

## TEMPTED OF SATAN

In the Year of Our Lord Eighteen-hundred Sixty-two, the newspaper *The Daily Alta* reported, “The Storm King reigns rampant in our vicinity, and his rain comes in such plenitudinous dispensations as to invite comparison between our present excess and the celebrated flood which dates from the great forty days’ storm of old.” The newspaper was reporting on the Great Flood of 1862, comparing it to the Great Flood of Noah. After the flood, government officials estimated that four-thousand people were killed, and one-quarter of the state’s cattle drowned. The damage was estimated at more than one-hundred million dollars. (Peter Hartlaub, “How bad was California’s ‘Great Flood’ of 1862? It was a torrent of horrors,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 20 2023) Fourteen years ago, scientists predicted another devastating flood for California, which flood they called ‘The ArkStorm Scenario.’ Two years ago, scientists from UCLA and the National Center for Atmospheric Research published a report in which they warned of the risk of a flood even greater than that before predicted. Two weeks ago, a terrible storm hit California, causing devastating flooding and mudslides, and leaving more than eight-hundred thousand residents without electricity. Three days ago, the *Los Angeles Times* reported, “Already inundated by record rainfall, Southern California is facing another major storm Presidents Day weekend that could bring new risks for mudslides and flooding in vulnerable areas saturated with water.” (Rong-Gong Lin II, Hannah Fry, Salvador Hernandez, “Record rain saturates SoCal landscape, heightening fears of more landslides,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 15, 2024) God did once destroy the world with a great flood, and after promised that he would never again do so. He does bring upon sinful people calamities, so that they will repent of their sins, and turn to Him for forgiveness and new life which Christ has purchased with His own blood, and which is signed and sealed by baptism.

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes wrote, “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.” (Ecclesiastes 7:29) When God created the world, He made mankind, both male and female, in His image. So man is, like God, a moral being. He can choose to do right, or to do wrong, and he is morally responsible for his actions. God cannot commit a sin, because a sin is a thing contrary to His nature. When God made the first man, Adam, He made him righteous. Man was good, and not inclined to sin. Yet, it was possible for him to sin, and possible for him not to sin. So, God would test man’s fidelity. He told the man, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:16, 17) God commanded that man not to eat of the tree, and He warned man that, if he did eat of it, then he would die. The serpent, which was more crafty than any other beast of the field, tempted the woman to disobey God. He said, “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) The serpent told the woman that she could not trust God. He implied that God forbade man eat from the tree because, if man did eat, then he would be like God, and God would have no rival. The woman, tempted by the serpent, ate of the forbidden tree. Then she gave some to Adam, her husband, and he ate. The woman, not trusting in the word of God, but trusting in her own reason, was deceived. She believed that she did what was good; she did not know what she was doing. The man, knowing full well what he was doing, rebelled against God. (1 Timothy 2:14) So God, ever true to His word, made good on His threat and barred man from the tree of life so that he died. Death affected, not only the one man, Adam, but all mankind. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Romans 5:12) Since that original sin, every man comes into the world under sentence of death, “dead in trespasses and sins,” so that he is both bound to sin, and guilty of sin. (Ephesians 2:1)

The serpent, “called the Devil, Satan,” did, by leading the man into temptation, kill him, and so killed mankind. So Jesus said that the Devil was a murderer from the beginning. (John 8:44; Revelation 12:9; 20:2) The Devil leads men into temptation, and so into death, and so the Devil holds over men the power of death. As men fear death, they are for all of their lives held in bondage to the Devil. (Hebrews 2:14, 15)

God was severe in His judgment of mankind, but He had given them fair warning. Yet, God was also gracious. He said to the serpent, “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.” (Genesis 3:15) God promised to destroy the Devil and his works, and He would do it by a people He would redeem for that purpose. He would ultimately do it by one person in particular, one who needed no redemption.

All of Adam’s posterity were sinners, and they indulged in all kinds of sin, but especially sins of sex and violence. Cain, son of Adam, murdered his brother, Abel, and then the earth was filled violence. Angels did not remain in their own domain, but left their proper place to mate with women. The Scriptures say:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. (Genesis 6:5–7)

Of course, God is perfect and makes no mistake. Nor did He fail to foresee mankind’s wickedness. Yet, the depravity of mankind filled God with loathing, and God was grieved for His creating them. Noah was an exception, however; he was a righteous man. So, God determined that, after the passing of one-hundred and twenty years, he would destroy all men except for Noah and his household. God might have immediately rained down fire from heaven to destroy men, as He later did with the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet, He intended, not to destroy the world, but to purify it. He would not consume it with fire, but would wash it with water. Moreover, He would not immediately bring destruction; He would wait one-hundred and twenty years, not only to give Noah time to build an ark of salvation, but to give men opportunity to repent. None did repent, however, and so God did flood the world, killing all mankind, except for Noah and his household. The Great Flood was the world’s baptism. With it, God cleansed the world of sin, giving it a new beginning.

After the rain stopped, Noah sent out of the ark a dove, and the dove returned to him with an olive leaf in her mouth, and so Noah knew that the flood waters had subsided. Just as the Spirit like a bird hovered over the waters at the beginning of the world, so a dove came to Noah above the waters of a new world. Noah and his household disembarked. Noah offered to the Lord burnt offerings, and this gratified the Lord. The Scriptures say, “And the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.” (Genesis 8:21) The Lord made a covenant with Noah, and his three sons, and all their posterity, and with every living thing on the earth. He said, “And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.” (Genesis 9:11) God destroyed sinful men, but man’s nature did not change, and, indeed, on its own it could not change. Nevertheless, the Lord made with the world a covenant in which He promised never again to destroy the world. Moreover, the Lord said:

This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a

token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. (Genesis 9:12–16)

When God makes a covenant, He also gives a sign of that covenant. For the covenant of Noah, the Lord gave the rainbow as a sign. When men see a rainbow, they should remember God’s promise, and they should thank Him for His grace. God promised that He would never destroy the world, but He did not promise that He would never bring judgment upon men for their sins. So, God destroyed the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone, and He caused heathen armies to destroy the wicked city of Jerusalem not once, but twice. God cannot tolerate sin. Yet, God promised not to destroy the world. So, God was bound to save the world, and He would save it by forgiving men’s sins, and destroying their sinful natures. God would destroy the works of the devil, the author of death, by giving men eternal life through the author of life, Jesus Christ. (Acts 3:15) Saint John wrote, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8)

When the Son of God came into the world, John the Baptist prepared the way for Him by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:1–4) John told people to confess their sins, and to turn from their sins to do right. He baptized them with water as a symbol of God’s washing away the filth of their sin.

Saint Mark wrote:

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Mark 1:9–11)

When the time came for Jesus to begin His earthly ministry, Jesus went to John to be baptized by him. Jesus without sin, and so had no need of forgiveness. Yet, God had commanded His people to be baptized by John, and Jesus always did the will of God. When Jesus came out of the water, He saw heaven open up, and He saw the Spirit of God descend upon Him in the form of a dove. He heard His Father in heaven tell Him that He loved Him. Jesus always obeyed His Father, and so His Father was always pleased with Him, and would give Him the world. Just as a dove came to Noah after the world was baptized, so the Spirit in the form of a dove came to Jesus after He was baptized. Just as Noah was the new head of the race of men, so Jesus would be the head of a new race of men.

Then Saint Mark wrote, “And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.” (Mark 1:12, 13) Jesus is the Son of God, and God loves Him. Yet, as God tested the faith of Adam, the first head of the race of men, so He would test the faith of Jesus, the head of a new race of men. Just as Satan tempted Adam, so he would tempt Jesus. Adam was tested in a garden, where he had all he needed. Jesus would be tested in a wilderness, where He had nothing He needed. The Israelites were tested in the wilderness for forty years, and were proved unfaithful. Jesus was tested in the wilderness for forty days, and was proved faithful. Jesus is the one perfect Israelite, the one who perfectly trusted God, and perfectly obeyed Him.

Saint Mark's narrative continues:

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. (Mark 1:14, 15)

Sometime after John baptized Jesus, King Herod Antipas imprisoned him, because John rebuked the king for taking his brother's wife. When Jesus learned that John was in prison, He knew that John's ministry had come to an end, it was time to begin His own. So, He preached to people the good news of the kingdom of God, that the kingdom of God would soon be established, and so everyone should repent and believe this good news, so that they might enter into this glorious kingdom.

Saint Peter, in his first epistle, gives theological perspective on the Great Flood, and on the ministry of Jesus. He wrote:

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. (1 Peter 3:18–22)

Saint Peter wrote to Christian who were suffering persecution, particularly persecution by the civil authorities. He wrote that it is God's will for the Christian to submit to his authorities. If a Christian suffers for wrongdoing, then he does not commend himself to God, but if he suffers for doing right, then God is pleased with him. Christ is the perfect example, for He is a perfectly righteous man, but was unjustly treated. Yet, He entrusted Himself to God who judges things rightly. If a man is persecuted for being a Christian, he should be afraid, or let it trouble him. He should be prepared to make a defense for his Christian faith, and do nothing that would give his persecutors ground to accuse him. Again, Christ is the perfect example. Saint Peter wrote:

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. (1 Peter 3:18–22)

Jesus was perfect, never sinning. Yet, the religious authorities and the civil authorities put Him to death. Yet, in God's wise plan of redemption, Jesus, the world's only righteous man, suffered death for unrighteous men, so that their sins might be forgiven, and so they might be reconciled to God. Jesus was put to death, but in the same moment He died, His spirit was made alive in that it entered a new sphere of existence, and spiritual one.

In this new state of being, He descended into Hades, the place of the dead, and He went to certain angels imprisoned there, and He proclaimed to them His victory over them, and Satan, their master, and even over death. These were the angels which had so egregiously sinned by mating with women, during the time when God was patiently waiting for Noah to build the ark. Noah and his family were saved in the shelter of the ark, but they were saved by water, which baptized the world, washing away all the wicked men who dwelt in it. Christian baptism is like the baptism of the world: it saves the one baptized, not by washing away dirt from the body, but washing away the dirt of the soul of the one who is baptized in good conscience. Of course, the water itself has no power to save a man's soul; only the death and resurrection of Christ can do that. Christ has not only risen from the dead, but He has also ascended into heaven to the right hand of God, to the place of honor and privilege, and there God made Christ ruler over all the world, both men and angels.

Saint Peter continues:

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1, 2)

As Christ suffered death for the Christian, and was made alive in spirit, made alive in a new, spiritual state of being, not subject to temptation to sin, the Christian ought to arm himself with the same thought. The Christian has in baptism been joined to Christ in His death, and so has been made alive in spirit. The Christian has ceased to be bound to sin, and is free to do good. He is able to resist the temptations of Satan. So, the Christian ought to live the rest of his life, not for the lusts of the flesh, but for the will of God.

Let us understand that God has promised not to destroy the world. Let us be glad that God sent His Son into the world to save it. Let us remember our baptisms, so that we will live, not for our sinful desires, but for the will of God.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.