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BEHIND THE CURTAIN...

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"The greatest want of the world is the want of men—
men who will not be bought or sold."—*Education*, p. 57.

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CONSPIRACIES IN THE BIBLE

“Conspiracy theory! Conspiracy theory!” What a quick way to make something look ridiculous these days. But is it not plausible that in some cases a significant group of people might indeed be conspiring together for nefarious purposes? To instantly retort against and disparage anyone who might express such a concern by firing back with the charge, “Conspiracy theory!” is a common technique that does not quite measure up to the principles of sound logic. This is an example of a common fallacy known as *Argumentum ad hominem*, a rhetorical strategy whereby a person (sometimes by insinuation) launches an attack on the character, motive, or some other attribute of one expressing a point—rather than considering the substance of the argument itself. The implication is designed to cast instant doubt on the one expressing something that could be of legitimate concern.

Many who are guilty of wrong and some swayed by them thus enshroud themselves by evading sound logical argument. They thrust the accusation that the one who perceives and expresses concern over something large-scale which doesn’t appear quite right must surely be a conspiracy theorist—in other words, a person overly wary, possibly lacking balance, and purporting a mere theory not yet proven. Thus, without fair investigation, through the jeering, many a legitimate observation is made to appear invalid—typically if it goes against the narrative of a majority (whose record historically has shown more often to be wrong than right.)

Interestingly, however, some have recently observed that the difference between many a so-called conspiracy theory and truth can be just a span of time, even as brief as 6–12 months. That’s sometimes the case. Why? Because when the reality breaks through a mass of biased or even bribed fake news fact checkers, people who had been unconsciously blinded by a mob finally wake up and see what had been going on the entire time. Yet on the other hand, in some cases, time and further research might eventually reveal a claim to be shallow and not well-

founded. But either way, as a first step, before mocking the messenger, it may be wise to humble our own hearts and investigate the validity of the claim. To repeat—that first step of humbling our own hearts is a vital one.

In general, what is the difference between any theory and the truth? A theory may have a very sound basis. Many things in life are not fully proven, but a credible theory is based on honest, reliable data and documentation. If the observation happens to challenge the status quo, it will be unpopular. Then it’s usually subject to vicious attack, but that’s unfortunate—because in all fairness, the burden of proof one way or the other rests on both sides of an argument, not only the minority position.

What about in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy? Do God’s sacred writings speak of historic conspiracies that were often hidden behind the scenes, whereby ill intentions were secretly waged against Him and His righteous principles? Absolutely! Inspiration speaks of many conspiracies—and strongly warns us in Revelation chapter 13 of quite a significant conspiracy looming on the horizon. Why did prudent safety render it necessary for much of the book of Revelation to be written in coded, symbolic language? It’s because the overall great controversy between Christ and Satan is a huge conspiracy unveiled!

In this issue of the *Reformation Herald*, we will look at a few samples of conspiracies launched against God and His people throughout history. These conspiracies have been instigated by the baser elements of fallen sinful nature, elements such as hatred, rebellious influence, and lust for revenge, pride, greed, position, or money—to name just a few. If we want to be part of the solution and not the problem in this world, it behooves us to search our hearts and consider these matters prayerfully, that we may open our eyes (in Revelation 3:18, Jesus calls it anointing our eyes with eyesalve) to honor the God of truth no matter what the cost, no matter what the mockery.



By Peter D. Lausevic

The First CONSPIRACY

When we look at the Ten Commandments, they say nothing directly about hatred. This element called hatred is a terrible thing. It causes wars, broken families and is the destroyer of all kinds of relationships. When the Ten Commandments say: “Thou shalt not kill,” it deals with more than the actual act. Exodus 20:13. These commandments as written in stone by the finger of God and stated from Mount Sinai are grand principles that include the cause—not just the outward action. And what is the cause of murder? What is it that leads a person to take away human life? “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). This means that when we entertain hatred, it begins to take hold of the mind and step by step its control gets deeper and

deeper until there is only one step between hatred and murder.

Another commandment associated with hatred is lying or bearing false witness (Exodus 20:16). The final generation called the 144,000 of the faithful will have their tongues under control. “And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Revelation 14:5). The relationship between the tongue and perfection is very clear from a biblical perspective. “For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” (James 3:2).

Why is perfection connected to the tongue? Because the issue of lying is related to all the other commandments. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his broth-

er whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20). Here hatred, which is the root of murder, is connected to what the tongue does. And more than that. Jesus said, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). So, hatred, murder and lying are integrally connected—and the origin is Satan who has mastered all of them.

These elements describe sin

The Bible refers to hatred, murder, lying as sin because the only real definition of sin is found in 1 John 3:4: “Whosoever committeth sin

transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Since we know that the law is the manifestation of the character of God, then sin must be that which goes contrary to His character. It is a note of discord in the universe. On the other hand, Christ brings unity among His followers: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).

At the same time Christ declared, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Why? Because men would not receive the word of life. Because they warred against the message sent them to bring them joy and hope and life.

"We look upon the Jews as inexcusable because they rejected and crucified Christ. But today the messages that the Lord sends are often received in a manner similar to the way in which the Jews received Christ's message. If the instruction of the Lord does not harmonize with the opinions of men, anger takes control of reason, and men play into the enemy's hands by opposing the message that God sends. Satan uses them as sharp instruments to oppose the progress of truth."¹

Although there is unity among Christ's followers, Satan brings in

only discord. Even among his own followers there is discord. So then we may conclude that before sin existed, there was perfect unity in the universe. All created beings were in harmony with the character of God. All was held together by the power of love for "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). The foundation of this true love is obedience to the law which is simply the manifestation of God's character: "For this is the love of God, that we kept his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Again, so long as there was no sin, transgression of the law, there was perfect harmony in the universe—for they all lived by the principle of obedience to God through true love. Why did they respond with obedience through true perfect love? "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This was not only the case after we sinned, because Christ was our Surety even before the foundation of this world was laid (Revelation 13:8).

Where did sin originate?

So then, where does sin come from? Let us read Ezekiel 28:11–15. "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me saying, son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king

of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee."

How do we know that this is not speaking literally of the king of Tyre? Because this being was in the garden of Eden (v. 13). If the king of Tyre was human, he was born of a woman. Therefore, he would start sinning from birth. The psalmist explains the true condition of everyone (except Jesus Christ) who has ever been born: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Of all those born of a woman, Christ is the only One who never sinned at all: "for even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:21, 22). So this being could not have been a man such as the king of Tyre (literally) for, as mentioned above: "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" (Ezekiel 28:15).

Also, the king of Tyre could not have been in Eden if he were a sinful man, for the only sinful persons in Eden were Adam and Eve—and because of their sin, they were expelled: "and the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the Lord



Satan grew bolder and bolder in defiance against God and His government and is going about as a roaring lion, “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). But finally that will all end! He and his followers will be destroyed—never again to bother this universe, for the promise is: “What do ye imagine against the Lord? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time” (Nahum 1:9).

God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Genesis 3:22–24).

The only other being involved with sin in Eden was the serpent (he who used the serpent). “And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life” (Genesis 3:14). You know the story. But who really was that serpent? “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:9). These were the only created beings that had committed sin on record in Eden. Therefore, this being recorded in Ezekiel who was in Eden and was once perfect must be Satan.

Notice the description of Satan before he became what we know of him today. He was “the anointed cherub” (Ezekiel 28:14). In the sanctuary service among the Hebrews, the cherubim were in the immediate presence of God (See Exodus 25:10–22. Especially make note of the presence of God in verse 22.) So, Satan, prior to becoming such an evil being, must have been one of the closest created beings in the universe to God if not the closest since it says “the anointed cherub.”

We can also see that Satan was a very musical being. So much so, that

“the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created” (Ezekiel 28:13). This shows why he uses music with so great success in the world today.

Because of his beauty, he became proud and sin was found in him. “By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be anymore” (Ezekiel 28:16–19).

Because of his sin, he will finally be destroyed and cease to exist. (v. 19). Notice how this will happen. God says: “I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee.” (v. 18). This being, Satan, must be the same as that root spoken of in Malachi 4:1–3. Notice the similarity in the destruction: “For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven;

and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. . . . And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.” Notice again: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

So, sin came into this world and universe through Satan in some mysterious way, for he was originally created perfect.

The cause

Another chapter also speaks of this fall of Satan is found in Isaiah 14:12–20. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! for thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings

of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evil doers shall never be renowned."

By comparing these verses with those of Ezekiel, we can see that Lucifer here is the same as the wicked one there. But let's compare also with the chapter in Revelation "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was there place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels



were cast out with him." Isaiah said that Lucifer fell from heaven. How clear a picture the Revelator gives of this event, but how sad the story. When he fell from heaven, John says: "Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Revelation 12:7-9, 12).

According to the reading in Isaiah, we see that the cause of Satan's fall from being Lucifer was due to pride and self-exaltation: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . I will be like the most High" (Verse 13, 14.) With this understanding, we may be able to appreciate the warnings in the following verses more than before: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (Proverbs 16:18; 1 Corinthians 10:12). This original of sins is still the cause of woe—not only with Satan and his angels but to all those who are not living in a saving relationship with Christ.

Therefore, why did Lucifer become Satan? Because instead of seeking to glorify God (Isaiah 14:13, 14) which was His due (Colossians 1:16) in his affections and allegiance, it was Lucifer's endeavor to win homage to himself. Thus he became the father of evil, the father of lies, and yes, the father of hatred (John 8:44). His murderous plans were fully revealed when he inspired the Jews to crucify Christ. But in this very act, he sealed his destiny: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself like wise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

But "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). And so it has been with Satan. He grew bolder and bolder in defiance against God and His government that he

is going about as a roaring lion, “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). But finally it will all end. As we have already seen, he, with all his followers, will be destroyed never again to bother this universe, for the promise is: “what do ye imagine against the Lord? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time” (Nahum 1:9).

In contrast: The character of God

In contrast to this horrible, destructive character of Satan, we find that only righteousness belongs to God: “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day” (Daniel 9:7). By this verse we may understand that God is righteousness. In other words, His character is righteous. Whenever we say that a person is righteous, we mean his character.

Another Scripture says: “For all thy commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:172). Since God is righteous (this reveals His character), and all His commandments are also righteous, therefore, we may conclude that sin, which includes hatred, murder and lying, could not have originated with God for only righteousness comes from Him. We may also conclude that in order for us to understand His character, we must look at His commandments, for they reveal it to us.

But even if we study His commandments, can we ever come to the full understanding of His character? “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! for who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Romans 11:33–36). Even though we may never understand Him fully, we can understand something: “the secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all

the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Here we notice that although the secret things belong to Him and to Him alone, there is that which is revealed. It belongs to us and to our children so that we may obey what we learn. We must study those things which are revealed so that we can come to the fullest knowledge available to us so that we can find out the true doctrines (teachings) in order to bring us unto perfection: “That the man of God may be perfect, perfected unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:17, mgn.).

Why is it so important to know God? Why is it so important to know truth? Because Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). So the truth is Jesus and in knowing Jesus the truth, we have eternal life: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). If we know Jesus right now as far and as deep as we can know Him, we have eternal life. Not in some great distant future but right now. Notice these words: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the son of God” (1 John 5:13).

In contrast to this character, we find the character of the archdeceiver. And yet there is no reason for his existence. The work of sin is called “the mystery of iniquity” (2 Thessalonians 2:7). A mystery is something that we cannot fully understand. Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin. Instead, it would be a natural part of the universe. Because of the perfect character of the Creator, mysteriously there has been this conspiracy from one who was once called Lucifer who has become this fiendish being called the devil and Satan.

And what happens to those that follow Satan’s ways in spite of God’s revelation of His character and His invitations to give forgive-

ness freely to those that repent? “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices” (Proverbs 1:24–31).

Why change?

Why is it so hard for us to change? “For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:20). It has to do with our desires. This is why God wants to help us actually change the way we think. Oh, if we would only realize how staying as we are is not to our benefit: “A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame” (Proverbs 13:5). In reality, to remain in a sinful condition causes our own death. God explains: “He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:36).

Righteous characteristics

Is there a positive side to hatred—not against people as we are to show God’s love to the world even those that become our enemies? “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh

his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:43–48).

We need to come to the point of hating sin so that we can turn away from it in our hearts. The psalmist declares: "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104). Since Satan is the father of lies, then it is natural that those who are born again have a hatred to that specific action. "I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love" (Psalm 119:163). Those that insist on maintaining that character enter into a war with those who espouse the character of God. "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (Psalm 139:21, 22). And this is not just in our actions but even in the realm of thoughts. "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love" (Psalm 119:113). Even thoughts are triggered with certain actions. For this reason we need to guard well the avenues of our senses that affect our soul. "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me" (Psalm 101:3).

Even God has hatred of certain things. "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16–19).

How are we to imitate God's character? "Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15).

What will be the result in our



personal lives in relation to the world and the ruler of the world? "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22). How should we react to such actions of the world? "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake" (Luke 6:22).

How is it possible to do what is right and then suffer for it? "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25). The issue has to do with the act of surrender—surrender of our will to the loving will of our Creator.

The end of this conspiracy

Just imagine that day: "The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in

their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."²

Remember this: "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. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:9–14).

¹ *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 5, p. 1089.
² *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.



By Marian Sirbu

Tainted influence

A CONSPIRACY BROUGHT TO EARTH TO INCITE REBELLION

In the word of God, we are told through his prophets that knowledge will increase rapidly in the end of time. “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:4, last part).

In the present world, it is easier than ever before to have access to different types of information such as print media, broadcast media, and social media—all of which contribute tremendously to the growth of knowledge. These tools have not only become very powerful, but have actually created a dependency

in people as a significant source for their everyday information such as the weather, meal plans, shopping, and their jobs. This dependency consequently brings about much influence over the human brain, whether positive or negative.

What is influence?

Influence is the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something, or the effect itself. It is the **capacity or power** of

persons or things to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behavior, opinions, etc., of others.

There are many people who disagree with this second concept, or at least the part which states that influence is a power. The understanding thus given is that threat or force is used to accomplish the goal. This is immensely contrary to the mere ability to “have an effect” on something through positive affirmation and encouragement.

The use of influence

"Among the many lessons taught by Solomon's life, none is more strongly emphasized than the power of influence for good or for ill. However contracted may be our sphere, we still exert an influence for weal or woe. Beyond our knowledge or control, it tells upon others in blessing or cursing. It may be heavy with the gloom of discontent and selfishness, or poisonous with the deadly taint of some cherished sin; or it may be charged with the life-giving power of faith, courage, and hope, and sweet with the fragrance of love. But potent for good or for ill it will surely be."¹

"Those who today occupy positions of trust should seek to learn the lesson taught by Solomon's prayer. The higher the position a man occupies, the greater the responsibility that he has to bear, the wider will be the influence that he exerts and the greater his need of dependence on God."²

In order to understand more about the power of influence, we need to go all the way back to the creation and investigate how this power was misused. In the Bible, we see that God said to Lucifer, "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" (Ezekiel 28:15).

"It was a being of wonderful power and glory that had set himself against God. Of Lucifer the Lord says, 'Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.' Ezekiel 28:12. Lucifer had been the covering cherub. He had stood in the light of God's presence. He had been the highest of all created beings, and had been foremost in revealing God's purposes to the universe."³

Lucifer was one of God's most amazing creations, and he held much power, authority, and influence in heaven. His influence among the angelic society was proportionate to his intelligence, position and popularity. God offered all these things to Lucifer freely, providing him with the

opportunity to use it all to give glory and honor to his Creator. However, the power and the talents granted him were abused and misused in the attempt to bring glory to himself.

"After he had sinned, his power to deceive was the more deceptive, and the unveiling of his character was the more difficult, because of the exalted position he had held with the Father."⁴

"All the powers of his master mind were now bent to the work of deception, to secure the sympathy of the angels that had been under his command."⁵

"This great change of position had not increased his love for God, nor for his wise and just law. When Satan became fully convinced that there was no possibility of his being re-instated in the favor of God, he manifested his malice with increased hatred and fiery vehemence."⁶

"Satan's position in heaven had been next to the Son of God. He was first among the angels. His power had been debasing, but God could not reveal it in its true light and carry all heaven in harmony with Him in removing him with his evil influences. His power was increasing, but the evil was yet unrecognized. It was a deadly power to the universe, but for the security of the worlds and the government of heaven, it was necessary that it should develop and be revealed in its true light."⁷

The question of many skeptical Christians is "Why did God allow Lucifer to create such a revolution? Didn't he have the power to destroy him, and thus stop him from defiling heaven's perfection?" It seems bizarre that God, who knows the beginning from the end, would allow such an evil to befall all of heaven, knowing that the consequences could not be good. So, why did He do this?

In His infinite wisdom, God fully knew that "the influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. Evil must be permitted to come to maturity.

For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, Satan must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of his law might forever be placed beyond all question."⁸

In contrast to the skeptical question, this paragraph states that it was for the good of the universe that Satan's evil influence was tolerated. Without the example of his failure, there would be others who would question God's authority and would attempt to challenge His great power. Thus, God's tolerance was an act of mercy rather than an act of cruelty.

A rebellious conspiracy on Earth

"Satan stood in amazement at his new condition. His happiness was gone. He looked upon the angels who, with him, were once so happy, but who had been expelled from Heaven with him. Before their fall, not a shade of discontent had marred their perfect bliss. Now all seemed changed. Countenances which had reflected the image of their Maker were gloomy and despairing. Strife, discord, and bitter recrimination, were among them. Previous to their rebellion these things had been unknown in Heaven. Satan now beholds the terrible results of his rebellion. He shuddered, and feared to face the future, and to contemplate the end of these things."⁹

"[Satan] would seek to destroy the happiness of Adam and Eve. He would endeavor to incite them to rebellion, knowing that this would cause grief in Heaven.

"His followers were seeking him; and he aroused himself and, assuming a look of defiance, informed them of his plans to wrest from God the noble Adam and his companion Eve. If he could, in any way, beguile them to disobedience, God would make some provision whereby they might be pardoned, and then himself and all the fallen angels would be in a fair way to

Most of us are familiar with the fall of humanity recorded in Genesis 3:1-7. But how many of us have ever considered that this account could uncover the true nature of today's conspiracy-saturated world? . . . Often what people think they want is actually a result of the powerful influence of the media, indirectly controlling what they want.

share with them of God's mercy. If this should fail, they could unite with Adam and Eve; for when once they should transgress the law of God, they would be subjects of God's wrath, like themselves. Their transgression would place them also, in a state of rebellion; and they could unite with Adam and Eve, take possession of Eden, and hold it as their home. And if they could gain access to the tree of life in the midst of the garden, their strength would, they thought, be equal to that of the holy angels, and even God himself could not expel them."¹⁰

Taking action

"Satan held a consultation with his evil angels. They did not all readily unite to engage in this hazardous and terrible work. He told them that he could not intrust the work to any one of them; for he thought that he alone had wisdom sufficient to carry forward so important an enterprise. He wished them to consider the matter while he should leave them and seek retirement, to mature his plans. He sought to impress upon them that this was their last and only hope. If they failed here, all prospect of regaining and controlling Heaven, or any other part of God's creation, was hopeless."¹¹

Most of us are familiar with the fall of humanity recorded in Genesis 3:1-7. But how many of us have ever considered that this account could uncover the true nature of today's conspiracy-saturated world?

Satan, in the guise of the serpent, laid out the basic elements of what every conspiracy needs in order to have a strong impact on humans.

However, he did not come to Adam and Eve as he was, in fear that they would recognize him and be reminded of his fall. "The angels . . . gave them the sad history of Satan's rebellion and fall. . . . They told them that Satan purposed to do them harm, and it was necessary for them to be guarded, for they might come in contact with the fallen foe; but he could not harm them while they yielded obedience to God's command; for, if necessary, every angel from Heaven would come to their help rather than that he should in any way do them harm. But if they disobeyed the command of God, then Satan would have power to ever annoy, perplex, and trouble, them."¹²

An open discussion initiated by Satan would make the human couple aware of his motives, and would cause them to withdraw from him, thereby destroying his plan. "Satan went alone to mature plans that would most surely secure the fall of Adam and Eve. He had fears that his purposes might be defeated. And again, even if he should be successful in leading Adam and Eve to disobey the commandment of God, and thus become transgressors of his law, and no good come to himself, his own case would not be improved; his guilt would only be increased."¹³

Satan cleverly devised another plan, in which he came in the form of a serpent to Adam and Eve, and delivered his message through this medium.

A dialogue with Eve in the Garden of Eden

First, Satan questioned Eve regarding the legitimacy of the truth

that she and her husband knew from God.

"He addressed her as though he was able to divine her thoughts: 'Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' Thus, with soft and pleasant words, and with musical voice, he addressed the wondering Eve. She was startled to hear a serpent speak."¹⁴ By twisting her perception of the truth, Satan aimed to lure her into a position in which he could better influence her mind. If he managed to make her step on this ground, then he would have full control of her mind and could entice her into sin.

In his attempt to entrap Eve, he seduced her by appealing to her passions and desires to do exactly the opposite of what she knew she should do.

"Eve was surprised and startled as she thus seemed to hear the echo of her thoughts."¹⁵

"He extolled her beauty and exceeding loveliness, which was not displeasing to Eve. But she was amazed, for she knew that to the serpent God had not given the power of speech.

"Eve's curiosity was aroused. Instead of fleeing from the spot, she listened to hear a serpent talk. It did not occur to her mind that it might be that fallen foe, using the serpent as a medium."¹⁶

Nowadays almost every deceptive scheme appeals to human passions and desires, causing people to lose sight of what they should do, and instead become centered on what they want. Oftentimes however, what they begin to believe they want is actually a result of the powerful influence of the media,



which is indirectly controlling what they want. The Bible says, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14, 15).

Thirdly, Satan told Adam and Eve a half-truth mixed with a lie. “And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, **then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil**” (Genesis 3:4, 5).

“By partaking of this tree, he declared, they would attain to a more exalted sphere of existence and enter a broader field of knowledge. He himself had eaten of the forbidden fruit, and as a result had acquired the power of speech. And he insinuated that the Lord jealously desired to withhold it from them, lest they should be exalted to equality with Himself. It was because of its wonderful properties, imparting wisdom and power, that He had prohibited them from tasting or even touching it. The tempter intimated that the divine

warning was not to be actually fulfilled; it was designed merely to intimidate them. How could it be possible for them to die? Had they not eaten of the tree of life? God had been seeking to prevent them from reaching a nobler development and finding greater happiness.”¹⁷

Conclusion

As mentioned in Revelation 20:10, the devil is the great deceiver of God’s people today, and has been through all the ages. Let us remember that Satan also tempted the Lord Jesus, the source of infinite wisdom. He came to Him as an angel, and he will come in the same manner to tempt men again. In 2 Corinthians 11:14, we read, “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

“Satan’s work has been the same since the days of Adam to the present, and he has pursued it with great success, tempting men to distrust God’s love and to doubt his wisdom. And in the great closing work of the rebellion the powers of evil will unite in a desperate struggle to work out their deceptive

plans to lead souls to ruin.”¹⁸

The enemy’s aim is to distort the truth given to us by a loving God, and replace it with lies about ourselves, and about God’s care for us. He is, after all, the father of lies “because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). If he manages to separate us from our Father, he is able to take full control of our mind and influence our every action. Only by immersing ourselves in God’s word with constant prayer and a powerful network of believers can we withstand Satan’s influence, and overcome the conspiracies with which he is scheming to target God’s people today.

1 *Prophets and Kings*, p. 85.
 2 *Christian Leadership*, p. 13.
 3 *The Desire of Ages*, p. 758.
 4 *Ibid.*
 5 *The Great Controversy*, p. 496.
 6 *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 30.
 7 *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 341.
 8 *The Great Controversy*, p. 498.
 9 *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 28.
 10 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 11 *The Signs of the Times*, January 16, 1879.
 12 *Ibid.*
 13 *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 31.
 14 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
 15 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 53.
 16 *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 36.
 17 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 54.
 18 *The Review and Herald*, September 30, 1909.



TEMPTED

BY REVENGE

OR SEEKING ETERNAL VICTORY?

Character revealed when facing a conspiracy

By Septimiu D. Muresan

Wonderful privileges are for every true believer to enjoy! To be the children of the Most High, to have our names written on the palms of His hands, to be redeemed and pardoned by the blood of the Creator, to be predestinated to a life which is measured by the life of God—what more can one desire? Indeed, we are the most privileged citizens of the universe! You, my dear reader, you are the object of the dearest care and sympathy of your Heavenly Father, as though you were the only human on this Earth, because “the soul that has given himself to Christ is more precious in His sight than the whole world. The Saviour would have passed through the agony of Calvary that one might be saved in His kingdom. He will never abandon one for whom He has died.”¹ And that you are!

Crime in the royal family! Amnon, the firstborn of king David forced his half-sister, Tamar, the beautiful daughter of David and Maacah. (Macaah was one of David’s six wives at the time; she was a daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur, an enemy territory David had conquered in 1 Samuel 27:8.) Another child born to this union was Tamar’s strikingly attractive brother, Absalom.

What a disastrous attitude was manifested in their half-brother, Amnon! After he forced Tamar, the Bible says that “Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her” (2 Samuel 13:15). That was not love at all, but lust.

How the desire for revenge is built

“And Absalom her brother said unto her, Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? but hold now thy peace, my sister: he is thy brother; regard not this thing. So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom’s house” (2 Samuel 13:20).

A major point that incited bitter wrath in Absalom was that the king was wroth but didn’t do anything whatsoever to punish the grievous crime. “When king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth” (2 Samuel 13:21). The father of these young people, the king, the most powerful man in the country, did nothing. . . .

The very first sign when someone is contemplating revenge is no communication: "And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar" (2 Samuel 13:22).

For two years, Absalom had appeared to be patient, yet he had secretly begun to devise a cunning plan to kill his half-brother. When the time came, he made the actual strike through his servants: "Amnon only is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar" (2 Samuel 13:32).

"But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day" (2 Samuel 13:37). As per Nathan's prophecy in 2 Samuel 12, the second son dies in David's family, killed by his own brother. . . .

Then after three years ("So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years" (2 Samuel 13:38), the king calls Absalom back—but with a condition: "The king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So, Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face" (2 Samuel 14:24).

The father's love vs. the son's mischief

Never praise a son, just appreciate the good traits developed! The Bible says that: "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him" (2 Samuel 14:25). Yet when we look over his entire life, we find very inspired the following thought: "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Isaiah 1:6).

Two years after he returned from his grandpa, finally Absalom is invited by the father to the palace: "Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face" (2 Samuel 14:28).

Combined, there were 7 years since Amnon's crime had triggered revenge in Absalom's heart: (2 years until he killed Amnon, 3 years away in Geshur and 2 years in Jerusalem).

Seven years of wrath, extreme anger, and full of revengeful thoughts. . . . This was Absalom.

Now the father receives his son with love and compassion: "Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom" (2 Samuel 14:33).

"It was not wise for the king to leave a man of Absalom's character—ambitious, impulsive, and passionate—to brood for two years over supposed grievances. And David's action in permitting him to return to Jerusalem, and yet refusing to admit him to his presence, enlisted in his behalf the sympathies of the people."¹

A thief of hearts

Absalom prepared his complete revenge against his father—who still had never punished Amnon—by getting ready to overthrow the kingdom and take it for himself: "Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him" (2 Samuel 15:1).

What a difference between the father and the son! The father, under divine inspiration, wrote: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Psalm 20:7).

Then Absalom became an early bird trying to appear popular: "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel" (2 Samuel 15:2).

No matter what the issue and without investigating anything, Absalom told every complainer they were right. "And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee" (2 Samuel 15:3).

So, he then presented himself as the savior of the country: "Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made

judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him" (2 Samuel 15:4, 5).

Reminds me somehow of Judas' kiss in betraying our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

Conspiracy covered by a pretended garb of piety

During the fortieth year of David's kingship: "Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord. And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron" (2 Samuel 15:7–10).

Innocent men involved

"With Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not anything" (2 Samuel 15:11). Notice that these knew nothing of Absalom's actual intentions.

The two hundred guests whom Absalom had invited to take part with him in his sacrifices, were likely prominent, influential citizens of Jerusalem. That they were entirely ignorant of Absalom's purposes is shown by the extreme secrecy with which the affair was managed. Absalom, no doubt, hoped that as soon as he had them at Hebron, he would secure them to his side, or, failing this, forcibly to prevent their opposition. In any case it would appear to the people that they were with him, and he would thus secure additional prestige.

"The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh

well to his going" (Proverbs 14:15). The *Amplified Bible Translation* says, "The naive or inexperienced person [is easily misled and] believes every word he hears, But the prudent man [is discreet and astute and] considers well where he is going." Or in other words, don't be stupid and believe all you hear; be smart and check where you are headed.

Those who take advantage of troublous times

There is a class of people that always try to speculate to gain the best advantages for themselves. The moments when they are less discovered are the moments of war, revolution, or any other restless situations that may come upon a nation.

One example of such an opportunist is Ziba. He had been a servant of King Saul and then a servant of Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, trying to look good in the eyes of the king while speaking badly about Jonathan's son, the good friend of David. When David fled Jerusalem after Absalom's conspiracy, Ziba came to David with provisions, claiming that Mephibosheth had broken faith with David. "And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king's household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father" (2 Samuel 16:1-3).

The king didn't know the other side of the story, and in response he rewarded Ziba: "Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth. And Ziba said, I humbly beseech thee

that I may find grace in thy sight, my lord, O king" (2 Samuel 16:4)

Shimei—a real enemy

"And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial; . . . And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust" (2 Samuel 16:5-7, 13).

"In David's prosperity Shimei had not shown by word or act that he was not a loyal subject. But in the affliction of the king this Benjamite revealed his true character. He had honored David upon his throne, but he cursed him in his humiliation. Base and selfish, he looked upon others as of the same character as himself, and, inspired by Satan, he wreaked his hatred upon him whom God had chastened. The spirit that leads man to triumph over, to revile or distress, one who is in affliction is the spirit of Satan."²

A cunning plan overthrown by God's Providence

The Providence of God works in mysterious ways. There is a limit to which evil forces can work. Specifically, Absalom called for the greatest counselor in the kingdom: "Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom" (2 Samuel 16:12).

"And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom" (2 Samuel 16:23).

"Ahithophel had been held in high esteem for his wisdom, but he was destitute of the enlightenment which comes from God."³

It was Ahithophel (grandfather of Bathsheba) that advised utter destruction of David. "Moreover, Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only: And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace. And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel" (2 Samuel 17:1-4).

Even though this counsel pleased Absalom and all the elders, God did not allow it to happen. Hushai was called to give his counsel as well. He started off in a very clever way. "And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is **not good** at this time" (2 Samuel 17:7). Then he continued by giving advice that all Israel should be gathered in battle against David. This counsel was received even better by Absalom and his rebellious crowd. "And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom" (2 Samuel 17:14).

Now this doesn't mean that the counsel of Ahithophel was good. It was just good in an evil way for the evil forces. Basically, this was an answer to David's prayer. "And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (2 Samuel 15:31).

The Christian dealing with evil ones

When the royal army of King David was about to be dispatched for the battle, the king gave a noble and

kind command: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom" (2 Samuel 18:5).

We find out that Joab the general was a ferocious leader. "Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak" (2 Samuel 18:14).

Despite all the evil that Absalom did, his father's love was still there for him until the end. "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33).

Beautiful was the kindness of the king toward those who had taken advantage of the troublous times. Shimei came to ask for forgiveness and was forgiven. "And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David. And there were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over Jordan before the king. And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan; And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. . . . Therefore, the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king swore unto him" (2 Samuel 19:16–19, 23).

The son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, was one of those who suffered for the king when he was in great distress. He was slandered by his servant Ziba. Mephibosheth finally met with the king—and he was in very bad shape because he had been affected by the whole situ-

ation. "And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace" (2 Samuel 19:24).

The King had only heard Ziba's side of the story and inquired of Mephibosheth as to why he did not join him. "And it came to pass, when he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth?" (2 Samuel 19:25).

Let us be amazed by the manifestation of Christian attitude in Mephibosheth toward the malefactors: "And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes. For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king? And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." (2 Samuel 19:26–30).

Conclusion

God has ultimate control over everything that happens. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). From on high, Providence sees all that the sons of men are plotting.

God saw Amnon forcing his sister Tamar. And God saw that Amnon never repented.

God saw Absalom plotting for two years to kill his brother Amnon.

God saw the loving heart of David that received his criminal son after three years.

God saw the mischievous and treacherous plans that Absalom was devising.

God saw the brilliant and cunning plan of destruction devised by Ahithophel. But God did not allow that to happen—for David's protection.

God saw the heart of Absalom never repenting and He allowed him to die.

God sees everything.

There are things happening—conspiracies that are happening—but God's plans are always best for those that love Him. God saw David's heart, Mephibosheth's heart!

A big lesson for us: Not to be absorbed in or become fretful about conspiracies—but instead to love the Lord. As frustrating as having to face conspiracies and injustice may seem, our real success is not in trying to take revenge against those who may have horribly hurt us—but rather in seeking victory in Jesus. "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

"Christ's life was an example of persevering energy, which was not allowed to become weakened by reproach, ridicule, privation, or hardships."⁴

And after all these trials, David exclaimed: "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence" (2 Samuel 22:2, 3).

"And he sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them" (Verse 15). "For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured" (2 Samuel 18:8).

"He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me" (2 Samuel 22:18). "Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great" (Verse 36).

"Therefore, I will give thanks unto thee!" (Verse 50).

1 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 729.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 736.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 739.

4 *Messages to Young People*, p. 79.

GRASPING FOR MORE

THE GREED OF JEZEBEL'S CONSPIRACY

By Nick Dobrescu

The problem of covetousness

“Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage” (Micah 2:1, 2).

“Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for none but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land” (Isaiah 5:8).

Introduction

The Bible record contains information portraying the events of earth's history which will confront God's church in this final hour.

“The Bible has accumulated and bound up together its treasures for this last generation. All the great events and solemn transactions of Old Testament history have been, and are, repeating themselves in the church in these last days.”¹

When, through the eyes of faith, we accept the “events and transactions” recorded within the Bible narrative as admonition for those at the end of the world, seemingly mundane or insignificant passages can take on serious implications. It is this type of passage which is preserved in the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21.

A covetous king: The story of Naboth's vineyard

The Spirit of Prophecy identifies the history of King Ahab's covetousness over Naboth's vineyard as the landmark leading to the close of probation for the king's household.

“Naturally of a covetous disposition, Ahab, strengthened and sustained in wrongdoing by Jezebel, had followed the dictates of his evil heart until he was fully controlled by the spirit of selfishness.”²

In striking contrast to the selfish king, Naboth's character shows nobility as he refused to sell his vineyard to Ahab. Unlike Esau, to him, his birthright was more important than life itself. When monetary enticement failed, Jezebel displayed her character by circumventing God's law through falsehood, threats, and finally murder. When Naboth

testified of his faith and obedience even to the point of martyrdom, the prophet Elijah appeared on the scene to announce that Ahab and Jezebel had closed their own probation. As we carefully analyze this story to ascertain the information relating to our generation, the passage bears a solemn warning to us all.

Jezebel represents the corrupting influence of Babylon upon God's church.

In the book of Revelation, the Lord declares to the professed church at one phase of its history: “I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. . . . And I will kill her children with death; and

all the churches will know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto everyone of you according to your works" (Revelation 2:20, 21, 23).

Ahab represents leadership of a church which has conformed to the influence of Jezebel, rather than to the influence of God:

"The influence of Jezebel over Ahab was greater than the influence of the Spirit of God, however powerful and convincing the evidence from heaven."³

"God would have been with Ahab if he had walked in the counsel of Heaven. But Ahab did not do this. He married a woman given to idolatry. Jezebel had more power over the king than God had. She led him into idolatry, and with him the people."⁴

When a leader rejects the influence of God's Spirit, in his position of responsibility he can do nothing else than to manifest the character of the spirit of Satan. Ahab represents an unholy "kingly power."

"Just as soon as man is placed where God should be, he loses his purity, his vigor, his confidence in God's power. Moral confusion results, because his powers become unsanctified and perverted. He feels incompetent to judge his fellowmen, and he strives unlawfully to be god over them."⁵

"It is not in the order of God that any man, or any class of men, should assume that God has made them conscience for their brethren, or put forth their finite hand in a patronizing manner to control the Lord's delegated workers, thus endangering the safety of the Lord's heritage as well as their own, and retarding the work of God."⁶

The setting of Naboth's story is a church corrupted by the idolatry of Babylon and which seeks to enforce arbitrary control through the exercise of kingly power, as symbolized by the marriage of Ahab with Jezebel. The story takes place in the city of Samaria, Ahab's capital and palatial city. The city represents the church which Jezebel is influencing and Ahab is ruling:

"Not only did Ahab introduce Baal worship at the capital city, but under the leadership of Jezebel he erected heathen altars in many 'high

places,' where in the shelter of surrounding groves the priests and others connected with this seductive form of idolatry exerted their baleful influence, until well-nigh all Israel were following after Baal."⁷

The church, as represented by the city of Samaria, was "well-nigh all" following the teachings of Babylon. Into this grave time of apostasy, the faithfulness of Naboth is uplifted. Naboth's name means "elevation," which not only describes how his character stood out during this time of great darkness, but also identifies how his enemies lifted him up as one causing great problems within the kingdom.

In Ahab's name, Jezebel wrote letters which declared, "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die" (1 Kings 21:9, 10).

The marginal reading for "set Naboth on high," states "in the top of the people." As Naboth is lifted up unto the people we should prayerfully ask what specifically turned Naboth's vineyard into an issue, forever finalizing the destiny of Ahab's household? Who are the "sons of Belial?" What were the tactics used by Jezebel against Naboth?

The record of Ahab's desire for the vineyard is more profound when one recognizes what a vineyard represents:

An example is given from Israel's wilderness journey, where "order, dispatch, and exactitude were required of each one, at the post of duty assigned him. This is an important lesson to the church, and to every man whom God has chosen to act a part in His great work. No one is required to do another's work. Each is to do the work assigned him with exactness and integrity. The management of that great church in their journeyings in the wilderness symbolizes the management of the church till the close of earth's history, till we come into possession of the heavenly Canaan."⁸

"When a laborer is set in a certain portion of the Lord's vineyard, his work is given him as a faithful

laborer together with God to work that vineyard. He is not to wait to be told at every point by human minds what he must do, but plan his work to labor wherever he is needed. God has given you brain power to use. The wants of the believers and the necessities of unbelievers are to be carefully studied and your labors are to meet their necessities. You are to inquire of God and not of any living man what you shall do. You are a servant of the living God, and not a servant of any man. You cannot do the work of God intelligently and be the shadow of another man's thoughts and directions. You are under God."⁹

Naboth's vineyard represents the specific work which the Lord had ordained for Naboth to accomplish.

Kingly power contrary to God's will

Naboth did not recognize this vineyard as simply his, but as an inheritance from his fathers, which God had commanded him to maintain:

"Naboth valued his vineyard highly because it had belonged to his fathers, and he refused to part with it. 'The Lord forbid it me,' he said to Ahab, 'that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.' According to the Levitical code no land could be transferred permanently by sale or exchange; every one of the children of Israel must 'keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.' Numbers 36:7."¹⁰



Not only was Naboth's vineyard ordained by the Lord to be his specific work to accomplish for the Lord, but Naboth's vineyard was also located within the city. Naboth's work was to be carried on within the precincts of the city, which represents a work within the church. By God's design, Naboth's ministry was his own possession to work. He was to be in the church, but was to carry on his work as the Lord specified, not as the leadership of the church dictated. Naboth was to work his vineyard for the Lord, regardless of whether the leadership was walking with God, or walking with Baal. Naboth's vineyard clearly represents a ministry which God ordained to be within the church, yet is a work to be accomplished in a self-supporting fashion:

"If there are those whom the Lord moves upon to give themselves to the neglected portions of the Lord's vineyard, let no man seek to tum them away from their appointed work. . . . As you go out in the highways and hedges, let no minister of the gospel say unto you, 'Why do ye do so?' We have for our example the ministry of Christ in earth."¹¹

"Now I want to say, God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line. Here is a vineyard presenting its barren places that have received no labor. And if one should start out to till these places in the name of the Lord, unless he should get permission of the men in a little circle of authority he would receive no help. But God means that His workers shall have help. If a hundred should start out on a mission to these destitute fields, crying unto God, He would open the way before them. Let me tell you, if your heart is in the work, and you have faith in God, you need not depend on the sanction of any minister or any people; if you go right to work in the name of the Lord, in a humble way doing what you can to teach the truth, God will vindicate you."¹²

The plot: An innocent man murdered

Moses through the Levitical code required Naboth to keep the vineyard of his fathers. "So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers" (Numbers 36:7). How Jezebel and Ahab pursued their purposes is illuminating:

When Naboth refused to surrender his work to the power of the king, a publicity campaign was initiated through the publishing instrumentalities which bore the "king's signet." This campaign was motivated by covetousness and selfishness, and established with falsehood: Naboth was lifted up through the king's publishing instruments and made to appear as the burning issue throughout the entire city. This campaign continued until a trial was set up, and false witnesses called to give false evidence. Two "sons of Belial" are brought forward to bear false witness against Naboth.

Just as in the case of Eli's sons (see 1 Samuel 2:12), these were men holding sacred office but who, in reality, were actually children of Satan.

The presentation of false testimonies in the presence of those within the city describes a church trial. After the testimony, Naboth was taken outside the city where he was stoned. Jesus even told a parable about a stolen vineyard and a son of the real owner—representing Christ—who is killed, paralleling what happened to Naboth (Matthew 21:33–40). After the crime, Elijah confronted King Ahab and essentially told him, "You're going to suffer the same fate as Naboth, because you killed an innocent man." Naboth, who was falsely accused and killed outside the city, is a type of Christ in Elijah's pronouncement. As an innocent man, Naboth being taken out of the city is representative of church members being unjustly disfellowshipped from the church. Each stone thrown at Naboth represents the casting of a vote. When we disfellowship members from the church today we

are stoning them in figure and type. That is a grave responsibility.

"Can we cast the first stone in condemnation of a brother, when God is extending His mercy to us, and forgiving our trespasses against Him?"¹³

The story of Naboth points out the specific actions of kingly power which has lost its discernment through the acceptance of Babylonian idols. And yes, sadly, this sometimes occurs in the church. In a state of ecclesiastical greed, motivated by selfishness and covetousness, this type of power determines to control those within the city, who have been raised up by the Lord to do a work for Him—and who choose to retain their ministry within the church and yet not submit their specific work to the control of men who have no connection with their work other than that they are all citizens of the city. After a falsified publicity campaign, a church trial is set up. False witnesses are then brought against the accused ministries, and they are then disfellowshipped from the church at large.

The climax of Naboth's story

As we have examined the story of Naboth, the implications for Adventism today are likewise sobering and solemn. Before we raise our hand in agreement against the accused, we should be absolutely sure that the vote we cast, is as the Lord would have us cast it. But the most sobering thought of the entire story is the climax of Naboth's story.

When the kingly power, directed by a church corrupted by the influence of Babylon, executed their judgment on Naboth, immediately Elijah appeared on the scene to pronounce God's judgment against that action, informing those involved that their probation was closed:

"And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, And will make

If we find ourselves in a position within God’s church where we must exercise the responsibility of voting on one side of an issue or another, let us fulfill our sacred responsibility with holy reverence and humility of mind, esteeming others as better than ourselves and shunning every possibility of reenacting the attributes of Ahab and Jezebel—who seized Naboth’s vineyard out of apostasy and greed for more gain.

thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 21:20–22).

God forbid that the “solemn transaction” of Naboth’s vineyard would be enacted again in this earth’s history! At the very least we should understand this story as a warning against exhibiting a desire to rule our brethren. We should not, however, use this history as an excuse to evade dealing with sin in the church, but as a call to deal with it righteously.

The balance

“When man is put to death by his fellowman, to serve some selfish purpose—as Naboth was slain that Ahab might obtain the coveted vineyard—what honor [horror], what anguish, should be felt by those who make and execute the laws! How zealous should be their efforts to ascertain the facts, and then decide the ease with strict integrity, and execute the penalty with impartial justice. . . .

“Here are lessons which God’s people at the present day should take to heart. There are grievous sins indulged by individual mem-

bers of the church—covetousness, overreaching, deception, fraud, falsehood, and many others. If these sins are neglected by those who have been placed in authority in the church, the blessing of the Lord is withheld from His people, and the innocent suffer with the guilty. The officers in the church should be earnest, energetic men, having a zeal for God, and they should take the prompt and thorough measures to condemn and correct these wrongs. In this work they should act, not from selfishness, jealousy, or, personal prejudice, but in all meekness and lowliness of mind, with a sincere desire that God may be glorified. Inhumanity, false dealing, prevarication, licentiousness, and other sins, are not to be palliated or excused; for they will speedily demoralize the church. Sin may be called by false names, and glossed over by plausible excuses and pretended good motives, but this does not lessen its guilt in the sight of God. Wherever it may be found, sin is offensive to God, and will surely meet its punishment.”¹⁴

“All of God’s servants have a work to do in His vineyard. In the church of God no one is to set himself up in kingly power and authority. ‘All ye are brethren.’ ”¹⁵

To whom does the land belong? (2 Samuel 3:12)

Elsewhere in Bible history, a mocking challenge is given to a king: “So you are a king; act like one and claim the land!” It was an old practice that kings could preempt property from others according to their own will and whim (see 2 Samuel 10:9, 10). The contemporary mode of that practice is that those with money and power characteristically can have property that belongs to others, whether by paying huge irresistible prices (gentrification!) or by “eminent domain” and other legal acts. Land tends to gravitate toward those who have socioeconomic, political leverage. At times in history, large-scale “land



grabs" have even been cloaked under the guise of "discovery," "scientific exploration," or similarly lofty self-justifications.

Food and lands in the last days (The time of trouble)

Like our Master, the kingdom to which Christians belong is not of this world. The messenger of the Lord makes a clear point:

"The Lord has shown me in vision, repeatedly, that it is contrary to the Bible to make any provision for our temporal wants in the time of trouble. I saw that if the saints have food laid up by them, or in the fields, in the time of trouble when sword, famine, and pestilence are in the land, it will be taken from them by violent hands, and strangers would reap their fields. Then will be the time for us to trust wholly in God, and He will sustain us. I saw that our bread and water would be sure at that time, and we should not lack, or suffer hunger. The Lord has shown me that some of His children would fear when they see the price of food rising, and they would buy food and lay it by for the time of trouble. Then in a time of need, I saw them go to their food and look at it, and it had bred worms, and was full of living creatures, and not fit for use."¹⁶

"Houses and lands will be of no use to the saints in the time of trouble, for they will then have to flee before infuriated mobs, and at that time their possessions cannot be disposed of to advance the cause of present truth. . . .

"I saw that if any held on to their property and did not inquire of the Lord as to their duty, He would not make duty known, and they would be permitted to keep their property, and in the time of trouble it would come up before them like a mountain to crush them, and they would try to dispose of it, but would not be able. . . . But if they desired to be taught, He would teach them, in a time of need, when to sell and how much to sell."¹⁷

"In the last great conflict of the controversy with Satan those who are loyal to God will see every earthly support cut off. Because they

refuse to break His law in obedience to earthly powers, they will be forbidden to buy or sell. It will finally be decreed that they shall be put to death. . . . But to the obedient is given the promise, 'He shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.' Isaiah 33:16. By this promise the children of God will live."¹⁸

Learning from the history of Naboth

The Naboth story is a paradigmatic tale that anticipates the contest between two ways of life that now occupy both the church and our world economy.

We can glean three concepts from it:

1. The narrative concerns a dispute between two systems of land ownership, inheritance, and possession.
2. The dispute between land systems is rooted in a dispute between Jehovah and Baal. Jehovah is the Owner of land as inheritance; Baal is the sponsor of land as a possession that leads, in turn, to commoditization.
3. This unequal struggle between these two land systems is interrupted by the sharp, critical appearance in the story of Elijah who is a truth-speaker who exposes the unsustainable folly of royal patterns concerning commoditized owners.

Different organizations—some of them churches—have verified how hunger is spreading over the world. Far from being circumstantial, this situation is the consequence of carefully designed measures to globalize the economy, which requires monopolizing of production goods and allocating land to agro-industrial, energy or development projects, condemning entire populations to death. The plans for the displacement and exile of communities come from the highest spheres of political power and are due to precise intentions. The internal war and social decomposition of our countries constitutes the strategy and instrument to structure an increasingly exclusive society and economy. The story of Naboth's vineyard invites us to analyze the deepest causes of the confiscation of land, to identify

personal and structural responsibilities, to examine the mechanisms used by power to produce hunger and to denounce exclusion as a situation totally contrary to the will of our God. Like Elijah before the king, the role of the believer is to keep the conflict open so that the system's plans are not clothed in religious clothing and the will of the Lord is not ideologized again. Therefore, the believer cannot act differently. His entire life, marked by kindness in fraternal relationships, but also by the strengthening of alternative economic practices, constitutes a powerful delegitimization of the system and a commitment to make this world a better and more livable, equitable and sustainable society.

An appeal to us

As we solemnly contemplate the sobering message found in the story of Naboth's vineyard, should we not rededicate our lives to Christ with the same consecration which Naboth demonstrated? Naboth chose to cast his vote on the side of the Lord's revealed will, and we too, may choose every day, moment by moment, to place our vote, through the exercise of our will, on the Lord's side of the controversy. And if we find ourselves in a position within God's church where we must exercise the responsibility of voting on one side of an issue or another, let us fulfill our sacred responsibility with holy reverence and humility of mind, esteeming others as better than ourselves and shunning every possibility of reenacting the attributes of Ahab and Jezebel.

1 *Selected Messages*, bk. 3, p. 339.

2 *Prophets and Kings*, p. 204.

3 *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 2, p. 1033.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 376.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

7 *Prophets and Kings*, p. 114.

8 *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, vol. 3, pp. 1147, 1148.

9 *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 13, p. 25.

10 *Prophets and Kings*, p. 205.

11 *Words of Encouragement to Self-supporting Workers*, 12 5, 11.

13 *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, vol. 4, p. 1746.

14 *The Home Missionary*, January 1, 1892.

15 *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1881.

16 *Bible Training School*, May 1 1903.

17 Broadside, "To Those who are receiving the seal of the 18 living God," January 31, 1849.

19 *Early Writings*, pp. 56, 57.

20 *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 121, 122.



FEAR...

By Barbara Montrose

OF LOSING EARTHLY POSITION AND STATUS

Most of us have heard of the wise men from the East who came to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. Although not of Hebrew lineage, they made their long pilgrimage by faith, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to present to the infant Saviour in Judea. Why did they do this? What led them?

These upright men of integrity, having studied the indications of Providence in nature, had turned to the Hebrew Scriptures for greater light. Having discovered a verse in Numbers 24:17, "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel", the magi followed what appeared to be a star, yet was a distant company of shining angels

directing them to Jerusalem.

Purehearted and noble as they were, these men honestly expected to find a city full of joy, heralding the advent of the long-awaited Messiah. How puzzling to arrive at the sacred temple—only to find no one interested in the matter. Much to their disappointment, they instead encountered a strange sense of surprise and fear, mingled with contempt.

Picture the scene: "The priests are rehearsing traditions. They extol their religion and their own piety, while they denounce the Greeks and Romans as heathen, and sinners above others. The wise men are not idolaters, and in the sight of God they stand far higher than do

these, His professed worshipers; yet they are looked upon by the Jews as heathen. Even among the appointed guardians of the Holy Oracles their eager questionings touch no chord of sympathy."¹

A conspiracy rooted in the earthly government

The news of the arrival of the magi then came to the palace of Herod the Great, a descendant of Edom. This ruler was bitterly hated by the Jewish populace, so his security apparently lay in three things:

1. Intimidation through violence and murder

2. Political ties to Rome
3. Lavish enrichment of the temple, a stupendous source of pride for all.

Indeed, it is a frail foundation that props up the tyrants of this world! Here we see a man plagued by fear of losing his position. His strategy now was to pretend to be a friendly “nice guy” interested in truth. (Have you ever met people like this?)

“Herod suspected the priests of plotting with the strangers to excite a popular tumult and unseat him from the throne. He **concealed** his mistrust, however, determined to thwart their schemes by superior cunning. Summoning the chief priests and the scribes, he questioned them as to the teaching of their sacred books in regard to the place of the Messiah’s birth.”²

Herod’s actual concern was only to maintain his kingly position, his power over the realm. But now suddenly he was pretending to be interested in Scripture.

The plot thickens. . . . A selfish, power-hungry worldly man then goes to meet with some selfish, power-hungry religious men:

Herod “was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born” (Matthew 2:3, 4). Notice, in stressed-out tension he “demanded” this information.

So, the guardians of the sacred oracles had to do some homework. In response, they found in Micah 5:2 that the answer was Bethlehem. But the verse also clearly reveals who that Ruler is! Someone “from everlasting”! This is a different kind of Ruler—One not limited to an earthly throne such as that jealously being clutched by Herod. But no one seemed to care about that fact. Worldly-minded people focus on this world and how they can desperately achieve and maintain their stranglehold on reigning over others. That’s their priority.

Danger at hand

Next, the sly Herod invited the wise men to a private interview. Cleverly disguising his furious rage,

he courteously inquired of them as to what time the star appeared. “And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also” (Matthew 2:8).

Really? This bitter Edomite is suddenly eager to worship Israel’s new young king? Hardly!

Yet, by God’s grace, the faithful wise men continued to be guided by a divine Hand: “When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:9–11).

In tune as the wise men were with the Spirit of God, “being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way” (Matthew 2:12). By God’s Providence, their generous gifts were to supply the means for Joseph and Mary’s journey into Egypt and temporary sojourn in that foreign land. Thankfully, Joseph had also been warned in a dream to flee from the wrath of Herod—wrath which his little family was spared the misfortune of seeing. He simply fled by faith, in obedience to the instruction: “The angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt” (Matthew 2:13, 14). (This was the direct fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy found in Hosea 11:1.)

Tragically, a Scripture found in Jeremiah 31:5 was soon afterward fulfilled: “Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamen-

tation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children

refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.”

Paranoia triggered by pride

Herod could not bear a biblical reality issued by the Majesty of the universe: “Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him” (Ezekiel 21:26, 27). Centuries before Herod, even the great Nebuchadnezzar had not been able to prevent this overturning. In Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar learned in a dream from divine Inspiration that other empires would follow his. His portion of the statue in his dream was gold, but the rest was not. He could not endure such a dampening of his pride! In the next chapter, Daniel 3, we see him making a statue entirely of gold, likely in a vain attempt to try to alter the course of future history. Thus is illustrated the unbridled lust of human ambition and fear of reduction in worldly status.

Now back to Herod:

“Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men” (Matthew 2:16).

Why did the Lord allow Herod and his soldiers to conspire in such a horrible massacre against innocent children? All these occurrences were part of a bigger picture than mere human eyes could see:

“Herod waited anxiously for the return of the wise men; for he was impatient to carry out his determined purpose to destroy the infant King of Israel. After he had waited long for the knowledge he desired, he feared his purpose might be thwarted. He reasoned thus: Could those men have read the dark deed he premeditated? Could they

have understood his design, and purposely avoided him? This he thought was insult and mockery. His impatience, envy, and hatred, increased. He was stirred by his father, the devil, to seek the accomplishment of his purpose by a most cruel act. . . .

“Herod issued a proclamation to a large body of soldiers, whose hearts were hardened by crime, war, and bloodshed, to go throughout Bethlehem and all the coasts thereof, and massacre all the children from two years old and under. Herod designed in this cruel act to accomplish a double purpose: first, to exercise, by this bold act, his power and authority over the Jews; and, second, to silence their proud boastings in regard to their king, and also make his own kingdom secure, by murdering the infant prince whom he envied and feared. This cruel work was accomplished. The sword of unfeeling soldiers carried destruction everywhere. The horror and distress of parents were beyond description.”³

A twofold judgment

“All this terrible calamity was suffered of God, to humble the pride of the Jewish nation. Their crimes and wickedness had been so great that the Lord permitted the wicked Herod to thus punish them. Had they been less boastful and ambitious, their lives pure, their habits simple and sincere, God would have preserved them from being thus humiliated and afflicted by their enemies. God would, in a signal manner, have made the wrath of the king harmless to his people, had they been faithful and perfect before him. But he could not especially work for them, for their works were abhorred by him.

“The Jews had excited the envy and hatred of Herod against Christ, through their false interpretation of the prophets. They taught that Christ was to reign over an earthly empire, in unsurpassed glory. Their proud boasting presented the Saviour of the world, and his mission to the earth, altogether in a false light. Their lofty ideas and their proud boasting did not result as Satan

had at first purposed they should, in the destruction of the infant Saviour, but rebounded back upon themselves, filling their homes with mourning.”⁴

The fearful death of the cruel tyrant Herod also followed soon afterward. Regardless of whether the perpetrator of crime be Gentile or Jew, the biblical principle is the same: What is sown is reaped.

A conspiracy rooted in the ecclesiastical government

What about the ecclesiastical government of the Hebrew nation? Were God’s chosen people immune to the same level of acute envy? Let us consider the fruits borne by the elite career clergymen and the council known as the Sanhedrin.

At the unjust arraignment of Christ, even the heathen Roman governor Pontius Pilate “knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy” (Mark 15:10). The priests and rabbis had continuously stalked Jesus, sending “certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words” (Mark 12:13). They were constantly conspiring to find some premise on which they could condemn the innocent Lamb of God. Finally, at His trial, “the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death” (Matthew 26:59). Is this not conspiracy of the highest order?

The conspirators twisted Christ’s words: “At the last came two false witnesses, And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days” (Matthew 26:60, 61). But did Jesus really make that comment? Had those been His words? What truly happened? Let’s look back at the scene: “Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was

risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:18–22).

So, we see here that the Jews were bullying Jesus into producing a sign especially for them, by making a show that He was able to perform miracles. (This, of course, was not actually necessary since the validity of His many miracles spoke for themselves.) But their priority was to have their office and authority recognized, hence their demand of Him. Jesus had never said He was going to destroy their impressive temple. He spoke of the temple of His body, which He Himself, in cooperation with His Father, was soon to resurrect from the dead through divine power. As He explained on another occasion, “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:17, 18). “In him was life; and the life was the light of men;” “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 1:4; 5:26).

But instead of accepting the truth about the life-giving power of Christ, the professional ecclesiastics chose instead to twist His words to label Him as a domestic terrorist. Here’s a lesson for all today. Don’t blindly take someone else’s version of what a person has supposedly said or done. Follow the Golden Rule to do unto others as you would want done if you were the victim suffering under what could possibly be a grossly inaccurate accusation. Do your research, connect the dots, and even speak to the source yourself instead of relying on hearsay.

Why were these career clergymen so afraid of Christ? Was it because His words of life and compassionate works happened to garner more attention from the people than they could manage to muster for themselves? Was this an insult to their self-exalted dignity? Did they consider this lowly Galilean to be a threat to their aims of perpetual pre-eminence as the leaders in Israel?

Evidently, like Nebuchadnezzar

and Herod, the career clergymen also failed to accept the same principle of the Almighty: "Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (Ezekiel 21:26, 27). The One "whose right it is" was Jesus Christ—and just like the worldly kings, the career clergymen were so blinded by their own ambitious conspiracy that they refused to accept it.

Refreshing exceptions

Thankfully, there were refreshing exceptions to the tendency of the religious leaders. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are two such examples. These prominent men bravely came to the forefront to stand for Jesus following His unjust and ignominious death. They saw the need of the hour and generously gave to the cause without being asked.

Likewise, later, in the time of the apostles, Gamaliel, too, was a voice of reason amid an envious council that conspired against Christ's followers, just as they had done while the Lord was on earth.

What about us? Are we willing to allow Christ to mold and fashion us into refreshing exceptions to the tendencies so common to the envious, conspiring world of today?

In the end, there will be a contrast between two different groups:

1. Those who strive for the highest place among their brethren on earth—and although they may achieve it and even jealously manage to maintain it through stratagem, show, backbiting, and conspiracy, they will finally see only this earth, not the kingdom of heaven.
2. Those who strive for the heavenly kingdom, even if it be at the cost of everything this world has to offer. These may suffer much humiliation here, but they follow in their Master's footsteps, "for even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us

an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:21–23).

In which group will we be? May the Lord help us to cherish His appeal to be among those who set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth—and are called, and chosen and faithful, whatever the cost!

How are we to nurture such a spirit?

"We dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12).

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:14, 15). The slightest root of bitterness cannot be allowed to spring up in our hearts. We need to nip it in the bud!

"Let every manifestation of animosity or unkindness be checked; let every root of bitterness be removed. . . .

"By spiritual pride, a desire to dictate, an ambitious longing for honor or position, a lack of self-control, by the indulgence of passion or prejudice, by instability or lack of judgment, the church may be disturbed and her peace sacrificed.

"Difficulties are often caused by the vendors of gossip, whose whispered hints and suggestions poison unsuspecting minds and separate the closest friends. Mischief-makers are seconded in their evil work by the many who stand with open ears and evil heart, saying: 'Report, ... and we will report it.' This sin should not be tolerated among the followers of Christ. No Christian parent should permit gossip to be

repeated in the family circle or remarks to be made disparaging the members of the church.

"Christians should regard it as a religious duty to repress a spirit of envy or emulation. They should rejoice in the superior reputation or prosperity of their brethren, even when their own character or achievements seem to be cast in the shade. It was the pride and ambition cherished in the heart of Satan that banished him from heaven. These evils are deeply rooted in our fallen nature, and if not removed they will overshadow every good and noble quality and bring forth envy and strife as their baleful fruits.

"We should seek for true goodness rather than greatness. Those who possess the mind of Christ will have humble views of themselves."⁵

The spirit of the wise

We've seen here how conspiracies directly against the Son of man—God Himself in human flesh—were rooted in a fear of losing earthly positions. Our Lord commands, "The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you" (Matthew 20:25, 26).

"If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:14–17).

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5, 6). Nothing else matters.

1 *The Desire of Ages*, p. 61.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 62.

3 *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, pp. 26, 27.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

5 *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 241, 242.

MONEY

LOVING IT DRAGS US DOWN

By Enrique Nataren

Is history repeating itself yet again? Will evil conquer at last? As our Lord Jesus once said, “No man can serve two masters.”

“Christ has brought before us two masters, God and the world, and has plainly presented the fact that it is simply impossible for us to serve both. If our interest in, and love for, this world predominates, we shall not appreciate the things, which, above all others, are worthy of our attention. The love of the world will exclude the love of God and make our highest interests subordinate to worldly considerations. Thus, God will not hold so exalted a place in our affections and devotions as do the things of the world. Satan deals with men more guardedly than he dealt with Christ in the wilderness of temptation, for he is admonished that he there lost his case.”¹

We live in a time when character formation is quite complex and difficult due to social, religious, and economic variations. Life is not as simple as it used to be, distractions are everywhere. The world has become a theater where the material takes on the greatest relevance and precedes all interests and needs of the spirit. People are involved in a fight that divides the human race into two groups, some to survive and others to get richer—but it is a fierce fight, where only the cunning and most lacking in mercy seem to survive or achieve

their selfish goals. One of our greatest challenges is our relationship with money—the access to it and the lack thereof. Money will buy almost anything, but when made a top priority, it can divide families and destroy marriages. What does the Bible say about us and our money?

Balaam

Let’s talk about a man who was once a prophet of the living God—but for his unmitigated hunger for riches, betrayed his principles that had made him a servant of Jehovah.

The Spirit of Prophecy declares:

“When Balaam, allured by the promise of rich rewards, practiced enchantments against Israel, and by sacrifices to the Lord sought to invoke a curse upon His people, the Spirit of God forbade the evil which he longed to pronounce, and Balaam was forced to exclaim: ‘How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?’ ‘Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!’ ”²

In the history of Balaam, to gain temporal benefits, this man who had once been a servant of God betrays his faith and beliefs. He conspires against a nation that God has blessed. Trying either to curse them or cause them

to bring the curse upon themselves, he presents arguments to make the simple to doubt—and with seductive strategies he puts before the most careless and lacking in consecration, temptations that upset their senses in such a way that his plan has negative results on the people of God.

Let’s look at the details of Balaam’s conspiracy against God’s people:

“Balaam knew that the prosperity of Israel depended upon their observance of the law of God, and that there was no way to bring a curse upon them but by seducing them to transgression. He decided to secure to himself Balak’s reward, and the promotion he desired, by advising the Moabites what course to pursue to bring the curse upon Israel. He counseled Balak to proclaim an idolatrous feast in honor of their idol gods, and he would persuade the Israelites to attend, that they might



be delighted with the music, and then the most beautiful Midianitish women should entice the Israelites to transgress the law of God, and corrupt themselves, and also influence them to offer sacrifice to idols. This satanic counsel succeeded too well. Many of the Israelites were persuaded by Balaam, because they regarded him as a prophet of God, to join him, and mix with that idolatrous people, and engage with him in idolatry and fornication."³

All this occurs when the people of God are just about to cross the Jordan River to enter into the promised land. When the victory is about to be completed, Satan brings this terrible attack upon the people of God.

"Great numbers of the people joined him (Balaam) in witnessing the festivities. They ventured upon the forbidden ground and were entangled in the snare of Satan. Beguiled with music and dancing, and allured by the beauty of heathen vestals, they cast off their fealty to Jehovah. As they united in mirth and feasting, indulgence in wine beclouded their senses and broke down the barriers of self-control. Passion had full sway; and having defiled their consciences by lewdness, they were persuaded to bow down to idols. They offered sacrifice upon heathen altars and participated in the most degrading rites. It was not long before the poison had spread, like a deadly infection, through the camp of Israel. Those who would have conquered their enemies in battle were overcome by the wiles of heathen women. The people seemed to be infatuated. The rulers and the leading men were among the first to transgress, and so many of the people were guilty that the apostasy became national. 'Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor.'"⁴

What about today?

"Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; Nor is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1, 2).

When we read the above text in the context of modern times, specifically applying it, for example, to the

great American nation, the longtime leading country of the free world, we can see that the USA—and many other nations as well—are in serious crisis. The prophet Isaiah boldly pointed out the sins of his day; upon a closer look, we can see distinct parallels to the sins of our day.

What happened with the people of Israel is repeating itself with America—a nation that is prey to seduction, licentiousness, immorality, and the inordinate desire to possess wealth. People—whether politicians, government officials, civilians, military, and religious figures—are bewitched by temptations that make them forget their duty to God and their nation. This occurs to such an extent that the moral and spiritual faculties are almost extinct from society.

In the second half of the 20th century, as the world turned away from the deaths of millions due to genocide, suffering, and war, society looked for respite, enjoyment, and relaxation. The ground was perfect for social change—a society formed around anything but God. Citizens have been captivated by entertainment, sports, the world of news with its lies, exaggerations, gossip, and bias—all designed for the sole purpose of keeping people in a stupor, unable to use spiritual discernment. Just as Israel followed Balaam into prosperity, leisure, and degeneracy in ancient times, America (influencing also other nations) has wandered away from God in search of wealth, pleasure, and instant gratification at the cost of its soul.

Society buys into any number of deceptions. It's just like in the days when Balaam managed to introduce wrong ideas about the true worship of God. Poisonous philosophies are consumed by each new generation. The people are caught in a net of iniquity. Young and old cannot understand that money, drugs, alcohol, pornography, and sexual immorality keep them captive as slaves of the enemy of God.

But many are having the experience of Balaam—and surely with them they are sacrificing many souls.

"Balaam had sold the children of Israel for a reward, and he perished with the people whose favor he had obtained at the sacrifice of twenty-four thousand of the Israelites."⁵

"Balaam 'loved the wages of unrighteousness' 2 Peter 2:15. The sin of covetousness, which God declares to be idolatry, had made him a timeserver, and through this one fault Satan gained entire control of him. It was this that caused his ruin. The tempter is ever presenting worldly gain and honor to entice men from the service of God."⁶

Due to their mad desire for material gain and temporary benefit, leaders gradually sold the values and principles of the people, enslaving their nation to another master. Through legislation, a satanic agenda has succeeded in separating, for example, America, from the fear of God, and the principles that, if espoused, make a nation truly great. Here are just a few examples:

Over roughly half a century, subtle yet drastic changes have taken place in America that shook its foundation to the core.

- In 1962, the United States Supreme Court ruled that voluntary prayer in public schools is unconstitutional.
- In 1963, the Supreme Court dismantled classroom Bible reading.
- In 1980, the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools was declared unconstitutional.
- In 1982, the court prohibited the teaching of biblical creation.

Over the span of just twenty years, God was expelled from the public schools, censoring His name out of the language used to educate the youth.

How did the people of that generation survive such an attack? Those who were children at that time are parents now. They were negatively impacted by the corruption, affecting them today with a decay that seems to worsen with every succeeding generation. Civic duty has been replaced by self-achievement, the Christian home by free love, Christian spirituality by affirmations, financial responsibility by quick wealth. The casualties of small decisions made by leaders led by ambition rather than principle have been high and they continue to compound every day.

Today, the pursuit of money has become more intense to the point

that this unmitigated hunger spreads corruption affecting all levels of society. Without God, a nation can follow any idea or leaders promising prosperity, peace, and leisure to make their way to the halls of government—leading the people further into corruption and moral decay. The unhinged pursuit of riches and hedonism have left society morally and spiritually bankrupt.

“Here this professed servant of the living God was seated, with a company of idolaters, at a feast given in honor of their deities. This wicked prophet was indeed selling himself for reward. In this case we have an illustration of the great blindness which will come upon the minds of those who sacrifice their eternal interests to the love of gain. Balaam’s character had been tested and tried and was found to be dross. The fine gold of principle and steadfast integrity was gone, and the base metal alone appeared.”⁷

Just as the people of Israel fell into temptation and followed other gods, the American nation is on the same path and its future is not very promising without a decisive change for the better.

Those who control the government and national economy play with the future of a nation, while creating distractions by any means necessary to lead the masses at their whim.

America, the renowned nation of liberty with freedom under God, has more recently been leading the rest of the world to a denial of the God of Heaven. False prophets who speak of peace and prosperity are spreading a cloak that covers physical, moral, and spiritual death. The people follow these false prophets of prosperity just as the Israelites ventured to follow Balaam, that false prophet who led them to the destruction of their own souls. When we find ourselves on the threshold of the heavenly Canaan, the enemy of God is fighting a great battle, leading more captives to destruction and entangling them with the enchantments of promises that, if fulfilled, would not give satisfaction to those who receive them.

“The world’s policy is to acquire money and advantages in any way that they can be obtained. An ac-

cumulation of this world’s treasure is the ambition of worldlings. The aim and object of the followers of our Lord Jesus Christ is to become Christlike by self-denial and self-sacrifice. They keep their eyes on the eternal riches which they can obtain by renouncing earthly treasure for heavenly treasure. Here are the conditions: He that will be My disciple, let him forsake all, and follow Me. Keep Christ in view, following where He leads the way.”⁸

History to be repeated

“Near the close of this earth’s history Satan will work with all his powers in the same manner and with the same temptations wherewith he tempted ancient Israel just before their entering the Land of Promise. He will lay snares for those who claim to keep the commandments of God, and who are almost on the borders of the heavenly Canaan. He will use his powers to their utmost in order to entrap souls and to take God’s professed people upon their weakest points. Those who have not brought the lower passions into subjection to the higher powers of their being, those who have allowed their minds to flow in a channel of carnal indulgence of the baser passions, Satan is determined to destroy with his temptations—to pollute their souls with licentiousness. He is not aiming especially at the lower and less important marks, but he makes use of his snares through those whom he can enlist as his agents to allure or attract men to take liberties which are condemned in the law of God. And men in responsible positions, teaching the claims of God’s law, whose mouths are filled with arguments in vindication of His law, against which Satan has made such a raid—over such he sets his hellish powers and his agencies at work and overthrows them upon the weak points in their character, knowing that he who offends on one point is guilty of all, thus obtaining complete mastery over the entire man. Mind, soul, body, and conscience are involved in the ruin. If he be a messenger of righteousness and has had great light, or if the Lord has used him as His special worker in the cause of truth, then how great is the triumph of Satan! How he ex-

ults! How God is dishonored!”⁹

America—along with the other nations of the world—needs true leaders. True to God, His law, and their own soul. Those leaders are to take the side of what is right not for convenience or reward but simply because it is what God and the nation demand. Both in government and in church, the voice of God must be heard. The spiritual rot can still be healed, the moral bankruptcy corrected only if the men who lead the people follow their Creator.

Examples like Joshua

“No stain rested upon the holy character of Joshua. He was a wise leader. His life was wholly devoted to God. Before he died, he assembled the Hebrew host, and, following the example of Moses, he recapitulated their travels in the wilderness and also the merciful dealings of God with them. He then eloquently addressed them. He related to them that the king of Moab warred against them and called Balaam to curse them; but God ‘would not hearken unto Balaam, therefore he blessed you still.’ He then said to them, ‘And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’”¹⁰

Let us pray that America—and other countries like it around the world—return into the hands of God, so that Balaam’s experience is not repeated in our lives.

Let us remember that money, entertainment, worldly fame, and everything that conspires against the will of God is all temporary and ceases to be. At the ultimate end, only God remains and only in Him is true prosperity.

1 *Counsels to the Church*, p. 321.

2 *The Great Controversy*, p. 529.

3 *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, p. 48.

4 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 454.

5 *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 332.

6 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 439.

7 *The Signs of the Times*, December 2, 1880.

8 *In Heavenly Places*, p. 300.

9 *The Adventist Home*, p. 327.



IT'S TIME . . .

By Liviu Tudoroiu

THE CLIMAX OF THE CONSPIRACY
WILL BE OVERTURNED!

It's about time that the universal conspiracy against God's government—initiated in darkness and going on for thousands of years—will come to an end.

The Lord Jesus Christ anticipated the final confrontation against the mastermind of evil with these words: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31).

The victory achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf is ultra-majestic—not only from a human perspective and the plan of salvation—but as a glorious and outstanding victory which unveils the actual nature of this conspiracy. It reveals the real motive of the great rebellion. It vindicates the name of God from all false accusations and upholds His matchless dignity as the supreme God of love.

Unfortunately, the usurper of God's authority on Earth has "cloned" and multiplied by billions his own malicious nature in the sons of men. Thankfully, on the opposite side, the Lord Jesus Christ is displaying His faithful ones who are ready to live or die for their Saviour.

Now is the time when "among earth's inhabitants, scattered in every land, there are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Like the stars of heaven, which appear only at night, these faithful ones will shine forth when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people. In heathen Africa, in the Catholic lands of Europe and of South America, in China, in India, in the islands of the sea, and in all the dark corners of the earth, God

has in reserve a firmament of chosen ones that will yet shine forth amidst the darkness, revealing clearly to an apostate world the transforming power of obedience to His law."¹

Dear reader: We are living in a most solemn time, a time that marks the stopping of the clock. Time will freeze and the pendulum will reach ground zero. The grace of God will be withdrawn. Everything that was done in darkness will be revealed in broad daylight. No one will then be able to say, "I was deceived," or "I didn't know because I didn't get the privilege or opportunity to know the truth about these things." At the time of Jesus Christ, every single person living on earth will be aware that they will have made their decisions in a perfect state of consciousness against or in support of the great arch-rebel. Very soon, no one will dispute the legitimacy of God's willingness to help and save as many as will allow His grace to work in their hearts:

"The aim of the great rebel has ever been to justify himself, and to prove the divine government responsible for the rebellion. To this end he has bent all the power of his giant intellect. He has worked deliberately and systematically, and with marvelous success, leading vast multitudes to accept his version of the great controversy which has been so long in progress. **For thousands of years this chief of conspiracy has palmed off falsehood for truth. But the time has now come when the rebellion is to be finally defeated, and the history and character of Satan**

disclosed. In his last great effort to dethrone Christ, destroy his people, and take possession of the city of God, **the arch-deceiver has been fully unmasked.** Those who have united with him see the total failure of his cause. Christ's followers and the loyal angels behold the full extent of his machinations against the government of God. He is the object of universal abhorrence."²

It is my impression that we have just crossed the last round heading toward the final crisis. Yes, many people have thought—especially in time of war—that the end must surely be here, and at different moments in history people have cried with a loud voice, *Misericordia!* ("The end of the world is here!") But this time, there will be no turning back for humanity. A very important declaration made back in the 1800's by the American author Ellen G. White begins to show real relevance in the current international context today as "[Satan's] last opportunity **to gain control of the world is now before him**, and he will make most decided efforts to accomplish the destruction of the inhabitants of the earth."³

Indeed, there have been a lot of waves made today by the disclosure statement regarding the future of humanity envisioned by the World Economic Forum (WEF) through its founder, Klaus Schwab, and one of its most influential lead advisers based in Tel-Aviv, Dr. Yuval Noah Harari. Professor Harari has made some very blunt and transparent declarations concerning the future of people living on this planet.

It's amazing how the expression in the inspired Ellen G. White quotation we have cited above—exposing that Satan's goal "to gain control of the world is now before him"—is actually being fulfilled in the declarations made publicly in various settings by the WEF's atheistic mastermind of a scholar.

Professor Harari has affirmed on video (speaking in reference to COVID-19): *"This is what convinces people to accept legitimize total biometric surveillance. If we want to stop this epidemic we need not just to monitor people; we need to monitor what's happening under the skin."*⁴

Along the same line of thinking, another of his statements underlining the concept of total control over humanity is the following: *"What we have seen so far is corporations and governments collecting data about where we go, who we meet, what movies we watch. The next phase is the surveillance going under our skin. . . . [the] same last surveillance systems established even in democratic countries which previously rejected them. And we also see a change in the nature of surveillance. Previously surveillance was mainly above the skin. Now it's going under the skin. Governments want to know not just where we go or who we meet. Above all, they want to know what is happening under our skin—what's our body temperature, what's our blood pressure, what, what is our medical condition now.*

*"Now humans are developing even bigger powers than ever before. We are really acquiring divine powers of creation and destruction. We are really upgrading humans into gods; we [are] requiring, for instance, the power to re-engineer life. . . . Humans are now hackable animals."*⁵

*"You know the . . . whole idea that humans have you know this . . . they, they, have this soul or spirit and they have free will and nobody knows what's happening inside me, so whatever I choose whether in the election or whether in the supermarket, this is my free will. . . . That's over."*⁶

So, friend, we can see the actual aim of a few people who are really obsessed with total control of their neighbors, while echoing the same old lie of the devil, "Ye shall be as gods" (Genesis 2:5).

Yet it's so amazing how the following revelation from the 19th century is in the process of fulfillment. Again, the messenger of the Lord explains:

"Since 1845 the dangers of the people of God have from time to time been laid open before me, and I have been shown the perils that would thicken about the remnant in the last days. These perils have been revealed to me down to the present time. Great scenes are soon to open before us. The Lord is coming with power and great glory. And Satan knows that his usurped authority will soon be forever at an end. **His last opportunity to gain control of the world is now before him, and he will make most decided efforts to accomplish the destruction of the inhabitants of the earth.** Those who believe the truth must be as faithful sentinels on the watchtower, or Satan will suggest specious reasonings to them, and they will give utterance to opinions that will betray sacred, holy trusts. The enmity of Satan against good, will be manifested more and more, as he brings his forces into activity in his last work of rebellion; and **every soul** that is not fully surrendered to God, and kept by divine power, **will form an alliance** with Satan against heaven, and join in battle against the Ruler of the universe."⁷

This will lead humanity to the verge of total collapse and set the stage for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the climax of cruelty, the great Emmanuel will rise in defense of His people. Then will be seen the real characters revealed in our world and the unmasked mastermind of rebellion against God's government.

"These have one mind.' **There will be a universal bond of union, one great harmony, a confederacy of Satan's forces.** 'And shall give their power and strength unto the beast.' [Revelation 17:13.] **Thus is manifested the same arbitrary, oppressive power against religious liberty, freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience, as was manifested by the papacy, when in the past it persecuted those who dared to refuse to conform with the**

religious rites and ceremonies of Romanism."⁸

This is the hour when the glory of the Son of God will be revealed and the marks of His suffering on the cross will overflow the world.

From that body that was glorified by the Father, especially from the side that was pierced by the ignorant Roman soldiers, from the face that was spat upon by the surrounding multitude, from the palms that were extended in an act of love for humanity, radiates the glory of the Son of God.

That was when the powers of darkness thought they would curb the plan of salvation, while the Lord was on the cross condemned by a corrupt tribunal. But that was the very time when beyond Orion, at the throne of the Father, the heavenly tribunal was deciding the irreversible condemnation of the cosmic "Barabbas".

It was at the cross that the Son of God died to resurrect the TRUTH. It was at the cross of Calvary that the most peaceful and humble—and the only divine—man on earth died to resurrect the dignity of human race. It was on the hill of Golgotha that the deadly draught made Jesus cry, "I thirst" in order that we may have water in the time of trouble. It was on Calvary where Jesus turned the hearts of the mothers to the sons and He said: "Woman, behold thy son. . . . [Son,] Behold thy mother" (John 19:26, 27).

It was at the cross where the entire universe ended the mystery of sin. Jesus is the glory of the Father and the express image of His beautiful, flawless, divine character. Praise to Jesus will be the melody that we are going to sing every day in eternity.

May the Lord help us to prepare for that great day when a new beginning will be given to the saints.

1 *Prophets and Kings*, p. 188.

2 *The Great Controversy*, p. 669.

3 *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 464.

4 <https://rumble.com/vxyfo5-yuval-noah-harari-the-covid-crisis-was-the-moment-when-surveillance-started.html>

5 <https://rumble.com/vz2ved-yuval-noah-harari-breaking-general-flynn-and-clay-clark-expose-the-man-elit.html>

6 <https://rumble.com/vthdl6-the-evil-transhumanism-agenda-of-klaus-schwab-and-doctor-yuval-noah-harari.html>

7 *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 323.

8 *Maranatha*, p. 187.

Missionary Work in Thailand

Pioneer work is going forward in the Buddhist nations of Thailand and Laos — the latter of which is also a Communist nation. We use online worship, canvassing, English teaching, and medical missionary work to honor God.



Youth Congress in Congo

December 26, 2021–January 2, 2022, at the SDARM Rama Theological Institute in Kasungulu.



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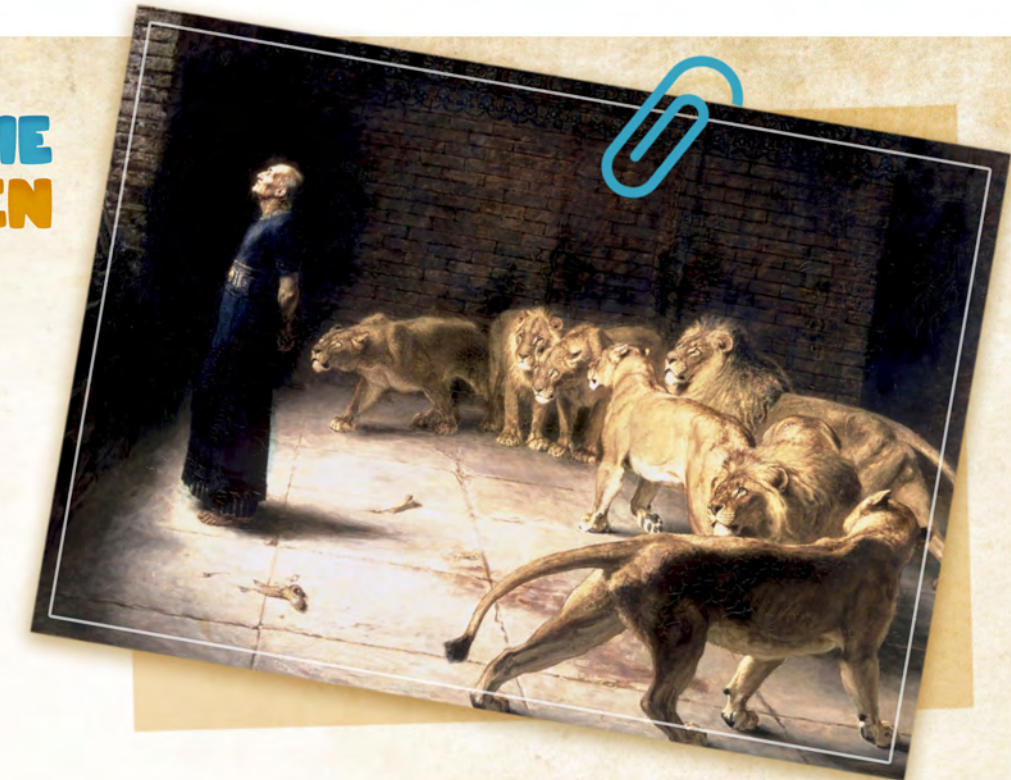
The prophet Daniel was a young man who, in time of war, was taken from his home and family to a faraway land. That was very sad and hard for him, for sure. The place was called Babylon—and later after another war, it became Medo-Persia.

The first king of Medo-Persia was named Darius. We read in the Bible that “it pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm” (Daniel 6:1–3).

When you do something well, sometimes surprises happen. Daniel was a Hebrew and Darius was not—but the king saw that Daniel did such a good job in his work and was so nice that Darius knew he could trust him.

But soon there was a problem: “Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God” (Daniel 6:4, 5).

Look at that! Those other men were mad because the king liked



Daniel better than he liked them. They could not stand that he was thinking to put Daniel in charge of the whole kingdom. People are like that sometimes. They get jealous very fast.

So, these bad men tried to find some way to get rid of Daniel so they could be the big bosses instead of him. They tricked the king into signing a law against anyone who would pray to any God besides the king.

Was Daniel afraid of that law? Did he stop praying to his God? No, he did not stop! He loved God and worshiped Him openly.

Because of the law, Daniel had to be thrown into a den of hungry lions. But most of us know what happened next. God shut the mouths of the lions, so they did not hurt Daniel at all.

The king was so happy. He knew it was Daniel's God that had protected him. So, he took Daniel

out and punished those mean men who had tricked him by throwing them into the lions' den instead. The lions ate them very quickly.

Why did that happen? “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3). God saw how the jealous men were being mean to His servant Daniel and He had them destroyed. The Bible tells us: “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb” (Psalm 37:1, 2).

Yes, God protected faithful Daniel. He will protect you, too, if you trust in Him and don't worry about what bad people may say or do against you. The King of Heaven sees everything, and He will guide you for good just as He did for Daniel! —BHM.