

## Why Does the Lord Sometimes Seem Angry?

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And the LORD said to Moses, “Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. (Exodus 34:1)

The two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments housed in the golden ark and stored in the most holy portion of the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, was the focal presence of the Lord with the ancient Israelites. Great miracles occurred with the presence of that golden ark carrying the precious stone tablets within it. But Exodus records that these stone tablets were not the ones the Lord originally gave to Moses. The first set of stone tablets were broken by Moses when he saw the Israelites worshiping the Golden Calf. Forty days earlier, the Israelites had heard God speak the words of the Ten Commandments and then had twice solemnly sworn “All the words which the LORD has said we will do.” But then the Israelites had disobeyed the primary commandment not to worship other gods.

The first set of stone tablets were cut out by God and written on by God (Exodus 32:16). These were destroyed. The second set of tablets were cut out by Moses before he returned up Mount Sinai for God to once again write the Ten Commandments on them. This change, as indicated in today’s lesson from the *Arcana Caelestia* reflects a fundamental change in the way the Old Testament presents the Lord, the Israelites and what the Lord expected of them. We read: “The secret [reflected in this story] is that the literal sense of the Word would have been different if the Word had been written among another people, or if the character of the Israelite people had not been such as it was” (*Arcana Caelestia* 10453:3).

One of the powerful ideas for the New Church is that there is an inner or spiritual meaning in the Old and New Testament. Like a parable that describes things of this world but teaches a higher spiritual idea within its words, all of the inspired books of the Old and New Testament, including the parts that describe genuine history, contain hidden wisdom from the Lord.

We are encouraged to read the Word daily (*Apocalypse Explained* 803:2). Reading two or three chapters a day a person can read all of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments in a single year. At times what one finds on its pages can be somewhat troubling.

A thoughtful reader of the Old Testament can react with discomfort to many of the events that are described there and especially to some of the words that are attributed to God. The stories have numerous examples of violence perpetrated against the enemies of the Israelites and even on the Israelites themselves. Sometimes this violence is presented as being guided by Divine command and sometimes is presented as being from the Lord Himself.

Sadly, some people have been taught a view of God that explicitly presents Him as having an angry condemning perspective on human beings. A passage in the *True Christian Religion* first describes how too often the idea of an angry, condemning God is taught as the truth and then it states:

Everyone with decent reasoning enlightened by the Word can see that God is compassion and mercy itself. He is absolute love and absolute goodness - these qualities are His essence. It is a contradiction to say that compassion itself or absolute goodness could look at the human race with anger and lock us all into damnation, and still keep its divine essence. Attitudes and actions of that kind belong to a wicked person, not a virtuous one. They belong to a spirit from hell, not an angel of heaven. It is horrendous to attribute them to God. (*True Christian Religion* 132:2)

Another aspect of the Old Testament that can be troubling is that God seems to be figuring things out as they unfold and sometimes changing His mind. He is described as being sad about how something has turned out and apparently wishing He had done something different previously or “repenting” of His past choices. The true nature of things is described in the following passage.

The Lord is referred to as repenting and grieving in heart however because all human mercy seems to involve those feelings. Consequently as is the case many times elsewhere in the Word, the manner of speaking here is in accordance with the outward appearance. Nobody can know what the Lord's mercy is, for it infinitely transcends all human understanding. But one does know what human mercy is; it is repenting and grieving. And unless a person grasps the idea of mercy from some different feeling whose nature he knows, he can have no possible conception of it and so cannot learn anything about it. This is the reason why human characteristics are frequently attributed to Jehovah, or the Lord - for example, that Jehovah or the Lord punishes, leads into temptation, destroys, and burns with anger, when in fact He never punishes anybody, never leads anybody into temptation, never destroys anybody, and never burns with anger. (*Arcana Caelestia* 588)

Why does the Old Testament exist as it does? One part of the answer provided for the New Church has to do with a vital connection that needs to exist between angels in heaven and human beings in this world. This vital connection is provided by a Church existing in this world formed of human beings who have been taught by the Lord and are following what they have been taught. Even if this group of human beings is small it still preserves the possibility of spiritual life for everyone else on the globe. The Heavenly Doctrine describes a series of Churches that existed starting with a golden age of love and wisdom represented in the stories of Adam and Eve and then descending to a Church whose establishment is reflected in the story of Noah and the Flood and continuing with three following Churches. The vast majority of the Old Testament was revealed during a time when a genuine Church founded on love and wisdom could not exist. We are taught in the *Arcana Caelestia*:

The Lord's Providence in a miraculous manner enabled [a representative of a church to exist], for the reason that some kind of communication might be established between heaven and mankind through what was a semblance of the Church. For without any communication of heaven with mankind by means of some kind of Church the human race would perish. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4288:5)

The representative of a Church described in much of the Old Testament was not a genuine Church, but rather a group of people who acted in ways that connected them to heaven. Although

the people had nothing of love and genuine faith within their worship, their external obedience allowed for a miraculous connection. This is described in the following words:

The communication with angels in heaven by means of representatives was effected at that time in the following way. People's outward worship was conveyed to angelic spirits who are simple and give no thought to inward values, though they are themselves nevertheless good inwardly. . . [These simple angelic spirits] pay no attention at all to what is in a person inwardly, only to what is visible outwardly; and if this is seen by them to be holy they think that what is inward is so too. The more internal angels of heaven saw in these spirits the realities that were being represented, consequently the corresponding heavenly and Divine values; for they could reside with these spirits and see those values, but not with human beings, except through those spirits. Angels dwell with people in their inward values; but when no inward values are there, they dwell in the interiors of simple spirits; for the wisdom of angels extends only to spiritual and heavenly values, which are the inward realities of representatives. (*Arcana Caelestia* 8533:6)

It was crucial that the ancient Israelites sacrificed in precisely correct ways. It was crucial that they followed the ritual laws of Exodus and Leviticus. The survival of the human race back then depended on it. We would not be alive if a representative of a Church had not been provided by the Lord. But to accomplish this external obedience the Lord had to present Himself in certain ways to the Israelites. He had to provide external rewards for obedience and consequences, some quite terrible, for disobedience. This is described in the following teaching for the New Church.

In order therefore that a representative of the Church might come into existence [among the Children of Israel] they were provided through plainly visible revelation with such prescribed rules and such laws as would be entirely representative. Therefore as long as they kept to them and strictly complied with them, those people were able to play a representative role. But when they deviated from them into the prescribed rules and laws of other nations, and in particular to the worship of another god, they deprived themselves of their ability to play that representative role. For this reason they were coerced by external means - which were captivities, calamities, threats, and miracles - into obeying laws and prescribed rules that were truly representative, not by internal means, as those people are whose external worship has internal within it. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4281:3)

The Lord maintained the crucial connection between heaven and earth at this time by what might be called the government of hell. In this setting there is no love, no living concern for the welfare of others, no genuine faith even in rudimentary form. It is a very perverse state. And consequently the way the Lord appears to this state of mind is far from what He is in Himself. If you read the Old Testament without realizing what the Lord was trying to do to preserve all people, you can end up with some serious misunderstandings of His priorities and of His true nature. For us, mere external behavior will give us no connection with heaven.

As you read the Word and run into troubling ideas or images, remember there is an inner or spiritual meaning contained within these words. Everything seen by the angels within these stories reflects the Lord's loving and wise care for all. It reflects the Lord's desire to lead us

away from qualities and choices that would harm others and us. It reflects the Lord protection of good people from those who seek evil things for them.

There are ways in which the Old Testament is a perfect revelation. The internal or spiritual sense is perfectly presented in its tiniest details. It was exactly what the Lord needed to reveal to establish a connection between heaven and earth that was vital for the entire human race in the centuries prior to the Lord's advent. But as was stated in one of the lessons: "the literal sense of the Word would have been different if the Word had been written among another people." This is the secret within the story of the Ten Commandments being written twice. The second time the tables of stone were provided by Moses. The Lord was willing to work within a disorderly time and with people whose hearts, minds and lives were far from what He would wish for us to accomplish His goal of love. The Old Testament was given to people who needed external rewards and punishments. It does not directly reflect the Lord's love in many places and too often reflects the government of hell.

As you read, focus on how often the Lord reminds the people that the problems are a consequence of their choices and that if they return to worshiping the Lord and following His commandments they will be blessed. This is a genuine truth. When you read of battles and the enemies of the Children of Israel try to remember that a key focus of the inner or spiritual sense is our own spiritual battles. The battles reflect how the Lord can lead us to fight against evil loves and false ideas that would harm us and others. When unrelenting destruction of all living beings in a city is being spoken of, we can remember that whole interconnected families of evil loves with their false ideas exist in our minds. Each one of these evil loves and false ideas from the greatest to the least represents a spiritual danger to us and our ability to be useful. The Lord wants us to seek His help to remove their influence from our minds.

The Lord encourages us to read the Word. Through our reverent reading we can help provide a foundation for the angels. If we are reading with an effort to recognize what the Lord wants for our spiritual lives and we use this to make better decisions and to fight our spiritual battles, the Lord will lead us from natural life to spiritual life. He will lead us to a heavenly home. It is not always easy to see the Lord's loving and wise presence in the stories of the Old Testament but let us sincerely believe it is always there. For those of us who read the Word reverently and try to follow what they learn, in the next life the hidden meaning of these stories will be given to us in clarity and detail far beyond what we can possibly know in this world. Then we will clearly see the truth that every tiniest detail of the internal meaning of the Old Testament presents a perfectly loving and wise God who is constantly working within our lives to lead us to a better, more useful and a happier life. AMEN.

### **Exodus 32**

<sup>7</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*. <sup>8</sup>They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" <sup>9</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! <sup>10</sup>Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

<sup>11</sup>Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup>Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. <sup>13</sup>Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.'" <sup>14</sup>So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

### **John 15:9-17**

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

### ***Arcana Caelestia* 10453:2-4**

The reason why the tablets here mean the outward form of the Word is that they are distinguished here from the writing, which is its inward form; . . . They are distinguished here because these tablets were broken, but nevertheless the same words were afterwards inscribed by Jehovah on the other tablets which were hewn by Moses. The outward form of the Word is its literal sense, the inward form is its internal sense. . . .

Moses broke the tablets which were the work of God, when he saw the calf and the dances, Later, Moses, as commanded by Jehovah, hewed other tablets, which then had the same words inscribed on them (so that the tablets were no longer the work of God but the work of Moses, though the writing was still the writing of God). This holds a secret unknown up to now. The secret is that the literal sense of the Word would have been different if the Word had been written among another people, or if the character of the Israelite people had not been such as it was. For the literal sense of the Word is all about that people since the Word was written among them, as is evident from both the historical sections and the prophetic parts of the Word. They were a people steeped in evil because they were idolatrous at heart; yet in order that the internal sense and the external sense might be in agreement that people had to be highly acclaimed, and to be called God's people, a holy nation, and a peculiar treasure. . . . Since therefore the literal sense of the Word came to be what it was because of what those people were like, the tablets which were the work of God were broken and others, as commanded by Jehovah, were hewn by Moses. But since they nevertheless had the same holy and Divine content within them the same words as were on the first tablets were inscribed by Jehovah on them.