

The Tree of Life & The Serpent



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Introduction

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The Tree of Life & The Serpent

Revelation 2:7,

"... To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree Of Life, Which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

This is the future reward to all overcomers of all ages. When the last call to battle has been sounded, when our armour has been laid down, then we will rest in the paradise of God and our portion shall be the Tree of Life, forever.

"The Tree Of Life." Isn't that a beautiful figure of speech? It is mentioned three times in the Book of Genesis and three times in the Book of Revelation. In all six places it is the same tree and symbolizes exactly the same thing.

But what is the Tree Of Life? Well, first of all we would have to know what the tree itself stands for. In Numbers 24:6, as Balaam described Israel, he said they were "trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted." Trees throughout the Scriptures refer to persons, as in Psalms 1. Thus the Tree Of Life must be the Person of Life, and that is Jesus.

Now in the Garden of Eden there were two trees standing in the midst of it. One was the Tree Of Life, the other was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Man was to live by the Tree Of Life; but he was not to touch the other tree or he would die. But man did partake of the other tree, and when he did, death entered into him by his sin, and he became separated from God.

Now that Tree back there in Eden, that Tree which was the source of life, was Jesus. In John, chapters six through eight, Jesus sets Himself forth as the source of eternal life. He called Himself the Bread from heaven. He spoke of giving Himself and that if a man ate of Him he would never die. He proclaimed that He knew Abraham, and that before

Abraham, He WAS. He prophesied that He Himself would give them living waters that if man drank he would never thirst again, but would live eternally. He showed Himself as the GREAT I AM. He is the Bread Of Life, the Well Of Life, the Eternal One, the TREE OF LIFE. He was back there in Eden in the midst of the garden even as He will be in the midst of the paradise of God.

Some have an idea that the two trees in the garden were just two more trees like unto the rest of those that God had placed there. But careful students know that this is not so. When John the Baptist cried that the axe was laid to the root of all trees, he was not talking of simply natural trees, but of spiritual principles. Now in I John 5:11 it says,

"And this is the RECORD, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."

Jesus said in John 5:40,

"And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life."

Thus the record, God's Word, states plainly and clearly that LIFE, ETERNAL LIFE, is in the Son. It is no other place. I John 5:12,

"He that hath the Son hath LIFE; and he that hath not the Son of God hath NOT Life."

Now since the record cannot change, be taken from or added thereunto, then the record stands that THE LIFE IS IN THE SON... Since this is so, THE TREE IN THE GARDEN HAS TO BE JESUS.

Alright. If the Tree Of Life is a person, then the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is a person ALSO. It can't be otherwise. Thus the Righteous One and the Wicked One stood side by side there in the midst of the Garden of Eden. Ezekiel 28:13a

"Thou (Satan) hast been in Eden, the garden of God."

Here is where we receive the true revelation of the Serpent's seed.' Here is what really happened in the Garden of Eden. The Word says that Eve was beguiled by the serpent. She was actually seduced by the serpent. It says in Genesis 3:1,

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made."

This beast was so close to a human being (and yet was pure animal) that he could reason and talk. He was an upright creature and was somewhat in between a chimpanzee and a man, but closer to a man. He was so close to being human that his seed could, and did mingle with that of the woman and cause her to conceive. When this happened, God cursed the serpent. He changed every bone in the serpent's body so that he had to crawl like a snake. Science can try all it wants to, and it won't find the missing link. God saw to that. Man is smart and he can see an association of man with animal and he tries to prove it out of evolution. There isn't any evolution. But man and animal did mingle. That's one of the mysteries of God that has remained hidden, but here it is revealed. It happened right back there in the midst of Eden when Eve turned away from Life to accept Death.

Notice what God said to them in the garden. Genesis 3:15,

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed, It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel."

If we give credit to the Word that the woman did have a Seed, then the serpent must have surely had a seed also. If

the Seed of the woman was a man- child apart from the man, then the seed of the serpent will have to be in the same pattern, and that is another male must be born apart from human male instrumentality. There is no student who does not know that the Seed of the woman was the Christ Who came by the instrumentality of God, apart from human intercourse. It is also just as well known that the predicted bruising of the serpent's head was in actuality a prophecy concerning what Christ would accomplish against Satan at the cross. There at the cross Christ would bruise the head of Satan, while Satan would bruise the heel of the Lord.

This portion of Scripture is the revelation of how the literal seed of the serpent was sown in the earth, even as we have the account of Luke 1:26-35, wherein is set forth the exact account of how the Seed of the woman came into physical manifestation apart from the instrumentality of the human male.

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His Name

JESUS.

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David:

And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also That Holy Thing Which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

As the Seed of the woman was literally God reproducing Himself in human flesh, so the seed of the serpent is the literal way that Satan found he was able to open the door to himself into the human race. It was impossible for Satan (for he is only a CREATED spirit-being) to reproduce himself in the manner which God reproduced Himself, so the Genesis account tells how he produced his seed and introduced or injected himself into the human race. Also recall that Satan is called the serpent.' It is his seed or injection into the human race we are speaking of.

Before Adam ever had carnal knowledge of Eve, the serpent had that knowledge ahead of him. And that one born of it was Cain. Cain was of (born of, begotten of) that "Wicked One". I John 3:12. The Holy Spirit in John could not in one place call Adam the "Wicked One" (for that is what he would be if he fathered Cain) and in another place call Adam the "Son of God" which he was by creation. Luke 3:38. Cain turned out in character like his father, a bringer of death, a murderer. His utter defiance of God when faced by the Almighty in Genesis 4:5,9,13,14, show him to be absolutely

un-human-like in characteristics, seeming even to surpass any account we have in Scripture concerning a confrontation of Satan by God.

"But unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

Behold, Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from Thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me."

Notice the exact way the record of God sets forth the account of the births of Cain, Abel and Seth. Genesis 4:1,

"And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bare his brother Abel."

Genesis 4:25,

"And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth..."

There are THREE sons born from TWO acts of carnal knowledge by Adam. Since the Bible is the exact and perfect Word of God, this is no mistake but a record for our illumination. Since THREE sons were born from TWO acts by Adam, you know POSITIVELY that ONE of those three WAS NOT the son of Adam. God has recorded this in this exact

manner to show us something. The truth of the matter is that Eve had in her womb TWO sons (twins) from SEPARATE impregnations. She was carrying twins, with Cain's conception sometime previous to that of Abel's. See those TWINS again. Perfect type as always. To those who think that this is not possible, let it be known that the medical records are replete with cases where women have carried twins who were of separate ova and separate insemination with the fertilization of the eggs being days apart, and NOT ONLY SO, but some of the records show that the twins were fathered by separate males. Recently worldwide coverage was given to a Norwegian mother who was suing her husband for support for herself and her twins, one of which was white and the other black. She admitted that she had a Negro lover. The two conceptions were about three weeks apart. In Beaumont, Texas, in 1963, the records again set forth a multiple birth wherein pregnancies were many days apart, in fact so much so that the woman almost died along with one child in childbirth.

Now why did this have to be so? Why was it that the seed of the serpent must come this way? Man was created for God. Man was to be the temple of God. The place of God's rest (the Holy Spirit) was man, the temple. Acts 7:46-51,

"Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

But Solomon built Him an house.

Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest?

Hath not My hand made all these things?

Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."

Satan has known this all along. He also wants to indwell man even as God so does. But God has reserved to Himself that right. Satan cannot do that. God alone appeared in human flesh. Satan could not and cannot do that. He does not have creative powers. The only way for Satan to accomplish what he wanted to do was to enter the serpent in Eden even as he entered by evil spirits into the swine at Gadara. God does not enter animals; but Satan can and will to accomplish his ends. He could not have a child directly by Eve as did God by Mary, so he entered into the serpent and then beguiled Eve. He seduced her and by her did Satan have a child vicariously. Cain bore the full spiritual characteristics of Satan and the animalistic (sensual, fleshly) characteristic of the serpent. No wonder the Holy Spirit said that Cain was of that wicked one. He was.

Now I want to go into some certain proof we have that there is a definite affinity between man and animal. It is a physical thing. Do you know that you can take the embryo cells from an unborn fetus and inject them into human beings? Then those thyroid cells will go right to the human thyroid, the kidney cells will go right to the human kidneys. Do you realize how stupendous this is? Some intelligence guides those animal cells exactly to the right place. That intelligence accepts those cells and puts them in exactly the right place. There is an affinity between animal and man. They can't intermingle and reproduce. That has been tried. But back in the garden that intermingling did take place and the chemical affinity which still exists proves it. For back in Eden the serpent was an upright creature. He was close to man. He was almost man. Satan took advantage of the serpent's physical characteristics to use him to beguile Eve. Then God destroyed that pattern of the serpent. No other beast can commingle with man. But the affinity is there.

Now that we have come this far, let me try to crystallize your thinking on this subject so you can see the necessity of our going into the serpent seed doctrine' as I have. We start with the fact that there were TWO trees in the midst of the garden. The Tree of Life was Jesus. The other tree is definitely Satan because of what came forth of the fruit of that tree. Now then, we know that both of those trees had a relationship to man or they would never have been placed there. They must have had a part in the sovereign plan and purpose of God in their relationship to mankind and to Himself or we could never impute omniscience unto God. This is all true so far, is it not? Now the Word most definitely sets forth that from BEFORE the foundation of the earth the purpose of God was to share His Eternal Life with man. Ephesians 1:4-11,

"According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved.

In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace;

Wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times

He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him:

In Whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

Revelation 13:8,

"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him (Satan) whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

But that Life could not, and would not, be shared in any other way than through the way of "God manifest in the flesh." This was a part of His eternal and predestinated purpose. This plan was to be to the praise of the glory of His grace. It was the plan of Redemption. It was the plan of Salvation. Now listen closely. "God being a Saviour, it was necessary that He predestinate a man who would require salvation in order to give Himself reason and purpose of being." That is one hundred percent correct and multitudes of Scripture bear it out as does the very pointed verse of Romans 11:36,

"For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are ALL THINGS: to Whom be GLORY for ever. Amen."

Man could not directly come and partake of that Tree of Life in the midst of the garden. That Eternal Life of the Tree had to become flesh first. But before God could raise and save a sinner, He had to have a sinner to raise and save. Man had to fall. The fall which would be caused by Satan, had to have flesh to make fall. Satan had to come through flesh also. But Satan could not come through human flesh to

make the fall as would Christ come in human flesh to restore the fallen. But there was an animal, the serpent, so close to man that Satan could get to that beast and through that beast he could get to human flesh and cause the fall, and inject himself thereby into the human race, even as Jesus would one day come and inject Himself into the human race, into human bodies, even to the extent of a resurrection wherein we would have bodies like unto His glorified one. Thus what God worked out here in the garden was His predestinated plan. And when Satan had brought about that which was necessary to the purpose of God, then man could not get to the Tree Of Life in the garden. Certainly not. It wasn't time. But an animal (animal had caused the fall had it not? let animal life be shed) was taken and his blood shed and then God had communion with man again. Then there was to come a day when God would appear in flesh, and by means of His humiliation He would restore fallen man and make him a partaker of that Life Eternal. Once you see this, you can understand the serpent seed and know that it was no apple Eve ate. No, it was the degradation of humanity by intermingling the seed.

Now I know in answering one question another one is apt to come up, and people ask me, "If Eve fell that way, what did Adam do, for God lays the blame on Adam?" That is simple. The Word of God is forever settled in heaven. Before one speck of stardust was made, that Word (God's law) was there EXACTLY AS IT IS WRITTEN IN OUR BIBLE. Now the Word teaches us that if a woman leaves her husband and goes with another man she is an adultress and is no longer married and the husband is not to take her back. That Word was true in Eden as it was true when Moses wrote it in the law. The Word can't change. Adam took her back. He knew exactly what he was doing, but he did it any way. She was a part of him, and he was willing to take her responsibility upon himself. He would not let her go. So Eve conceived by him. He knew she would. He knew exactly

what would happen to the human race, and he sold the human race into sin that he might have Eve, for he loved her.

And so those two sons were born. Sons that would be the fathers of the human race that was even now polluted. And what does the record say of them? Read the record. Jude 14,

"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied..."

Genesis 5 is the chapter of genealogy of Enoch. It gives that genealogy thusly,

Adam, 2. Seth, 3. Enos, 4. Cainan, 5. Mahalaleel, 6. Jared, 7. Enoch.

Notice that Cain is not mentioned. The line of Adam goes through Seth. If Cain were the child of Adam, the law of the birthright would have given Cain the right in the lineage. Also it must be noted carefully that in Genesis 5:3, it says that, "Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth." Nowhere does it say that Cain was in Adam's likeness, yet he would have to be if he were his son, for the law of reproduction is emphatically that each brings forth after its likeness. We must also credit the fact that in both genealogies in Genesis and Luke, Cain is missing. If Cain were the son of Adam it would be said of him somewhere that, "Cain, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God." It does not say that for it CANNOT say that.

Of course students for a long time have set forth two lines of men: one of which was the godly line found in Seth and the other the ungodly line as founded by Cain. And it is strange, but true, these same students have never told us how it was that Cain was the kind of person he was while Abel and Seth were of the spiritual, godly line. Factually,

Cain should have been spiritual and Abel less spiritual, and Seth even more so, and right on down the line because each succeeding generation has always gotten further away from God. But no, Cain comes forth as wicked as no man ever has been described for he violently withstands God and the Word.

Now let this be known: Scripture does not play with words. Whatever is in the Record is there for the anointed eyes to see. It is there for a purpose. In that Word it says, Genesis 3:20,

"And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living."

But no Scripture ever says that Adam is the father of all living. If there is not this connotation to be placed upon Genesis 3:20, why would it be mentioned that Eve is the mother of all, and no word said about Adam? The fact is that though Eve was the mother of all living, Adam was not the father of all living.

In Genesis 4:1, Eve said, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." She does not credit Adam with the fatherhood of Cain. But in Genesis 4:25, she says,

"... For God, said she, hath appointed me ANOTHER seed, INSTEAD OF ABEL, whom Cain slew."

She does not say God had GIVEN her another seed - that would have been Christ, for He is GIVEN. This son, Seth, was APPOINTED instead of Abel. She recognizes her son that came by Adam; she does not now recognize Cain for he came by the serpent. When she says ANOTHER SEED instead of Abel, she is saying that Cain was different from Abel, for if they were of the same father she would have had to say, "I have been given some MORE SEED."

I don't believe everything I read, but it is certainly a

curious thing that the March 1, 1963, issue of LIFE reports psychiatrists as saying exactly the same thing we are discussing. Now I know that all psychiatrists don't agree with each other, but here it is. The fear of snakes is not a conscious revulsion but an unconscious one. If it were a natural fear people would just as happily stand fascinated before the gorilla or lion cages. Their unconscious thoughts keep them staring at snakes. That lure of snakes is unconsciously sexual. That it has been through the ages is seen by the people in generation after generation going through the same thing. Snakes have always been and always will be repulsively attractive. The snake has always stood for that which is both good and bad. It has been a phallic symbol through the ages. Just exactly as the Garden of Eden description, we find the serpent the personification of passionate evil.

It is almost universal amongst the various uncultured tribes that the snake is associated with sex and often worshipped in conjunction with it. The study of sexology brings that out in many instances. Now I would like to know where these people got that from, seeing they are uneducated and never read the Bible. But even as the story of the flood is known throughout the world, so is this truth of the fall of man known. They knew what happened there in Eden.

Now right here someone is going to ask me this question: Did God tell Eve to watch out for the serpent or the serpent would seduce her? Now listen, God didn't have to say one thing about what would happen. Just get the point of the story. He simply gave the Word. He said not to partake of KNOWLEDGE. Partake of LIFE. LIFE WAS THE WORD OF GOD. DEATH WAS ANYTHING THAT WASN'T THE WORD OF GOD. She allowed ONE WORD to be changed and right then Satan had her. God could have said, "Don't pick more fruit off the trees than you can eat." Satan could say, "Look, that is quite right. You see if you pick too much it will

rot. But here is a method of preserving the fruit and yet at the same time you can pick all you want. So you see, you can have your way and God's way at the same time." The devil would have her right there. He that is guilty in ONE point of the law has broken the WHOLE law. Don't fool with that Word. That is exactly what happened in the Ephesian Age before it ran out in about 170 A.D.

And what did that tree produce? The Tree of Knowledge produced death. Cain killed his brother, Abel. The wicked killed the righteous. It set a pattern. It will keep that pattern until the restoration of all things as spoken by the prophets.

The Tree of Knowledge produced clever men; men of renown. But their ways are the ways of death. God's people are simple but spiritual minded, leaning toward God and nature, calmly tilling the soil, caring for truth rather than wealth. The seed of the serpent has brought tremendous commerce, wonderful inventions, but with it all comes death. Their gunpowder and atomic bombs kill in war; and in peace time their mechanical inventions, such as the car, kill even more in a time of peace than do the inventions of war destroy in times of trouble. Death and destruction are the fruits of her labors.

But they are religious. They believe in God. They are like their father, the devil, and their ancestor, Cain. Both of them believed in God. They go to church. They mingle with the righteous as do tares mingle with the wheat. In so doing they corrupt and produce a Nicolaitane religion. They spread their poison in every effort to destroy the seed of God even as Cain killed Abel. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

But God loses none of His own. He keeps them even in death, and has promised that in the last day He will raise them up.

Living By God's Words

"... To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree Of Life, Which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

What a thrilling thought is this. That Tree Of Life in the Garden of Eden Which could not be approached unto because of the fall of Adam is now given to the overcomer. The flaming sword of the guarding cherubim has been sheathed. But it was not sheathed ere its blade was bloody with the blood of the Lamb. Let us meditate upon this truth awhile as we consider why the Tree was denied to Adam and his descendants but now allowed again.

God's intention for His creation, man, is to express His Words. In Genesis, Adam was given the Word to live by. A life lived by the Word would be the Word expressed. That is true is it not? But did Adam live by that Word? No, because he was to live by EVERY Word, and he failed to take heed to every Word. Then there arose Moses. What a great and mighty man he was. Yet he also failed to live by every Word, and that prophet, the type of the Great Prophet to come, failed in anger to obey the Word. And there was also David, the great king of Israel, a man after God's own heart. He failed by adultery, when he was tempted. But eventually, in the fullness of time, there came One, the Head, even Jesus, Who also must be tempted to see if He would live by EVERY Word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. Then was Satan foiled. For here was One Who lived by "It is written," and that Masterpiece of God overcame by reflecting God's Word. Then was this manifested Perfect One given to the cross, as the Perfect Lamb of God for the perfect sacrifice. And on the tree' He received the wounds unto death, that we, by Him and because of Him, might eat of the Tree Of Life, and then that Life freely given would enable us to overcome, and express the Word of God.

And now to these Sons of God, who by Him overcome, are given the privilege of the paradise of God, and the constant fellowship of Jesus Christ. There will never more be any separation from Him. Whither He goes, His bride will go. What is His, He shares with His beloved on a joint-heir relationship. The secret things will be revealed. The dark things will be made plain. We shall know as we are known. And we shall be like Him. This is the heritage of the overcomer who has overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of testimony to Jesus Christ.

How we long for that day when the crooked roads will all be straightened, and we will be with Him, time without end. May that day hasten its appearance, and may we hasten to obey His Word and thereby prove our worthiness to share His glory.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." How tragic it is that this first age did not listen to the Spirit. Instead it listened to man. But thank God, in the last age there will be a group rise up, the True Bride of the last day, and she will listen to the Spirit. In that day of gross darkness the light will return by the pure Word and we will return to the power of Pentecost to welcome back the Lord Jesus Christ.

Suffering and Character

Revelation 2:9,

"I know thy works and thy tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

The key to this age is most evidently tribulation. If there was tribulation in the first age, there is now predicted an intensified tribulation throughout the second age. There is no doubt but what the following words of Paul applied to the

mass of Christians wherever they were in the world and in every age.

Hebrews 10:32-38,

"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;

Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

For yet a little while, and He That shall come will come, and will not tarry.

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

The mere association of kindhearted people with the true believer might well bring death in return for their kindness.

Now the Lord God Almighty says, "I KNOW." There He is walking in the midst of His people. There He is, the Chief Shepherd of the flock. But does He hold back the persecution? Does He stem the tribulation? No, He does not. He simply says, "I KNOW your tribulation—I am not at all

unmindful of your suffering." What a stumbling block this is to so many people. Like Israel they wonder if God really loves them. How can God be just and loving if He stands by and watches His people suffer?

That is what they asked in Malachi 1:1-3,

*"The burden of the Word of the Lord to Israel
by Malachi.*

*I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet we say,
Wherein hast Thou loved us? Was not Esau
Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved
Jacob,*

*And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and
his heritage waste for the dragons of the
wilderness."*

You see, they could not figure out God's love. They thought that love meant no suffering. They thought that love meant a baby with parental care. But God said that His love was "elective" love. The proof of His love is ELECTION—that no matter what happened, His love was proven truly by the fact they were chosen unto salvation (because God hath chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth). He may commit you to death as He did Paul. He may commit you to suffering as He did Job. That is His prerogative. He is sovereign. But it is all with a purpose. If He did not have a purpose, then He would be the author of frustration and not of peace. His purpose is that after we have suffered awhile we would be made perfect, be established, strengthened and settled. As Job said, "He puts strength in us." (Job 23:6b) You see He, Himself, suffered. He learned obedience by the things that He suffered. He was actually made perfect by the things that He suffered.

Hebrews 5:8-9,

"Though He were a Son, yet learned He

obedience by the things which He suffered;

And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him."

In plain language, the very character of Jesus was perfected by suffering. And according to Paul He has left His church a measure of suffering that they, too, by their faith in God while suffering for Him, would come to a place of perfection. Why did He want this?

James 1:2-4,

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Why does He stand by? The reason is in Romans 8:17-18,

"And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Unless we suffer with Him we cannot reign with Him. You have to suffer to reign. The reason for this is that character simply is never made without suffering. Character is a VICTORY, not a gift. A man without character can't reign because power apart from character is Satanic. But power with character is fit to rule. And since He wants us to share even His throne on the same basis that He overcame and is

set down in His Father's throne, then we have to overcome to sit with Him. And the little temporary suffering we go through now is not worthy to be compared to the tremendous glory that will be revealed in us when He comes. Oh, what treasures are laid up for those who are willing to enter into His kingdom through much tribulation.

"Think it not strange concerning the fiery trials that are to try you."

That is what Peter said. Is it strange that God wants us to develop a Christ-like character that comes through suffering? No sir. And we all have trials. We are all tried and chastened as sons. Not one but goes through that. The church that is not suffering, and is not being tried, hasn't got it—it isn't of God.

Heb. 12:6,

"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

Now this special condition in Smyrna must be applied to every age. There is no age free from it. There is no true believer free from it. This is of God. This is the will of God. It is needful. We need the Lord to teach us the truth that we are to suffer and be Christ-like in doing it. "Love suffereth long and is kind."

Matthew 5:11-12,

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake."

Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

The cloudy skies and storms of life are no signs of God's disapproval. Neither are bright skies and still waters signs of His love and approval. His approval of any of us is only IN THE BELOVED. His love is elective which He had for us before the foundation of the world. Does He love us? Ah yes. But how shall we know? We shall know because He SAID SO, and manifested that He did love us for He brought us to Himself and gave us of His Spirit, placing us as sons. And how shall I prove my love to Him? By believing what He said, and by conducting myself with joy amidst the trials that He in His wisdom allows to come to pass.

"I know thy poverty (but thou are rich)."

There it is again. See Him walking up and down in the midst of His Church. Like a father He is looking down upon His family. He is the Head of His household. He is the provider. He is the protector. Yet He looks on at their poverty. Oh, how the untutored believer stumbles at this. How can God bear to look upon His own in a time of need and not just stop it all—just give in and lavish everything material upon them?

Here is where you have to believe again in the love, and goodness and wisdom of God. This, too, is needful. Remember He admonished, "Take no thought for the morrow, what ye shall eat or what ye shall put on. Your Father knoweth the things ye have need of. He Who clothes the lily and feeds the sparrow shall do much more for you. These physical things are not the true basic necessities of your life, for a man's life consisteth not of the things he possesses. But rather seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all material necessities will be added unto you."

The people of God are not material minded. They are Christ-minded. They do not seek the treasures that are below; they seek those above. It is absolutely true, the

majority of Christians are NOT wealthy. Rather they are on the poor side. It was so in Jesus' day. It was true in Paul's day and it should be true today. Oh, it is not too true today for the Laodicean Age is one of vast wealth where often the criterion of spirituality is an abundance of earthly goods. My, how rich the church is in goods. But how poor in Spirit. "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is NOT meat and drink." It is not material. It is WITHIN us. A rich man is rich in God, not in worldly things.

"Oh," cries the Spirit, "I see your poverty. I see your need. You haven't very much, if anything, to boast of. What you did have has been taken from you. You gladly gave up your possessions in exchange for eternal ones. You are laughed at. You are scorned. You don't have material resources to fall back on. But you are rich in spite of it all. Your security lies in Him Who is your shield and exceeding great reward. Your kingdom is yet to come. But it will come. And it will be an everlasting one. Yes, I am mindful of your trials and woes. I know how hard it is to get along. But I will remember all this when I return to claim you as My own, and then I will reward you."

Now this is nothing against rich people because God can save a rich man. Some of God's children are rich. But money can be such a snare, not only to those who have it but to those who don't have it. Way back there in the first age, James cried out to those who were putting stock in wealthy people, "Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons." The poor there were trying to butter up the rich in order to get help, rather than trusting in God. "Don't do it," says James. "Don't do it. Money isn't everything. Money isn't the answer." And today it is not the answer either. We have more wealth than we have ever had and yet less is being accomplished Spiritually. It is not with money that God works. He moves by His Spirit. And that moving of the Spirit comes only to a life consecrated to the

Word.