

God's Way Is Possible I

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Because he found himself shut out from heaven, Lucifer turned his hatred against God and determined to obtain, by stealth, the allegiance of His newly created beings, Adam and Eve. From that day to this, his purpose has been to harass and discourage the members of the human family, and to separate them from a loving relationship with the Sovereign God of the universe.

He uses different tactics with different subjects, having studied the characters and weaknesses of human beings now for 6,000 years. He leads some into a blissful ignorance of the seriousness of the issues of life and persuades them to think "all is well," when in actuality they are standing on a precarious precipice, just as veteran climber 52 year old Joseph Bohlig did a few days ago.

He was posing for a picture Monday, February 15, atop Mt. St. Helens, Washington, just 5 feet from the edge, when the snowy cornice gave way and he fell 1,500 feet into the volcano. His frozen body was recovered later. He didn't realize how close to danger he was as he smiled for the camera. Satan thus leads many to destruction through carelessness and indifference. When someone close to me was approached with Bible truth not long ago, he flippantly replied, "I don't need to read the Bible. Don't worry about me. I'll be up there for the 'big party.'"

Others Satan harasses and discourages by whispering to them that God's way is too hard. It's not within reach. It's not achievable. No matter what you do, you'll never make it. Have you ever felt that way? The bar is too high. The standard is too lofty. It is to those hearts that I share these thoughts from the Bible today and next Sabbath. The Bible teaches us emphatically that God's way is possible!

Of course, the first thing to do if the devil tempts you with the thought that you're not good enough, is to agree with him. You can answer him, "You're right. I am a sinner. I can't do what God wants. I don't deserve to live. But Jesus came to save sinners, and He promised to redeem me. He will do in me the work of salvation. I can do nothing of myself, but He can do all things." Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13. The devil trembles when he hears prayers like that!

We're going to look at six snapshots from the Scriptures, three from the Old Testament this week, three from the New Testament next week, that teach us that God's way *is* possible. We find that the message of the Old Testament is no different than the message of the New Testament. The

same battle between good and evil is presented in both. The same God of love and devil of destruction are portrayed in both.

The Old Testament was the Bible for the believers in Christ's day, and it proved to be more than sufficient. Another time we'll take an in depth look at that subject. Just bear in mind that it is the devil's intention to "shorten" your Bible; to remove sections from it that God put there for a purpose. We don't subscribe to his philosophy. "Every word of God is pure" (Proverbs 30:5), spoken by King Solomon, is wisdom that still pertains today. Thank God for the Old Testament!

The first snapshot is within the story of Cain and Abel. Remember that they were the first two offspring of Adam and Eve, and were instructed thoroughly in the principles of worship. A blood sacrifice was required, pointing forward to the death of the Messiah, Whose blood would atone for sin. Notwithstanding what he was taught, Cain felt that his fruit was adequate as an offering and came without the shedding of blood. When his brother's sacrifice was consumed and his was not, his face fell.

The Lord condescended to speak with Cain about this matter. "So the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?'" Genesis 4:7. There's much to be learned from this story, but what we want to see today is the principle that right doing and acceptance is something that *was* possible. It *was* within reach. The "respect" given to Abel's sacrifice, which was no doubt a bolt of fire that consumed it, as happened in many other Bible stories, indicates that Abel was in a right relationship with God. Of course, it was based on the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, typified by the offering he brought, but it is absolutely true that Abel was right with God. He was "accepted."

The word "accepted" is worthy of our attention. It is the Hebrew *nasa*, which has the meaning of "to lift up, bear, or carry." It can also have the meaning of "forgiven," as in the passage, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Psalm 32:1. In that text, the idea is that the sin has been "lifted up and carried away." It has been translated "exalted, magnified or extolled." When I studied Hebrew, I found it difficult because, unlike Greek, very few English words come from that language. This word *nasa*, meaning "to lift up," I was able to remember. Can you guess why?

There's a principle of emotion and psychology embedded in this word. When we do right, there is a euphoria, a good feeling, a "high" that comes upon us that is healthy. We are "lifted up," and "exalted." When we do the right thing and know that we are accepted by God through His grace, there is peace that comes upon the soul. The Lord would not have made this statement, had the fulfillment of it not been within reach. How cruel would that have been? Besides, the smoke of Abel's sacrifice ascending in the air was proof enough that God's way *was* possible. It was possible back then; it is possible today. You can have the peace in your heart that you are right with God when you invite Him into your heart and determine by His grace to obey Him. You can present yourself a living sacrifice and claim the blood of Jesus and have the assurance of God's

acceptance. One day soon, by His grace, you'll meet Abel, the first martyr, and hear his story first-hand.

Moving quickly, consider for a moment one of the Hebrew festivals called Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, occurring in the fall of the year. *Yom* is the Hebrew word for "day," and *Kippur* means "covering," in a special sense. It is still observed by orthodox Jews today as the holiest day of the year. It is still looked upon as a day of judgment, when God examines the records and seals the righteous.

On this day, and only on this day, the tenth day of their seventh month, the high priest went into the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle to perform a special work of cleansing. It was incumbent on all Israel to have "afflicted their souls," that is, to make sure their hearts and records were clean of all sin by confession and repentance in preparation of that service. If the high priest, the representative of all the congregation, went into the Most Holy Place, the presence of the Holy God and there was unconfessed sin in the camp of Israel, what happened to the high priest? He would drop dead. (See Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 352. Also The Jewish Encyclopedia II, 284.) For this purpose, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place, there was always a rope tied about his waist or leg, so that should he expire, there would be a way to extract him.

We don't know how many times Israel conducted the annual festival; we know that there were times later in their history when the festivals weren't observed. But surely there were times when it was held! It's inconceivable that it would never have been held in the 40 years of wilderness wandering with Moses at the helm; never have been held in the 1400 years between the entering of Canaan and the advent of Christ.

The fact that no mention is made that a high priest died on that day, which would have been newsworthy, indicates that it was successfully carried out. That means that on that day; at least on that day, the whole congregation (which numbered about 600,000 men and presumably an equal number of woman as they left Egypt) stood in a right relationship with God. Think of it! The whole congregation; the entire nation, cleansed from sin! God's way *is* possible!

We know that Israel stumbled often in their wilderness journey, but at least on the Day of Atonement, they were put right with God. Which leads us to suggest that if we would "afflict our souls" today, that is, seek earnestly to be cleansed from every sin, that the same could be true for us, every day. What could possibly hold us back from seeking the peace that would come from being covered by His blood?

The third snapshot we're going to look at in the Old Testament is an amazing statement made by God Himself, through a prophet. The messenger in this case was not the epitome of righteous living; he had his own problems, but the word he spoke came from God, and can be viewed as reliable from that perspective.

This is the story of Balaam, the prophet who was hired to curse Israel but ended up pronouncing God's blessing upon them. When most people think of his story, they think of the donkey that talked or the renegade prophet. But there's something very interesting and encouraging in this account, something that I believe shines brighter than all the other aspects of the story.

Balak, a king of Moab, was in fear because of the approaching multitude of Israelites. This was at the end of the 40 years of wandering, and soon Israel would finally enter the promised land. Skirting the southern shore of the Dead Sea, the territory of the Moabites, the congregation made their way eastward and then northward to Canaan.

This aroused the anxiety and animosity of Balak, who felt that he, his people and his territories would be in jeopardy. So he sent for Balaam, who was reputed to have certain supernatural powers. Balaam had been a true prophet, but his walk with the Lord had suffered and now he was more interested in money than ministry. Nevertheless, when he opened his mouth, it was the Word God had given him which came forth.

Look now at this amazing statement found in Balaam's second prophecy. "He took up his oracle and said; 'Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to me, son of Zippor! God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a King is among them. God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox. For there is no sorcery against Jacob, nor is there any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, "Oh, what God has done!"'" Numbers 23:18-23.

Take a very close look at the part of the passage where it says, "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel." This is truly an amazing statement. Let its meaning sink deeply into your heart. Let's double check: it was a statement by a prophet of the Lord in whose mouth God's word was placed. Balaam had previously told Balak, "The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak." Numbers 22:38. And, "Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?" Numbers 23:12. So, this represented the Word of God, and we're told specifically within the passage itself that God does not speak that which is not true. "God is not a man, that He should lie." God is the embodiment of truth. Paul assured his young protégé Titus, that God "cannot lie." Titus 1:2. Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life." John 14:6. He is declared to be the "Faithful and true Witness." Revelation 3:14.

If God was telling the truth, and we believe that He was, how could it possibly be that "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob"? Scan a few pages back in this very book of Numbers and you will find in chapter 21 the story of Israel's sin of murmuring which brought about the attack of the poisonous serpents. In the chapter before that, we have the fatal mistake of Moses recorded, who lost his temper and struck the rock instead of speaking to it. Chapter 16 is close behind that, containing the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Before that the envy of Miriam and Aaron is

related. These are just a few of things mentioned in the book of Numbers. And yet the Bible says that "God has not observed iniquity in Jacob."

How can we understand this statement then? It must be viewed through the lens of God's amazing forgiveness, which covers us so effectively, so completely, that God, the Omniscient One, the One Whose memory never fails, nevertheless sees us, in Christ, as though we had never sinned. Here's the good news for today; you and I may have chapters in our lives that are similar to the first part of the book of Numbers. We may have sinned in murmuring and complaining as did Israel. We may have lost our tempers like Moses. We may have rebelled like Korah and his colleagues. We may have entertained jealousy and envy as did Aaron and Miriam in chapter 12.

But we can today be in Christ and through the miracle of divine forgiveness experience this wondrous state of freedom from guilt and know that as God sees us, He sees us as though we had never sinned. He looks at us and says, "I have not observed iniquity in (put your name in the blank)." Would you like that today? Would you like Him to say, "I have not seen wickedness in" your life? Can you imagine hearing God's voice speak those beautiful words about you?

"Oh," but you say, "there was this in my life, and I did that, and all those other things." "No," the Lord would reply, "They're forever gone. They are hidden behind a dark cloud. Isaiah 44:22. They are cast behind My back. Isaiah 38:17. They are sewn up and sealed in a bag. Job 14:17. They are covered over with plaster. Job 14:17. They are thrown into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:19. (These are five Scriptural illustrations of God's forgiveness, all, by the way, in the Old Testament.) They are forever covered, and I don't see them anymore. Since you have accepted My Son Jesus into your heart, it is His perfect record that I see. I don't observe any wickedness in you." There is plenteous mercy available today in Christ if you will accept Him into your heart. What could there be that would withhold that blessing from you?

Beside these examples, there are many more we could turn to. We could look at the translations of Enoch and Elijah. What was the message there? It was that God's way *is* possible! In the midst of an unrighteous generation; the corruption and wickedness the brought about the world-wide deluge, lived Enoch. His life of purity and excellence was a testimony that God's way *is* possible. God took him to heaven while his contemporaries watched, as a testimony of the result of godly living. It was to encourage the dwellers on earth that there is a reward that awaits those faithful to Him. It was to demonstrate that there was reality to the claims of the prophets like Adam and Enoch, who testified that there was a God in heaven Who has a plan to fix what went wrong on this earth.

Likewise with Elijah; a man with our nature. A man subject to the frailties of mortality. Where is Elijah now? He is in heaven; translated by the chariot of fire to live in God's presence. Elijah's story can be yours. Enoch's life can be yours. Moses' reward can belong to you. God's way is possible!

We close by noting the end of Balaam's second speech. After declaring that "God had not observed iniquity in Jacob," the prophet announced, "It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!'" That statement, "What hath God wrought" (as it is translated in the

KJV), was the first phrase uttered across the wires of the telegraph when it was officially opened, transmitted on May 24, 1844.

That statement has deep meaning in the context of our study today, because it underscores the fact that this is God's doing, not ours. It is what He has done. Making myself righteous is not something I can do. Even if I had the strongest soap I couldn't wash myself clean from sin. See Job 9:30; Jeremiah 2:22. I can no more practice right doing on my own than can I change the color of my skin or a leopard its spots. Jeremiah 13:23. I can't pay for my sins with a crater full of gold. But God has cleansed me; He has paid for my sins. The impact of Balaam's sermon is meaningful; God has not observed iniquity in Jacob because of what He has done.

Lucifer stands as the one who opposes God's kingdom, seeking to harass and discourage every member of Adam's family so that they will miss out on the wonderful plan God has put in place for the salvation of mankind. With some he leads into a misty fog of oblivion, tied up with the cares of this life and unconscious as to the real issues at stake. With others, he brings discouragement in tempting them to believe that God's way is too hard and out of reach.

If we would but read the Bible and trust the God Who is its Author, we would see that Satan's claims are false. Was not Abel "accepted"? Was not the whole congregation put right with God, at least on the Day of Atonement? Did God not look over the nation of His people, so prone to falling, and say that He has not seen iniquity in Jacob?

These stories and promises are there for our benefit. If we believe and surrender to Him, those very statements will be made of us also. God's way *is* possible!