

## IF

*Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it. All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. —Ecclesiastes 8*

History records that in the fourth century B.C., Philip II of the Kingdom of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, began his conquest and consolidation of ancient Greece. Beginning with Athens, and after receiving the surrender of the key city-states, he'd turned his attention to the indomitable Spartans. After advising them once by messenger to submit to his rule and receiving a short letter in rebuff, he sent a second... The ancient historian, Plutarch records the letter to the Spartan's as follows:

*"You are advised to submit without further delay, for **if** I bring my army into your land, I will destroy your farms, slay your people, and raze your city..."*

The Spartan's replied with their own letter in exactly one word:

*"If."*

Both Phillip, and later Alexander the Great, wisely left Sparta alone and chose to form their great Grecian Empire without them.

The story of the Spartans is admirable for their warrior spirit, simultaneous with their lives of pastoral frugality. Not interested in conquest or dreams of empire, nevertheless, as a free people of strong tribal and separatist character, they fashioned their pagan civilization by military strength and an ethic of honor. All able boys were trained in the art of war at an early age—and there likely *were* no 'unable' boys. Like most pagan societies, the weak and deformed were separated from the living shortly after birth.

But this isn't an essay about the Spartans. Rather, it is a brief foray into a realistic view of history, that is, an *honest* view, taking into account the vast amount of hardship, deprivation, suffering, and blood which stains the pages of the chronicle of mankind upon the earth. And yet somehow a hidden thread of peace and righteousness, nearly invisible, is being woven into the binding within. If history has meaning—and I believe it does—there must be a purpose for Creation which transcends our experience here.

*Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.* (Ecclesiastes 7:29)

I don't believe God causes man to sin. Rather, since the beginning man has been given choices—one of which always leads to life, and the other, ultimately to death. Adam, while in the Garden in a state of innocence and "uprightness" directly *knew* the will of God. I will go out on a limb here and say that it was NOT a foregone conclusion that he would fail. I suppose his time in Eden was not to be forever, but like life is for us, *a time of testing*. I do not think it was necessary or inevitable that he would choose to disobey God and thereby sin. Because if so, it was really a false choice which Yahweh gave to him.

Let us recall that God did give to Adam some autonomy—and it was genuine. And I also believe it is an error to ascribe—as some do—the phrase we find later in the scriptures, "[marred in the hand of the potter](#)" to him. God did create him "upright" and in a state of maturity of mind; of high intellect, reason, and capability of the greatest love and loyalty. He was made fully equipped, in other words, to perform the task God had required of him. In fact, his first order of business, according to Genesis 2, was to give names to all of the birds and beasts...*"and God brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof."*

Do we recognize that? God was curious and interested in what Adam would call them! And apparently, He did nothing to guide him, or 'correct' him (as you or I might do when our small child would attempt to name a family pet), but rather **Adam decided**—*"and that was the name thereof."*

Undoubtedly today the names of many animals could be traced etymologically back beyond the veil of recorded history as resembling (had it been recorded) the original name Adam gave it.

Therefore, man was given a will of his own. He could choose to obey God, or not. *This must have been a legitimate offer*. But the hazard of this, of course, is that he would choose *not* to obey. Did God have foreknowledge that Adam would fail the test? I can't speak for Him. I suppose He did. *But it intrigues me to wonder if perhaps He did not*. That thought is the source of this essay.

### **The Arrow of Time**

Whatever History and Time is or isn't, we now have the advantage of a lot of it (behind us) to consider the trajectory it has taken... something Adam did not have. We have now seen the course of history which arose from *the disobedience of one man*. We have witnessed the apparent direction of time and wonder about the purpose of mankind. Since we have seen the blood-tide of his rebellion come in and out for millennia like waves upon the sea shore, leaving

behind the debris of each civilization, it's easy to believe in the *devolution* of the species. It's hard to see real progress and one wonders about the point of it all. Solomon said in the end:

*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.* (Ecc 12:13)

But duty and purpose are not necessarily synonymous.

Adam's autonomy presented a *duty*—same as all of us. Moreover, the scripture says Adam [was not deceived](#), but rebelled *presumptuously*. When he failed, he failed to do what he *knew* was right, and the purpose of man was altered. The Remedy that was offered by God—"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"—then became the answer to the question of "What if?"... For IF God did not "know" whether Adam would choose correctly, He most assuredly did know how He would make it right.

*For as by **one man's disobedience** many were made sinners, so by the **obedience of one** shall many be made righteous.* (Romans 5:19)

The upright man then became rare in the earth. And death [would reign](#) supreme for four thousand years...

*The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.* (Micah 7:2)

The times of the empires of men came and went. Seas of blood were spilt (battlefield accounts of ancient historians record meadows turned to literal mud from the gore of scores of thousands slain, often times in one day). Whole nations were enslaved and absorbed into others, while the wealth of the earth changed hands a thousand times—all for the appeasement of some god or gods. Except for one family, the march of history of those who descended from Adam is but a single file of wretched souls into [Abaddon](#).

The family I speak of is *Israel*. Ostensibly meaning, "*rules with God*", it might better render from the Hebrew word meaning "*contender*"—thus, "**soldier of God**". Thus, I believe Israel began with Seth (Genesis 4:26) as it was then, with his son Enosh, "that men began to call upon the name of Yahweh". That lineage, of course, is the lineage of Christ, as it proceeds down through the ages, over the waters of the flood, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob-Israel, and on down to the birth of the Son of God in the town of Bethlehem, inside the Empire of Rome...which we recall as the most brutal and efficient of all the human killing machines—that "dreadful beast with great iron teeth" of Daniel 7:7.

But for the children of Israel—the actual descendants of Abraham and Jacob—God had made a covenant. It was revealed at that time that the Christ, the Promised Seed first prophesied to

Adam and Eve in the Garden, would come from *that family*. And so it was that History was destined to follow that path “through hell or high water”. Somehow, the will of man and the autonomous choices he would collectively make could not, and would not thwart the Sovereign Plan of God.

Back now to the “*clay that was marred in the hand of the potter*” ...This of course was Israel. For the times leading up to the Kingdom Age, Yahweh worked all good and all evil towards His ultimate goal of Redemption. This in fact is what He was showing Jeremiah in that passage:

*“...so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, **O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?** saith the Lord. Behold, **as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.**”*

This is fascinating, really. Because for God to give us an honest choice—and not the *illusion* of choice—He must allow the consequences to unfold. How this happens and yet does not undermine His overarching Plan of History is beyond the human intellect, but as Jesus said, “*the scripture cannot be broken*” (John 10:35). Whatever Yahweh has prior decreed **must be**.

And yet... Is God really sure what we will do? Does God understand the word, “IF” the same as we? I believe He does, and He uses the word honestly in Scripture.

*At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; **IF** that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, **I will repent of the evil** that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; **IF** it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, **then I will repent of the good**, wherewith I said I would benefit them.” (Jeremiah 18)*

Understanding exactly what it is He has “pronounced,” and what He has “spoken”—and making the distinction—is part of our responsibility as His people. This means “diligently seeking” and “studying” the scriptures—and *practicing obedience* toward them (Hebrews 11:6, 2 Timothy 2:15). He has given us the liberty to obey... OR to disobey. The ramifications of that freedom are unspooled in history—as we have seen. We need to receive that liberty with all gravity as well. Because allowing us to choose a path and then permitting us to follow it *to the bitter end* is both His prerogative and even [His pleasure](#), at times. And that should strike fear into the hearts of careless men.

***If** I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. (Deuteronomy 32:41)*

That sounds a bit like King Phillip's injunction to the Spartans. But, we are not Spartans and dare not cast that back into His teeth with such a [laconic](#) word.

And yet the word 'If' begins the warning—hinting at a choice. For those comparatively few that choose wisely:

*Now therefore, **IF ye will obey my voice indeed**, and keep my covenant, **then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.** (Exodus 19:5)*

Are we starting to see it now?

And finally, from one of the most beloved passages of 'Christian patriots'—in context...

***If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; IF my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.** (2 Chronicles 7)*

The calculus is clear. We may turn... or we may not turn. He waits to see.

God may understand every statistical possibility and probability of every tiny cause and effect in the cosmos—and He may very well have the power of manipulating those odds in whatever favor He wishes. Or, He may be more like us than we've imagined, and **God may wonder at times...** 'What will Adam call these things?' He has made us creatures of wonder. But our human nature has also made us prone to *wander*. Thus has He *Revealed* to us His Sovereign Will in the matter of good and evil in His Word. Summed up, it is the law of curses and blessings (or sowing and reaping). IF... THEN.

The ancients (outside or Israel) did not know the Mind of God—His Law-Word—thus we may excuse their "times of ignorance" while still being revolted at their blood lust and depravity. But we have no excuse. We have an enormous benefit in that God has given us the MAP—if we will only learn to read it... We may speculate about much in this strange reality we find ourselves in, but we shouldn't *wander* too far off the page lest we become hopelessly lost.

I think in time we will all understand the meaning of History—perhaps even the wicked. (How often did Yahweh decree some death-dealing judgement upon His enemies and then finalize it with "and then they shall know that I am the Lord!") To what degree our choices are able to influence His mind or alter His ultimate plans, we can't know on this side of eternity. And strangely, for the congenitally wicked, it seems God has *planned* their destruction early and merely gives them [the rope they need to hang themselves](#). As Paul said in Romans 1, God "gave them up" to their own depravities. Of course, this was not a new understanding...

*Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. **I also will choose their delusions**, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. (Isaiah 66:3-4)*

It's possible that all of history—all of mankind's meanderings upon this earth—from the exploration of every possible form of evil to the embodiment of every possible form of good, achieved in various individuals throughout time are all the combined considerations of the Mind of God. And we know that all things were [ultimately created](#) to glorify God, which means every possibility, and every choice made by man, and every path—whether taken or not taken—would also glorify His Name and serve His ultimate purpose... And that is how History transcends our sorrowful experience of it.

God—the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, King of Kings and Lord of Lords surely does have a Historical Plan that *expands*, as does His Kingdom, forever. This Plan can never fail, regardless of what man does or fails to do, it proceeds according to His schedule. And still, *He waits upon us*. Because **He is the Lord**, He can do both.

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, **to give you an expected end**. (Jeremiah 29:11)*

However long the wicked choose to be wicked, and receive their just rewards, and how ever long His children, *Israel*, take to mature into sons of God, “time and judgement” will not fail to reckon whatever misery must come upon us all... and yet, *WE have an expected end*.

“If” ends in expectation. God can both wonder, and contemplate thoughts of peace in a world of madness and KNOW that one day it will all come to pass in His favor—and in ours.

Perhaps then all of history, past and future, is the out-workings and the inevitable answer of *one primal thought* of the Everlasting Father made before the foundation of the world... “If”.