You are now being warned of pending judgments.*

Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Behold, disaster shall go forth from nation to nation. And a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth. And at that day the slain of the Lord shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth.”
—Jeremiah 25:32,33

Is global destruction possible? Yes, for Jesus Christ Himself plainly predicted:

And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.—Luke 17:26-30

If we take these words at face value, Planet Earth is slated for total depopulation (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 be forgiven and find a place in God’s “new earth”? There’s only one answer. Through a merciful Savior, who took our 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.